

A funerary monument on the Capitoline: architecture and painting in mid-Republican Rome, between Etruria and Greece

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The debate on the relationships between Rome, Italy, and the Mediterranean world in the Archaic and mid-Republican periods remains very lively.¹ Complementing the most recent discoveries and interpretations, I present two unknown mid-Republican documents from the Arx, the N summit of the Capitoline hill (fig. 1). Excavations for the Monument to Victor Emmanuel II brought to light after 1887 many walls and artifacts, which have been studied almost exclusively to produce archaeological maps or catalogues of objects,² but the structures sealed beneath the basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli toward the end of the 13th c., rediscovered in the 1980s and surveyed by the present author since 2001, shed new light on a number of religious, historical, topographical, architectural and art-historical issues.

The new archaeological evidence may be summarized as follows. In the 1st c. B.C., an aristocratic *domus* set on three levels occupied the NW sector of the Arx; it was remodeled in the Flavian and Severan periods (figs. 2-3).³ Apparently a location of the temple of Juno Moneta on the site of the Aracoeli must be ruled out. Among the structures still preserved beneath the basilica, which include an Imperial-era wall with huge curvilinear spurs that can be associated with the Iseum Capitolinum,⁴ we may mention an ashlar wall in blocks of Grotta Oscura tuff (a stone available after the defeat of Veii in 397 B.C.) that constituted the façade of a monument with a false arch dating from the 4th c. B.C. (fig. 2). Not far from there, the 9th-c. foundations of Santa Maria in Capitolio (the predecessor of the present Aracoeli) were built with re-used blocks, one of which, laid above the marble floor of a Flavian room (fig. 2), preserves a fragmentary fresco that likewise dates from the 4th c. B.C.⁵ Both the false arch and the fresco are unknown to date, but they represent an important contribution to our knowledge of Roman art and architecture. The analogies with a Lucanian tomb at Paestum and with city walls in Magna Graecia (as concerns the false arch) or with the uppermost frieze of the Tomba François at Vulci (as regards the fresco) signal the extent to which cross-cultural contacts can be recognized in the built environment of mid-Republican Rome. The false arch can be credited to Greek masons, whose intervention in Rome when the “Servian Walls” were being constructed was suggested by some scholars but eventually dismissed for lack of evidence (more on this below). While a Greek origin cannot be excluded, the fresco echoes Etruscan paintings and sculptures.

1 As attested by the international conference “Roma Medio Repubblica: dalla conquista di Veio alla battaglia di Zama,” held in Rome on April 5-7, 2017.

2 M. R. Coppola, *La fabbrica del Vittoriano. Scavi e scoperte in Campidoglio (1885-1935)* (Rome 2012); P. Mazzei, *Il Campidoglio dalle origini alla fine dell'antichità* (BullCom Suppl. 25, 2018).

3 See P. L. Tucci, “La sommità settentrionale del Campidoglio all'epoca dei Flavi,” in F. Coarelli (ed.), *Divus Vespasianus. Il bimillenario dei Flavi* (Milan 2009) 218-21.

4 P. L. Tucci, “L'Arx Capitolina, tra mito e realtà,” in L. Haselberger and J. Humphrey (edd.), *Imaging ancient Rome* (JRA Suppl. 61, 2006) 63-74.

5 On Santa Maria in Capitolio and the Aracoeli, see C. Bolgia, *Reclaiming the Roman Capitol. Santa Maria in Aracoeli from the Altar of Augustus to the Franciscans, c.500-1450* (Abington 2017).