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# Rediscovering the Roman Forum

Nicholas Purcell

## Abbreviations:

*FR I* = F. Coarelli, *Il Foro Romano I: periodo arcaico* (Roma 1983; 2nd ed. 1986)

*FR II* = F. Coarelli, *Il Foro Romano II: periodo repubblicano e augusteo* (Roma 1985)

*QuadTop 10* = *Quaderni di topografia antica dell'Università di Roma X: Topografia romana: ricerche e discussioni*, 1988.

*Arch. et soc.* = *Architecture et société de l'archaïsme grec à la fin de la république romaine* (Rome 1983)

*L'Urbs* = *L'Urbs. Espace urbain et histoire (Ier s. av. J.-C. - III s. apr. J.-C.)*, Rome 1987 (Collection de l'École Française de Rome 98)

*RArchCentro I/II* = *Roma - Archeologia nel centro urbano I and II* (Roma 1986)

*ArchLaz.9* = *Archeologia Laziale IX. Nono incontro di studio del comitato per l'archeologia Laziale* (Roma 1988) (Quaderni del Centro di Studio per l'archeologia etrusco-italica 16)

Other general collections of material include *BullCom* 91.1 (1986 [1988]) 186-96. This account is not intended as a review of the work discussed here.

## Introduction

The prosperity of Italy over the last two decades has led to a great quickening in the pace of archaeological discovery, planned and unplanned. Both the excitement of the revelations and the admirable response, intellectual and organizational, of Italians, both from the traditional ranks of scholars and administrators and from the general public, are heartening to citizens of other states whose governments are unmoved by the aims of recovering and interpreting the past. In Italy, the new finds are regarded as a revolution comparable to that of the last decades of the 19th c., when urbanisation and industrialisation combined with the possibilities produced by the new state to make feasible a wholesale investigation of many archaeologically-rich areas. Nowhere was that more true than in Rome itself; and in Rome again today the results of the large-scale archaeology of Lanciani and Boni are being reexamined by the people who have led the more recent campaigns of discovery.<sup>1</sup> They bring to the intricacies of the archaeology of the centre of the Roman world the data and the experience gained in the recent general archaeological boom and the methodological sophistication of interpretation which has arisen from the intellectual revolution in Italy that, like the opportunity for archaeological discovery itself, comes from the economic and social changes of the last generation. Not that this process is simple or homogeneous: the sign of an intellectual revolution is the intensity of debate, and the understanding of Roman history through the archaeological and literary record is proving extremely fertile in producing polarised discussions which can at times be ferocious but are always very rich in insight and challenge for anyone working on the interpretation of the distant historical past. The debate, in fact, meshes with the preoccupation felt by many archaeologists outside Italy concerning the problem of how their discipline relates to the history of the *Annales* school and its successors, and with the crisis perceived by many ancient historians in the building of history on the very special and slippery evidential base of the corpus of ancient literary texts — a crisis fuelled by modern views of what a text is and, more mundanely, by the diminishing ability of people at large to read these documents in Latin and Greek.<sup>2</sup> The climate of discussion, when it avoids polemic, is most invigorating: but it is important that as many scholars as possible should involve themselves in the issues to prevent a situation of stalemate. Signs of the strain are apparent when researchers investigate complementary metaphor-systems such as the 'stratigraphy of the literary texts'

1 Important in this context are the exhibition catalogues in the series *Roma Capitale*, especially *L'archeologia in Roma Capitale tra sterro e scavo* (1983) 15-29 (contributions by G. Pisani Sartorio and A. M. Ramieri). There remains a great *Nachlass* of unpublished notes and finds, the consideration of which alongside new excavation and research is essential. See for an example D. Palombi, "Contributo alla topografia della Via Sacra dagli appunti inediti di Giacomo Boni," *QuadTop* 10, 77-98.

2 For a sense of the nature of the latter crisis in Italy itself, see F. Coarelli (infra n.49).