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ABSTRACT

The Forgotten Graffiti of the Templum Pacis in Rome

Pier Luigi Tucci

The graffiti found in 1825 and 1999 in the square of the Temple of Peace, a monumental architectural complex built by Vespasian in A.D. 71–75 near the Forums of Caesar and Augustus, have been completely overlooked to date. In particular, the reports and publications on the post-1999 excavations have never mentioned the existence of the scratched image of a charioteer, despite the growing interest in graffiti and charioteers in the Roman world. The first part of the present article reviews the complete documentation of the digs made in 1825; then, it examines the graffiti that came to light in 1999, with a focus on the figure of the charioteer that, with its height of nearly 1 m, is the largest identified in Rome to date. The author supports the identification of the figure through comparisons with images of charioteers from various media and examines how it was carved (a drawing of the graffiti is presented here for the very first time) along with its state of preservation – the figure is fading away because since 1999 it has been exposed to the elements on the top surface of a marble step. The final section discusses why and when that image was scratched in the Temple of Peace, thus providing a glimpse into everyday life in late-antique Rome, and how it has survived until today.

KEYWORDS

Temple of Peace, graffiti, charioteers, knives, late antiquity

The Forgotten Graffiti of the Templum Pacis in Rome

Introduction

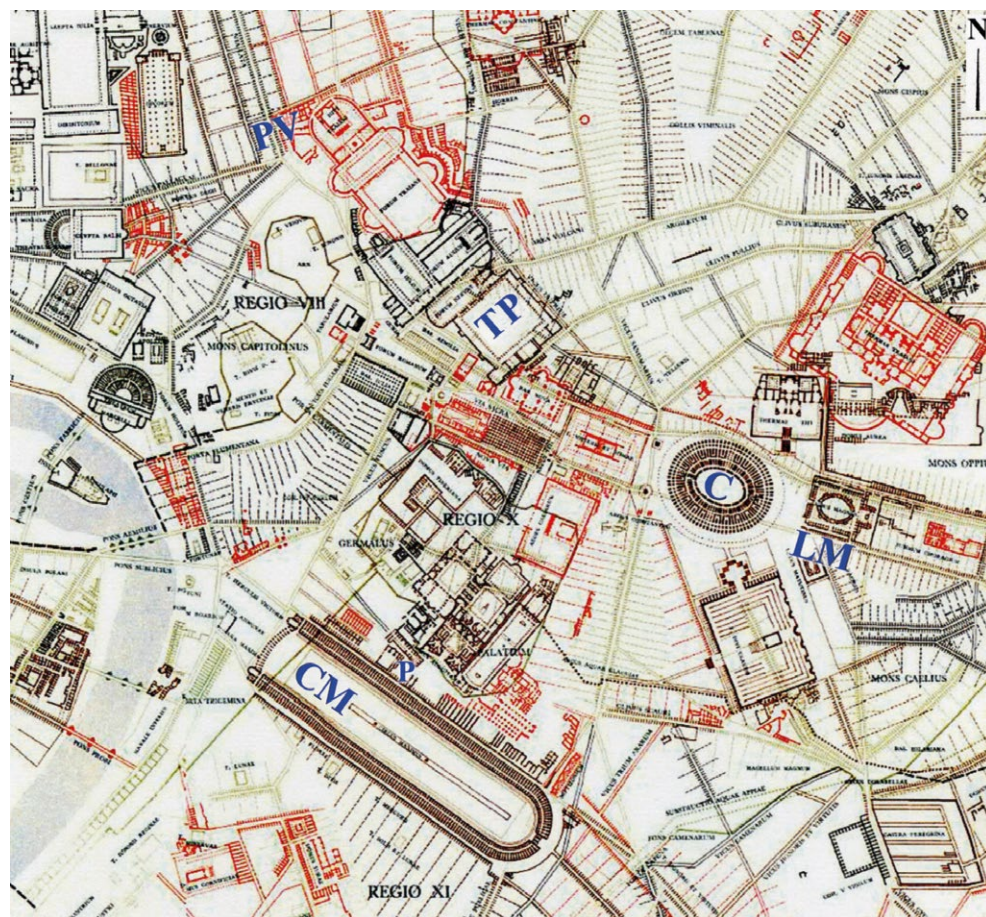
¹ The only Roman temple dedicated to Peace stood in the centre of the city of Rome, next to the Republican forum and the Forum of Augustus (Fig. 1). However, the Templum Pacis was not a traditional temple on a podium, but a monumental square surrounded by porticoes and with large halls on its rear side. The axial hall housed the statue of the goddess. This architectural complex was built by Vespasian between A.D. 71 and 75 and was completely restored by Septimius Severus after the fire of A.D. 192. At present, only 13% of its original surface has been excavated, especially since 1998, while the remains of another 13% of the building are incorporated inside the basilica and monastery of Saints Cosmas and Damian¹. Unfortunately some recent finds have long remained unknown, like the pre-existing walls in *opus incertum* excavated for a few days beneath the square and possibly belonging to the Republican *macellum*, and the existence of marble fragments from the attic that stood above the porticoes, is still surrounded by mystery². However, this present article focuses on the graffiti found in 1825 and 1999 – remaining unpublished to this day in the latter instance – in the north-western sector of the square, that is, specifically on the marble floor of the Temple of Peace next to the Forum of Nerva.

² Some graffiti were temporarily brought to light in the north corner of the Temple of Peace during the course of some digs carried out in 1825 near the Torre dei Conti (Fig. 2). They were first published eight years later, yet without images (or, at least, a clear indication of the findspot), and were eventually forgotten, just to be mentioned again a few years ago (see below). Another two scratched graffiti were brought to light at the beginning of 1999 during the course of the excavations of the Sovrintendenza Capitolina but, likewise, they have been overlooked to date: not a single photo, drawing or even a mention in passing has appeared in official reports, articles and monographs published in the past quarter century. The director of the earliest phases of the ex-

¹ Colini 1937; Montalbano 2014; Tucci 2017; Tucci 2022.

² Tucci 2017, 31 and Tucci 2022, 221–222, respectively.

Fig. 1: Rome, plan with the Templum Pacis (TP, marked with an asterisk), the Paedagogium (P), the Colosseum (C), the Ludus Magnus (LM), the Circus Maximus (CM) and the *insula* near Piazza Venezia (PV)



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cavations since 1998, Silvana Rizzo, was aware of the existence of the main graffito, as attested to by an article appearing in a newspaper on the 27th of April 1999: »al Foro della Pace, su uno degli scalini che collegavano il centro della piazza con il portico, è comparsa l'immagine di un auriga, impressa nella pietra, riconoscibile dal corsetto legato a stringhe e dal copricapo«³. Unfortunately, nobody has revealed to the scholarly world what this auriga looked like, despite the growing interest in graffiti and charioteers in the Roman world (see below)⁴. Moreover, we are dealing with the largest image of this kind found and preserved in Rome to date: this auriga, about 1 m high, is almost as important as a statue and is worth a full discussion⁵.

3 Boccacci 1999, who mentions another discovery that has left no traces in the official publications: »in un mattone di argilla, un'altra incredibile sorpresa: il corpo perfettamente conservato di una lucertolina che evidentemente era rimasta intrappolata nell'argilla nel lungo periodo che veniva fatta essicare al sole prima della cottura«. Likewise, Iacovazzo 1999 mentioned »l'immagine di un'auriga impressa sulla pietra«.

4 The graffito of the charioteer is only listed in the index of Langner 2001 (160 no. 674), with reference to the Forum Pacis and to a travertine step (in fact, a marble step), and with a question mark as regards its identification (»Gladiator oder Wagenlenker?«), which suggests that somehow he could see it (I guess that his original source was one of the newspapers cited above). However, the graffiti of gladiators in his own catalogue do not support this alternative proposal.

5 I wish to thank the first director of the excavations in the Imperial Forums, the already mentioned Dr Silvana Rizzo, and the present director of the Ufficio Fori Imperiali, Dr Massimiliano Munzi, for their permission to begin and complete my research on the graffiti of the Temple of Peace. Special thanks go to the Parco Archeologico del Colosseo and the Museo Nazionale Romano, to the staff of the Archivio di Stato di Roma and to the Department des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, as well as to Dr Agustín Velázquez, curator of the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano at Mérida. For comments, discussions and information, I am grateful to Sinclair Bell, Frederik Grosser, Russell Fleming (Digital Maps of the Ancient World) and Martin G. Conde (Roma Archeologica & Restauro Architettura 2003). Last but not least, I thank the editors and staff of AA (in particular Dr. B. Boyxsen) as well as the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions.



2

The Graffiti near the Torre dei Conti (1825)

3 The digs promoted in 1825 by Canon Alessandro Dionigi and carried out in the northern corner of the Temple of Peace, between the Colonnacce (the two surviving columns of the Forum of Nerva) and the *Torre dei Conti*, were two holes approximately 10 m deep that were excavated regardless of the stratigraphy (Fig. 2): the deposits accumulated on that site during centuries of human activity were simply removed from top to bottom, since the main goal was the discovery of valuable objects⁶. Dionigi's diggers brought to light the floor made of slabs of white marble of the northwestern side of the Temple of Peace (the rest of the square was not paved at all), fragments of red granite shafts of the northeast portico »danneggiati dal fuoco« (with a diameter of ca. 4½ Roman palms, that is, ca. 100 cm), a fragmentary shaft of Africano marble belonging to the row of columns of the building's northwestern side »che venne segato per farne tavole« (diameter of ca. 5½ Roman palms, that is, 123 cm); finally, according to Antonio Nibby and another witness, the German archaeologist Eduard Gerhard, the excavation reached some marble steps, also attested to in a contemporary drawing in which they are strangely perpendicular to the northeastern portico (Fig. 2 bottom right, dig 1)⁷. Some graffiti were noticed, too; they were carved roughly (»grossolanamente«, in Nibby's words) next to those steps and were left *in situ* on the marble floor. Dionigi reported that »a symbolic inscription« was carved on one slab; for Nibby, instead, the graffiti depicted »some symbols alluding to fecundity and to the reproduction of things«

Fig. 2: Rome, left: plan of the Templum Pacis with location of the graffiti (asterisks); in the insets, the digs carried out in the northern corner of the square in 1825 and the steps of the southwestern portico in January 1999. Right: plan and section of the digs drawn by architect Calderari in 1825 (1 and 2 indicate the two different digs)

⁶ Since the summer of 2022 the archaeologists of the Sovrintendenza Capitolina have been excavating behind the Colonnacce but, for lack of space, they will not reach the area of the graffiti found in 1825: as of December 2023, they have brought to light the remains of two circular lime kilns.

⁷ The quotes are from the general report (»Anno 1825 Scavo di Torre de Conti«), in ASR, Camerlengato, Parte II, Titolo IV, b. 154, fasc. 194, which does not mention all the finds (more below). This dossier was partially published in Morselli – Tortorici 1989, 95–97 fig. 74, and Montalbano 2014, 248–254 fig. 2, without mentioning the graffiti.

– in fact, obscene images that were described by Gerhard in detail (see below) – while the general report of the excavation mentions »un rozzo grafito [sic] con emblemi allusivi alla fecondazione della natura«⁸.

4 The documentation, discussed here briefly but in its entirety for the first time, sheds light of some neglected aspects of this excavation that took place despite some criticism. Indeed, before issuing the license, the local authorities objected that »è desiderabile che gli scavamenti intorno le antichità si facciano da colte persone, poiché ottiene maggiori riguardi l'erudizione«. Because the marble floor with the graffiti was found at a depth of 43 Roman palms (9.60 m: »Piano antico con pavimento di lastroni di marmo« according to the drawing) in the dig closer to the Torre dei Conti (Fig. 2 dig 1; note that the marble floor is not visible in dig 2), the graffiti must have stood on the »lastroni quadrilunghi di marmo« located in front of the third column of the northeastern portico, which is symmetrical to the column next to the grafito scratched on the opposite side of the square and discussed below (Fig. 2 left)⁹. After a storm, earth and debris fell down into the dig and Dionigi had to remove it again to allow the members of the Commissione Consultiva di Belle Arti to examine the marble floor. As compensation for these unexpected expenses, the Canon asked for permission to remove the marble slabs, but the Committee voted against this proposal and suggested to expand the excavation. In addition, Dionigi requested 30 scudi to take the debris away (note the mounds in Fig. 2 right), for instance to the »scarico della Villa Borghese fuori di Porta del Popolo«.

5 The interpretations of the finds published first by Gerhard and then by Nibby are untenable: they both believed that the ashlar walls still incorporated into the nearby Torre dei Conti belonged to the Temple of Tellus, whereas they are the remains of a rectangular exedra of the Temple of Peace opening onto the northeastern portico. Gerhard wrote his notes on the 13th of May 1825, possibly while visiting the site with architect Giuseppe Valadier, who was there before the 16th of the same month. The German scholar thought that the Dionigi's dig was disappointing, compared to the excavations in the Forum of Trajan. His report mentions the discovery of just three shafts of red granite, three steps (he is the only one who gives their number: cfr. Fig. 2 bottom right, dig 1) and a mosaic (sic) characterised by some lines – Gerhard seems to allude to an inscription – and by a series of images: some branches, a vulva between two phalluses surmounted by an 8, and the letters »EPPE« over the figure of a naked woman offering grapes to a phallus¹⁰.

6 Nibby visited the site together with Valadier (they were both members of the Commissione Consultiva di Belle Arti) on the 19th of November 1825 and published his own report after 1838, relying on the official documents. He stressed that the images mentioned above were, in fact, scratched onto the marble floor next to the steps, but his description is vague¹¹:

8 Tucci 2017, 31.

9 Dionigi requested the permission on the 20th of January 1825 and got it at the beginning of February. The excavation (dig 1) began on the 3rd of February and one and a half months later, on the 18th of March, the Canon drafted a detailed list of his finds, slightly different from the report mentioned above: »N° 9 rocchi di colonne di varie grandezze, di Granito rosso orientale, informi e corrosi in parte dal fuoco. N° 2 pezzi di modiglioni di marmo Africano. Vari pezzi di marmo bianco, e Tevertino. Un capitello di palmi 1½ di diametro d'ordine corintio molto danneggiato« and, finally, »un piano formato di grandi lastre di marmo bianco, in una delle quali vi è scoperta un'iscrizione simbolica«. Two days earlier, architect Giuseppe Valadier examined the »pavimento di lastre di marmo« and reported the discovery of »piccoli avanzi di marmo e travertino, con pochi pezzi di muri rovesciati di pietra e tevolozza«. See below for the final finds in Dionigi's report of the 28th of November 1825.

10 Gerhard 1833, 139–140. Such graffiti are not common: see Langner 2001, 32 (»e. Phalli und vaginae«), who states that »vaginae are rarely depicted and have a very incoherent aspect. Therefore they are not easy to recognise as such«. It is clearly impossible to guess the date of those graffiti from Gerhard's description.

11 Nibby 1838–1841, II, 721.

»Negli scavi fatti l'anno 1825 nell'area dinanzi a questa torre verso occidente si ebbe agio di meglio conoscere, che è fondata sopra muri di marmi quadrilateri di peperino della cella antica [of the Temple of Tellus]: ed alla profondità di circa 35 palmi [781 cm; less than the 40 Roman palms mentioned by Gerhard] corrispondenti a poco più di 26 piedi romani [774 cm] si scoprì il pavimento dell'area della Tellure lastricata di tavole di marmo bianco quadrangolari sulle quali presso ai primi gradini del tempio, che pure si riconobbero, si videro graffiti grossolanamente alcuni simboli allusivi alla fecondità ed alla riproduzione delle cose, i quali furono lasciati sul luogo. In tale occasione fra molti frammenti di colonne di granito rosso che potevano avere appartenuto al portico del tempio fu pure scoperto un bel rocchio di marmo affricano, e che per la gran dimensione sembra aver servito a sostenere qualche statua.«

⁷ To date, it has been overlooked that Dionigi's excavations continued until the end of 1825. This is an important detail, because it is now possible to distinguish dig 1 (in which the graffiti came to light) from the final dig 2¹². On the 28th of November, after the second dig, the Canon reported the find of »un rocchio di colonna informe di marmo Africano lungo palmi sei, e largo palmi cinque, in parte danneggiato dal fuoco« and »un pezzo di condotto di piombo corroso della lunghezza di palmi 24« (ca. 5.36 m). The archival documents mention the discovery of, and damage to, the aqueduct »spettante alla Real Corte di Napoli« (that is, the Bourbon family) supplying water to the Orti Farnesiani on the Palatine Hill – apparently, an inverted siphon delivering water under pressure. Such a structure is visible, coloured in pink, in the second dig closer to the Colonnacce (Fig. 2 right), thus confirming the progress of Dionigi's excavation.

⁸ A note dated the 16th of November 1825 by the architect of the King of Naples, Giuseppe Marini, reveals a great concern: indeed, Dionigi's diggers had exposed the underground conduit that was inserted at the bottom of a concrete structure – indeed, water flew under pressure – for a length of 20 palmi (4.46 m). As reported by the workers, a break »largo palmi 1½ che giunge fino al centro del medesimo, e prossimo perciò a penetrare nel vuoto del tubo« was made by means of pickaxe (the demolition was 3 Roman palms deep out of a total of 6 palms) »per conoscere a che oggetto inservisse il masso riferito«. After another few centimetres the water would have come out from the conduit as a geyser, turning the second dig into a pool.

⁹ As anticipated above, on the 19th of November Valadier and Nibby visited the excavation together with Ottavio Dionigi, on behalf of his brother Alessandro and of his associate »il Saponajo presso la chiesa di S. Maria in Campo Carleo« (presumably the »Sig.^r Francesco Archini« mentioned in the general report), who promised to repair the aqueduct and to expand the dig »dall'opposto lato lontano dal detto acquedotto«¹³. However, the final plan (Fig. 2 bottom right) does not show any further extension and Dionigi's final report dates to the 28th of November¹⁴. It is likely that the excavation was definitively interrupted: the graffiti remained *in situ* and it is far from clear whether they were destroyed by the foundations of the late 19th century buildings erected in that area and demolished in the 1930s to join Via Cavour and Via dell'Impero (now Via dei Fori Imperiali).

¹² ASR, Camerlengato, Parte II, Titolo IV, b. 160, fasc. 346, partially cited in Lanciani 1989–2002, VI, 281.

¹³ Likewise in ASR, Camerlengato, Parte II, Titolo IV, b. 160, fasc. 346.

¹⁴ The drawing of Dionigi's excavation dates to the first months of 1826 (therefore, it shows the two digs) and Valadier credited it to the »Sig.^r Calderani« or »Calderani«, who received 9 scudi. I guess that the author of the drawing was the architect Enrico Calderari, a nephew of Carlo Fea, likewise involved in the Antiquities Service and whose activity is attested since January 1825, when his archaeological drawings were praised by Valadier. After 1828, Calderari was »Ispettore per la polizia dei monumenti pubblici di antichità e disegnatore dei nuovi scavi«. See Miano 1973; for his relationship to Carlo Fea, see Ridley 2000, 17.

Fig. 3: Rome, western corner of the Templum Pacis with indication of the step with the auriga's graffito (white asterisk) and floor slab with the inscription »TENER« (black asterisk: see the inset)



3

The Unknown Graffiti towards the Southwestern Portico (1999)

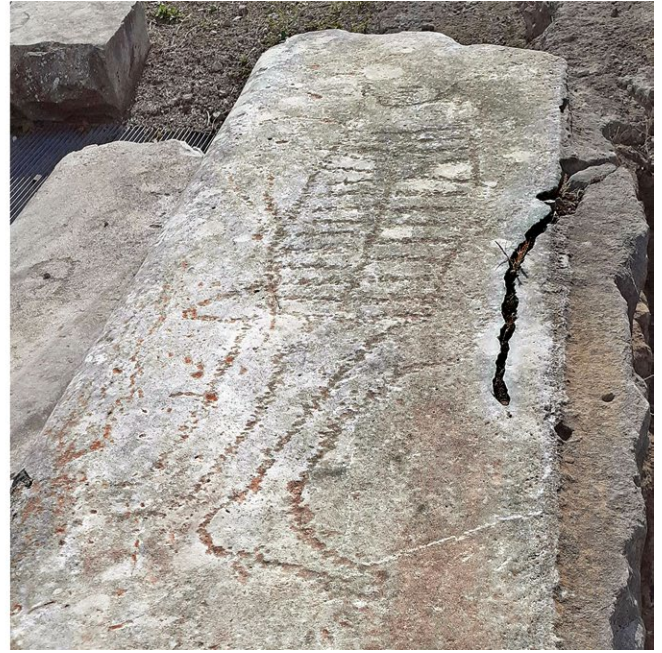
¹⁰ Around January 1999, a scratched image measuring approximately 40 by 100 cm came to light on the top surface of the southwestern portico's second step (Fig. 2 left, in the inset; Fig. 3, white asterisk) and became completely visible after March 1999¹⁵. As anticipated above, the first news dates to the end of April 1999, but afterwards this graffito has been forgotten¹⁶. It is still *in situ* next to the third (missing) column of that portico counting from the Forum of Nerva – that is, exactly on the symmetrical spot as the graffiti discovered in 1825 (cfr. Fig. 2 left) – and near the seven column shafts re-constructed in 2015, in full view of the tourists strolling along the Via dei Fori Imperiali who, however, can hardly notice it.

¹¹ The step this graffito was scratched on is a block of Proconnesian marble from the Island of Marmaris (Turkey), which was extensively used in the Severan restoration of the Temple of Peace: therefore, it was laid in place after the fire of A.D. 192 together with the column shafts of red granite of the porticoes. The restoration ended around A.D. 203, which is the *terminus post quem* for the image of the auriga, but it is worth noting that the left side of our graffito was scratched on the already worn-out edge of the marble step. Because the circus races were extremely popular in late antiquity, a precise date is difficult to guess. Note that after the middle of the 4th century A.D. the Temple of Peace was called the *Forum Pacis* to underline a shift from its original religious function¹⁷. The northwestern side of the square, near the marble floor with the

¹⁵ Tucci 2017, fig. 10.

¹⁶ I decided not to publish this graffito in my monograph on the Temple of Peace (however, it is mentioned in my Ph.D dissertation on this topic) because for many years, after 1999, it was impossible to access the remains of the southwestern portico. Note that an inscription is scratched on a 25 cm high marble slab placed on the ground next to the wall of the Forum of Nerva (Fig. 3, black asterisk). It is not *in situ* and is thicker than the actual floor slabs. The inscription reads »TENER« (Fig. 3, inset) and is 35 cm long, with letters' height ranging between 6 and 9 cm.

¹⁷ The date of a partial change of function of the square based on the early 4th century A.D. stamps on *bipedales* re-used in some utilitarian buildings is controversial (these bricks might have become available much later) and is also at odds with the praise of the *Templum Pacis* by Constantius II during the course of his visit to



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graffiti, was occupied by commercial structures and some historical events – riots and lootings – that took place there in the 5th century A.D., when it might have been easier and more acceptable to scratch the marble step.

12 The charioteer is beardless (Fig. 4), which is typical from the Constantinian age onwards, as opposed to the bearded charioteers of the Severan mosaics from the Villa del Baccano, along the *Via Cassia* (see Fig. 9); since it would have been quite easy to scratch the beard by means of a chisel, its absence is an element to be considered. The 4th century seems more likely for another reason as well: as discussed below, the figure is very similar to the depiction of a charioteer carved on the handle of a 4th century A.D. ivory knife.

13 In September 2022 I had the opportunity to re-examine the graffito and to check its state of preservation (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, the top surface of the step is not white and polished anymore, but appears to be greyish and porous. Just a few smooth circular areas preserve the original surface, attesting to the degree of deterioration of the marble block: indeed, in some points the graffito is almost lost¹⁸. In particular, the head is almost illegible; if an object was scratched towards the edge of the step, next to the auriga's right leg, it is now definitively lost. Assuming that the graffito dates from 4th century A.D. and that it was buried during the Early Middle Ages, one should conclude that it remained intact for more than ten centuries and deteriorated in the past twenty years (and increasingly faster, if one compares the photos taken in 2010 and 2022: Fig. 4. 5)¹⁹. The granular disaggregation of the marble crystals (‘sugaring’) is due to the fact that the top surface of the block has been exposed to the elements since 1999 (moreover, in February 2018 it was covered by ca. 10 cm of snow for many days) and

Fig. 4: Rome, the graffito of the auriga of the Templum Pacis on the 10th of September 2010 (left) and on the 29th of September 2022 (right: note the deterioration of the top surface)

Rome in A.D. 357, when the world *Forum* was first used: see Meneghini – Santangeli Valenzani 2007, 115–117, who discussed floors and walls but overlooked the graffiti; *contra* Tucci 2017, II, 492. Those utilitarian buildings are too simple to have replaced, even temporarily, the nearby *Horrea Piperataria*; Santangeli Valenzani himself claimed I did not value those walls, although he had defined them «strutture schifose» (disgusting structures), at a conference in 2011: <https://youtu.be/Ltg9mt2oifl?si=sF0tzgzIIhd-XXUr> (5:42 onwards; last accessed on the 5th of December 2023).

18 My guess is that a protective product used, say, during the reconstruction of the seven column shafts of the southwestern portico in 2015, fell on the top surface of the marble step and preserved those smooth areas. If so, it would have been wise to spread it all over the step's top surface from the outset.

19 Between January and March 1999, the state of preservation of the graffito was remarkable – much better than in 2010 (Fig. 4, left, courtesy Russell Fleming; unfortunately, in my earlier photos the graffito was being uncovered and not completely visible).

particularly to acid rains, which have turned marble into gypsum through a process called sulfatation²⁰. Even today, when the rainwater, acidified by carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from air pollution (the nearby Via dei Fori Imperiali is still affected by traffic) gets dry on the almost flat top surface of the block, it gradually fills the cavities of the graffito and dissolves the Proconnesian marble, the marble crystals of which inevitably loose cohesion²¹.

¹⁴ From the head down to the left foot, the graffito of the charioteer is 98 cm high and has the same width as the marble step, that is, 39–40 cm (Fig. 5). This step was the second from the level of the square; at present, because of the missing third step that partially overlapped it, the slightly lowered surface on the rear side, 6 cm wide and destined for the laying in place of the lost step, is clearly visible. The present length of the marble block is 139 cm, for a width of ca. 46 cm and a height of 28.5 cm, slightly less than a Roman foot²². The step is what remains of a marble block whose right-hand joint is still preserved; the opposite face is broken precisely above the auriga's head, as if the preservation of the graffito was intentional: when the block was smashed, it is possible that an inscription with the auriga's name was lost.

¹⁵ As noted above, the edge of the step towards the square of the Temple of Peace is worn out and rounded (Fig. 6), attesting to the high frequentation of the porticoes. Consequently, the right arm of the auriga has almost vanished – it also seems that there was an object parallel to the same edge – but some marks corresponding to the elbow were clearly scratched on the already lowered surface (cfr. Fig. 4 left), which suggests that the graffito can be dated to much later than A.D. 203. On the opposite side of the step's top surface there is a deep crack that, however, has not affected the graffito at all (cfr. Fig. 4. 5). The rear side of the block is rough and irregular, with two recesses for the lifting devices, whereas the front is smooth but not completely polished: it was finished by means of a bush-hammer and bears the previously unnoticed inscription »EI«, which is carved in Roman capitals and might even refer to the auriga (Fig. 6, inset; see below).

¹⁶ From a technical point of view, this charioteer should not even be considered a graffito: it was not scratched, but literally carved on the marble surface by means of chisel and hammer. In Rome, not only graffiti but also architectural drawings were scratched on the public floor inside, or next to, the major monuments: in the early 2nd century A.D., the floor in front of the entrance to the Mausoleum of Augustus became a workshop for the reconstruction of the Pantheon and several architectural drawings carved on that occasion still survive²³. Moreover, the Temple of Peace housed a sort of ›extra-large graffito‹ measuring 13 by 18 m: I refer to the Forma Urbis, the marble plan of ancient Rome incised (by means of chisel) at the time of Septimius Severus on the slabs of Proconnesian marble that veneered the wall of a great hall located on the right-hand side of the axial hall (Fig. 2 left).

¹⁷ The author of our graffito will remain unknown, but he was certainly unfamiliar with chiselling. It is even unlikely that he traced a preliminary drawing on the top surface of the marble step; he carved the charioteer by creating a discontinuous

20 Calcium carbonate, the main component of marble, reacts with sulfuric acid carried by acid rain and turns into calcium sulfate, which is about one thousand times more soluble in water than calcium carbonate: $\text{CaCO}_3 + \text{H}_2\text{SO}_4 > \text{CaSO}_4 + \text{CO}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$. Apparently, rain water has removed the deteriorated surface through washout and has made the graffito almost unrecognizable.

21 It is still possible – or, better, necessary – to take action, by replacing the marble step, which remained without any protection even during the course of the reconstruction of the seven column shafts of the southwestern portico in 2015.

22 The rise of the southwestern portico's steps, from top to bottom, is: 28.5 cm (second step); 29 cm (first step); 26 cm (floor slab); note that these measures have never been published to date. The two surviving steps, belonging to the Severan restoration, rest on a block of Tufo Lionato that is L-shaped, unlike the continuation of the steps along the southwestern portico, most of which were laid on the original concrete structure.

23 Inglese – Pizzo 2016.

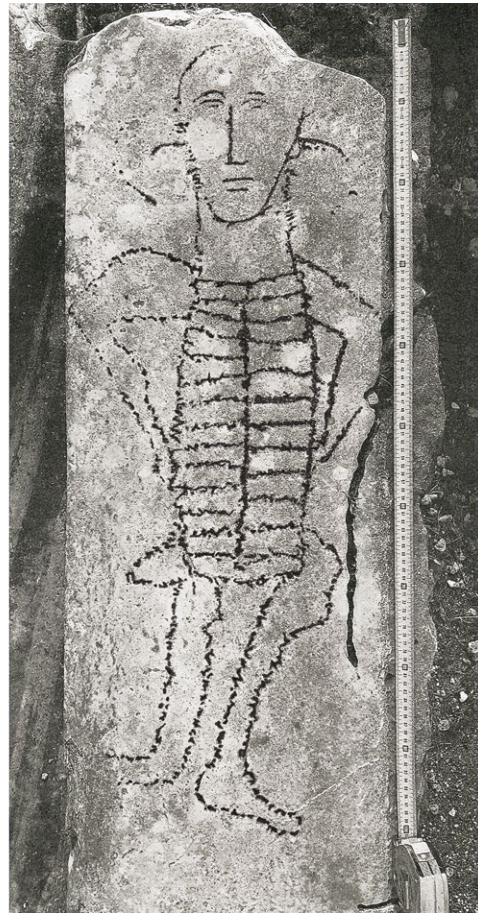


Fig. 5: Rome, the graffito of the auriga of the Templum Pacis in 2022 (left) and reconstructive drawing (right)

5

sequence of countless dots, short marks and V-shaped signs circa 2–3 mm deep (cfr. Fig. 4. 5) instead of a continuous line that, moreover, would have been easier to carve (as in the much smaller and ordinary graffiti that were scratched on plaster in a few seconds). It is likely that it took at least two hours to carve the entire figure in the square of the Temple of Peace, no doubt making a lot of noise, and yet the author did so undisturbed. We can hardly guess the response of the viewers; no doubt, for some centuries this auriga became a familiar presence inside the late antique Temple of Peace, like the statues that still decorated the monument in the 6th century while part of the building was almost in ruin (Procopius, JW 4.21.11).

¹⁸ The graffito is the frontal image of a beardless man who seems to wear a *lorica segmentata* (implying war, although the architectural complex was dedicated to Peace). The bands on the chest (Fig. 5 right) may recall the strips of ferrous plates of a legionary armour, but the shoulder guards, which would have appeared as vertical bands, are missing. In addition, the arms and legs (feet included) of the man scratched on the step are bare. Rather than horizontal rows of overlapping bands of solid armour plates, the author of the graffito may have depicted the distinct band-work (*fasciae*) consisting of leather thongs that wrap around the chest of a charioteer in a crisscross pattern²⁴ – slightly asymmetrical in our graffito, though – as already guessed after its discovery in 1999 (see above). Other details, although over-simplified, may support this identification. The helmet, just partially preserved (note the two rounded marks starting below the ears), is usually a signature of the charioteers' profession²⁵. Below the right

²⁴ General discussion in Bell 2018/2019.

²⁵ Made of felt or leather, it was generally rounded or lozenge-shaped, with a thick brim (sometimes turned up at the back), and was secured by a chin strap. See Bell 2008.

Fig. 6: Rome, the step of the southwestern portico of the Templum Pacis with the auriga's graffito on the top surface and the inscription »EI« on the front (detail in the inset)



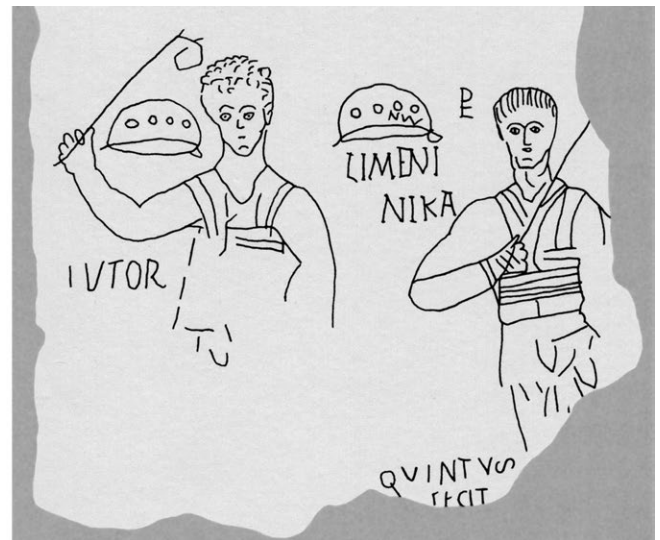
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hand, the author of the graffito may have highlighted the knife used to cut the charioteer free in the event of an accident – unlike the Greek races, in the Roman circus the reins were fastened to the charioteer's body – and this detail may be a key element (more below). Parallel to the edge of the marble step some traces survive of what might have been a whip, which is usually depicted together with the auriga. The padding secured around the legs, another characteristic aspect of the charioteer's bodily iconography, is absent but it would have been difficult to carve it on marble with such a rough carving technique. As noted above, the name of this charioteer might have been incised on top of the figure, but the marble block is broken just above the head. The figure is clearly disproportioned: the neck is too large compared to the elongated head and the legs are too short. The ›sculptor‹ enhanced the muscles of the right arm (Fig. 5); by comparison, the left arm is quite thin, but it should be considered that the presence of the lost upper step was an obstacle. Finally, note that the charioteers' left hip looks quite irregular, as if he had suffered some kind of injury.

¹⁹ Altogether, it seems to me that this is not the depiction of a ›victorious‹ auriga and not so much because, otherwise, his right arm would be raised, as is seen in countless depictions, but because of the absence of the attributes of victory, such as a prize crown or a palm leaf. As a mere hypothesis, this image might fix on stone the memory of a fatally injured auriga who suffered a race accident and could not use his knife to cut the reins²⁶. As anticipated above, on the front side of this marble step the letters »EI«, 4 cm high, are carved in capital letters (cfr. Fig. 6, inset), whereas no inscription appears on the front side of the step below, which may exclude that they were incised during the construction process – moreover, their meaning would be obscure²⁷. It is unclear whether »EI« refers to the charioteer, but the letters were incised in correspondence with his knife, which appears to play an important role in the depiction (more below). Rather than the dative of *is*, »EI« might be the Latin exclamation corresponding to *ouch* or *alas* and alluding to a race accident (the *naufragium*), the frequency of which is made

²⁶ A sort of precedent, dating from the late 1st century A.D., would be the funerary monument of the 22-year old auriga called *Eutyches*, on display at the Diocesan Museum of Tarragona: see Grosser 2021, 229–230 pl. 15.2; however, the relevant inscription emphasizes that he did not die in the circus and was not victorious during the course of his lifetime. Injured charioteers are shown on some circus sarcophagi during the racing, at the very moment of the accident.

²⁷ The front of the step does not appear to be finished with a smooth surface (Fig. 6). By coincidence, »EI« are the first two letters of *Eirene*, the Greek word for Peace. Even assuming that they were a stonemasons' mark for the supply of Proconnesian marble in the Severan restoration of the *Templum Pacis*, why carve them on that block and not on the one below?



7

apparent by the depiction of mangled carts and twisted bodies in circus images. My only concern is that the letters »EI« were carved accurately, as opposed to the rather rudimentarily incised graffito, and seem to have been cut by another hand. If, however, they were connected to the auriga, the graffito might even be considered to be a sort of anticipation of later funerary slabs with the figure of the deceased (but, to avoid misunderstandings, I state explicitly that nobody was buried underneath the step). The author of the graffito may have wished to preserve the memory of this unknown charioteer by scratching his image along the porticoes of the Temple of Peace, the steps of which, running on three sides more than 100 m long around the square of the Severan monument, were reminiscent of the seating area of a circus (whereas a series of six longitudinal structures, not visible in my plans, might recall the *spina*). If this was the goal of the »sculptor«, ultimately he succeeded: the graffito is still there and we are speculating on an unknown charioteer who lived in Rome many centuries ago.

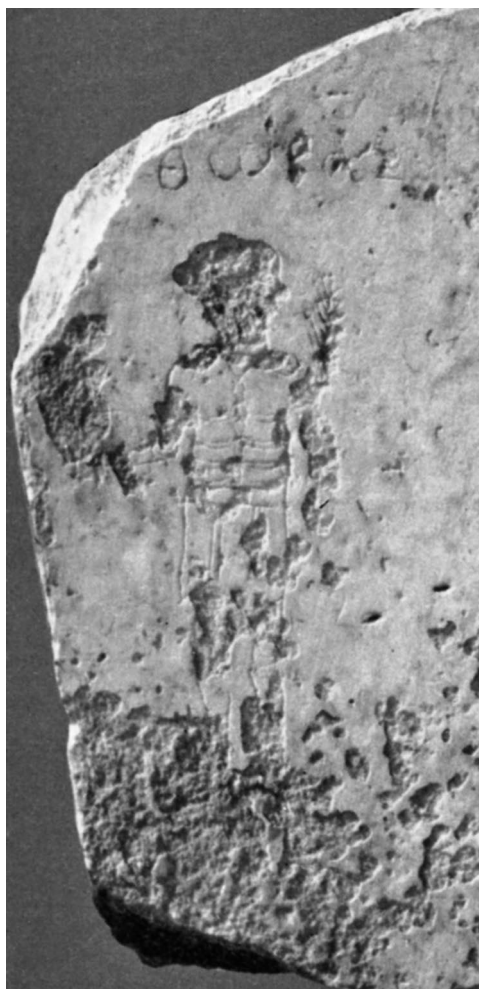
Fig. 7: Rome, graffiti of a charioteer's bust in the »Paedagogium« (left) and of two charioteers in the Colosseum, not in situ (right)

Depictions of Charioteers in Various Media

20 Images of charioteers are relatively widespread in Roman art, but there are just a few iconographic parallels, including some graffiti, for the auriga of the Temple of Peace²⁸. Focusing on Rome, in the early 3rd century A.D. a now-lost graffito just 12 cm high was scratched on the northwestern wall of room 8 in the so-called *Paedagogium*, on the Palatine slope facing the *Circus Maximus*, west of the hemicycle façade of the Domus Augustana (cfr. Fig. 1). This graffito depicted the bust of a charioteer with a palm encircling his helmet, prize boxes (*modii*) with his winnings in the background, and had the name »CORDIVS« carefully inscribed overhead (Fig. 7 left). The charioteer wears the characteristic costume of its profession – leather straps around its chest that cover the entire torso and a tight-fitting racing cap with chinstrap – and is reasonably interpreted as an actual bust on display at the entranceway to, or somewhere within, the nearby Circus Maximus²⁹. The graffito has been attributed to slaves or freedmen who were in the employ of the *Paedagogium* and attended the games in the circus, where they would

28 On the charioteers' graffiti, see Langner 2001, 56 and Grosser 2021, 141–143. 232–235 pls. 44–45 (note that Gf9 and Gf10, from San Salvatore di Cabras, in Sardinia, show the charioteers with horizontal *fasciae* on the bust). In general, see Baird – Taylor 2011.

29 Bell 2019. See Langner 2001, 132 and fig. 74 for a general view and pl. 11 no. 209 for the detail.



8

Fig. 8: Rome, graffito of an auriga from the Ludus Magnus



9

Fig. 9: Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, second floor, Hall IX, inv. 1247b. Mosaic floor from the Severan Villa del Baccano depicting an auriga of the red faction (russata) and his racehorse

have been eyewitnesses to chariot races – indeed, other graffiti scratched on the plaster of its walls preserve names and images of racehorses.

21 Two victorious charioteers appear on a graffito 32–35 cm high scratched onto the seats of the Colosseum (Fig. 7 right). They are distinguished from one another by their hairstyle, which means that these images may depict the likeness of actual charioteers: they are flanked by the inscription »IVTOR« (left) and »LIMENI NIKA« and »PE« (right), whereas »QVINTVS FECIT« (below) refers to the author³⁰. Another graffito of auriga holding a palm leaf (Fig. 8) was sketched onto a marble slab found inside room 35 of the Ludus Magnus, near the Colosseum (cfr. Fig. 1). The image was previously thought to depict a gladiator, but the leather straps around its chest have suggested its identification with a victorious charioteer³¹.

22 Note that the graffiti of gladiators and athletes are not characterised by the horizontal bands across the body, over the short tunic, that we see on the step of the Temple of Peace, although these bands are not visible in the just mentioned charioteers' graffiti (the latter are recognizable thanks to other elements, though). Otherwise, charioteers can be identified with certainty in other media: for example, the images of representatives of the four factions with their respective racehorses appear on the Severan mosaic floor from a cubicle of the upper storey of the Villa del Baccano, excavated in

30 Langner 2001, pl. 47 nos. 943–944.

31 Colini – Cozza 1962, 45 fig. 63 and 62 n. 29; Langner 2001, pl. 47 no. 945. This image seems to have suffered a sort of *damnatio memoriae*: the head was defaced along with the crown (?) in the right hand.



Fig. 10: Rome, left: the graffito of the auriga of the Templum Pacis; right: detail of the auriga carved on an ivory knife handle, 4th century A.D. Paris, BnF, Médaillles et Antiques, inv. Froehner 887

10

1869–1870 at the sixteenth mile of the Via Cassia and now displayed on a wall at the Museo Nazionale Romano (Fig. 9)³².

23 Our graffito finds the closest parallel in the late-antique representation of a charioteer called »HJIL/ARVS« (the letters are highlighted in red) carved on the ivory handle of a knife dating from the 4th century A.D., now in the holdings of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Froehner 887: Fig. 10 right)³³. Actual knives were used during the chariot races to cut the reins in the event of an accident, as discussed below. However, such ivory handles had nothing to do with the charioteers' personal knives (see below),

32 The villa at Baccano belonged to the imperial family: note that the name of Septimius Severus' brother was stamped on a leadpipe. The charioteers were represented on four insert panels (*emblemata*), grouped in the centre of a single room and made with the technique of *opus vermiculatum*, that is, by means of tiny tesserae of coloured marbles and other stones. Sanzi di Mino 2005 dates these mosaics to the Severan period because they lack the captions with the charioteers' names that instead appear in later mosaics depicting circus scenes.

33 Paris, BnF, Médaillles et Antiques, inv. Froehner 887 (formerly Babelon 887; now the BnF website refers to the collector Wilhelm Froehner, 1834–1925); the relevant entry in the same website mentions the possible use as whip handle, which is unlikely, and gives for granted that such knives were used by the charioteers during the circus races (see below). Cfr. Landes 2008, 421 fig. 7; Grosser 2021, 94–95 and 252 pl. 26.3.



11

Fig. 11: Charioteers depicted on the fragments of two different ivory handles, 4th century A.D.; note that the scale relates to the one on the right only. Paris, BnF, Médailles et Antiques, inv. Froehner 886, left, and 887, right

despite the names engraved on them; due to their size, material, and retractable blade, they were more likely souvenirs sold at the circus, attesting to the popularity of chariot races in imperial Rome³⁴. This specific handle is incomplete (Fig. 11 right: the preserved length is 8.2 cm) and its rear surface is flat and rough; yet, another three items in the holdings of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, also dating from the 4th century A.D., clarify the original shape of the one taken as an example. In particular, the surviving part of another knife handle (Froehner 886), possibly from Rome, as it was purchased there in 1909, suggests that the Hilarus' fragmentary piece was completed by a missing part that showed the right-hand side of the auriga with raised arm³⁵. The two fragmentary handles do not belong together (Froehner 886 is 9.9 cm high, therefore a little bit longer than the other), but it is clear that they both had a slot that housed a retractable rotating blade, as confirmed by a hole for the circular pin (Fig. 11)³⁶. It appears that the blade was about 6 cm long and, when fully opened, the knife would not have exceeded the length of 15 cm: it was clearly unfit for the circus races.

24 The image of Hilarus carved on the ivory handle Froehner 887 is just 5 cm high, as opposed to the 98 cm of the charioteer scratched on the step of the Temple of Peace, and yet is the most complete image of this kind known to date. From a technical point of view,

the former is a sort of graffito and, despite its tiny size, is more detailed than the latter. The auriga's elongated, almost tubular figure carved on ivory holds a long palm leaf in his left hand and had very likely a prize crown in his lost right hand, as in the other fragmentary handle (Fig. 11). His head is V-shaped, exactly like the graffito of the Temple of Peace (Fig. 10 left); likewise, the position of the legs on the marble step, with a deviation towards the edge, seems to have been inspired by a depiction similar to the one carved on this ivory handle, where it was inevitably distorted because of the shape of both blade and handle. The exaggerated muscles of the right arm of the scratched auriga of the Temple of Peace might have been influenced by the (lost) raised arm of the model. If so, we might explain not only the layout of the graffito of the Temple of Peace – possibly scratched using the image carved on a similar ivory handle as a starting point and then completed with a certain degree of freedom – but also why an actual knife features so prominently on the graffito itself, unlike other depictions of charioteers.

25 Indeed, the images of charioteers with knives are very rare and are carved in marble, with an exception in mosaic (see below). The best example is the 1st century A.D. statue of a victorious auriga, 1.84 cm high, on display in the Sala della Biga of the Vatican Museums³⁷. The handle and blade of his knife, both quite different from the later

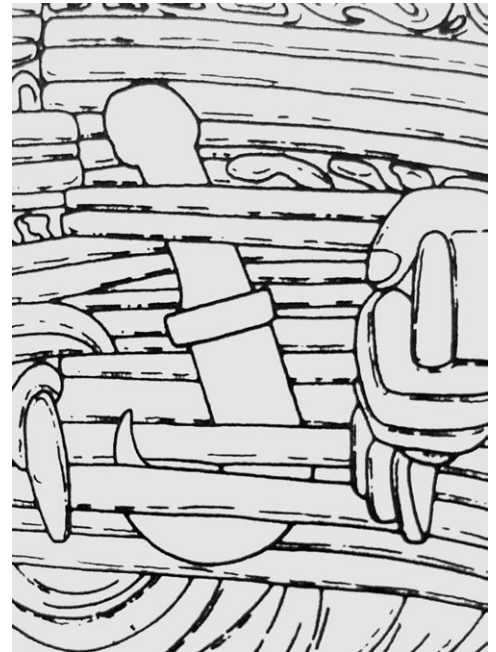
34 Thuillier 1999, 211 n. 20; likewise Landes 2008, who examines six knife handles in the holdings of the BnF.

35 On the opposite side are the motifs of the horse (with its name) and three palm leaves. The ivory handle Froehner 888 preserves on one side the complete name, »HILARVS« (possibly the same as above), a whip and a cap, but the charioteer was not depicted at all; on the opposite side are the horse head, its name (»BAIANO«) and a palm leaf.

36 This reconstruction is confirmed by a fourth item of the BnF, Froehner 885, likewise from Rome and broken almost vertically, like the others, in correspondence of the internal slot that, apparently, was a point of weakness.

37 Vatican Museums, Museo Pio Clementino, inv. 2344 (see Grosser 2021, 272), from the private collection of

knives with ivory handle, are inserted into the leather straps in front, not at the side, of the chest (and on the left, for the sake of precision). Because of the curve blade the knife looks like a billhook (Fig. 12), which would have made it easier not only to fix it into the leather strings during the races but also to cut the same strings and, consequently, the reins (also wrapped around the torso) in the event of a *naufragium*³⁸. In the case of the victorious charioteer on a quadriga, crowned and surrounded by Erotes, visible on the fragment 1.32 m high of a 3rd century A.D. sarcophagus at Villa Albani in Rome, the knife is partially visible behind the head of one of the four racehorses, likewise inserted between the leather bands (Fig. 13)³⁹. In both cases, these straps are extremely realistic and appear to be asymmetrical, since they cross the chest and join horizontally at slightly irregular intervals, combined with a vertical band. This layout is simplified in the smaller images, where the leather straps do correspond from left to right; in addition, the horizontal straps end at the level of the armpits, leaving in sight the top of the tunic (note the double-banded cord that wraps around the neck), which is also visible below, on the charioteer's hips. Because the graffito of the Temple of Peace was scratched in a summary manner, the band-work is rendered roughly and schematically all around the torso and cannot represent how the *fasciae* fit together (cfr. Fig. 10 left): however, the fact that the latter are asymmetrical – fifteen on the charioteer's right side and thirteen on his left – further excludes the possible identification with the regular horizontal overlapping bands of a *lorica segmentata* (that, likewise, did not reach the neck) and rules out the identification with a Roman, a Byzantine or even a barbarian soldier.



12

Fig. 12: Rome, Vatican Museums, Sala della Biga, inv. 2344. Statue of a victorious auriga, 1st century A.D., detail of the knife inserted into the leather straps



Fig. 13: Rome, Villa Albani Torlonia, inv. 493. Left: Fragment of the sarcophagus showing a charioteer on quadriga, circa A.D. 240; the knife is partially visible. Right: detail of the knife

13

Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590) at the Villa Peretti Montalto on the Esquiline hill; in the late 18th century, the head was replaced whereas legs and arms were restored.

38 See Thuillier 1999, who is more concerned with the Etruscan influences on the *ludi circenses* relying on the presence of a sickle on an Etruscan cista in private collection (another specimen is in the holdings of the Vatican Museums, inv. 39877). Note that the detailed drawing of the knife of the Vatican auriga in his fig. 1 (redrawn and adapted in my Fig. 12 because of the expensive rights of reproduction of my personal photo) is not accurate as regards the point of the blade. See also Bell 2018/2019, 74 n. 3.

39 Rome, Villa Albani, inv. 493; see Grosser 2021, 277–278, pl. 16, 2. Another unclear example is the (lost) fragment of a sarcophagus from the circus of Vienne, France (see Cherel 1904, pl. 2, 2).



14

Fig. 14: Mérida, Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, inv. CE26389. Detail of the 4th century A.D. mosaic of the auriga

26 The Vatican auriga was awarded the palm of victory, which he holds in his right hand; apparently, during the race he did not make use of his knife and did not suffer an accident. Yet, because this life-size statue is the only sculpted body of a charioteer in Roman art and, consequently, the only explicit example of a charioteer's knife, we cannot be sure whether the curve blade was typical of the equipment or if, instead, we should assume changes or personal preferences over time in the way charioteers hold the knife. For example, it seems that the victorious charioteer called Marcianus, who is depicted in a 4th century A.D. mosaic from Mérida (Fig. 14), held the knife on his right (only the handle is visible)⁴⁰. In addition, note the position of his left arm, identical to that of the graffito of the Temple of Peace. In the case of the latter, it might even be objected that the knife is not explicitly identifiable as such but, beside the fact that it does not look like any other object, my proposal to identify the entire figure with a charioteer appears to be compelling for other reasons, especially in light of the image carved on the 4th century knife with the ivory handle mentioned above: note the similarity of the charioteer's head (particularly his nose) and the leather straps around the chest.

27 I am aware that some elements are missing, such as the tunic under the leather straps (but it would

have been extremely difficult to depict it between those straps, even at the larger scale of the graffito) and the possible attributes of victory (yet, he might not have been a victorious charioteer). The absence of the racehorse is not a problem. In general, besides the images of charioteers during, or at the end of, circus races, many depictions show an auriga with his horse, as in the four mosaics from the Villa del Baccano and in various media, from gems to late-antique contorniates, with figures that however are very small – usually just a few centimetres high⁴¹. In many other cases the charioteer is without racehorse, as in our graffito. For instance, a black-and-white mosaic floor in the Baths of the Imperial Palace at Ostia, dating from the late 3rd to the early 4th century A.D., shows six victorious charioteers and their prizes: their names are followed by those of the respective racehorses that, however, are not shown⁴². Besides the three graffiti at the Colosseum, the *Ludus Magnus* and the *Paedagogium*, other examples of charioteers without horses include mosaics, the already mentioned funerary monument of *Eutyches* and the ivory handles mentioned above (the horse appeared on the opposite side, as other specimens attest to), oil lamps, contorniates, and even a bronze plaque⁴³.

28 In any case, the graffito of the Temple of Peace is not consistent at all with depictions of gladiators and legionaries as well. The pose itself is not conventional, but we are not dealing with a work of art or a faithful depiction of reality. I would argue that the knife is at the auriga's right hip, and it is clearly highlighted, moreover with a blade

40 Museo Nacional de Arte Romano at Mérida, Spain, inv. CE26389. According to Landes 2008, 421, a short vertical bar visible on the image of the ivory handle Froehner 887 (Fig. 10 right), precisely on the left of *Hilarus' fasciae*, would be the knife used during the circus races; however, a symmetrical bar appears on the opposite side in the ivory handle Froehner 886 (Fig. 11 left).

41 See Landes 2008, 424–429 and fig. 9 (fibula); Grosser 2021, 212 pl. 30, 2 (gem); 224 pl. 20, 2 (glass); 248 pl. 42, 3 (bronze contorniate); 292 pl. 24, 1–2 (terracotta).

42 Height: 8 m; width: 5.7 m; the individual figures of the mosaic are nearly life-size, ca. 1.55–1.75 m in height.

43 Grosser 2021, pls. 9, 1 (mosaic); 12, 2 (*Eutyches's* relief and inscription); 25, 4 (terracotta money box); 26, 2–3 (bronze plaque and ivory handle); 33, 3–4 (oil lamps); 41, 2–3 (contorniates); 43, 3 (game pawn).

different from that of the Vatican auriga and similar to that of a knife sold as souvenir, precisely because, paradoxically, in my view the latter constitutes the key element of the composition. We can safely exclude that an auriga scratched an image of himself as carved on the handle of his own knife, but we can try and guess that the author of the graffito was a charioteers' passionate follower (see further below), that he owned a knife with the ivory handle decorated with a charioteer, and that he scratched that image on the marble step of the Temple of Peace, no doubt with another tool, trying to copy and enlarge the prototype by twenty times with a certain degree of freedom. At the end of the previous section, I proposed that the same author may have wished to preserve the memory of an unknown auriga: the connection of the 4th century knife (whose shape, when open, was identical to the knife visible on the graffito) with the very image incised on its ivory handle might be a supporting element. This option would explain some details of the graffito and the presence of a knife with a straight, not curve, blade: its insertion was intentional and necessary.

Why in the Temple of Peace?

29 If the presence of the graffito of the auriga's bust near the Circus Maximus and those of the charioteers in the *Ludus Magnus* and the Colosseum is comprehensible (although the actual chariot races did not take place in the amphitheatre), the image scratched inside the Temple of Peace is more problematic. If the depiction of a charioteer on an ivory handle was an actual model, why enlarge that small figure and carve it on a marble step in a way that made it not fully recognizable, except for the crisscross pattern of the leather thongs wrapped around the upper body? The distance of the Temple of Peace from the Circus Maximus is irrelevant. We can take as an example an *insula* located near the present Piazza Venezia, on the site of the Palazzo delle Assicurazioni Generali (cfr. Fig. 1, PV), where »due larghi gradini, irregolarmente rivestiti con pezzi diversi di lastre marmoree« were brought to light in 1904: »il ciglio del gradino superiore era costituito da tre lunghi lastroni rettangolari«, the top surface of which was scratched with graffiti depicting some gladiators, although the Colosseum (Fig. 1, C) stood at a considerable distance⁴⁴. Note that the auriga in the Temple of Peace was clearly larger than those graffiti, the biggest of which did not exceed the height of 55 cm. Originally those slabs belonged to a more ancient floor, possibly located in the porticoes that surrounded the temple of Divus Traianus. Beside some *tabulae lusoriae* (board games), there were at least five graffiti depicting »pugilatori o gladiatori, come viva reminiscenza dei pubblici spettacoli, cui il popolo aveva assistito«, with their names incised above the respective heads. The steps ran along the northern façade of an *insula* facing a large public space and their re-use was dated to a period not earlier than the 5th century A.D. On the other marble slabs, too, the diggers recorded »rozzi graffiti, consunti in gran parte per attrito, e tracciati dagli oziosi plebei che passavano il loro tempo all'aperto in quei luoghi di popolare ritrovo« as, for instance, on the steps of the *Basilica Iulia* or in the pronaos of the temple of Divus Antoninus and Diva Faustina⁴⁵.

44 Gatti 1904a, 341–346 (341); see also Gatti 1904b, 153–157 figs. 2–17. For the context, see the plan in Gatti 1934, pl. 1.

45 Cfr. Langner 2001, 72 n. 457 fig. 29 and pl. 152 no. 2346 (Basilica Iulia); pl. 36 no. 763; pl. 75 no. 1182–1183 and 1187; pl. 76 no. 1192 (column shafts of the temple of Divus Antoninus and Diva Faustina). See also Langner 2001, pl. 70 no. 1129 for a simple sketch of a charioteer in the Domus Aurea. As for other subjects, two figures (identified as a man and a woman) and other marks were scratched on a marble slab reused in the early Middle Ages in front of the Pantheon and brought to light in the 1990s: Virgili 1997/1998, 205 figs. 5, 7–8; for a later period, see the graffito of the Archangel Michael scratched on the door jamb of the Porta San Sebastiano in 1327.

30 Chariot races were not only the oldest and most popular of the spectacles in Rome: they also drew the largest crowds throughout the Roman Empire (suffice it to recall the importance of the *Hippodrome in Constantinople*) and continued to do so centuries after the gladiatorial games faded away. The »passion for the circus« (*furor circensis*) extended far beyond the Circus Maximus and penetrated deep into the lives of all Romans regardless of age, gender, or social status, and even following them into death, as attested to by many sarcophagi. In the 2nd century A.D., Lucian of Samosata (*Nigrinus* 29.1) wrote about »the uproar of the city, the crowding, the theatres, the races, the statues of the drivers, the names of the racehorses, and the conversations in the streets about these matters«. From the 4th century A.D. onwards, with the decline of gladiatorial games, chariot races gained even more popularity: in Rome there were about sixty-six days of games in a calendar year and approximately twenty-four chariot races on a game day⁴⁶. During the high point of the sport's popularity, Ammianus Marcellinus (14.6.25) recalled the favourite amusement of »the multitude of lowest condition and greatest poverty«: indeed, »from sunrise until evening, in sunshine and in rain, they stand open-mouthed, examining minutely the good points or the defects of charioteers and their horses«.

31 The charioteers occupied positions of high social visibility; most of them were slaves or freedmen but their success enabled them to attain wealth and exercise public influence. They were criticised for competing publicly for money and for the astronomical sums they won, but the lower layers of Roman society were their most passionate and partisan followers. All this suggests the possible existence of honorific dedications to charioteers: not by chance, the graffito from the *Paedagogium* depicts a charioteer's bust. The entranceways, *euripi*, and galleries of circuses, the stable houses of the factions and various prominent public locations throughout the city of Rome were potential sites in which such statues may have been erected. Other depictions of charioteers may have been inspired by the now-lost public statues, as in the case of the charioteers from the four factions on the 3rd century mosaics from the villa near Baccano (cfr. Fig. 9) that, moreover, look like the statues of Castor and Pollux excavated in the Circus Flaminius and eventually displayed on top of the Capitoline stairway. The provenance of the Vatican auriga is unknown (Fig. 12), but charioteers' statues are also known to have been erected in religious precincts: Galen (de Praecogn. 1.13) states that »the rich and powerful in the cities« set up portraits of charioteers besides divine cult images. Given the dedication and display of life-size charioteer images in sacred contexts, we might even consider the existence of at least one such statue in the Temple of Peace, along with that of victorious athletes from Greece attested to by literary sources and inscriptions. For example, beneath the now disappeared Via del Sole, corresponding to the southwestern half of the marble floor of the Temple of Peace square – that is, very close to the step with the graffito of the auriga – in September 1891 the pedestal of a statue of Pythokles made by the sculptor Polykleitos (5th century B.C.) came to light. The former, a pentathlon champion, after his victory in 452 B.C. was originally honoured in the sanctuary of *Olympia* (Pausanias 6.7.10; Pliny, Nat. Hist. 34.9.16)⁴⁷. The pedestal found in the Temple of Peace, at least 1 m high, is of Greek marble and preserves almost entirely the five lines of a Greek inscription (re-carved under Septimius Severus) and the upper moulding; its top surface preserves two holes, apparently corresponding to the feet of the lost statue. If the statue of an auriga, too, was displayed there, his image scratched on the step might have recalled, or would have been in competition with, the statues that decorated the porticoes and the square of the Temple of Peace: note that some graffiti sketched on the floor of the Basilica Iulia depicted at least one of the statues

46 Bell 2014.

47 Cfr. Gatti – Visconti 1891.

displayed nearby. Yet, the pose of our auriga does not recall Classical and Hellenistic statues; just to take an example, imperial charioteers have at least a raised arm instead of both hands on their hips, which is more common in the Middle Ages (for instance, in the 13th century carnet of Villard de Honnecourt and in many medieval funerary slabs). In any case, despite its ›ephemeral‹ character, the auriga of the Temple of Peace is the only image from that architectural complex that has survived *in situ*.

32 Independently from the statues on display, it is worth noting that the philosophers and doctors who gathered in the porticoes of the Temple of Peace used to discuss about the human body from a philosophical and a medical point of view – possibly the wounds of the Circus Maximus charioteers and of the Colosseum gladiators were a favourite topic⁴⁸. In any case, we can try and guess the reason why the auriga was scratched precisely on that step of the Temple of Peace (cfr. Fig. 2. 3). In that location, our graffito would have been visible along with the cult statue in the distance through the columns of the axial hall: vice versa, the auriga, like the graffiti found in 1825, could be seen by the goddess⁴⁹. Those two locations seem to have been chosen very carefully. Although the few excavations carried out in 1825 and 1999 brought to light graffiti, one should not assume that such images were widespread in the Temple of Peace. Indeed, the surviving floor slabs towards the Forum of Nerva are without figures or inscriptions (cfr. Fig. 3); likewise, some steps of the northeastern portico, found in 1935 underneath the now demolished Palazzo Nicolini, had no graffiti at all⁵⁰. Because only two steps belonging to the southwestern portico and a length of less than 2 m survive, it is impossible to know whether other graffiti were scratched on the next steps, but the visual connection of those that have come to light with the cult statue in the axial hall might not be a coincidence.

33 It is probably easier to guess why the second step of the southwestern portico has survived. As noted above, the relevant marble block was smashed just above the charioteer's head in order to preserve the whole image; inevitably, the lowermost step and the large slab of the actual floor were not removed. It would seem that these blocks were not dismantled and re-used elsewhere precisely because of the presence of the graffito, so similar to a funerary slab. If so, should we think of a sort of religious scruple? Another aspect to consider is that this sector of the southwestern portico remained unbuilt for centuries: at the beginning of the 17th century it corresponded to an empty area and apparently survived the construction of the modern neighbourhood. Yet, the adjacent steps were spoiled. In 1890–1891, the marble steps still *in situ* were almost reached by the trench opened for the construction of the large sewer running underneath Via Cavour, which can still be seen in section in the retaining wall of Via dei Fori Imperiali and across the end of the southwestern portico (note the diagonal trace towards the Forum of Nerva in Fig. 3). The survival of those steps might also be a lucky coincidence.

48 See Tucci 2017, 174–215. Galen, who was a regular visitor to the Temple of Peace at the age of 27, had been appointed surgeon to the gladiators who performed in honour of the imperial cult in his hometown Pergamon: Nutton 1973. The charioteers were also mentioned in philosophical discussions: see, for example, Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 17–18 and 27.

49 Check the plan of the Temple of Peace in Tucci 2022, fig. 17. In Roman temples the cult statues were not just looked at but, in their turn, reciprocated the gaze. Vitruvius (Arch. 4.5.1) writes that »the images themselves will seem to be rising as well, to view the supplicants and sacrificers«; see also Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (15.840–842) and Statius (Silv. 1.1).

50 Colini 1937, figs. 17 and 19.

Conclusions

34 This article sheds light on the graffiti of the Temple of Peace and, in particular, asks and answers a series of questions about the image scratched onto one marble step of the southwestern portico by assessing and considering its identification as a charioteer. The analysis has tried to provide a glimpse into everyday life in the capital of the empire during late antiquity and also to tackle issues of methodology and conservation: in some cases, it would be advisable to limit the excavations or, at least, to protect the finds. As attested to by my drawing of the charioteer overlaid on the top surface of the marble step (cfr. Fig. 5, right) as opposed to a line drawing on a blank backdrop, I have favoured an approach that does not study the graffito in isolation but takes into consideration its materiality and context, before we have to associate the adjective »lost« to this rare late-antique image. This graffito may well be unsophisticated but it constitutes an unexpected and welcome voice within the context of classical masterpieces, first-rate literary sources and imperial sponsorship that characterised the Temple of Peace. Our charioteer can be seen as actively engaging with its built and social environment in a variety of ways; certainly, it still communicates with us after many centuries.

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CONTACT

Dr. Pier Luigi Tucci
6, Avenue Simon Bolivar
75019 Paris

France

pigitucci@hotmail.com

ORCID-iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8549-2726>

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