ROME, ITALY
The Palatine Hill in Rome and its history of research in the 19th century. A report on the latest ›excavations‹ in the archives of Rome

Season 2021
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Der Palatin in Rom hat eine sehr lange und gut dokumentierte Forschungs-geschichte. Es fehlt jedoch eine systematische Zusammenstellung der bei seiner Erforschung produzierten Bilder. Mit Hilfe eines Forschungsstipen-diums (Santoro) wurden umfangreiche Materialien zu seiner Erforschung im 19. Jahrhundert gesammelt. Die dabei recherchierten Bilder stehen für die Aufnahme in ein Geoinformationssystem zum Palatin (»PalatinGIS«) zur Verfügung. Das GIS dient als Arbeitsinstrument für eine Studie zur Visualisie-rungsgeschichte des Palatins (Sielhorst). Im Beitrag wird exemplarisch die Rolle von fünf Bildern des Palatins näher erläutert, in dem sie in aller Kürze beschrieben und in ihren medien- und ideengeschichtlichen Kontext einge-ordnet werden.

The Palatine in Rome has a very long and well-documented history of research. However, there is no systematic compilation of the images produ-ced during its exploration. With the help of a research grant (Santoro), extensive materials were collected for its exploration in the 19th century. The

Head of project: B. Sielhorst.

images researched in the process are available for inclusion in a geoinformation system on the Palatine (»PalatinGIS«). The GIS serves as a working tool for a study on the visualisation history of the Palatine (Sielhorst). In this article, the role of five images of the Palatine is explained in more detail by briefly describing them and placing them in their context in terms of the history of media and ideas.

The exploration of the Palatine at the end of the 20th century

1 At the beginning of the current research, it seemed as if the Palatine ↗ had been thoroughly investigated at the end of the 19th century, especially in its north-western half, the Horti Farnesiani. This is due, on the one hand, to the well-known excavations in this area by the architect Pietro Rosa as well as an extensive study on it from 1999 [1] and, on the other hand, to the numerous publications on the original state of the Horti Farnesiani and their transformation in the 19th century that have appeared in recent decades [2]. In order to obtain a complete picture of the exploration of the Palatine at the end of the 19th century, it was therefore necessary to collect the documents on the archaeological activities in the other areas of the Palatine in order to clarify their relationship to the excavations in the Horti Farnesiani. The two main aims of the project were to fill a gap in the history of research on the Palatine and to make material available for a history of its visualisation.

2 With the help of a scholarship awarded from the head office of the DAI at Berlin, Valentina Santoro was able to do an extended work of research from mid-January until mid-July 2021. She visited about 13 archives and collections in Rome ↗ which host images from the research history of the Palatine from its very beginning in the Renaissance age until modern times [3]. The fundamental research carried out by Santoro is related to the scientific network of Barbara Sielhorst (DAI Berlin, Head Office) who is conducting a habilitation project about the Palatine as a methodological case study on the creation of knowledge in Classical Archaeology. The focus of the scholarship was to capture images from the Palatine from the 19th century and enrich them with metadata. On the basis of five images

(one lithograph, two photos and two maps) this article presents some of the results about the specific role of visualizations of the Palatine in the period under review.

Recent ›excavations‹ in the archives of Rome

3 The material found in the archives of Rome was immediately recorded in lists following the template for metadata recording for iDAI.objects ↗ (formerly Arachne). In the list, each image has an identification number (ID) that is identical to the ID of the digital copy that has been collected in a separate folder. The list is also supplemented with a map of the Palatine in which all the illustrations are mapped with the viewer's point of view [4]. Almost 50 % of the collected images come from online archives that are easily accessible on the web (a link to the specific webpage is also provided in the list). During our research, however, we discovered that many of them show inaccuracies or errors in their descriptions: wrong identifications, rough or wrong dates, etc. [5]. For this reason part of our job has been dedicated to double checking all the images in order to correct the errors and to put them in the right chronological order and topographical position [6]. The documents that are not available online have been consulted in the archives of Rome which answered our requests to provide a digital copy of each graphic for study purposes. We have now archived the total number of about 1100 records and we hope to get even more documents in the near future in order to enrich the collection.

The establishment of »PalatinGIS«

4 The graphics and the map will be transfered into a geoinformational system of the Palatine (»PalatinGIS«) within the iDAI.world ↗. The system currently under construction is published according to the FAIR principles. As an open access tool the GIS is not only interesting for scholars who deal with the history of research of the Palatine but also for those dealing with other topics, which is open for new research questions and extensions. The GIS will be situated within the iDAI.world which offers several different kinds of storing and visualizing data. The central part will be a collection of historic maps of the
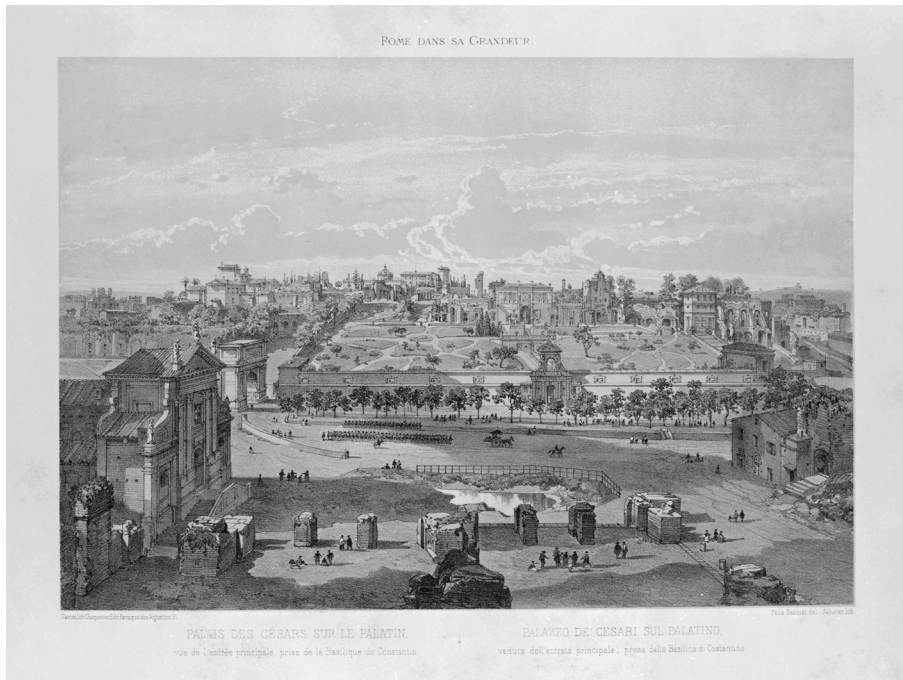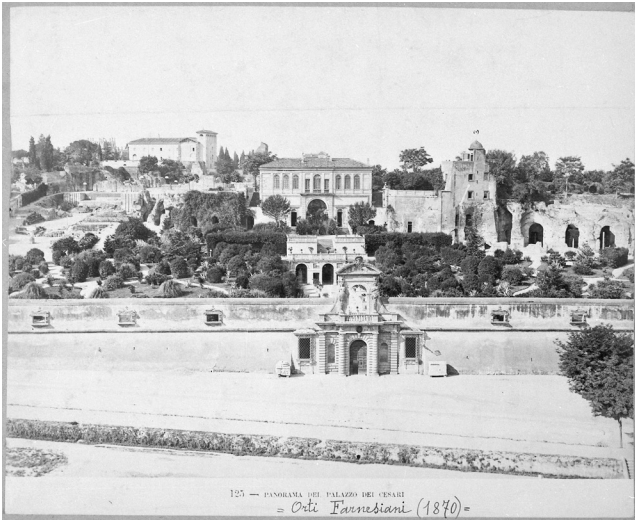
1 The Roman Forum and the Palatine seen from the Basilica of Maxentius in 1870. (Lithography: Leon J. B. Sabatier, Felix Benoist; Roma – Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali – Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico, MR – 37431)

Palatine within iDAI.geoserver ↗. This server provides georeferenced maps in the form of different layers so that it will be possible to compare the different manisfestations of the hill throughout its history. The images from the Palatine will be collected within the database of iDAI.objects. There, even digitized books concerning the Palatine (espacially rare editions) have already been made accessible. The metadata of each ›object‹ (image, book, etc.) and its topographical classification within the maps will make it possible to carry out many different search queries. The intelligent linking of the geoserver with the database of iDAI.objects wil help to recontextualize the data from the Palatine. By organizing, visualizing and making accessible a large amount of data, »PalatinGIS« will make it easier to work with it, thus leading to new research questions. The images collected by Valentina Santoro are a first building block for the GIS that is currently being created.

Pictures of the Palatine: New technology, new perspectives?

5 In order to demonstrate the role of images within the history of research and the creation of knowledge about the Palatine, five images from the end of the investigated period will be described and analyzed in more detail. The years between 1870 and 1890 mark a fundamental change not only in the appearance of the Palatine to the contempary visitor but also concerning the strategic implementation of the excavations.

6   The two pictures (Figs. 1. 2), both taken in 1870, show the view of the Palatine from the Maxentius Basilica ↗ in the north-east in a state that was to change fundamentally some fifteen years later. The main entrance to the Horti Farnesiani, with its 17th century double-storey entrance portal, lay in the middle of a high enclosing wall and was aligned with the central vault of the basilica opposite. In 1883/84, the wall with the portal was demolished to make way for large-scale excavations. The two illustrations show this view of the Palatine from the Forum/Campo Vaccino ↗, which has had a formative influence for more than two hundred years, and in their juxtaposition they also mark a radical change in the history of the visualisation of the Palatine. While the lithograph produced by Léon J. B. Sabatier and Felix Benoist (Fig. 1) shows the entire complex with the Palatine and the Forum as well as

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2   The front of the Horti Farnesiani towards the Roman Forum seen from the Basilica of Maxentius in 1870. (Photography: Author unknown; Roma – Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali – Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico, AF – 1626)

3   The Roman Forum and the Palatine seen from the Basilica of Maxentius after the demolition of the buildings of the Horti Farnesiani. (Photography: Author unkown; Roma – Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali – Museo di Roma, Archivio Iconografico, AF – 6793)

various gatherings of people including a military parade, the photograph produced in the same year (Fig. 2) shows a section of the Palatine with the entrance to the Horti Farnesiani in the centre, but without a single person. The use of photography, which was still relatively new, only became standard in the documentation of excavations on the Palatine during this period. Probably the most important protagonist here is John Henry Parker. From one of his publications from 1870, we are informed that he promoted the use of photography in the documentation of excavations on the Palatine, as he was of the opinion that this technique was superior to drawing or painting (»Photographs can only tell the truth«) [7]. However, his offer to photograph the ancient wall paintings in the area of the Horti Farnesiani was rejected by the director of the excavations there, Pietro Rosa, on the grounds that they had to be restored first. Reports such as this one show that when a new technique was gradually established, opinions always oscillated between adherence to familiar methods of documentation and a naive belief in progress. The comparison of the two images of the Palatine also makes it clear how much lithography was used to reproduce a panoramic overview of the site with the activities taking place there, while photography produces an ›objective‹, almost sterile reproduction of a part of the Palatine which, despite the extension of the buildings over several terraces, has been robbed of any depth effect in black and white photography.

7   In contrast, the photo taken after the demolition of the enclosing wall of the Horti Farnesiani gives a completely different impression (Fig. 3). There is nothing left of the baroque park. Instead, this part of the Palatine now looks like a deserted landscape of ruins. The picture, taken at a slight angle to the building structures, makes the spatial depth visible and shows in detail the structured, orderly procedure of the excavations. The ruins are neatly uncovered, marble finds in the centre of the picture are lined up and there is even a ladder to indicate the work that took place there. When looking at this picture, however, the viewer is left alone with several questions. In order to understand the picture, one needs, at best, the expertise of an archaeologist working there, who is practised in ›reading‹ these pictures and has sufficient previous knowledge.
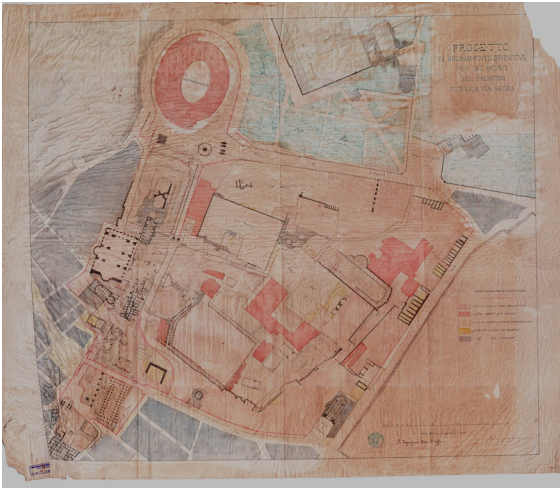
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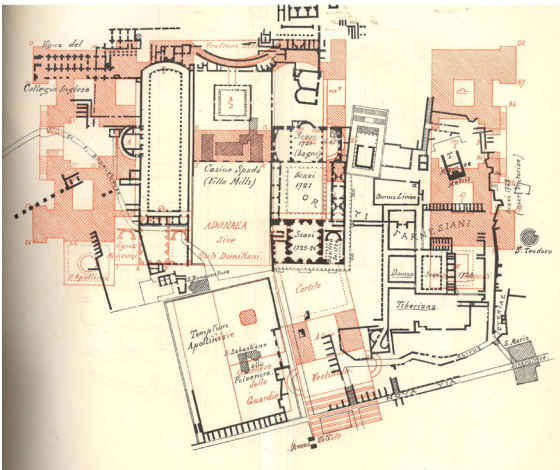
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4 General planimetry of the Palatine: final project for the excavations carried out by Rodolfo Lanciani. (Ground plan: Rodolfo Lanciani, Angelo Contigliozzi, Courtesy of MiC-MNR, Archivio Storico, 1687)

5 The Palatine around 1895 with details of the excavations documented by Francesco Bianchini from 1720 to 1730. (Ground plan: Hülsen 1895, 252–283 Taf. 6.7)

Maps as media of knowledge transfer

8 The two floor plans of the Palatine from the end of the 19th century (Figs. 4. 5) also require further explanation. While Rodolfo Lanciani's plan (Fig. 4) shows the Palatine with colour-coded areas indicating where excavation can take place and under what conditions, and which structures are to be demolished, Christian Hülsen's floor plan (Fig. 5) shows the excavated structures in black and the reconstructed structures in red. Lanciani was appointed head of the excavations on the Palatine in 1877, and the plan drawn up in 1881 offered, in a manner of speaking, an overall view of the work he was to carry out prospectively. Even though the ground plan certainly contained too little information for the scientist working on site to be able to serve as a guide to action, it certainly had its value in communicating and enforcing the planned expropriations and demolitions to representatives of municipal and state authorities. Hülsen's ground plan (Fig. 5), on the other hand, had a completely different function. Within the excavated and reconstructed structures shown, it also indicates where excavations had already been carried out on the Palatine by order of the Bourbons between 1720 and 1730. After an intensive reading of the manuscript of the book »Del Palazzo dei Cesari« by Francesco Bianchini from 1738, Hülsen had reconstructed where excavations had already been carried out some 170 years earlier. This research-historical work is visualised in this ›picture‹ of the Palatine. However, both Hülsen's retrospective plan and Lanciani's plan, which is oriented towards future work, require further information in order to be understood. The aspects of a primarily image-based interpretation mentioned here would have to be enriched with further information, such as on the historical context (in 1871 Rome became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy), on the structures of the administration of antiquities in Rome as well as on the training of the actors.

Summary and outlook

9 The brief insight into the research of Valentina Santoro on the history of research on the Palatine in the 19th century and of Barbara Sielhorst on its visualisation history as a case study of knowledge generation in classical

archaeology make it clear how many insights into the Palatine can still be expected through research in the archives. Due to its research history of over 500 years and the density of its documentation and reception, the Palatine in Rome offers unique conditions for a study of the methods and techniques used in its exploration. An intensive study with regard to the images produced in the broadest sense and the media upheavals associated with them therefore seems a worthwhile undertaking. With the scholarship, a major step was taken towards a more in-depth analysis of an important phase in the history of research on the Palatine and, at the same time, an extensive collection of data was created for the geoinformatic system on the Palatine, which is currently under construction. The systematic cataloguing of material, the development of the GIS and the subsequent analysis of further phases in the research history of the Palatine will be continued.

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Endnotes

[1] Tomei 1999.

[2] Giess 1971; Luciani 1983; Morganti 1993; Romanelli 1960; Pensabene 1990; Bruni-Fraschetti 1990; Benedetti 1990.

[3] Consulted Archives: American Academy in Rome, photo archive; Archivio Fondazione Primoli; Archivio Storico del Museo Nazionale Romano (partly); Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte (partly); Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; British School at Rome (partly); Istituto Archeologico Germanico a Roma; Archivi Fotografici dell'Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione; Istituto Centrale Per La Grafica; Archivio del Museo Centrale del Risorgimento di Roma; Museo di Roma; Archivio Storico del Parco Archeologico del Colosseo; Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari (partly).

[4] The map shows the latest state of research of the Palatine Hill and was made by Jens Pflug (Architectural historian and Doctoral candidate with a project about the structural development of the Domus Augustana on the Palatine).

[5] For example Fig. 3 (Museo di Roma, AF – 6793). The picture shows the Palatine Northern slopes after the demolition of the surrounding wall and its entrance in 1883–1884 and the subsequent excavations carried out by Rodolfo Lanciani. The dating of the photograph by the archive, on the other hand, is 1850–1880.

[6] In order to ensure the quality of the data and to improve iDAI.objects Valentina Santoro also reviewed the records from the Palatine drawings at the DAI in Rome which are already accessible online.

[7] Parker 1870, 174–175 (177).

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