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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The extension of Rome's Capitoline Museums and the design of a new Hall on the site of the ancient 'Giardino Romano'



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**Abstract**

The new Hall of Marcus Aurelius in the Capitoline Museums, located within the ancient site of Giardino Romano, displays the original statue of the Roman emperor of the 2nd century AD. The idea of extending the Capitoline Museums by including this site came about in the framework of its general redevelopment.<sup>1</sup> The new Hall is the result of a long and complicated process (1988-2005) considering the exceptional importance of the site and the many changes brought to the museum programme during the said period (Figures 1 and 2). In fact, the new Hall was originally supposed to display the marbles of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, the foundation wall of the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter, embedded within the structures of the Palazzo Caffarelli, opposite the Giardino Romano. However, in 1997, the plan for the Capitoline Museum changed radically as the statue of Marcus Aurelius, which had been restored following the blast of a bomb attack in 1979, was determined to be the focus of the Hall. The project finally consisted of a steel and glass structure on an elliptic plan and shaped around the foundations of the Temple, with the statue at its center.

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<sup>1</sup>The chronology of the design work stretches from 1993 to 2002; the works have been achieved between 2004 and 2005. The design leader was Carlo Aymonino and his collaborators architects Maria Luisa Tugnoli, Geneviève Hanssen, Raffaella Castrignanò. The structural design is by engineer Antonio Michetti, with Giuseppe Silveti and architect Marco Astolfi.

## 1. Introduction

The new Hall of the Capitoline Museums, also called the "Hall of Marco Aurelius," displays the original equestrian statue of the Roman Emperor.<sup>2</sup> This hall is located at the

<sup>2</sup>Marcus Aurelius Caesar, Emperor of Rome from 161 to 189 A.D., was surrounded by an aura of good governance, which he had largely proved by sharing his imperial power with Lucius Verus. He

ancient site of the former Giardino Romano (Roman Garden). This open space has served as a garden since the first decades of the past century. It is located at the rear of Michelangelo's Palazzo dei Conservatori and is the result of a sequence of additions. The site includes part of the Palazzo Caffarelli<sup>3</sup>, which today flanks the hall on two sides, with a wing extending to the southeast along the via del Tempio di Giove and serving as the stables of the Palazzo. This hall also borders a free area that is used as a garden (Figure 3).

The hall is the result of a complicated design process that was begun at end of the 80s and that lasted for 17 years (Musei, 2000; Musei Capitolini, 2006). The programme initially aimed at the general rehabilitation of the entire Capitoline Museums to showcase artifacts of extraordinary value, which needed an organic reorganization throughout a set of strategic works. Architect Costantino Dardi<sup>4</sup> participated in the first step of the design process. However, the second phase shifted the focus to the restoration of the Giardino Romano for exhibition purposes.

In the framework of the research and of the proposals developed during these years, the idea of using the site of the Giardino Romano as an exhibition space was proposed based on the old and unsuccessful idea of Rodolfo Lanciani. Lanciani proposed reshaping the site into a closed space and lit from above for exhibitions of exceptional importance. Before dying in a car accident in 1991, Costantino Dardi had time only to sketch some perspectives that showed a covered glass-ceiling shed over a large portion of the garden.

Carlo Aymonino resumed Dardi's project and completed the work in 2005. The length of the entire operation may seem longer than even the average length of great projects conducted in Italy in the past decades. However, the facts and events that influenced its implementation cannot be overlooked. The exceptional historical and artistic importance of the site, the *Capitolium*, which symbolizes the founding of Rome, is renowned for its world-famous piazza designed by Michelangelo with the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, its famous staircase that slopes down to the city, and the three buildings that impress the viewer by the magnificence of the site.<sup>5</sup> The historical and

architectural importance of the site has obviously marked the operation with great caution and also strong opposition against the idea of transforming the ancient Giardino Romano into a closed hall (Aymonino 1997a, 1997b, 1998).<sup>6</sup>

Events grew complicated as further changes in the museum programme were effected and were abruptly impacted by a traumatic episode in Rome's and Italy's history: a bombing attack on the Capitoline Hill at the end of the 70s. This event influenced the decision to shelter the equestrian statue of Marco Aurelius<sup>7</sup> in the new Hall, which changed the organization and the architectural design of the museum despite the implementation process that was underway. On the other side, no questions were raised around the inclusion of the archaeological remains within the site. These remains contributed to retracing the history of the site, such as bringing to light a section of the foundation walls of the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter. Excavation works, which should have been initiated ten years earlier to establish whether or not the intervention was a feasible option, began only in 2000.

In any case, without the resolution of Anna Mura Sommella, Director of the Capitoline Museums, and of Eugenio La Rocca, Head of the Municipal Superintendence, along with the heartfelt commitment of Carlo Aymonino, one of the most important Italian architects of the last century, the extension of the Capitoline Museums would never have been achieved. Along with the municipal administration, these people have managed, each through their own role and hard work, to facilitate consensus among policy makers, cultural realms, and public opinion, which are all necessary to any form of progressive public initiative in Italy.

## 2. Premises of the design work and Costantino Dardi's solution

In the early 1990s, the Giardino Romano was a bare space with no outstanding feature. It was located 6.60 m above the adjacent courtyard of Michelangelo's Palazzo dei Conservatori, on the northern side of the *Capitolium*. The garden was accessible from the first floor of the Palazzo from the hall of Horatii and Curatii and from the hall of the Castellani Collection, and today from the Galleria degli Orti. The garden borders Palazzo dei Conservatori on two sides: along the rests of the Palazzo Caffarelli and along the

(footnote continued)

was also a very cultured person and was devoted to the study of Stoic philosophy, on which he also wrote a treatise in Greek.

<sup>3</sup>Palazzo Caffarelli was built during the Renaissance in Rome's most important site, the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter. The temple is considered to be the highest institutional place of worship in ancient Rome. The structure was built by Tarquinius Priscus and Tarquinius Superbus, two Etruscan kings of Rome, in the 6th century B.C.

<sup>4</sup>Costantino Dardi is well known in Rome as the author of two difficult conservation plans for the Roman museums at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in via Nazionale and at the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme in Piazza dei Cinquecento.

<sup>5</sup>These are the Palazzo Senatorio, Palazzo dei Conservatori, and Museo Nuovo. The first was erected during the renovation of the pre-existing medieval building, which was supposed to host the Senate, and which in turn was built on the *Tabularium* (i.e., the State Archives of ancient Rome). The second was built later in place of a building, with a portico erected a century earlier by Bernardo Rossellino, which was then demolished. The third was built *ex novo* on the side of the hill with the church of the *AraCoeli*. Michelangelo died before completing the work, which was then conducted by

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Giacomo Della Porta and other architects in full respect of the original project. However, the project was accomplished in a very long time.

<sup>6</sup>The central role of the *Capitolium* in the age-old history of Rome is beyond question. Since the late medieval period, the Romans have identified themselves with it. The Palazzo Senatorio was built on Capitoline Hill upon the remains of the ancient *Tabularium*, followed by the Palazzo dei Conservatori. The Marcus Aurelius and the Capitoline Wolf were brought here. Michelangelo was chosen among the great architects of the Renaissance to give shape to the representativeness of the Roman people. When Rome became the capital of Italy, the monument represented the nation's longed-for national unity (the Vittoriano) and was also erected on Capitoline Hill.

<sup>7</sup>The statue dates back to 176 A.D. or shortly after the emperor's death.

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