

ORTO

òrto – noun [lat. hòrtus]

The Italian word for a small or medium plot of land, often next to or around a house, enclosed by wall or hedge, in which vegetables, fruit and flowers are grown. In certain literary uses and some specific cases, it is equivalent, as already in Latin, to “garden” (lat. hortus).

ORTO

Before the Villa Maraini,
a History of *Horti*.
Travelling Back Through
the Centuries While
Staying at Home

Romeo Dell’Era

Starting from some questions about the ancient objects kept at the Villa Maraini in Rome, headquarters of the Istituto Svizzero, the reader is guided in a journey back into the history of that villa and the place where it stands. From present until Antiquity, from the Istituto Svizzero until Julius Caesar.

The author would like to express his deep gratitude to Basil Nelis (University of Oxford) for his attentive and patient proofreading.

1.
View from the top

The Villa Maraini in Rome, the main location of the Istituto Svizzero, dominates the highest part of the Pincian Hill. From the top of its tower one can enjoy a magnificent 360° view over the whole city. Monuments that have stood for over two thousand years of history can be sighted in just one glance.

I have been living here for ten months, including the lockdown of spring 2020. During that period, climbing the tower was my only way to “visit” Rome. Whereas previously an entire city stimulated my historical curiosity, my movements were subsequently restricted to that beautiful villa.



View to the west from the tower of the Villa Maraini.

Villa Maraini itself is, in fact, an interesting starting point for historical reflection. A stroll through the garden leads one to encounter many ancient objects. The walls of the *loggia* are entirely decorated with fragments of antique marble. Although generally said to have been found during the construction of the villa, this romantic

explanation seems rather far-fetched. Where do they all really come from? Why are they now here? What is their historical significance? Before trying to answer these questions, we need to recall the history of the building and the place in which it stands. Without leaving the villa, we will be able to travel back through the centuries.



Ancient marbles in the loggia and in the garden of the Villa Maraini.

The history of the Villa Maraini

The Villa Maraini has belonged to the Swiss Confederation since 1947. It was built in 1903-1905 by a couple from Lugano, Emilio Maraini (1859-1916) and Carolina Sommaruga (1869-1959). Designed by Otto Maraini (1863-1944, brother of Emilio), the villa arose in the northern part of the city center at the western end of what nowadays

is the Rione Ludovisi. The plot of land purchased by the Maraini in 1902 was used as a landfill until then and was an incorporation of two different lots: the north-eastern corner had been part of the Villa Ludovisi until 1888; the rest had already been expropriated in 1873 from the Convent of the Capuchins of Santa Maria della Concezione.

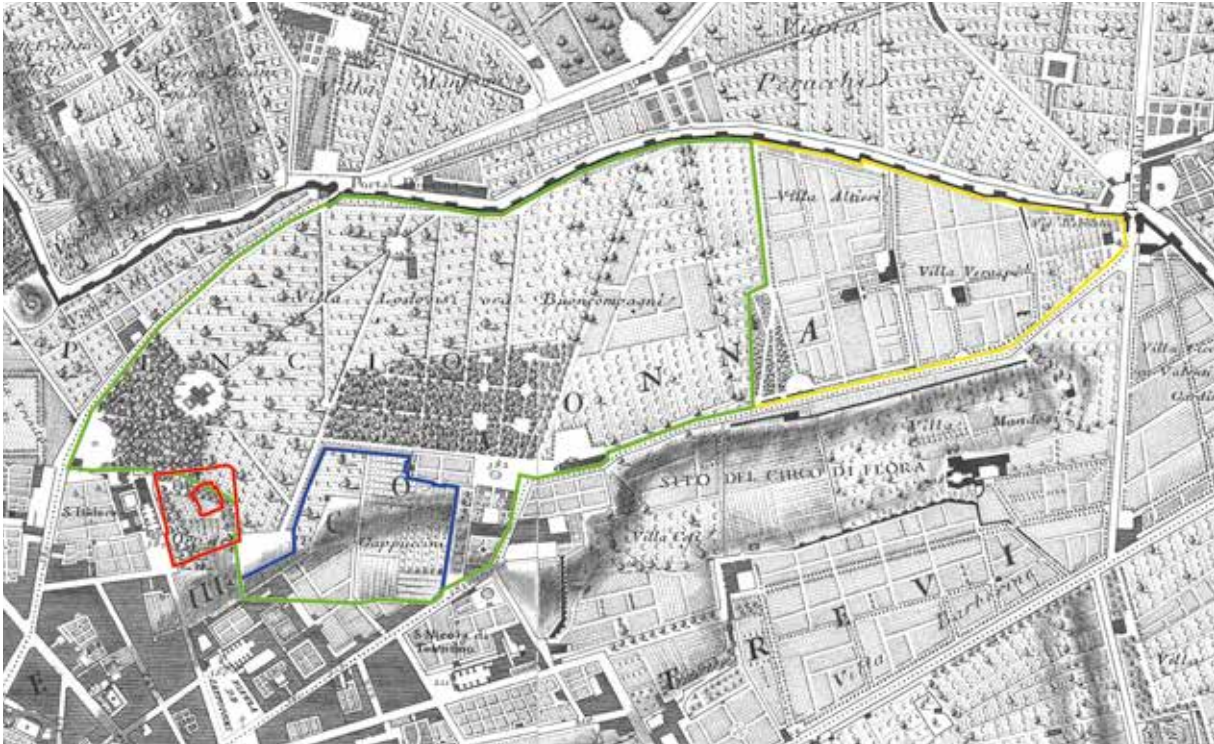


The Villa Maraini.

4.
Villa Ludovisi

Until 1886, most of the area of the future Ri-one Ludovisi had been one single property, the Villa Ludovisi. This huge suburban villa was sold to the Società Generale Immobiliare by its last owner, Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi, and subsequently divided into lots. The villa's beautiful park was then destroyed and a completely new neighbourhood was constructed in the area in the first years of the twentieth century. Only a few remains recall the existence of the former Villa Ludovisi: the main palace, incorporated and hidden behind the Palazzo

Margherita (American Embassy), and the Casino dell'Aurora, which stands in front of the Villa Maraini to the north. The Villa Ludovisi consisted of a complex of lands purchased and assembled in 1621-1622 by Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi (the nephew of Pope Gregory XV, Alessandro Ludovisi), who had bought the whole expanse of land between what now are the Via di Porta Pinciana and the Via Piemonte. He acquired its westernmost part, along with the Casino dell'Aurora, from Francesco Maria del Monte, another influential cardinal of that time.



The Villa Ludovisi. In green, the property acquired by Ludovico Ludovisi in 1621-1622; in blue, the land granted to the Capuchins; in yellow, nineteenth-century extensions of the

property; in red, location of the Villa Maraini. Map: Giovanni Battista Nolli, *Nuova Topografia di Roma*, 1748 (© Wikimedia Commons).

5.
Casino dell'Aurora

When Ludovico Ludovisi purchased the property of Francesco Maria del Monte on the Pincian Hill in 1621, the Casino dell'Aurora, which had been constructed between 1556 and 1570 by the apostolic secretary Francesco del Nero, had already stood there for over fifty years. Each owner wanted to increase the Casino's artistic attraction, to the extent that its rooms today are graced by paintings of masters such as Caravaggio and Guercino, whose representation of the Chariot of Aurora gave the building its current name. The

Casino is still used as a private residence by the Boncompagni Ludovisi family.



The Casino Boncompagni Ludovisi ("Casino dell'Aurora") from the tower of the Villa Maraini.

6.
*Santa Maria della Concezione
dei Cappuccini*

This convent, now located in Via Vittorio Veneto, was founded in 1626 by Antonio Barberini (brother of Pope Urban VIII, Maffeo Barberini). The Barberini and the Ludovisi were bitter rivals: the former were close to the King of France, the latter to the King of Spain. Under Gregory XV (1621-1623), the Ludovisi were in power, but their position was overturned after the election of Urban VIII in 1623. Then, in 1628, Ludovico Ludovisi was forced to donate to the Capuchins a part of the land he had bought in 1622 from Duke Giovanni Antonio Orsini. At that moment, although it was not involved in this controversy, the area of the future Villa Maraini was divided between the park of the Casino dell'Aurora, which was annexed to the Villa Ludovisi, and the gardens of the Capuchins, who benefited

from the protection of the Barberini. On ancient maps, a small chapel belonging to the Capuchins appears near what is now the Villa Maraini's northwestern corner.

An inscription citing the convent can still be read in Villa Maraini's garden:

M.I.C.B.M.V.
CAPVCCI.

The abbreviations can be developed as follows:

M(onasterium) *I*(mmaculatae) *C*(onceptionis)
B(eatae) *M*(ariae) *V*(irginis) / *Capucci*(norum).

“Convent of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Capuchins”.



The inscription of the Capuchins in the garden of the Villa Maraini.

7.
Villa Orsini

As shown in a plan drafted by the famous Swiss Italian architect Carlo Maderno, Duke Giovanni Antonio Orsini sold the eastern and largest part of his property including the main palace to Ludovico Ludovisi in 1622. Duke Orsini later divided the western part of his property extending to the west as far as Via Sistina and Via di Porta Pinciana into lots and sold it to several buyers: Ottavio Vestri di Barbiano, for example, bought the land to build the Convent of Sant'Isidoro (1625). Supported by the Barberini, the Capuchins purchased the area currently occupied by the

Villa Maraini, which was located to the north of their convent (1626). There, in the place where the friars subsequently set up their gardens with the small chapel, stood a house indicated in Maderno's drawing as a "house that remains in possession of the duke", but a few years later it was apparently sold or granted to the Capuchins before being demolished. Giovanni Antonio had inherited the Villa Orsini from his uncle, Cardinal Flavio Orsini, who had bought at least part of that property from the heirs of Giovan Girolamo de' Rossi, bishop of Pavia.

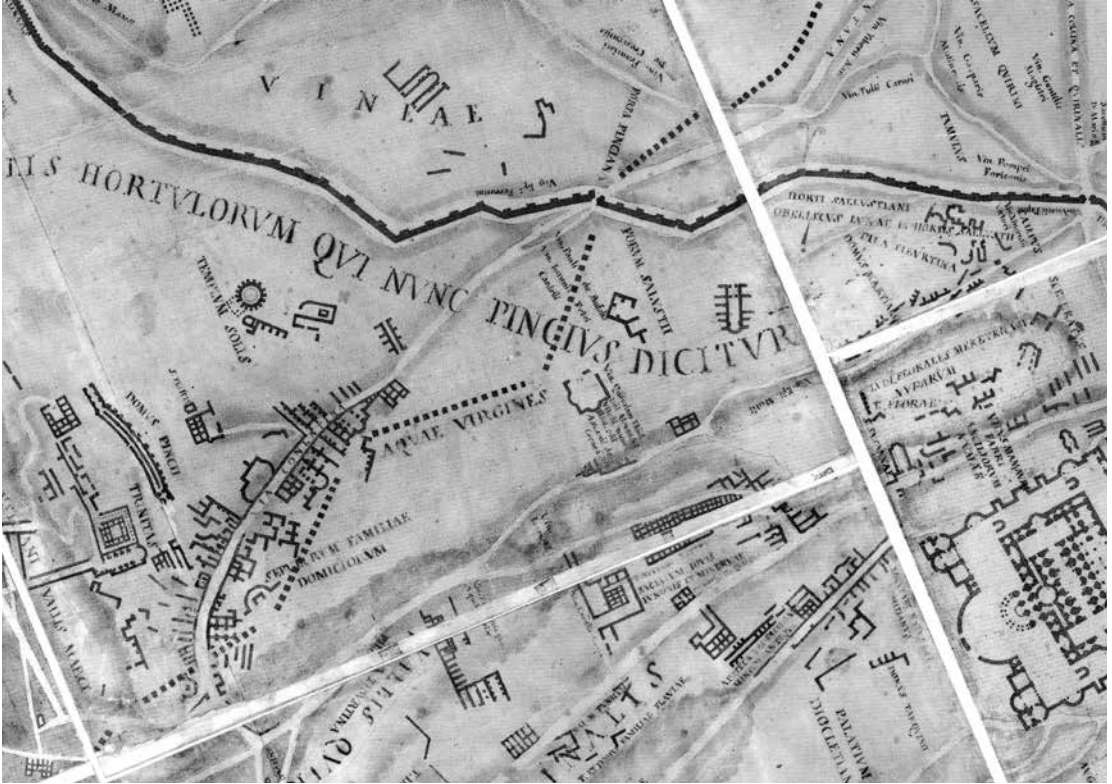


In orange, the Villa Orsini; in violet, the Vigna of Francesco Maria del Monte with the Casino dell'Aurora; in red, location of the Villa Maraini.

Map: Giovanni Battista Nolli, *Nuova Topografia di Roma*, 1748 (© Wikimedia Commons).

Little is known of the Pincian Hill in the Middle Ages. A few decades later, the first printed map of Rome drawn by Leonardo Bufalini in 1551 provides a plan of the area as it was before the interventions of Francesco del Nero and Flavio Orsini. Despite its inaccuracies, the map shows ancient

ruins on the hill: the site of the future Villa Maraini, however, is empty. This is the situation documented in all previous depictions of Rome. Although vineyards on the Pincian Hill were marked as early as in the eighth century, they cannot be located with precision.



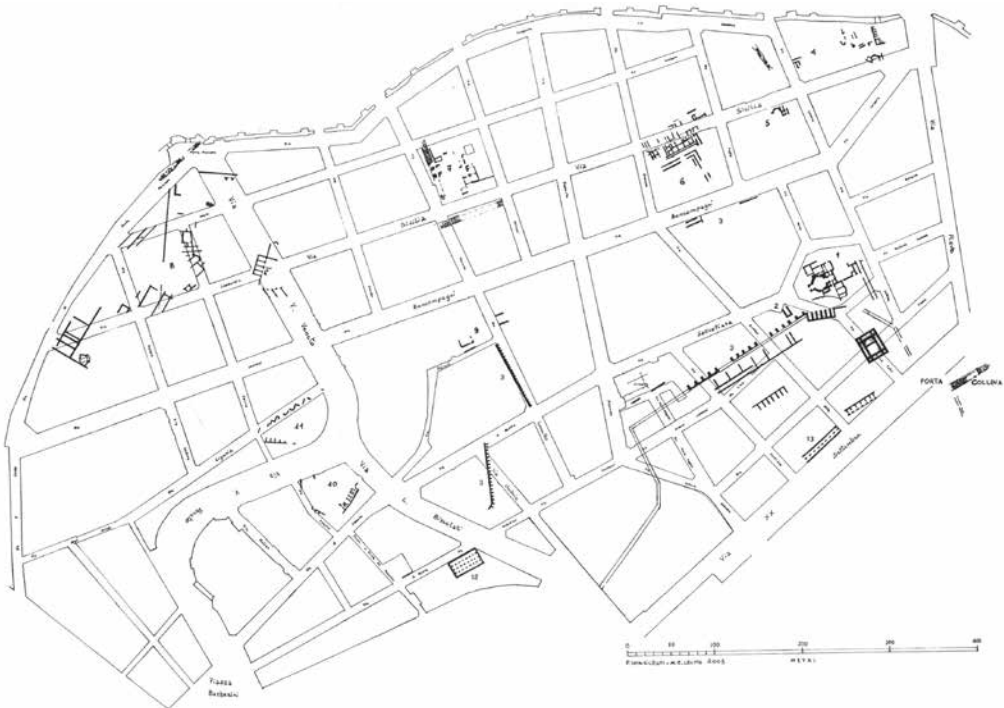
The Pincian Hill on the map of Rome by Leonardo Bufalini, 1551 (© Mapped storiche di Roma, LeggereScrivere.it).

*Antiquity: the imperial estate
in Pincis and the Horti Sallustiani*

In Late Antiquity, the expression *in Pincis* was used to refer to an enormous imperial estate that covered the whole Pincian Hill. That name appears for the first time in 400 AD, when the poet Claudian mentions the “Pincian summits” (*Pincia culmina*: Claudianus, *Panegyricus de consulatu Stilichonis*, v. 401). The *Pincii* were a Roman family of the late fourth century who owned a villa (*domus Pinciana*) west of the *Via di Porta Pinciana* (ancient *Via Salaria Vetus*). After the sack of Rome in 410 AD, the *domus Pinciana* seems to have been incorporated into the *Horti Sallustiani*, an imperial estate that already existed east of the *Via Salaria Vetus*, badly damaged during the sack. It is perhaps for this reason that the name of the *Pincii* continued to be used during the Middle Ages while that of the *Horti Sallustiani* fell into disuse.

The extremely rich imperial estate known

as *Horti Sallustiani* (“gardens of Sallust”) covered the vast area between the *Via Salaria Vetus* (*Via di Porta Pinciana*) and the *Via Salaria Nova* (*Via Piave*) outside the so-called Servian Wall. Today, the only visible structures of this estate are located on the Piazza Sallustio, 1 km east from the Villa Maraini. The gardens, which had been the property of the emperor since Tiberius (14-37 AD), took their name from the Roman senator and historian Sallust, their owner between 44 and 36 BC. Before that, these *horti* had belonged to Julius Caesar. No one knows how the dictator had acquired such a vast property: the Pincian Hill was in fact known at that time as “hill of the small gardens” (*Collis Hortulorum*: Suetonius, *Vita Neronis*, 50, 2). No information is available on the area on the current Villa Maraini’s location at the western end of the *Horti Sallustiani*.



Plan of the *Horti Sallustiani* (Innocenti and Leotta, “*Horti Sallustiani*,” 150).

10.
Conclusion

What can be said about the numerous ancient objects and fragments preserved here at the Villa Maraini? Considering that some may have been brought accidentally when the site was still a landfill, it is very unlikely that they belong to the gardens and secondary buildings present in the past. Roman inscriptions are very helpful in answering the question: their unique texts make them easily identifiable in the databases epigraphists use in their research. Thus we discover that the small marble altar with the funerary inscription of the young *Charitinus* now placed in the garden had already been seen in 1574 in a house in Rome's historic center. The marble plaque with the funerary inscription of *C. Venatidius Sabinus*, now walled in two separate fragments in the *loggia*, was registered in the last decades of the nineteenth century in a villa on the Via Casilina. There-

fore, the ancient objects that adorn Villa Maraini must have been purchased on the antique market at the time of its construction. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to find out where most of them come from, and even if they had been recorded in scientific literature or indeed even drawn or photographed before being taken away, it is extremely difficult to obtain such information.

Like the inscription of the Capuchins, other objects may have a different origin. For example, we can reconstruct the history of the marble plaque with the funerary inscription of *Ti. Claudius Hymnus Plocamianus*, now walled in a concrete plant box at the villa's east entrance. Research conducted on the basis of this inscription allows us to know that it was discovered in 1907 during the implantation of a vineyard in Torre del Padiglione (Aprilia). A masterpiece of ancient art now on display in the Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Massimo) was discovered at the same time and place: the marble relief of Antinous, lover of the emperor Hadrian, rep-



resented as the god Silvanus. According to the anonymous biography of Emilio Maraini, the Swiss entrepreneur, who was on the spot as a board member of the company that owned the land, was the first to notice the relief still half-hidden in the ground. Thus we may deduce that Maraini, respecting the law of that time, was able to bring the small inscription to his villa after the intervention of the archaeologist Giulio Emanuele Rizzo. It is conceivable that other objects found in Torre del Padiglione are now kept at the Villa Maraini (according to Rizzo, “*rozzi mosaici a bianco e nero, rocchi di piccole colonne o capitelli di peperino di sagoma tuscanico-romana, mattoni [...] e frammenti di lastre di marmo per rivestimento di pareti o pavimenti*”).

Beyond this small contribution, there is still much to discover: specific research could trace the origin of some other objects that today anonymously decorate the beautiful Villa Maraini. My residence at the Istituto Svizzero is almost over: will anyone continue this investigation?

Three Roman funerary inscriptions kept at the Villa Maraini. From left to right: *Charitinus*, *C. Venatidius Sabinus* and *Ti. Claudius Hymnus Plocamianus*.



Bibliography

Benocci, Carla. *Villa Ludovisi*. Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato – Libreria dello Stato, 2010.

Broise, Henri and Vincent Jolivet. "Pincius Mons". In *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*. Vol. 4. Ed. Eva Margareta Steinby. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 1999. 90–93.

Cima, Maddalena and Eugenio La Rocca, ed. *Horti Romani. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Roma, 4-6 maggio 1995)*. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1998.

Coarelli, Filippo. *Guida archeologica di Roma*. Rome/Bari: Laterza, 2008 (first ed. 1974).

Dell'Era, Romeo. "Iscrizioni romane conservate presso Villa Maraini (Istituto Svizzero di Roma)." *Epigraphica* 82 (2020). In press.

Emilio Maraini. Rome: Tipografia Cuggiani, 1936.

Frutaz, Amato Pietro. *Le piante di Roma*. Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1962.

Fritz, Michael P. *La villa Maraini a Roma. Un richiamo allo spirito della villeggiatura romana nei primi decenni di Roma capitale*. Bern: Società di storia dell'arte in Svizzera/Ufficio federale della cultura UFC, 1998. Guide storico-artistiche della Svizzera SSAS 642/643.

Guidobaldi, Federico and Vincent Jolivet. "Domus Pinciana". In *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*. Vol. 2. Ed. Eva Margareta Steinby. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 1995. 156–157.

Innocenti, Paola and Maria Cristina Leotta. "Horti Sallustiani: le evidenze archeologiche e la topografia." *Bollettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 105 (2004). 149–196.

Maier, Jessica. "Leonardo Bufalini and the first printed map of Rome, 'the most beautiful of all things.'" *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 56-57 (2011-2012) 243–270.

Rizzo, Giulio Emanuele. "Torre del Padiglione." *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, 1908. 48–52.

Virgili, Paola. "La villa di Lucullo a Palazzo Mediobanca." *Bollettino di Archeologia online* 6, n° 2-3-4 (2015). 237–256.

ORTO

This publication is a project conceived
by Istituto Svizzero

Editorial coordination:
Saul Marcadent

Texts: Armando Bramanti,
Johanna Bruckner, Romeo Dell'Era,
Francesco Dendena, Attilia Fattori Franchini,
Pauline Julier, Dominique Laleg, Quinn Latimer,
Charlotte Matter, Nastasia Meyrat, Real Madrid,
Kiri Santer, Urs August Steiner, Anais Wenger

Translations:
Maureen S. Friedman (pp. 54–63, 139)
Phillip Hill (pp. 87–106)
Proofreading, copy editing:
Craig Allen

Published and designed by NERO

All texts © the authors
All images © the authors and Istituto Svizzero

All rights reserved. No part of this
publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system or
transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or
otherwise, without the prior written
consent of the publisher.

Individual order and information
distribution@neroeditions.com
neroeditions.com

ISBN: 9788880561040
Printed and bound in July 2020