

URBAN RITUALS IN ITALY AND THE NETHERLANDS

Historical Contrasts in the Use of Public Space,
Architecture and the Urban Environment

Heidi de Mare and Anna Vos (eds.)



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... He turned right through the arches opened in the wall, then left, circling the bulky mound which gave its name to the Testaccio district. At the base of the hill stood a line of squat, formless, jerry-built huts, guarded by savage dogs. Here metal was worked and spray-painted, engines mended, bodywork repaired, serial numbers altered. During Zen's time at the Questura this had been one of the most important areas in the city for recycling stolen vehicles.

The other main business of the district had been killing, but they had ceased with the closure of the slaughterhouse complex that lay between the Testaccio hill and the river. Any killing that went on now was related to the part-time activities of some of the inhabitants, of which the trade in second-hand cars was only the most notable example. As for the abattoir, it was now a mecca for aspirant yuppies like Vincenzo Fabri, who thronged to the former killingfloors in their Mercedes and BMWs to acquire the art of sitting on a horse. Opposite, a few exclusive nightclubs had sprung up to attract those of the city's gilded youth who liked to go slumming in safety.

Skirting the ox-blood-red walls of the slaughterhouse, Zen walks on into the grid of streets beyond. Although no more lovely than the suburb where Tania and her husband lived, Testaccio was quite different. It had a history, for one thing: two thousand years of it, dating back to the time when the area was the port of Rome and the hill in its midst had gradually been built up from fragments of amphorae broken in transit or in handling. The foursquare, turn-of-the-century tenements which now lined the streets were merely the latest expression of its essentially gritty, no-nonsense character. The merest change in the economic climate would be enough to sweep away the outer suburbs as though they had never existed, but the Testaccio quarter would be there for ever, lodged in Rome's throat like a bone.

Testaccio: Change and Continuity in Urban Space and Rituals

Anna Vos

Testaccio is a well defined area of Rome. On two sides it is marked out by natural boundaries, the river Tiber and the slopes of the Aventine. The borderline between the Aventine and the plain of Testaccio is underlined by the ancient Via Marmorata. The third boundary consists of the Aurelian wall, containing the Porta S. Paolo and the Pyramid, and has, due to its age, acquired the status of a natural boundary as well. In the words of Carlo Aymonino, Testaccio is 'confined within its boundaries' (Aymonino 1990: 20).

Apart from these exceptional boundaries, Testaccio is also rich in remarkable spatial elements: the rigid grid-pattern of streets, including tenement houses in a variety of forms, the huge open and now deserted spaces and cast-iron constructions of the slaughterhouse and cattle market, the quiet cemeteries shaded by cypress trees up against the Aurelian wall, the jumble of corrugated-iron shacks housing down-market businesses of one sort or another. And last but not least, a strange bare hill rising up in the middle of the flat area. At its base, it is largely surrounded by delapidated old buildings with windowless holes through which the cold wind blows.

Just as varied as Testaccio's spatial elements are the people who are, or were, interested in this quarter, and just as varied are their opinions of it. At the beginning of this century, for example, Domenico Orano chose Testaccio, then a brand-new residential quarter, for his research project 'How do the people of Rome live?' In his eyes, Testaccio was a real working-class district. The majority of Romans however, according to Orano, considered Testaccio to be a 'centre of evil and destruction, a prison for people on probation. The well-to-do citizen only mentions it with contempt and does not hide his disgust at the idea of having to live there' (Orano 1912: xi). During Orano's time, the scholars who were interested in Testaccio were mostly archaeologists and historians, for whom it was 'the commercial area of ancient Rome', with its many ruins, and especially the hill itself, as objects of interest (Orano 1912: xi).

There was also, however, a Testaccio for tourists. During Orano's time, foreigners used to climb 'the mysterious hill, on top of which they [could] enjoy a wide vista extending from Rome to the Alban hills, reminiscent of the landscapes painted by Poussin'. They also visited the Protestant cemetery, 'the goal of the pilgrimage to the tombs of Keats and Shelley' (Orano 1912: xi). Nowadays, access to the hill is officially allowed only on request, and very few tourists pay a visit to the cemetery, where the ashes of Gramsci lie as well. Confronted with the poverty opposite, most tourists make a U-turn. The hill 'used to be one of the sights of Rome and must have been one of the gayest and most delightful places in the city: now, surrounded as it is by dreary suburbs, no one would want to linger more than a few minutes to view it as a curiosity', says a current guidebook, thus confirming the disappearance of Testaccio as a tourist attraction (Masson 1965: 371). Nevertheless Testaccio, with its trendy bars and



Fig. 1 Actual situation, sketched by author. sw = rests Servian wall, aw = Aurelian wall, pp = Pyramid and Porta S. Paolo, e = rests Emporium, l = Arco di S. Lazaro, ss = S. Saba, c = non-Catholic cemetery, w = war cemetery, cm = former cattle market, s = former slaughterhouse, so = Stazione Ostiense

discos, which create their own special ambiance in the shadow of the hill, and with its bad reputation and dilapidated state, nowadays attracts certain groups of Romans, if only for a short visit.

Novels also confirm the ambiguous reputation of Testaccio. In Michael Dibdin's crime novel (1990), but also in a book by Leonardo Sciascia (1961), Testaccio is specifically mentioned as a criminal hangout. Pier Paolo Pasolini ends his poem *The Ashes of Gramsci* (1957) with a description of daily life in Testaccio. In contrast to the cemetery — 'silent in the wind's wet humming, here where Rome is silent, among wearily agitated cypresses, next to you' — he portrays the vitality, the frivolity and sensuality of the shrieking and laughing inhabitants of the sombre tenement houses and the whores awaiting their customers in the shadow of the hill: nighttime pleasures with a flavour of poverty (Pasolini 1984: 15). Pasolini also chooses Testaccio as the spot where the protagonist in his film *Accattone* dies (1961).

As varied as the interests and possibly biased judgements are, there exists a certain measure of agreement in the recognition of the *place* Testaccio. Testaccio is undoubtedly an historic landmark, rich in history, a place which counts for something in the Rome of today. Why this unusual collection of urban elements in this particular spot? What sorts of things have happened here? What have been the events here in which spatial elements played a role? What positions has Testaccio assumed in the many Romes that Rome has been?

It is remarkable that the only professional attention focussed on Testaccio at the moment comes from urban planners and architects. Testaccio, thanks to its boundaries and despite its diversity, is recognized as something special within the context of the city. Luigi Caruso remarks that its seclusion has led to the district being able to preserve its original character — an *area popolare* in the true sense of the word —, which makes it the last *area Romana* of the city (Caruso 1984: 49). Caruso was part of the municipal *Laboratorio Testaccio* which, at the instigation of the architect Aymonino, former city councillor for the historic centre, developed a *Piano Quadro* for Testaccio, which had been declared a strategic area.

What I would like to deal with in this article is the way in which physical changes and continuities in the urban space of Testaccio are related to the events that have taken place there. My object is to gain insight into the extremely complex interplay between spatial structure and social structure, interplay that clearly goes beyond a functional interpretation. Therefore, the following analysis of Testaccio will postulate urban space and urban use as two respectable, equal, self-willed and well-matched opponents in the process of urban transformation.

For this purpose, I shall consider the heterogeneous reality of Testaccio at three levels. Firstly, Testaccio has been documented and depicted in maps and illustrations for centuries. This historical material is the basis for a description of a number of spatial transformations. In the second section I shall consider which urban facilities have made their way into Testaccio in the course of time. Finally, I shall draw attention to the extraordinary events that have taken place there over the years, to the way in which people have physically occupied the place and made Testaccio their own.

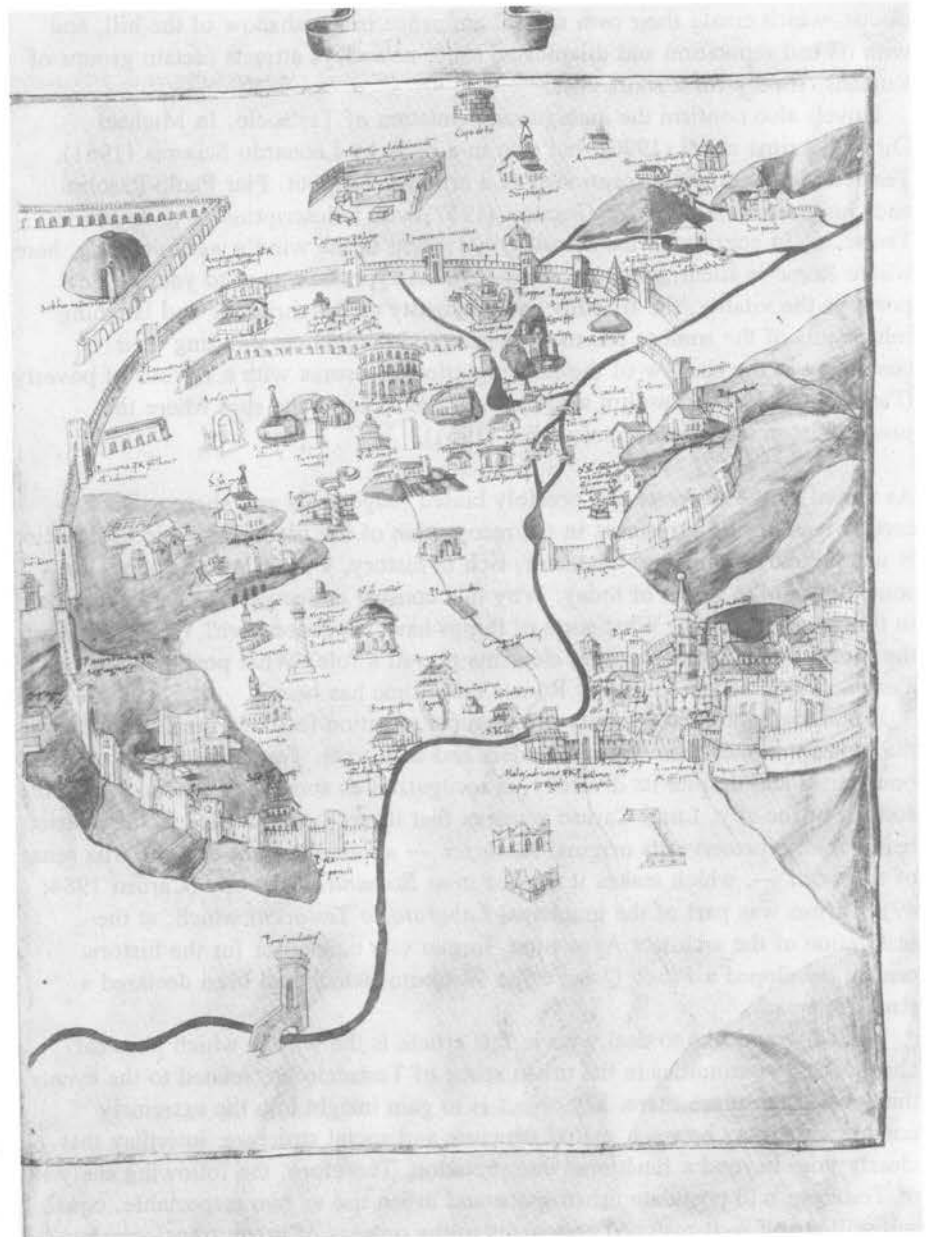


Fig. 2 Miniature by Pietro del Massaio 1471

Topography of Testaccio

The most distinctive, and at the same time oldest feature of the district is the strange, barren hill, Monte Testaccio, which lends its name to the area. The oldest known city map in which the Monte is depicted, is a miniature from the early years of the fifteenth century. From then on, the hill is consistently depicted on all maps and drawings of the city, often as an object comparable to the ruins and buildings of Rome; the miniature by Pietro del Massaio (1471) is a perfect

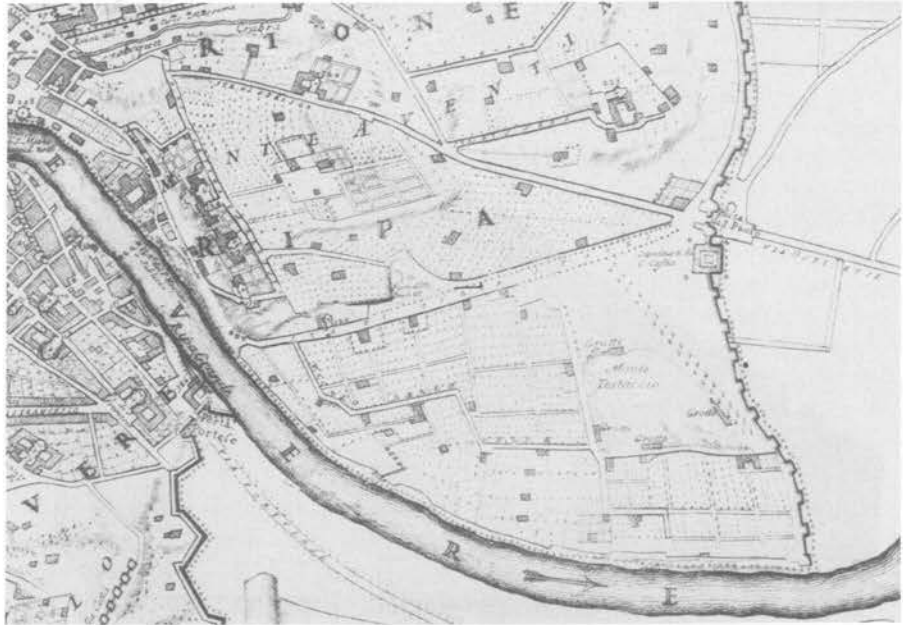


Fig. 3 Antonio Barbey 1697. This is the first map on which caves are indicated

example. Older depictions do not include the hill, nor do the famous travel guides for pilgrims, such as the twelfth-century *Mirabilia Romae* and the eighth-century *Itinerarium Einsiedlense*.

The hill is virtually bare, almost without vegetation. Further inspection reveals that it consists entirely of fragments of pottery. The buildings at the foot of the hill are basically no more than a front wall. One could see them as caves dug out of the hill. The local climatic conditions are exceptional, due to the air which is permanently held by this mountain of potsherds: it is perpetually cold here. From written sources we learn that the construction of the caves started in about 1667; the municipality — or rather, as the wording says, the Roman people — has since granted concessions to individuals to excavate the caves.²

Here and there in the area between the Tiber, Monte Testaccio and Via Marmorata, within the grid of twentieth-century housing blocks, we still find fragments of ancient buildings. Impressive ruins have recently been excavated on the bank of the river, several metres below the present street level. The oldest known map of Rome, the so-called *Pianta Marmorea*, Marble Map, dates back to the time of the emperor Settimio Severo (192-211). This consisted of two hundred and thirty-five square metres of carved marble, one-tenth of which has been preserved in fragments. Some of these pieces show what is now Testaccio, in the areas adjacent to the river.

The fragments show gigantic buildings in the vicinity of the river. In some of the fragments portions of texts are carved, such as *Horrea Lolliana*, the warehouses of Lollius, and the last three letters of *Porticus Aemilia*. The *Porticus* was an immense arcade, almost five hundred metres in length and dating back to 193 B.C. (Reconstruction of ancient Rome by Giuseppe Lugli and Italo Gismondi 1949). Between the *Porticus* and the Tiber lies the building of the *Emporium*.

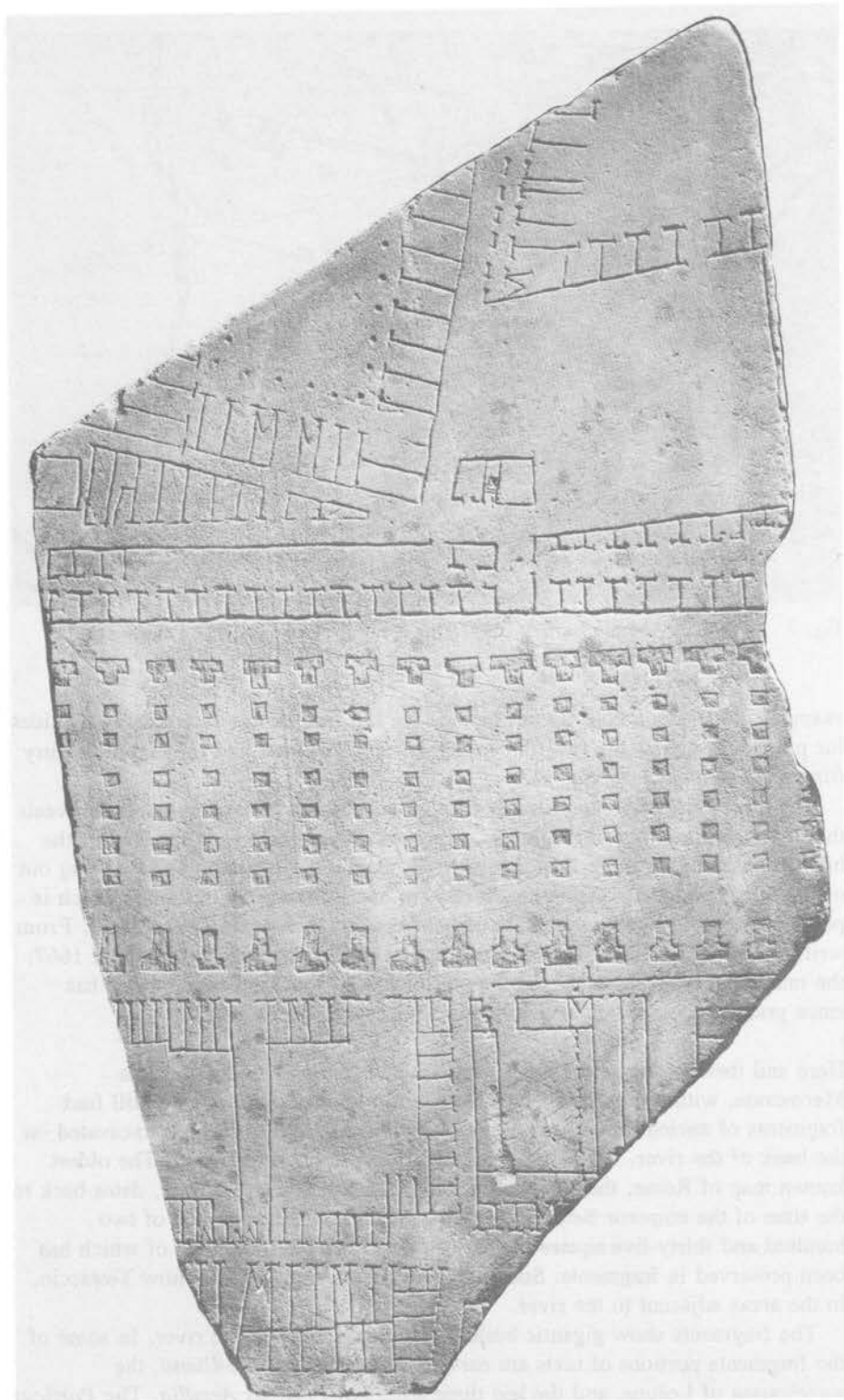


Fig. 4 Fragment of the *Pianta Marmorea*, the Marble Map, indicating the *Porticus Aemilia* and the *Horrea Galbana*, dating to the time of Settimio Severo (203-211)

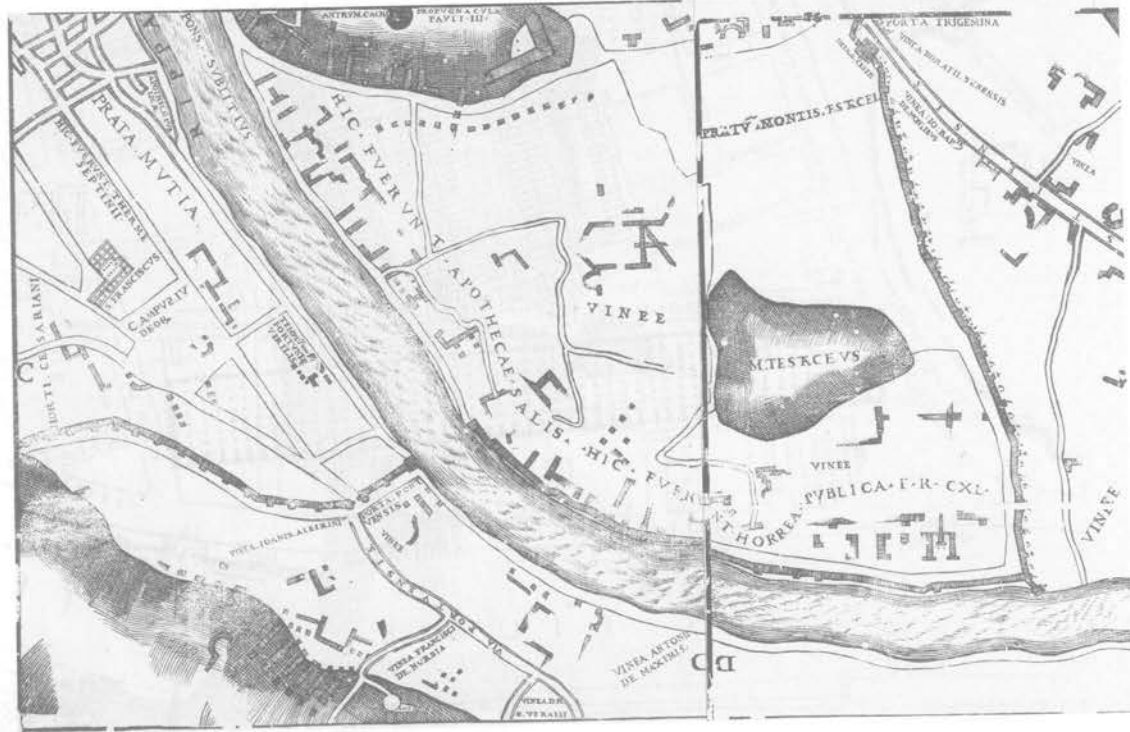


Fig. 6 Leonardo Bufalini 1551

and the Via Marmorata. In general, this allocation of space corresponds to the situation in ancient Rome. The junction between the two grid systems, where the angular distortion is absorbed in a square, coincides with the boundary between the ancient *Porticus Aemilia* and the *Horrea* behind it. The ruin of the *Porticus Aemilia* has always played a part in the development plans for *Roma Capitale*, understandably as archaeological work was at its height in Testaccio at the time.⁵ The very first city plan for *Roma Capitale*, dated 1873, shows no development at all in the area of the *Porticus*. The city plan of 1882, however, indicates a large-scale development on the site of the *Porticus*, in size similar to that of the *Porticus* itself. Eventually a grid of streets and housing blocks materializes in this area of both *Horrea* and *Porticus*, in such a way that the old angular distortion is retained.

In the area between Monte Testaccio, the Tiber, and the Aurelian wall, at the back of the hill, the large-scale complex of cattle market and slaughterhouse is situated. This was built towards the end of the nineteenth century according to a plan by G. Ersoch and was closed down in 1977. The courtyard of the former cattle market is enclosed by buildings and divided by a footpath which is slightly elevated and enclosed by fences, in order to separate it from the cattle area. In the centre is a little concentric building from which the entire complex can be seen. The cattle market is one of the largest open-air public spaces in Rome. The city plans of the late nineteenth century all indicate a large-scale industrial complex on this site, a complex linked to the adjacent railway. The part of the Aurelian wall that ran parallel to the river, still visible on a map of 1868, was

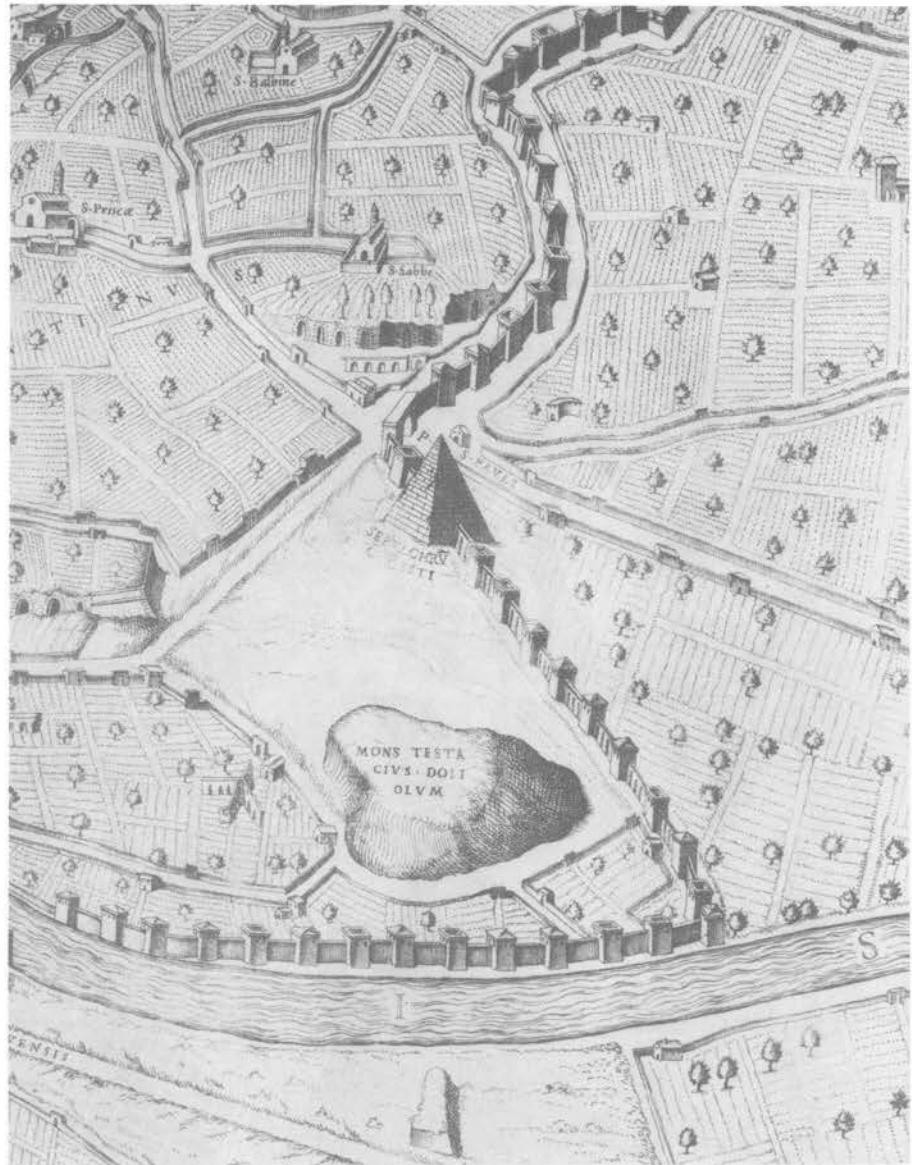


Fig. 7 Mario Cartaro 1576

demolished, probably to boost industrial development in the area by providing direct access to the river. The slaughterhouse and cattle market complex does not, however, utilize this feature: it is entirely surrounded by a new wall, with entrance gates on the city side as well as the riverside.

The contrast between the impressive age-old ruins and cast-iron nineteenth-century slaughterhouse on the one hand and the shabby, provisional nature of Testaccio's most recent buildings on the other, is painfully apparent. Ramshackle sheds made of corrugated iron make up the area in front of the hill. This development dominates the first impression one gets upon entering Testaccio from the historic centre. At the height of the building boom of *Roma Capitale* in

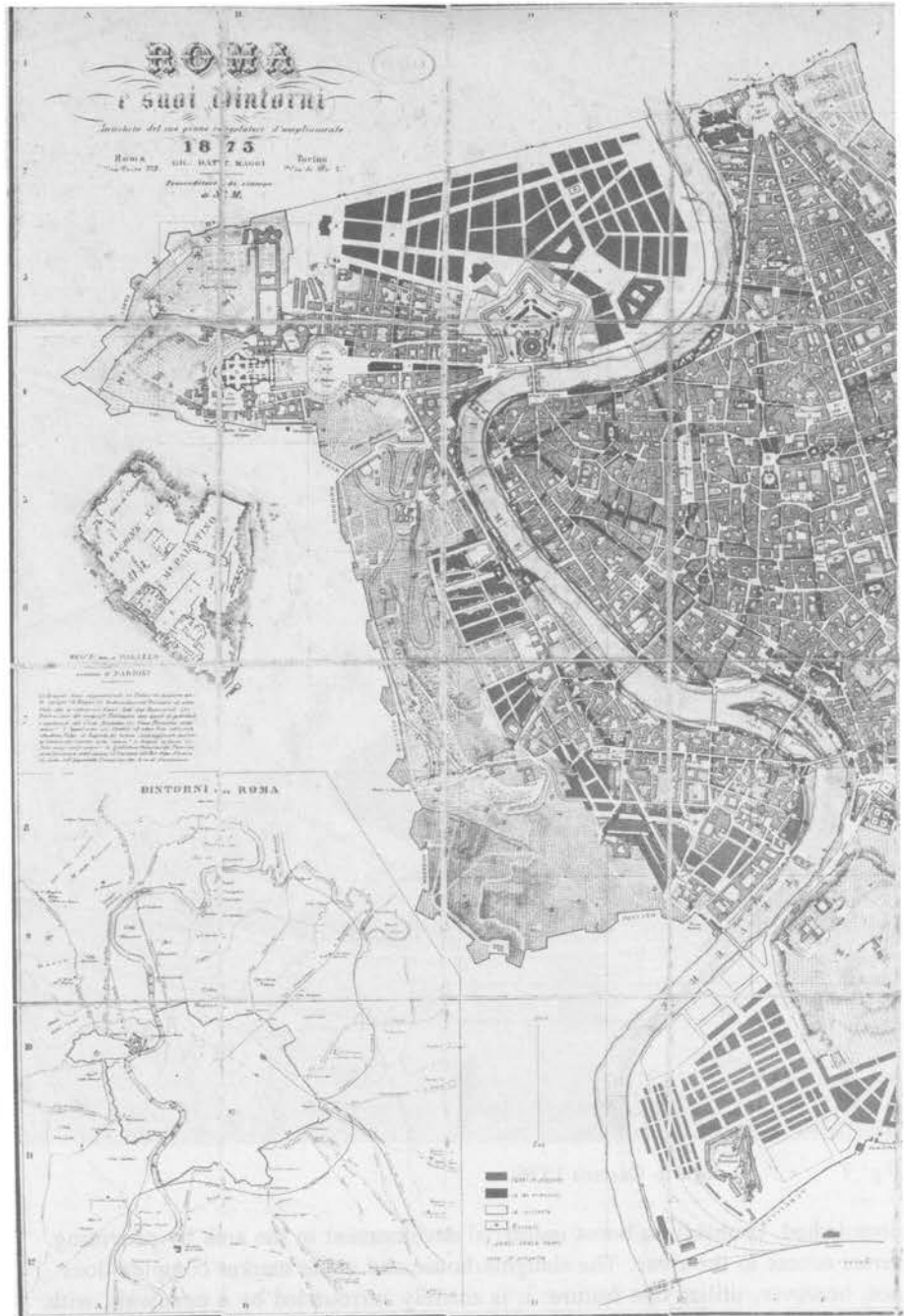


Fig. 8 Giuseppe Micheletti, *Piano Regolatore (City Plan) 1873*

the late nineteenth century, this area was spared, despite the city council's plans. The city plan of 1873 allocated only half of the site for development. Remarkably enough, the other half remained blank. The 1882 city plan indicates it as the site for a large-scale industrial complex. Despite these plans, this part of Testaccio remains waste land until the 1930s, when a football stadium is built, *Campo*

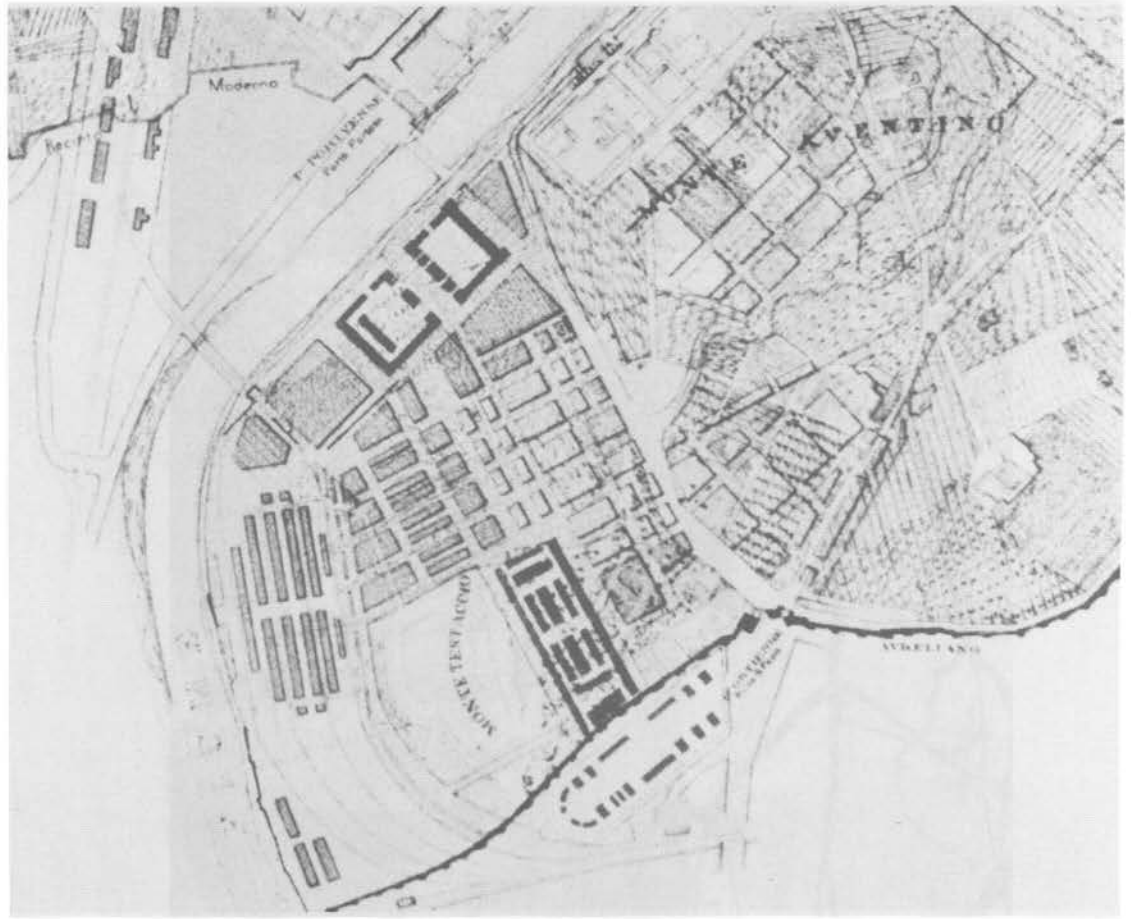


Fig. 9 *Piano Regolatore* (City Plan) 1882

Testaccio. After the demolition of the stadium in the fifties, the site is illegally used by private individuals for all sorts of marginal businesses like scrapyards and tire storage. This type of squatting has so far been tolerated by the city council.

The recent history of this part of Testaccio, which is called *Prati*, is not so surprising when we consider its past. Throughout the previous twenty centuries — dating back to Roman times — this area has remained vacant, and thus undeveloped. On his map of 1551, Bufalini does not indicate any archaeological remains in this area, in contrast to the area adjacent to the Tiber. All maps published since portray the terrain as different to the patchwork of walled vineyards that surrounds it. Some maps leave the area white, others show rough grass or meadowland; sometimes sparse trees are shown, at other times a whole grid of trees is drawn in, or a path is indicated. Here and there some words are added: *pratium*, meadow, as in Bufalini's map (to be distinguished from *vinee*) or *Prato del popolo Romano*, meadow of the Roman people, as is the case in

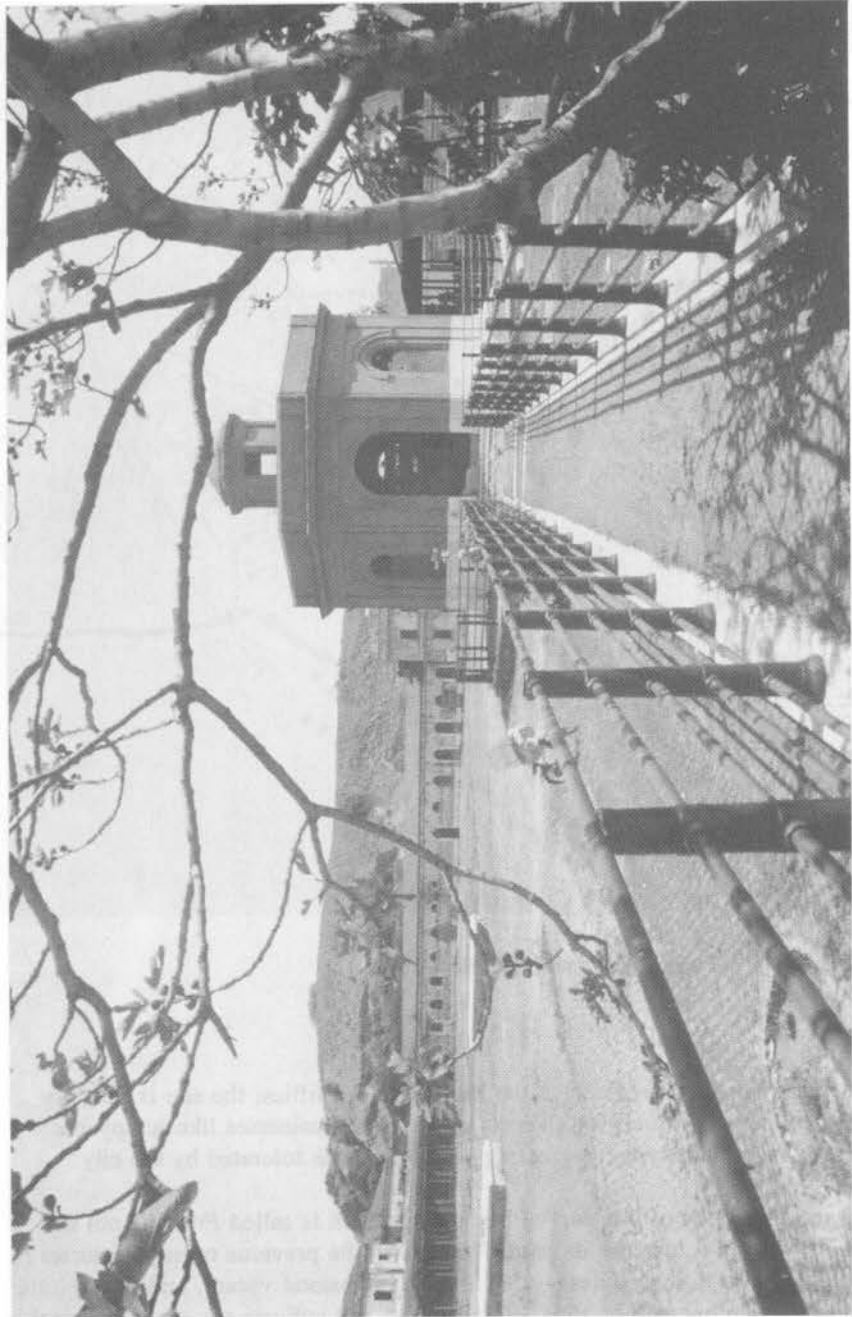


Fig. 10

G. Ersoch, plan cattle market

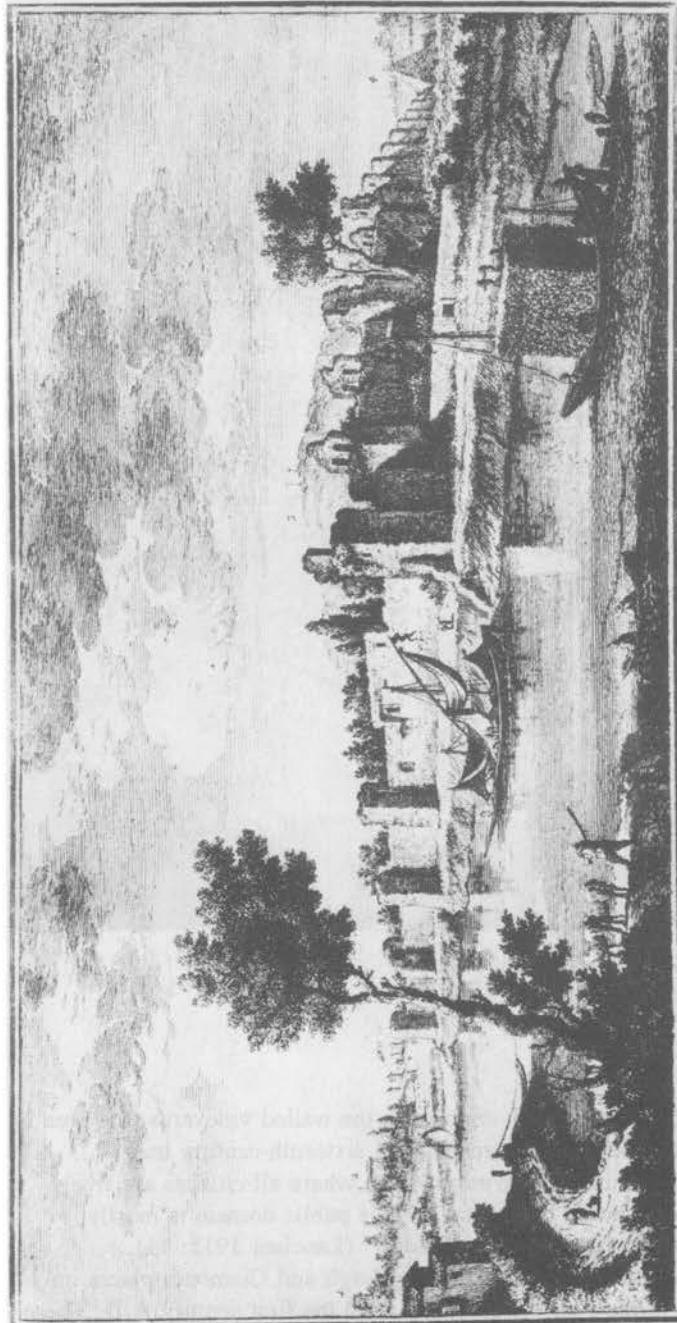


Fig. 11 Giuseppe Vasi 1754. The Aurelian wall in Testaccio seen from the outside. Monte Testaccio is provided with three crosses

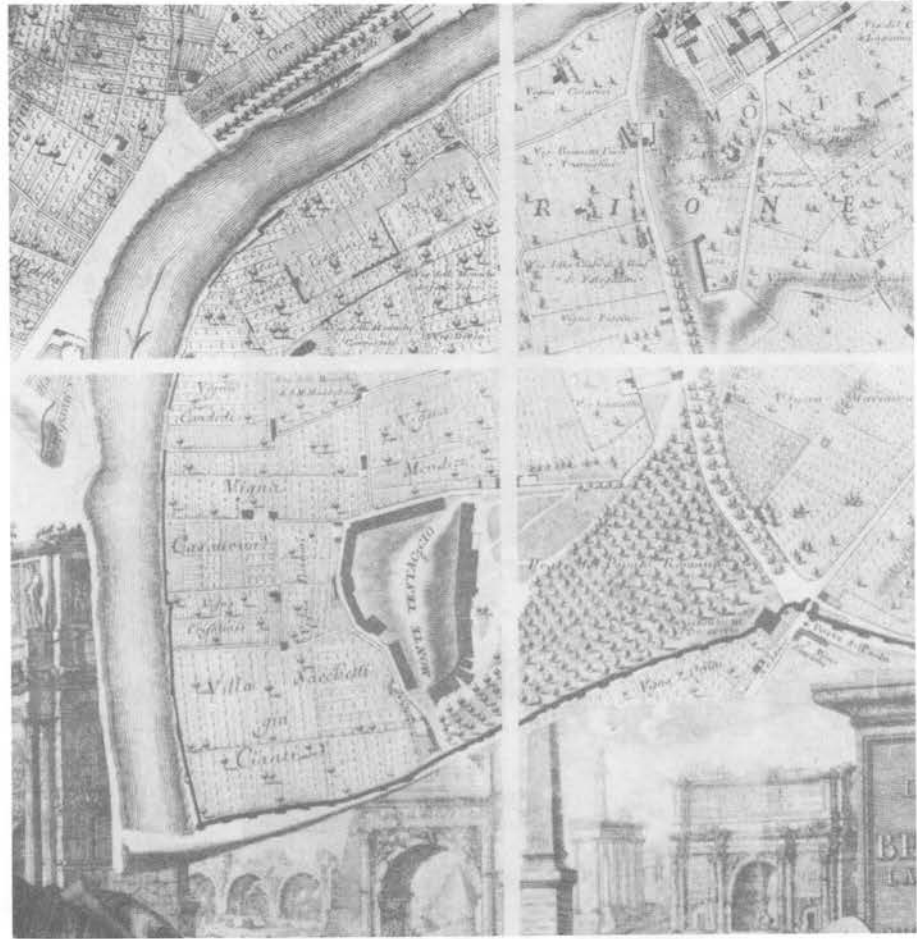


Fig. 12 Giovanni Battista Nolli 1748

Giambattista Nolli's map of 1748. In contrast to the walled vineyards, the area is directly accessible from the adjoining roads. 'All sixteenth-century maps ... indicate the hill and the plain ... as *area pubblica* where all citizens are freely admitted, not enclosed by walls or hedges ... This public domain is mostly indicated ... by pedestrian figures in the meadow' (Lanciani 1915: 11).

The 1949 reconstruction of ancient Rome by Lugli and Gismondi places only two *cippi* or columns in the Prati area, dating from the first century A.D. These columns guarded the *pomerium* (*post moerum*, behind the wall), 'the sacred borderline, indicating the imaginary contour of the city' (Paoli 1944: 36). Outside the Servian wall (sixth century B.C.), which enclosed the *Urbs* and ran along the south side of the lower slopes of the Aventine, successive emperors enlarged the *pomerium* and demarcated new boundaries. According to Joseph Rykwert, the privilege of enlarging the *pomerium* was reserved to those who had succeeded in expanding the Roman domains (Rykwert 1983: 15). Up until the final days of the Roman Empire this ritual remained as a relic of the ceremonial founding of

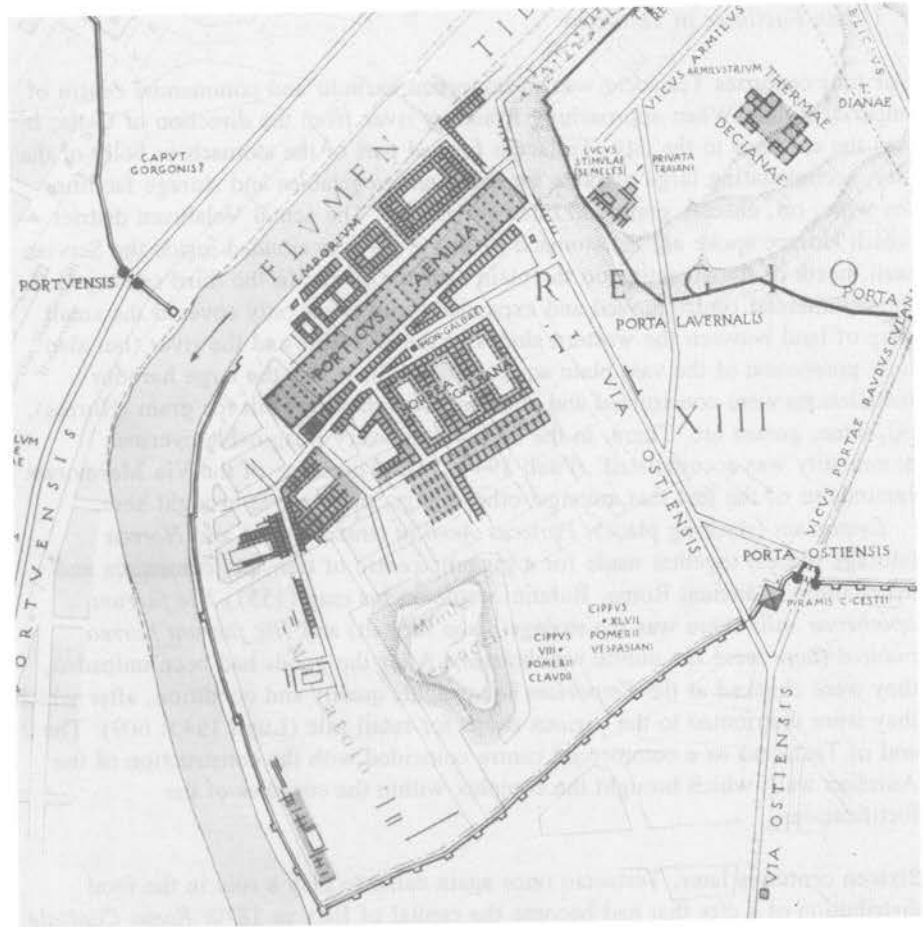


Fig. 13 Giuseppe Lugli and Italo Gismondi 1949. Detail of their Reconstruction of *Roma antica*

cities. In this ceremony a furrow and the corresponding ridge of earth were made by means of a bronze plough pulled by a white cow and a white ox. Where arterial roads were crossed, the plough was lifted because people and goods had to pass by, therefore making it necessary to make a bridge over the sacred zone, an area that could not be trodden (Rykwert 1983: 1-8). The *pomerium* is thus primarily a ritual wall, marked by columns. Defensive walls were mostly built within the zone of the *pomerium*.⁶ The establishment of the Aurelian wall in 270 A.D. can be interpreted as a confirmation of the presence of the *pomerium* in Testaccio.

For four centuries Testaccio was an important harbour and commercial centre of imperial Rome. When approaching Rome by river from the direction of Ostia, it was the entrance to the city. Testaccio formed part of the stomach or belly of the city, accomodating large markets for cattle and vegetables and storage facilities for wine, oil, cheese, grain and other provisions. The actual Velabrum district — which Horace spoke as 'the stomach of Rome' — was situated inside the Servian wall, north of the Aventine on the plain near the river.⁷ In the third century B.C. the commercial centre moved and expanded 'until it not only covered the small strip of land between the western slopes of the Aventine and the river, but also took possession of the vast plain south of this hill, where the large harbour installations were constructed and enormous warehouses built for grain (Horrea), oil, wine, *garum* etc. There, in the *Emporium*, every imaginable overseas commodity was accumulated' (Paoli 1944: 34).⁸ The name of the Via Marmorata reminds us of the fact that amongst other things, marble was brought here.

Emporium (stacking place), *Porticus Aemilia* (trade centre) and *Horrea* (storage places) together made for a gigantic centre of transfer, commerce and distribution in ancient Rome. Bufalini wrote on his map (1551) *Hic fuerunt apothecae salis* (here was the storage place for salt) and *Hic fuerunt horrea publica* (here were the public warehouses). After the goods had been unloaded, they were checked at the *Emporium* for weight, quality and condition, after which they were distributed to the various shops for retail sale (Lugli 1943: 609). The end of Testaccio as a commercial centre coincided with the construction of the Aurelian wall, which brought the complex within the confines of the fortifications.

Sixteen centuries later, Testaccio once again came to play a role in the food distribution of a city that had become the capital of Italy in 1870: *Roma Capitale*. Rome's new role demanded a city which was above all representative, but the city development commission realized that for a well-functioning city of this size other facilities are necessary as well. The commission was 'well aware of the necessity of a big city to have a large area at its disposal that can be utilized for noisy workshops, buildings to house the working class and large factories, a variety of warehouses, central depots for wine and other goods'. It considered the 'vast plain surrounding Monte Testaccio' suitable for 'buildings of that kind ... These buildings should ... be situated outside the excise boundary, to ensure the safety of the goods stored there; furthermore their accessibility to the nearby station will be advantageous for the storage of all goods but specifically for wine, which is intended to be stored in the caves in the hill, and can be brought there directly, without, as often occurs, long delays at the station' (Comune di Roma 10/11/1870).⁹

Testaccio's suitability for functions like these, which were seen as a necessary evil, was repeatedly emphasized. In its second report the commission points out that the district is 'suitably separated from the rest of the city', without compromising its good connections with water and road transport (Comune di Roma 22/7/1871). The district's destination was in the meantime better defined: 'In addition to the existing train station of the railroad company, another Testaccio station, specifically intended for the supply of goods, will have to be built, surrounded by general depots, warehouses for the most important foods and

provisions, the cattle market, the public slaughterhouse, and other buildings associated with these facilities, as well as related industries' (Comune di Roma 22/7/1871). In short, this includes everything necessary for food distribution in the future metropolis.

The 1882 city plan includes three industrial and commercial centres in Testaccio. A 'general market' is situated on the site of the ancient *Porticus Aemilia*. In the *Prati* area the slaughterhouse is located, directly adjoining the cattle market outside the Aurelian wall, according to Ersoch's first design.¹⁰ A third complex is planned behind the hill near the river and provided with a railway yard, of which no further specifications are given. A second design by Ersoch, however, places the slaughterhouse and cattle market in this area behind the hill, thereby preserving the open space of the *Prati*. Ersoch initially also incorporated a wine market in his plan, a courtyard-like complex including part of the hill and the caves. This never materialized, although considering the age-old custom of using these caves as wine cellars it would have been most appropriate. Concessions for using the caves were exclusively granted *pro conservatione vini et non ad aliud finem*. After 1870, however, the caves were housing all sorts of activities (Orano 1912: 39-40). Only the slaughterhouse and cattle market were actually built in Testaccio, the remaining food distribution of *Roma Capitale*, the warehouses and central markets, as well as the gasworks being built in the area outside the Aurelian wall, directly south of Testaccio: a conglomeration of facilities intended to 'feed' the city.

In the end, Testaccio's role in the food distribution of *Roma Capitale* is a limited, but special one. After all, the slaughterhouse is not just an institution that produces food. It is at the same time a place of death and destruction. The slaughterhouse in Testaccio was not, however, the first public slaughterhouse in Rome. This dates back to 1824 and was located near the Piazza del Popolo. The fact that it hindered the city's 'proper' northwestern expansion led to its disappearance.¹¹ The institution of public slaughterhouses — a general European trend in those days — was accompanied by laws against private slaughtering. Prior to that, animals were slaughtered twice a week on fixed days in private slaughterhouses in the centre of Rome, witnessed by a throng of spectators. To their great enjoyment, although not without danger, they could observe the animals being herded by yelling drovers on horseback from the cattle market — which was at that time held on the site of the ancient cattle market, the *Campo Boario* in the Velabrum district north of the Aventine — through the narrow streets, driven to their deaths. The establishment of the public slaughterhouse consequently evoked indignant protests from the populace, who believed that the city council was intentionally depriving them of this traditional spectacle and who immediately nicknamed it *l'ammazzatora*, murder machine.¹² The fact that Testaccio became the location where animals were slaughtered — out of sight of the centre, behind the Aventine and behind Monte Testaccio — fits in with the other implications of death, decay and rubbish which are attached to the district.

In Testaccio, death is not only present in the slaughterhouse, but also — albeit in a different form — in the timelessness and tranquility of the cemeteries. The oldest cemetery, dating from antiquity, has disappeared under the Monte. Its existence is evident in a number of tombs discovered while the caves were being excavated around the end of the seventeenth century. The most remarkable proof

of burials in this area is obviously the Pyramid, a monument erected in honour of himself by the tribune Caio Cestio around the beginning of the Christian era. The most recent cemetery is the British war cemetery, which dates from the nineteen-forties. Further to the north and also adjacent to the Aurelian wall lies the famous non-Catholic cemetery, 'walled in and surrounded by cypresses, a haven of peace and greenery, just outside Rome's old city wall', according to notes accompanying the Dutch translation of Pasolini's poem *The Ashes of Gramsci*. The mistake is striking, since the cemetery is located not outside but inside the Aurelian wall. This is the area designated by the Church authorities in 1765 to serve as the burial place for British nationals and other Protestants. Until then, there had been a problem, as the burial of non-Catholics in a Catholic church or in consecrated ground was forbidden. The influx of non-Catholics into the city — the result of educational visits by young artists and intellectuals and the increase in diplomatic contacts — demanded a solution to this problem, leading to the designation of the site within and near the wall in Testaccio.¹³ By order of the Church authorities, funerals could take place only at night, so that confrontation with 'the aversion and religious fanaticism ... of the uneducated and violent populace' could be avoided (Beck-Friis 1989: 8).

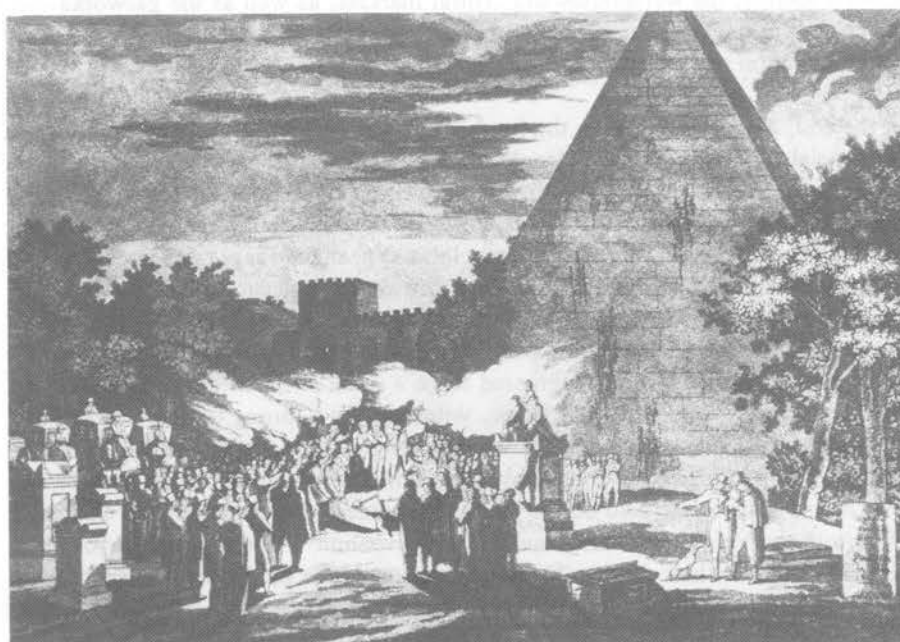


Fig. 14 Bartolomeo Pinelli 1811. Nightly funeral

At first the tombs were exposed in the surrounding countryside, freely accessible for men and animals, as can be seen in the many existing illustrations. Later, the delimitation of the cemetery is no more than a ditch around the oldest part near the Pyramid, since a wall would have obstructed the view of the Pyramid. That is also the reason why the authorities objected to the planting of trees. Hence the allocation of a new part of the cemetery, located more to the south, which was surrounded by walls and where trees were permitted.

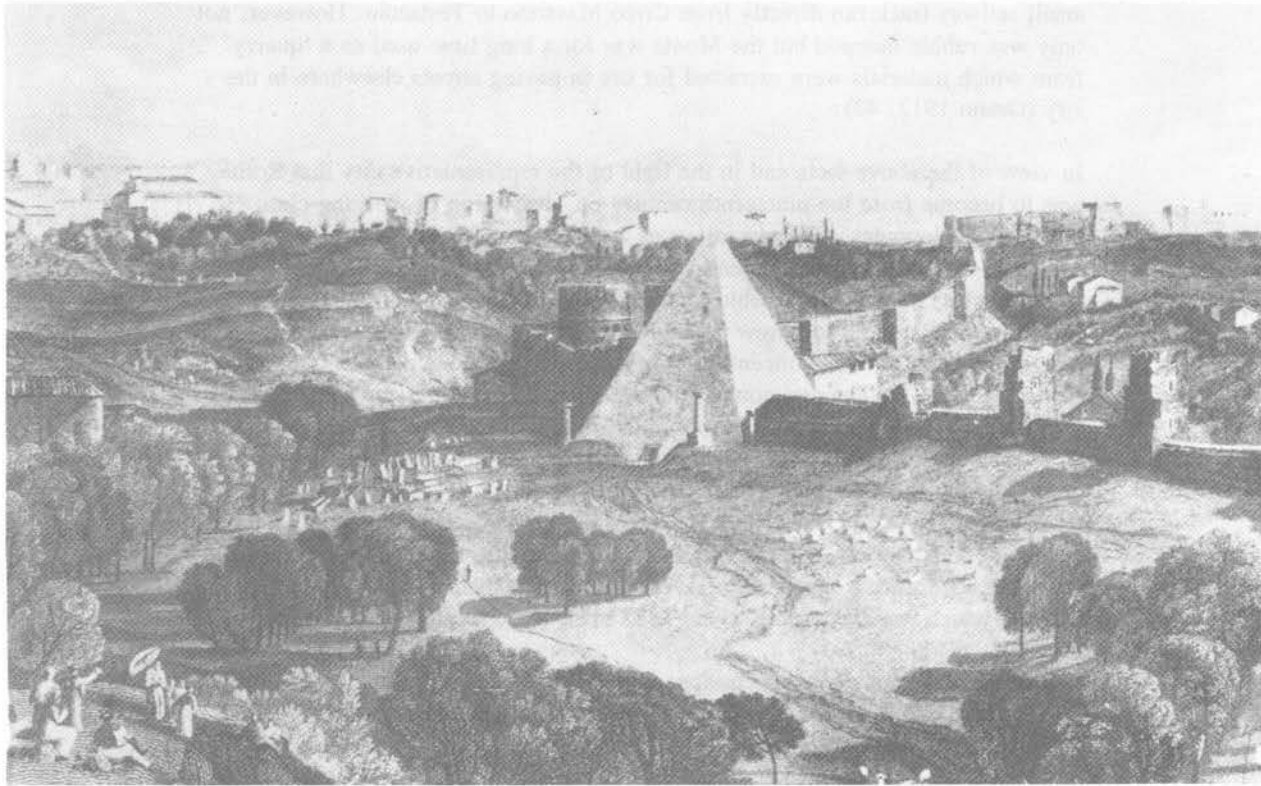


Fig. 15 Anonymous 1819. View from Monte Testaccio on the *Prato del popolo Romano*. Left of the Pyramid the graves of the protestant cemetery are visible

Eventually, in 1870, the entire cemetery was walled in and came to take up the whole area alongside the Aurelian wall up to the gateway near the Monte. This haven of peace and greenery, in the shade of the cypress trees and the Aurelian wall, is still one of the loveliest places in Rome.

Finally the hill itself — an ancient rubbish dump — is the most visible example of the city's metabolism. It consists entirely of potsherds or *testae* from the pottery jugs which in antiquity were used as containers for commercial goods such as grain, wine and oil.¹⁴ Apparently these jugs were subject to quite a bit of breakage, and the fragments were deposited on a heap. Hence the name *Mons Testaceus*, which is not, incidentally, an ancient name. Nor is another name, *Mons Doliolum*, which refers to wine barrels or jugs.¹⁵ Two centuries of commercial activity (from approximately 50 A.D. until 250 A.D.), led to the rubbish dump growing into a full-scale hill fifty metres in height and with a circumference at the base of fifteen hundred metres. It is the highest of the seven artificial hills in Rome, all formed by similar deposits of rubbish or by ruins. In contrast to the other artificial hills such as Monte Giordano, Monte Savello or Monte Citorio, Monte Testaccio has remained undeveloped for a period of twenty centuries.

In 1854 the city council once more designated the area near Monte Testaccio as a place to dump rubble and garbage. To facilitate the dumping of rubble, a

small railway track ran directly from Circo Massimo to Testaccio. However, not only was rubble dumped but the Monte was for a long time used as a 'quarry' from which materials were extracted for use in paving streets elsewhere in the city (Orano 1912: 47).

In view of the above facts and in the light of the representative city that Rome was to become from the nineteenth century on, discussion of working-class housing development in Testaccio leaves an unpleasant aftertaste. In the same breath as workshops, factories and warehouses, the commission also mentioned working-class housing as suitable for Testaccio (Comune di Roma 10/11/1870). The commission later withdrew its advice about this housing development, for fear of bringing about a concentration of possibly rebellious persons (Comune di Roma 22/7/1871). The city council did not share this opinion and indicated in its resolution of 1872 that it must be possible to build houses above the workshops, as well as along the Via Marmorata, which forms the district's 'face' towards the city (Comune di Roma 18/3/1872). The latter point is a recurring factor in the city plans of 1873 and 1882. The buildings along Via Marmorata should have the appearance of *case civili* (Orano 1912: 61). Eventually, the plans for housing were extended until it reached the river, this at the expense of the 'general market' which was, according to the 1882 plan, to be located at the site of the *Porticus*.

The general drift of the discussions is that the working classes do not really fit into *Roma Capitale*, but a large city, unfortunately, cannot do without them. It is agreed that, since housing workers in Rome is unavoidable, Testaccio is the place of choice. As elements which do not fit in Rome, the workers are hidden behind the Aventine, behind the 'barrier' of the generally respectable housing blocks along the Via Marmorata.

Special Events in Testaccio

In Medieval Rome, countless pilgrims travelled along fixed routes from church to church. The tenth route, from S. Pietro to S. Paolo, followed the old commercial route along the Aventine and the then deserted plain of Testaccio, with its hill and ruins, and with the Aurelian wall on the horizon. According to Rodolfo Lanciani, this was the setting for a spectacle imported from the Holy Land by the crusaders: the *passion play*. Rome in those days provided the perfect background. The *Via Dolorosa* was present in the route starting at the Via Bocca della Verità — where the houses of Caiphas and Pilate were imagined to be —, passing by S. Maria in Cosmedin, under the arch of Lazarus at the foot of the Aventine and on to Monte Testaccio, the ultimate *Mount Calvary* (Lanciani 1915: 5). Illustrations of Monte Testaccio surmounted by three crosses, however, date from a later period.¹⁶

The rise of papal authority in the sixteenth century brought new life into the traditional visit to the seven churches. Weekly processions were organized to the seven basilicas, a sixteen-mile journey. One day a year, on *giovedì grasso*, Fat Thursday (the Thursday before Carnival), the people of Rome were invited to participate. The journey was both devotional and recreational, a 'spiritual carnival' (Gasbarri 1963: 311). The popes Pius V, Gregorius XIII and Sixtus V — initiators of the system of connecting roads between the basilicas — travelled



Fig. 16 Antonio Lafrery 1575. The route along the seven churches of Rome

this route several times a year, and always on the day following the Sunday of Carnival, as a sign of atonement for the fact that the people had fallen back into heathen customs (Ingersoll 1985: 120). From 1512 dates the remark that it is a difficult task in Rome to distinguish a virtuous woman from a whore, as the roads are crowded with women (and men) (Ingersoll 1985: 119). Antonio Lafrery's 1575 map of 'the circuit of Rome' gives a clear picture of the stream of pilgrims travelling from church to church.

Testaccio also played a major role in the Roman Carnival. The *Ludi di Testaccio* were part of the more elaborate Carnival celebrations. The Games of Testaccio took place from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, with their heyday in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The games were held on the last Sunday of Carnival and are said to have been one of the oldest and most original of the Carnival rituals.

The ritual slaughter of animals was the highlight of the Games of Testaccio. According to a document from 1143, the celebrations were initially patterned after the procedure of a liturgical ceremony, to which were added some final

remnants of pagan rites. In the presence of the Pope, three kinds of animals were slaughtered: a bear, representing the devil, a number of donkeys, representing the submission of human pride, and a cock, whose death was intended to kill any sensuality in preparation for an honest life of fasting and abstinence in the following forty days (Clementi 1937: 598).

Later on, in the fifteenth century, on the Thursday and the Saturday in the Piazza Navona and the Campidoglio respectively, a parade and a meal for notables were organized. On the Campidoglio, the bulls were displayed which were to participate in the Sunday games in Testaccio, one bull from each city or later from each city district.¹⁷ Each of the cities or districts provided a team of players. On the Sunday morning of Carnival, a large procession took place from Campidoglio to Testaccio, a half-hour walk from the residential part of the city to the undeveloped plain. On the hillside a bloody and violent game took place. The teams of players tried to kill pigs that were pushed off the hill in wagons, while the incensed bulls were mixed in, resulting in a situation not without danger for the participants. Afterwards the animals were slaughtered. 'The exuberant glorification of blood and carnage was a reaction to the abstinence and fasting that would be imposed during Lent and an outlet for pent-up violence' (Ingersoll 1985: 289). The 'games' involved not only animals. Jews are mentioned in the same breath as animals as objects of jollification and mockery.

Testaccio was 'the most suitable place in the world for this spectacle' because of its slopes, which served as natural grandstands for spectators (Bibliophilus 1913: 90). This fact is embodied in the city statutes of 1363, which dictate that the fields of Testaccio (as well as the space of Piazza Navona) need to be kept as they are in order to facilitate the Games, at the same time forbidding any housing or agricultural development of these fields. The statutes of 1464 confirm this state of *pubblico dominio*.

The game with bulls and pigs was above all a spectacle by and for the people. The aristocracy and clergy had their own amenity: horse racing. As laid down in the 1363 city statutes, three traditional horse races took place near the *Mons de Palio*, as Monte Testaccio was called.¹⁸ The course started at the Tiber, in the corner of the Aurelian wall, crossing the *Prati* and ending at the summit of the Aventine at the church of S. Saba.

All levels of society therefore participated in the Games, which were definitely not only a public entertainment. On the contrary, the Games also served a political purpose, as is evident from the fact that all cities under the rule of Rome were to participate. The Games were not only about the suppression of physical desires but also about the symbolic submission of the surrounding cities. Testaccio was the appropriate place for this, being a neutral zone far from the centres of power of the Church and the Commune, and outside the general residential area, a zone where the Republic of the time could symbolically work out its conflicts (Ingersoll 1985: 289). Often, however, the violent Games were forbidden as well, for fear of too much insubordination. The fact that from the beginning of the fifteenth century the Monte has consistently been depicted on all city maps may be evidence of the importance of the Games. During the following period, the increasingly influential papal authority tries to gain control of matters and relocates the Games in its own immediate area of influence (Ingersoll 1985: 270). The city statutes of 1464, during the reign of Paolo II, show that the traditional horse races had been supplemented with six others.¹⁹ These additional races do not take place in Testaccio, however, but on the Via Lata, consequently

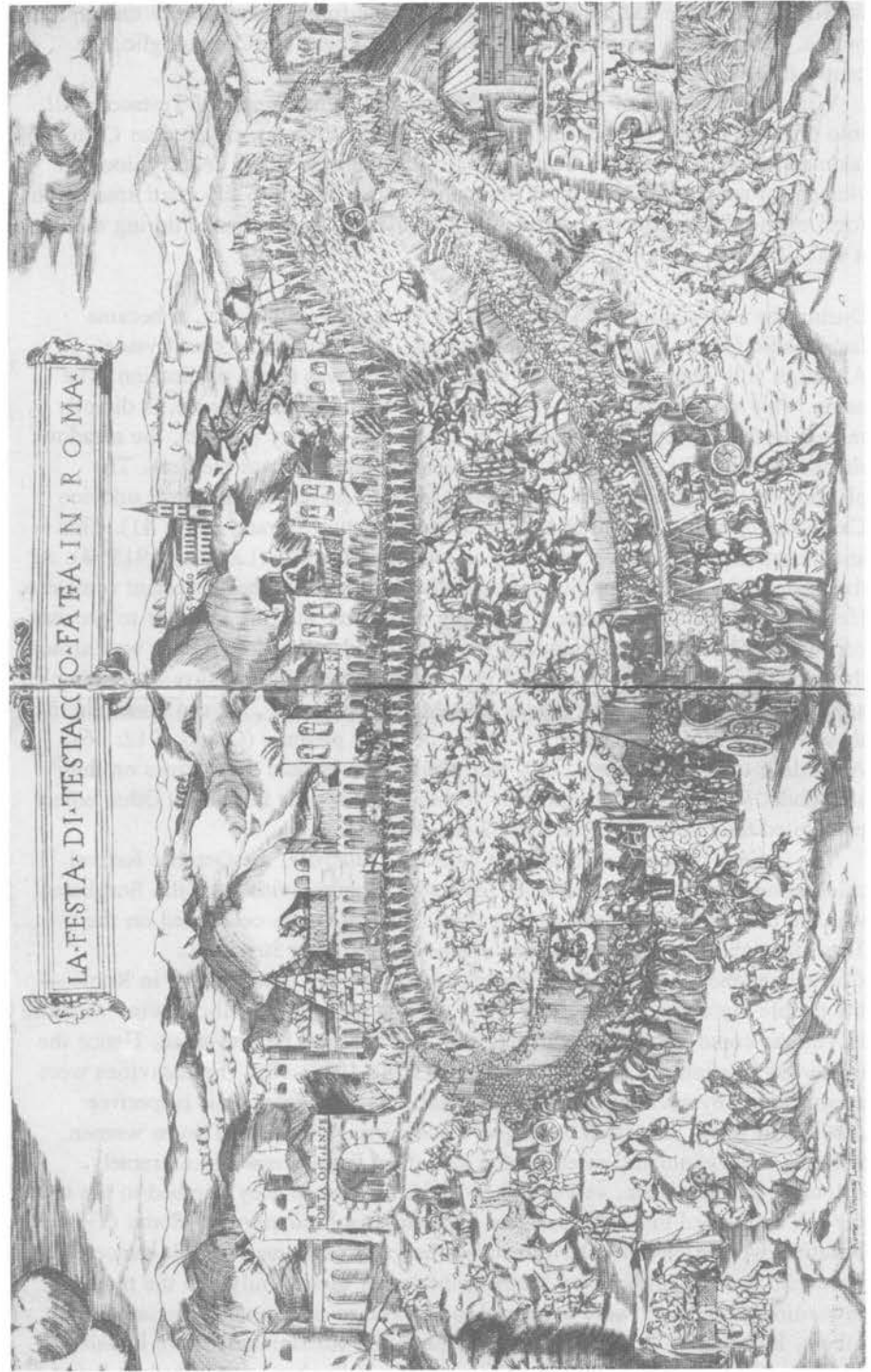


Fig. 17 I.T.F. (Johann Theufel) 1550. The Games of Testaccio in 1545

Testaccio: Change and Continuity in Urban Space and Rituals

called the *Corso* or *Via del Corso* nowadays, the finish being nearby the papal palace, Palazzo San Marco, and at the same time near the Campidoglio, the centre of civic power.²⁰

With the exception of the years 1536 and 1545, the Games of Testaccio fall into oblivion during the sixteenth century.²¹ From 1566 on, the Roman Carnival takes place entirely outside Testaccio. Not until the twentieth century does the element of sport — if only for a limited period — return to the *Prati* area, in the form of the *Campo Sportivo* erected in the thirties. Requisitioned during the war, it was demolished shortly afterwards.

During the intervening period, starting in the eighteenth century, it became fashionable for the citizens of Rome to make outings into the countryside. Although still within the Aurelian wall, Testaccio was also a destination. The name *Prati del popolo Romano*, the meadow of the Roman people, is directly related to this custom. As indicated by nineteenth-century pictures, the meadow, shaded as it was by mulberries, was a pleasant place to pass the time. The planting of trees in the *Prati* was subject to concessions, the first to Ludovico Casali dating from the end of the seventeenth century (Orano 1912: 41). This is another example of its special status as *pubblico dominio* (Lanciani 1915: 4). At the edge of the same meadow were situated the tombs of the Protestant cemetery. Hence the religious ordinance concerning night-time burials, in order to prevent conflict and hence also the request, from the secular side to put up a wall around the cemetery. From communal and papal edicts on public morality, for example against the abuse of solitary places 'like Monte Testaccio', we can conclude that these *scampagnate* gave place to idyllics not only platonic (Orano 1912: 46). According to an edict from 1750, men were to be hoisted three times on the strappado, women were irremissibly forbidden to appear in public. Other edicts prohibited the climbing of the hill (Orano 1912: 47).

The outings became an institution with the *Ottobrate*, the October festival celebrating the new grape harvest. Testaccio, together with the Villa Borghese, was the most important venue, where the *Ottobrate* were celebrated on the Thursdays and Sundays in October. Orano quotes from Stendhal's *Correspondance* (1800-1842): 'The month of October is wonderful in Rome — the people are delirious with joy. They wish to believe that all old wine will turn to vinegar come November and precisely that needs to be prevented. Hence the numerous libations on Mount Testaccio' (Orano 1912: 48). The festivities were accompanied by a variety of customs. People arrived from their respective districts in finely decorated carriages. Each carriage contained seven women, with the most exquisite seated on top and all of them dressed in extremely colourful gowns of silk, velvet and brocade. On arrival they climbed to the top of the hill and called out: *A la bellona! Semo arrivate alle porte di Roma* (To the beautiful woman/city! We have reached the gates of Rome). People danced the *saltarello* and the higher they jumped, the larger their family and the more rewarding the harvest were supposed to be. The many drawings by, among others, Bartolomeo Pinelli, Achille Pinelli, Luigi Rossini and Ettore Roesler Franz, and the poetry of Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli show young people being driven into the countryside in carriages, dancing and singing and reciting poetry, eating and drinking. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the disappearance of the *Ottobrate*. The city planners of *Roma Capitale* then set their sights on Testaccio.



Fig. 18 Luigi Rossini 1829, *Ottobrate* (October festival)

In our own time, it has been not the Monte or the *Prati*, but the cattle market complex, deserted since 1977, which — as ‘Rome’s most New York-like place’ — formed the perfect ambiance for a series of Summer celebrations, the *Estate Romane* (Bruscolini 1986: 17). Starting in 1977 on the Via Giulia and the Piazza Farnese, the *Estate Romane* soon required a larger venue. The cattle market in Testaccio, among other places, came to be considered. Experimental music, film and video festivals were organized here at the initiative of the city councillor for culture at that time, the architect Renato Nicolini. Along with the left-wing city council, the *Estate Romane* were destined to die an early death in 1984, a final posthumous event being organized in 1985. But that was not the only reason. Elisabetta Bruscolini points out that Rome is not New York: ‘The majority of the spectators do not appreciate the beguiling qualities of dust and discomfort’. The terrain is unpaved and the entrances poorly illuminated. The expanse of the cattle market is experienced as repulsive rather than attractive. Only rock concerts seem able to fill the entire place with a public accustomed to discomfort, according to Bruscolini. Despite the various disappointments so far, the largest enclosed public space in Rome has enormous potential for large-scale urban events. The new interest in Testaccio is partly responsible for the opening of a number of trendy bars, discotheques and jazz clubs in the caves at the foot of the hill, places where youngsters ‘go slumming in safety’ as Dibdin puts it. The restaurants, which have

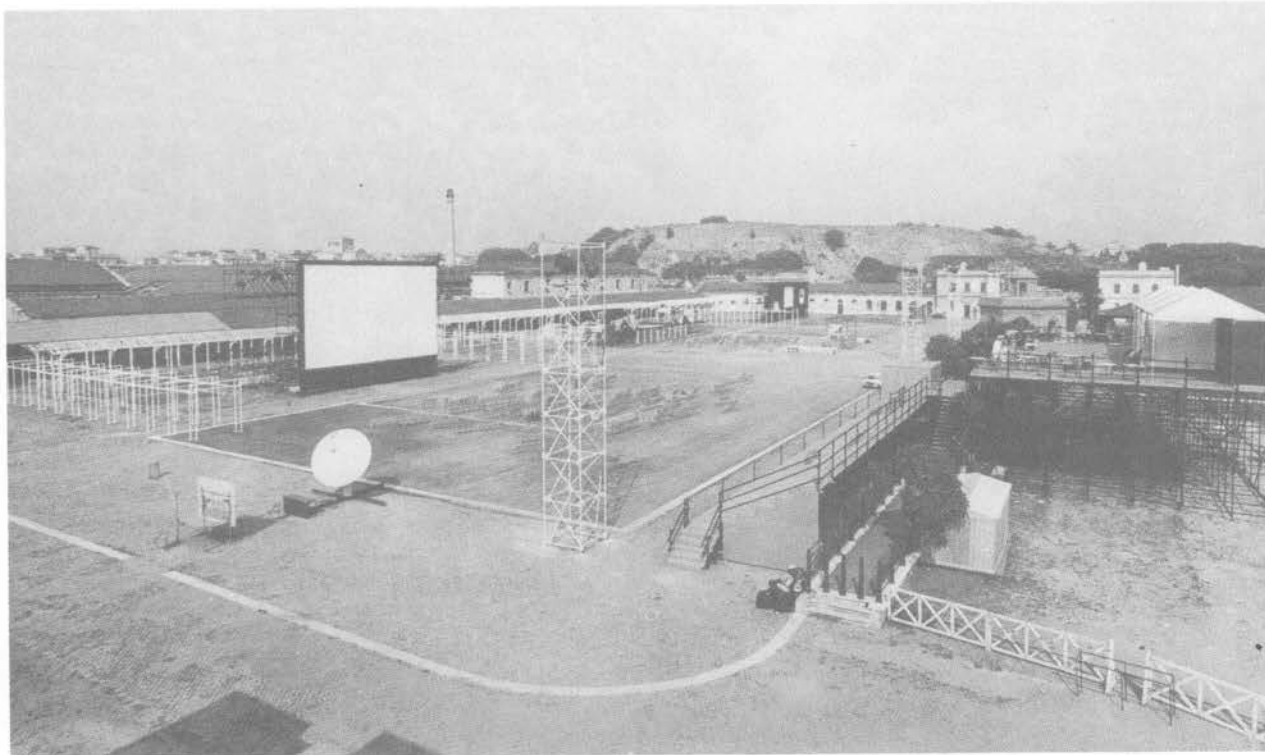


Fig. 19 The former cattle market at the time of the *Estate Romane* 1983

been located in the caves for years, also do profitable business. Evenings are once again party time in Testaccio.

Change and Continuity

Testaccio is an interesting example, on the one hand because of its obvious and exceptional spatial conditions, and on the other because of the wealth of histories which permeate the place. Last but not least, it is important to note that Testaccio is not part of what can be called the consolidated city, nor is it a peripheral area, but rather, in the words of Aymonino, it is an *historical periphery*. The group of Roman architects occupied with plans for Testaccio during the past decade has exhibited an unusual sensitivity to the self-willed nature of the area.

Even today, Testaccio's spatial position within Rome, is a multiple one. It is simultaneously part of the historic city within the Aurelian wall as well as being located on the edge of town, on the fringe of city life. Testaccio's location, furthermore, is in the transition area between 'crystalized centre' and 'nascent city'. It has neither the 'sacredness and unviolability' of the central areas nor the 'complete disintegration' of the twentieth-century peripheral areas (Caruso 1990: 143-144). The conservative approach to the preservation of historic centres, where any modification is sacrilege, is unsuited to the process of urban renewal in Testaccio, which from a physical point of view has already deteriorated too much and is also too modern a quarter. On the other hand, care has to be taken



Fig. 20 *Laboratorio Testaccio 1984; Piano Quadro of Testaccio*

that ruthless interventions do not turn everything completely upside down, as is happening in the peripheral areas. Testaccio's spatial organization is too well defined and its cultural heritage too rich for that to be condoned. This double perspective is the underlying reason for Testaccio being declared a *strategic area*. The historical periphery which is Testaccio is a *parte di città*. Not in itself homogenous but rather fragmented, it nevertheless commands a specific physical and social position in the city as a whole.

The basic aims of the *Piano Quadro* are the restoration of Monte Testaccio and its urban 'reappointment' to a pivotal position within a system composed of large spaces (Caruso 1990: 144). The reorganization of the *Prati del popolo Romano*, the new Piazza Testaccio and the renovation of the former cattle market area together form the main ingredients of the plan. Piazza Testaccio replaces the two vacant areas between the housing area and the Monte. The present decrepit

commercial buildings are to make way for the new *Prati*, an open space, excavated to three metres below the current level, that is to say to the same level as the base of the Pyramid and the caves. Although the decision to give the *Prati* the appearance of an ancient circus is somewhat contestable, in view of the inherent historical value of the place, a propitious factor is the presence of an elongated plot of greenery which links the outside of the quarter visually to the heart of Testaccio, i.e. the hill. Monte Testaccio will once more be visible from the city. The enclosed cattle market complex will be preserved in its existing form. The Piazza Testaccio, the new *Prati* and the cattle market yard make up the spatial framework, confirming the exceptional nature and position of Monte Testaccio.

Aymonino's characterization of Testaccio as a strategic *parte di città*, puts the urban renewal of the area in a broader perspective. As far back as 1977, discussions on the future of the empty cattle market and slaughterhouse complex led to proposals for situating functions there which would be significant for the surrounding neighbourhood: a senior citizens centre — which has actually been carried out — a youth centre and a centre for the disabled. The involvement of the inhabitants of Testaccio has also led to renovation plans for the existing housing blocks.

The new vision of Testaccio embodied in the *Piano Quadro* does not limit Testaccio's significance to its inhabitants, but extends it to the city as a whole. This significance must not only be spatially 'confirmed' but also has programmatic consequences, since it is not only neighbourhood concerns but also metropolitan interests which come into play. Testaccio, in view of what it once was and what it now is, presents a fantastic opportunity to 'recycle' its historic heritage into objectives with a contemporary social application, according to Caruso (1986: 56). The *Prati* area, which has also been labelled as a place where a transferium or terminal could be situated for travellers to Fiumicino airport, has been designated as an ideal area for sports and educational events, taking place on and around the circus. The former cattle market area, already used for concerts and performances during the *Estate Romane*, is to be used for a changing array of cultural events. Some of the surrounding buildings are to be equipped by the *Soprintendenza Archeologica* (Historic Monuments Commission) for exhibits dealing with Monte Testaccio and more generally with commercial activity in ancient Rome. A plan by the architect Paolo Portoghesi proposes a *Città della Scienza e della Tecnica*, to be erected in the old slaughterhouse complex. This new institute would make the various sciences more accessible to the general public. The city council conceived this plan in 1982 and set up a committee to determine its feasibility. The committee concluded that such a museum would be well suited 'to an urban area rich in evidence of industrial archaeology and bound up with the history of the city's productive life' (Caruso 1986: 81). It would also help put an end to the stereotype view of Rome as an unproductive and parasitic city, according to the committee. Independently of the *Piano Quadro*, the architects Laura Thermes and Franco Purini have developed an impressive plan to protect the ruins of the ancient harbour of Testaccio, including provision for a cultural centre.

It is remarkable that Testaccio has once again been earmarked for a variety of unusual projects, some of them illustrating the history of the place. But unlike the former functions of Testaccio, all of which had some connection with food and

drink or death and destruction, and unlike the special events which occurred there, the *Piano Quadro* proposes mainly cultural projects, intended to give form to the public nature of Testaccio. It is exceptional on the part of the planners of the *Piano Quadro* that they did not only take into account the spatial design, but also developed a programme to accompany it. Programme and design do not have a sequential relationship to one another but display a mutual interaction. The result is that the exceptional place that Testaccio commands in Rome is illustrated at more than one level. This is probably the most important result of the intellectual efforts connected with the *Piano Quadro*.

So far no part of these fine plans for Testaccio has yet materialized. Testaccio has not yet been able to fulfil its strategic role. It would seem that the urban public centre which Testaccio is supposed to become, according to the *Piano Quadro*, is easier to design and programme than to actually put into practice. The intellectual interest of the architects and city planners no longer finds a sympathetic response from the city council, which has in any case shifted within the political spectrum. Other obstacles are the lack of interest from investors and the fact that the Historic Monuments Commission continues to prevent even a single ancient brick or fragment being covered up by city renovation. And finally, even the people of Rome themselves fail to show interest. Ever since *Roma Capitale*, no Roman has wanted to belong to the 'people'. Indeed, the 'people' who migrated from the provinces to the city after the Second World War are anything — Calabrian, Apulian, Abruzese etc. — but Roman. Rome is now made up primarily of spatial concentrations of people originally from the same region, who hang on, in a remarkably persistent manner, to their own regional culture in terms of lifestyle, cuisine and language. In other words, there is no Roman 'people' that claims rights to the *area popolare* of Testaccio. Hopes are now pinned on Testaccio itself, on the uniqueness it has displayed for centuries, and on its ingrained nature — all of which have been brought to light once more by the *Piano Quadro*.

With thanks to Lex Pouw, Arnold Reijndorp and particularly to Heidi de Mare, without whom this article never would have obtained its present form.

Notes

1. It is remarkable that he did not choose one of the old working-class districts in the inner city for his demographic research, but focussed his efforts instead on the only modern working-class area in Rome, an area only partly completed at that time.
2. *Siti del Monte Testaccio venduti e concessi dall'inclito popolo Romano per far grotte, per istrumenti rogati dal notaio dei signori Conservatori.*
3. In the Middle Ages, Rome was scarcely larger than the area between the current Via del Corso — from Piazza del Popolo to Piazza Venezia — and the Tiber. The Christian basilicas were scattered around the *campagna*.
4. The maps by Mario Cartaro (1576), Stefano Du Perac (1577), Antonio Tempesta (1593), Francesco De Paoli (1623), Goffredo van Schayck (1630) and Giovanni Battista Falda (1676) are some of the most remarkable examples. Elsewhere in Rome, the so-called *strade agricole* between the walled vineyards have been preserved.

5. It is not only the mountain of potsherd which has always attracted a lot of attention from archaeologists — the area alongside the river Tiber has greatly interested them as well. In this context, the Geographical Institute in Weimar's map of 1807 is noteworthy; it shows this area as separate from the vineyard area surrounding it. On his map of 1551, Bufalini already showed ruins here as well.
6. The definition of the *pomerium* as the strips of land on either side of the (defence) wall where cultivation was prohibited is correct in the spatial sense of the word, although it incorrectly suggests that the construction of the wall preceded the delimitation of the *pomerium*.
7. Although the choice of this site was understandable for reasons of safety, the location within the wall obstructed its functioning as a small harbour near to the old *Campo Boario*, cattle market (Lugli 1943: 594).
8. *Garum* is a kind of fish paste, that was used frequently in the Roman cuisine.
9. Testaccio was seemingly situated outside the excise border. Other sources indicate that it also had a different legal status to the rest of the area within the Aurelian wall. A decree of 1898 concerning the inclusion, for administrative purposes, of the *Agro Romano* — outside the Aurelian wall — into the city discusses the setting up of twenty-four delegations concerned with public safety, police control posts which could keep an eye on the areas outside the wall and on expansion within them. These posts were positioned at the various city gates. Testaccio was one of them, and was said to be *nel recinto urbano, ma con giurisdizione anche esterna*. Testaccio was therefore included in the law that governed the areas outside the Aurelian wall (Bortolotti 1988: 142).
10. The text accompanying Ersoch's first design for the slaughterhouse and cattle market complex reads: 'The area between the wall and the hill is the intended site for the slaughterhouse; the area right next to it, but outside the wall, is reserved for the cattle market, as can be seen on the city plan that was accepted by the city council on June 26 1882' (Ersoch 1891: 9).
11. There were also motives of hygiene. Before the institution of public slaughterhouses, blood flowed freely through the gutters and offal piled up in the street (Tirincanti 1975: 5-6). The public slaughterhouse near the Piazza del Popolo discharged waste directly into the river, but as it was located upriver from the city centre, the matter of hygiene was still a problem, especially when the level of the river was low. Its relocation in Testaccio — downriver of the centre — solved this problem.
12. Pinelli's drawings and Belli's sonnets picture this public spectacle during the so-called *capate*. In the sonnet *Le capate*, we are told that now that the 'murder machine' has been moved outside the city gates, the city is even more dead than the butchered animals.
13. Among the list of strangers, artists and writers who visited Rome, not for religious reasons but primarily because of the Classics, were Goethe, Keats, Shelley, Chateaubriand and Stendhal.
14. Enrico Dressel's research (1873 and later) reconstructs the chronology of the deposits by studying the makers' marks and other impressions that owners, transporters and customs officials left on the pottery. It indicates that dumping occurred from approximately 50 A.D. until about two centuries later (Lanciani 1914-1915: 3).
15. The name *Mons Testaceus* first appears on an eighth-century marble tableau in the S. Maria in Cosmedin (Orano 1912: 20; Clementi 1937: 594).
16. For example, an engraving by Francesco Ferrari (1634-1708), a 1807 map by the Geographical Institute in Weimar and a drawing by Giuseppe Vasi (see fig. 11).
17. Until the beginning of the fifteenth century, cities under the rule of Rome were obliged to provide a contribution and to send animals and a team of eight

- players. After Rome lost control of these cities, the participants were recruited from the *rioni*, the various districts of the city (Ingersoll 1985: 288).
18. A document from 1256 already mentions Monte Testaccio as the *montis de Palio* (*palio* being the prize given to the winner of the race) (Orano 1912: 24).
 19. The entire ten-day period preceding Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, was now programmed: on Monday the race for Jews, on Tuesday that for boys up to 12 years of age, on Wednesday for men up to 30 years of age, on Thursday the traditional parade on the Piazza Navona, on Friday the race for men over 60, on Saturday the festivities on the Campidoglio, on Sunday the traditional horseraces still in Testaccio, on Monday the donkey race and on Tuesday, *mardi grasso*, the buffalo race. From chronicles we learn there was also a *palio delle cortigiane* — the race of the prostitutes —, that was not, however, mentioned in the city statutes (Ingersoll 1985: 274).
 20. Initially held at the Via del Corso (the ancient Via Lata), the new races took place over a route ending near the Vatican (ca. 1480), to be moved once again and for good to the Via del Corso, in 1566, during the reign of Pius V. According to Peter Burke, this took place in order to keep Carnival away from consecrated ground, which would suggest a clearer distinction between the sacred and the profane (Burke 1988: 221). One of the races, the *Barberi*, continued to be held on the Via del Corso until 1883. Besides the relocation of these activities, papal influence can also be seen in the provision of financial support, in other words sponsoring.
 21. The 1545 Games must have been very exceptional, judging by the existing illustrations: two anonymous paintings, both entitled *Giuochi a Testaccio del 1545* and two etchings by E. Dupérac dating from 1554 and 1558. There is also an etching by L.T.F. (Johann Theufel), *La festa di Testaccio fatta in Roma* dating from 1558, which is identical to Dupérac's 1554 etching (see fig. 17).

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