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MAKING A MUSEUM:

National Heritage, Urban Politics and the Museo Nazionale Romano, 1981-2000

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Per Anna Rachele e Gennaro, che hanno dato tanto perché potessi fare questa ricerca. Senza di voi, nulla di questo sarebbe stato possibile.

And to, of course, Francesco.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that understanding the transformation of the Museo Nazionale Romano between 1981 and 2000 requires examining the structures and processes of Italian state bureaucracy that enabled, constrained, and ultimately shaped the museum's evolution. When Italy's principal repository of ancient Roman art evolved from a single site into a network of four distinct venues, the museo diffuso model represented both institutional innovation and administrative compromise, revealing how museums operate within and are shaped by the governance systems that enable them.

The study begins with the Special Law for Roman Antiquities (Legge 92/81), which authorized exceptional funding for expropriating and restoring key buildings. Drawing on archival materials from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, ministerial correspondence, and press coverage, the dissertation reconstructs the bureaucratic obstacles and political pressures that shaped the museum's development over two decades.

The transformation was neither smooth nor inevitable. Palazzo Massimo took nearly two decades to complete due to expropriation disputes and funding delays. Palazzo Altemps reframed the museum's interpretive approach by foregrounding collecting histories. The Terme di Diocleziano was reconfigured for epigraphy and protohistory, while Crypta Balbi presented urban archaeology as an ongoing process. Together, these four sites distributed collections and interpretive authority across Rome. This institutional evolution unfolded during turbulent years in Italian political life. Legislative reforms in the 1990s promised greater autonomy, yet the MNR remained embedded within hierarchical structures, with decision-making concentrated at ministerial level and funding dependent on exceptional allocations.

The dissertation treats administrative documents as primary evidence of how museum visions become institutional reality, demonstrating that bureaucratic practice is not an obstacle to museum development but constitutive of it.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Democrazia Cristiana	DC
Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali	MiBAC
Movimento Sociale Italiano	MSI
Museo Nazionale Romano	MNR
Partito Comunista Italiano	PCI
Partito Democratico	PD
Partito Socialista Italiano	PSI
Popolo della Libertà	PDL

INTRODUCTION

On a winter evening in December 1997, crowds streamed into Palazzo Altemps, newly inaugurated by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Culture. In just its first ten days, the museum welcomed nearly ten thousand visitors, quickly establishing itself as a focal point of Rome's holiday festivities, a clear signal of the public's appetite for renewed access to the city's heritage.[1] For many Romans, the festive crowds at Altemps did not simply mark the arrival of another museum, but signaled a moment when the city's layered history was made newly accessible, as a convergence of civic ritual, urban memory, and institutional renewal. This shift exemplifies broader trends in what museum scholars have termed "new museology" a movement that, as Vikki McCall observes, reframes museums as reflexive, community-focused institutions, responsive to social and urban change rather than simply repositories for collections.[2] This moment was emblematic (not only as the opening of a restored Renaissance palazzo) but as a visible sign of the transformation of the Museo Nazionale Romano from a single monumental site into a network of distinct yet interconnected spaces, each embedded in the city's historical fabric. This shift, rooted in decades of debate, legislation, administrative struggle, and financial negotiation, marked a critical moment in Italian museology and urban heritage policy. How did an institution born out of post-unification nationalism come to embody the complex realities of late twentieth-century Rome: bureaucratic delays, the demands of mass tourism, and the aspiration to make the city itself a living museum?

The changes that took place at MNR in the late twentieth century bring up a number of important questions about what museums can be and how they function. For one thing, there's the ongoing tension between preserving tradition and adapting to change. As Bruno Brulon Soares notes, the very field of museology is defined by this constant negotiation between rupture and continuity, with museums continually

1 "L'Altemps aperto fino a tardi," La Repubblica (Cronaca Roma), 28 December 1997, p. 7.
2 McCall, Vikki, Gray 2014, pp. 19–35.

balancing inherited traditions against the imperatives of change.[3] As the MNR responded to new urban realities, shifts in cultural policy, and different ideas about how heritage should be handled, it faced the challenge of redefining its own role. Some of these changes, such as those brought on by the Special Law for Roman Antiquities (*legge 92/81 "Interventi urgenti per la protezione del patrimonio archeologico della città di Roma"*), didn't happen in a vacuum. They were shaped by a mix of political decisions, legal reforms, and social pressures, factors that often showed up directly in the way museum spaces were organized or exhibitions were put together.

The move toward a "multi-site museum" with its emphasis on multiple locations and different stories for each site, made it necessary to rethink what it means to manage collections, exercise curatorial authority, and connect with the public. In a sense, the evolving structure and curatorial strategies at the MNR were not just passive reactions to outside events. They were part of a much bigger set of changes (social, technological, political) that affected museums everywhere in Italy during this period. By looking closely at how these developments played out, this study aims to show not just how the MNR responded to changing times, but how it sometimes helped to drive those changes, challenging our assumptions about what a museum can be and how it might adapt in the future.

The stakes of this inquiry extend well beyond the institutional history of MNR. As museums across the globe confront urgent debates around decolonization, restitution, inclusion, and digital transformation, the experience of the MNR provides valuable insight into how heritage institutions can (or cannot) navigate the competing demands of authenticity, accessibility, and innovation. In a city like Rome, where the remains of the past are not only visible but omnipresent, the museum's role as mediator between history, memory, and civic identity is especially charged. This raises fundamental questions about authority, legitimacy, and the evolving relationship between cultural institutions and their publics.

3 Soares 2020, pp. 15–27.

This dissertation explores the institutional, political, and museological transformations of MNR from its 19th-century origins to the threshold of the new millennium. It asks how museums in Italy mediate between continuity and change, vision and execution, and how their development is shaped by factors far beyond curatorial ambition and among them, urban planning, legislative reform, legal dispute, and public investment. Drawing on archival documents, administrative correspondence, government reports, and contemporary commentary, this study situates the MNR as a product and a protagonist of Rome's evolving relationship with its ancient past.

This study brings to the forefront the persistent tensions that define heritage management in Italy, the need to find an equilibrium between the protection of cultural assets and their accessibility to the public, and between respect for tradition and the demands of innovation. It also considers the difficult balance between the museum's social mandate and the realities of financial constraint. By examining MNR's development into a multi-site institution, I argue that its experience sheds light on the broader patterns shaping museum practice in contemporary Italy, particularly in cities where layers of history and a complex urban environment present unique institutional challenges.

Recent museum studies increasingly understand major institutions not merely as repositories of collections, but as active agents in the ongoing negotiation of civic identity, urban transformation, and heritage policy. As David Harvey notes, efforts to create a city's cultural image (through institutions like museums) can "help create a sense of social solidarity, civic pride and loyalty to place," even as they respond to broader political and economic forces.[4]This perspective is particularly relevant in Italy, where museums are deeply embedded within both the symbolic narratives of the nation and the shifting realities of the contemporary city.[5]

Further scholarship has increasingly acknowledged how museums are deeply entwined with their social, political, and economic environments. Tony Bennett, for instance, introduced the concept of the

4 Harvey 1989, p. 13.
5 Aronsson, Elgenius 2015, p. 196.

"exhibitionary complex" arguing that museums serve as instruments of governance and social discipline.[6] In Italy, Massimo Montella has traced the evolution of cultural-heritage policy as a negotiation between tutela, central administrative indirizzo, and local istanze. As he argues in a peer-reviewed essay in *Il capitale culturale*, this balance became explicit with the late-1990s reforms: «il 1998, quando la legge consentì di trasferire - e direi meglio di restituire-alle Regioni e agli Enti locali la gestione dei musei… beni che nessun Comune e nessuna Regione chiese però di riavere»[7]. This formulation captures both the juridical opening toward decentralisation and the persistent asymmetries of capacity and will that continued to anchor governance at the centre. Daniele Manacorda's work on the Crypta Balbi treats the museum as an urban-historical actor that connects research, place, and publics; in discussing Rome's "museo della città" he argues the task is to "mettere in rete l'offerta gigantesca di storia monumentale" della città[8], a principle that underpins the Crypta Balbi project's emphasis on urban transformation and continuity.[9]

This aligns closely with trends identified by Sharon Macdonald and Helaine Silverman, who demonstrate how museums increasingly participate in urban regeneration and cultural policymaking.[10] Despite wide-ranging studies on national museums elsewhere (like the British Museum and the Louvre) Anglophone research often overlooks the Italian case. While La Regina, Scoppola and Manacorda[11] have addressed institutional transformations, however no comprehensive work has yet tied them into discussions of museum change, law, and urban complexity at an international level. Although scholars have explored Italian museums and Rome's ancient heritage from a variety of angles, the specific story of how MNR became a multi-site museum has not been fully addressed in the academic literature, either in Italy or abroad.

6Bennett 1995, pp. 6–8.
7Montella 2014, pp.159–160.
8Manacorda 2008, pp. 225–226.
9 Ibid 227–229.
10 Macdonald 2011, pp. 1–12; Silverman 2015, p. 6.
11 e.g., La Regina 1998; La Regina 2007; Compagna 1987; Manacorda 2002.

There is also a substantial body of work concerned with how archaeological museums relate to their publics. Pearce and Macdonald, for instance, have shown that museums do not simply house artefacts but actively construct narratives about their significance through the way space and historical context are organised.[12] Skeates and Carman push this further, arguing against a heritage paradigm centred on the monument as a fixed entity and calling instead for approaches attentive to transformation, multiplicity, and social engagement.[13] Related questions have been taken up in work on public archaeology and on the visitor experience more broadly. Merriman frames public archaeology as the translation of excavation data into narratives that reach beyond the academy,[14] while Gosden and Marshall's notion of the "cultural biography of objects" treats material culture not as a set of isolated aesthetic specimens but as evidence caught up in longer historical and social trajectories.[15] On the museum side, Hooper-Greenhill and Simon have drawn attention to the participatory and dialogical character of visitor engagement,[16] and Falk and Dierking's contextual model highlights the cognitive, spatial, and social factors that shape interpretation in practice.[17] These perspectives recur in the chapters that follow, most directly in the discussion of the Crypta Balbi, where the curatorial choices made by Manacorda and his team can be read against the frameworks set out here. MNR's development into a multi-site institution, driven by cultural legislation, bureaucratic negotiation, and the practical constraints of Rome's historical structure provides fresh empirical insight into how museums both reflect and shape processes of societal transformation. This dissertation traces the MNR's journey from its nineteenth-century foundations to its integral role in the Jubilee of 2000, addressing a notable gap in existing scholarship. By focusing on the institutional, political, and curatorial forces that shaped its transformation during the crucial years from 1981, year of the Special Law for Roman Antiquities, to 2000, when the

12 Pearce 1992; Macdonald 2006.

13 Skeates 2000; Carman 2002.

14 Merriman 2004. See also e.g., Smith 2006; Holtorf 2007; Stone, MacKenzie 1990.

15 Gosden, Marshall 1999, pp. 169–178.

16 Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Simon 2010.

17 Falk, Dierking 2013

Great Jubilee took place, this dissertation seeks to offer a detailed perspective that connects developments in Rome to wider trends in museum studies and contemporary cultural policy.

The decision to focus on the years 1981 to 2000 is shaped by both internal changes at MNR and wider developments in Italian museum policy. This period begins with the Special Law for Roman Antiquities (Legge 92/81), which marked the start of significant reorganization in Rome's heritage administration, and concludes with the Jubilee of 2000, when the city's museums and cultural infrastructure were placed in the national spotlight. Between these two moments, the MNR underwent major administrative and curatorial changes, reflecting larger debates about decentralization, public access, and the redefinition of museum roles.[18] As scholars of museum studies have noted, times of legislative and social change often provide unique opportunities to observe how the functions and identities of museums are re-examined and negotiated.[19] The completion of this thesis by the end of that holy year will, it is hoped, contribute to understanding the extent to which cultural institutions and heritage sites, such as the MNR, must prepare for such significant events.

Methodologically, this study draws on archival research, policy documents, and administrative correspondence to reconstruct the institutional transformation of MNR. The research privileges an institutional perspective, while situating the museum's development within the wider contexts of urban governance and cultural policy. A more detailed account of sources and research methods is provided in the methodology section.

The dissertation is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 traces the origins of the Museo Nazionale Romano, situating it within the wider processes of Italian nation-building and urban transformation following unification.
- Chapter 2 examines the intersection of politics, preservation, and museology in late twentieth-century Rome, with a focus on

18 Montella 2011, pp. 377–400.
19 Macdonald, Fyfe 1996, pp. 1–18.

the legislative and administrative reforms that acted as the catalyst to MNR's reorganization.

- Chapter 3 analyzes the museum's evolution into a dispersed institution, considering both the rationale and practical challenges behind the development of its multiple sites.
- Chapter 4 explores the MNR's dynamics of loans, exhibitions, and object mobility as tools of institutional strategy and cultural diplomacy.
- Chapter 5 considers the MNR's role during the Great Jubilee of 2000, situating its transformation within the context of mega-events, urban renewal, and the politics of heritage.

For a summary of key institutional milestones in the history of MNR, see the timeline presented in Chapter 1 (Table 1.1).

Inspired by both recent academic debates and the insights of those who have steered the Museo Nazionale Romano's development, this dissertation approaches the institution as an active and evolving component of Rome's civic and cultural landscape. Rather than seeing the MNR as a fixed entity, the analysis emphasises its capacity for adaptation, a trait that emerges through the constant interplay of preservation and accessibility, the balancing of historical traditions with new museological approaches, and the ongoing negotiation between administrative demands and the museum's broader public responsibilities.

This approach draws on the metaphor of the museum as a living organism, constantly adapting to external and internal stimuli and on Crane's conception of the museum as a flexible space with "convex potential for multiple interpretations and participation," shaped by its ongoing engagement with society and memory.[20] Throughout the period examined, the MNR has had to continually reinterpret its collections, missions, and public function in response to shifting urban priorities and broader currents in Italian society. The museum's

20Bernard, Catoni 2022, p. 113; Crane 1997, p. 63.

journey from a centralised antiquities collection to a distributed, multi-site network, exemplifies the possibilities and the limits of institutional transformation in contexts marked by layered histories and persistent structural obstacles. The case of the MNR demonstrates how museums are shaped as much by bureaucratic inertia, financial constraints, and legal complexities as by curatorial vision or policy reform.

By focusing on the intertwined political, legal, social, and spatial forces that have driven these changes, this study seeks to understand how museums not only reflect, but actively participate in, the reshaping of urban identity and heritage policy. In doing so, it raises broader questions about what it means to steward cultural heritage in a city like Rome, where the past is omnipresent and often contested, and where the role of the museum is constantly being renegotiated. The findings invite reflection on the ways in which museums might continue to adapt in the future, both in Rome and in other urban centres navigating similar tensions between continuity and change.

Before turning to the case studies, I need to slow the narrative down and show the scaffolding that holds it up. What follows is not a story told from the gallery floor, but from the level of files and signatures: buste and fascicoli, ministerial circulars, feasibility studies, typed minutes with handwritten corrections in the margin. The wager, stated in the Introduction, is that the MNR's transformation cannot be read through curatorial rhetoric alone. To test that claim, I placed administrative papers beside policy texts and contemporary press, treating each as a situated discourse with its own silences and pressures.

The next section explains how the argument is built. It sets out where I looked, what I included and excluded, and what remains unknowable in a record that is at once abundant and fragmentary. It also names my vantage point, between Italian and Anglophone debates; between practitioner narratives and scholarly critique and the practical choices that follow from it. In short: the Methodology makes explicit the evidentiary posture on which Chapters 1–5 rest.

Methodology

This thesis employs an interdisciplinary methodological approach, combining archival research, historical analysis, museological theory, and policy studies to explore the institutional evolution of MNR from 1981 to 2000. Due to the multi-dimensional nature of museum transformations, particularly within Rome's complex cultural heritage framework, this study necessitated comprehensive archival research alongside critical engagement with secondary literature.

During this research, I was mindful of my position as both an insider and outsider to the Italian heritage sector, considering scholars such as Bernadette Lynch and Sharon Macdonald have emphasized the importance of researcher reflexivity, self-awareness, and the influence of positionality in shaping the production of knowledge within museums and cultural heritage studies.[21]

As a Canadian-Italian scholar trained in both North American and Italian academic environments, my perspective on the history and governance of MNR is shaped by a hybrid intellectual background. This dual identity has provided unique advantages, including familiarity with multiple scholarly traditions, and access to both Italian and international archives and resources. My experience navigating diverse academic cultures has also informed my critical approach, encouraging a comparative and interdisciplinary lens throughout the research process.

Primary archival research formed the foundational aspect of this thesis. Research primarily took place at the Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma (Archive of the former Special Superintendence for Archaeological Heritage of Rome), analyzing collections identified by specific Busta and Fascicle numbers. These archival materials included critical administrative documents, correspondence, internal memoranda, legislative texts, feasibility studies, and financial reports, offering valuable insights into decision-

21 Lynch 2012, pp. 133–150; Macdonald 2003, pp. 8–12.

making processes, institutional debates, and policy shifts at the MNR. Significantly, unpublished correspondence between the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and other ministries, political figures, and relevant institutions provided crucial evidence, revealing the behind-the-scenes negotiations and strategic decisions involved in museum creation and development in Rome. Alongside the institutional archive, I also consulted the digital Fondo Cederna, whose dossiers on urban planning and heritage disputes offer a parallel record of the political pressures surrounding Rome's archaeological spaces. These materials, though produced outside the Soprintendenza, helped clarify the wider civic debates against which the museum's decisions were made. This approach follows recent scholarship suggesting that cities such as Venice and Rome serve not only as concrete sites but also as interpretive models for understanding broader cultural and institutional transformations.[22]Furthermore, legislative documents, particularly Legge 92/81 and the Ronchey Law of 1993, were consulted extensively to comprehend how national policy directly influenced museum practices and governance.

Much of what follows treats scholarly output as administrative evidence. Catalogues, feasibility studies, restoration dossiers, and exhibition texts are read not only for argument but for governance: the paratexts, prefaces, lists of comitati scientifici, credits, "responsabilità delle schede" map who advised what, under which mandate, and with what effect. Cross-checking names against university posts and ministerial appointments allows a small prosopography of influence: which academic networks shaped selection, order, and display; which offices translated advice into binding acts.

Alongside the files, I drew on practitioner testimony from three protagonists: a semi-structured interview with Adriano La Regina (Rome, 21 May 2024) and email exchanges with Daniele Manacorda (2024) and Pier Giovanni Guzzo (2024). These are used sparingly (to fix a date, clarify a committee's remit, or explain a curatorial choice where

22 Biasillo 2021, pp. 157–160, for discussion of Venice as both a concrete case and metaphor in heritage analysis, and for the significance of public intellectuals and media debate in shaping contemporary heritage discourse.

files are thin or unclear) and are cited as personal communications. No confidential material is reproduced.

Analytically, the evidence clusters around three points of contact: (1) curation and catalogue authorship (e.g., *Palazzo Massimo* guides; *Italia dei Sanniti*; *Roma. Romolo, Remo e la fondazione della città*), where disciplinary claims harden into itineraries; (2) conservation governance (ICR/ISCR opinions; ICCD standards), where technical thresholds delimit what may travel or be shown; (3) advisory and approval layers (the *Comitato di Settore per i Beni Archeologici* of the *Consiglio Nazionale per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali*), where scholarly authority meets ministerial prerogative. Letters of appointment (*incarichi*), minutes, and *pareri* are read against the press to register both the decision and its staging. Where gaps persist, catalogue apparatus and restoration files serve as thick administrative traces; practitioner testimony tests, not replaces, the documentary record.

The archival collections at the Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma proved to be an invaluable foundation for this research. Like many historical archives, however, some degree of fragmentation and the occasional absence of documents are an inherent aspect of working with institutional records spanning several decades. At times, I encountered files that were incomplete, or found that older finding aids did not always correspond precisely to the physical contents, occasionally making the process of document retrieval more time-consuming.

One challenge related to the nature of the documentation itself: a number of internal notes and correspondence from the 1970s through the 1990s were handwritten, and in some instances, the handwriting was so difficult to decipher that I was not confident enough in my reading to include these materials as sources. In such cases, I chose to err on the side of caution, omitting evidence unless its interpretation was clear.

To address these normal research challenges, I supplemented the archival materials with published government reports, contemporary press coverage, and existing secondary literature whenever possible.

These strategies helped to mitigate the impact of occasional gaps or ambiguities and ensured that the overall analysis rests on a solid evidentiary foundation. As is often the case in historical research, the process required a degree of adaptability and methodological flexibility, which has informed the critical approach adopted throughout the thesis.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Italian into English are my own. I have aimed to render sense accurately, preserving key terms where necessary for clarity. Any errors or infelicities are my responsibility. Where an authorised English version exists, I cite it explicitly; in cases of technical or contested terminology, I supply the Italian in a footnote.

Because working with historical archives often means dealing with incomplete records or unclear evidence, I found it necessary to draw on several different types of sources. By comparing internal correspondence with official government reports and news coverage, I was able to piece together a fuller picture of how key decisions were made and how those choices were received by the public.[23] This kind of cross-checking between sources reflects a standard approach in current museum studies, where researchers stress the importance of weaving together multiple forms of evidence to produce a richer and more reliable understanding of the past.[24]

Secondary literature review encompassed historical scholarship, museological texts, policy analyses, and contemporary journalism. Key theoretical frameworks and historical contexts were derived from scholarly works by authors such as Massimo Montella, Guido Crainz, and Adriano La Regina. Given La Regina's dual role as both a principal actor and a chronicler of these events (serving as Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma from 1976-2004) his publications and archival correspondence are cited extensively in this thesis, with attention to the interplay between his administrative authority and his interpretation of institutional developments. Contemporary media analysis included national newspapers such as Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica, and La

23 Silverman 2010, pp. 110–117.
24 Watson 2007, pp. 1–24.

Stampa. Examining these diverse sources allowed a comparative analysis of how media narratives portrayed the MNR's transformations, showing the public's reception and understanding of cultural heritage developments. It is important to note that these newspapers frequently exhibited political biases reflective of their affiliations with particular political parties, providing an additional layer of complexity to the analysis of public discourse on museum policy.[25] Newspapers can also be particularly valuable as considered as primary sources, offering insight into how museological developments were framed within public discourse at the time. However, given the political affiliations and editorial orientations of major Italian newspapers, their perspectives must be carefully contextualized and critically analyzed. In this research, newspapers are not viewed simply as channels of information, but as active players in shaping public understanding and debate. Their reporting did not just reflect policy decisions about museums and cultural heritage; it helped define which issues gained attention, whose voices were heard, and how events were interpreted by the wider public. For this reason, particular care has been taken to consider the editorial perspectives, institutional connections, and political contexts that influenced how these newspapers covered the MNR's evolution.Various newspapers were consulted, including not only Italian newspapers, but also international papers. These publications provide differentiated political and ideological standpoints, allowing for a more comprehensive examination of how MNR's institutional changes were perceived and debated. The selection is deliberate: alongside the national dailies already cited, where relevant, I signal editorial orientations, but I use these outlets primarily as primary sources for how cultural policy was framed in the Roman public sphere.

Corriere della Sera, one of Italy's oldest and most authoritative newspapers, has historically maintained a centrist establishment-oriented perspective. Throughout the late 20th century, its reporting reflected the views of Italy's political and economic elites, often

25 See Settis 2002, pp. 39–43, for a discussion of the increasing role of the press and public intellectuals in framing debates on museum reform, privatization, and the tensions between state stewardship and market-driven approaches to cultural heritage

favoring institutional continuity and official narratives regarding cultural policy.[26] During the 1970s and early 1980s, *Corriere della Sera* underwent a period of political controversy, particularly with its involvement in the Propaganda Due (P2) scandal, which revealed connections between its management and covert political lobbying networks.[27] This affiliation is significant when analyzing its coverage of museum policies during the 1980s, as its editorial line frequently aligned with governmental positions on heritage management, state funding, and museum modernization efforts. In the 1990s, the newspaper maintained a liberal-conservative stance, broadly supportive of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and market-oriented cultural policies, which in turn shaped its reporting on museum administration and funding debates.[28]

By contrast, *La Repubblica*, founded in 1976, positioned itself as a progressive, center-left newspaper, often aligned with intellectual and reformist circles.[29] From its inception, the publication took a critical stance toward the Christian Democracy (DC) government and was particularly vocal during the Duomo Connection and Mani Pulite investigations of the early 1990s. Its coverage of cultural policy and museum governance frequently emphasized state mismanagement, funding crises, and political interference in heritage administration. *La Stampa* occupies a centrist to center-left position,[30] historically

26 Corriere della Sera 2025.

27 Gilbert 1981.

28 Mancini, Berlusconi 2012, pp. 357-378.

29 Journalist and author Alexander Stille, whose father, Ugo Stille, served as editor of Corriere della Sera from 1987 to 1992, provides a detailed analysis of the political influence and ideological orientations of these newspapers during Silvio Berlusconi's tenure in his book, The Sack of Rome: Media + Money + Celebrity = Power = Silvio Berlusconi; "When Berlusconi is talking about the media being against him, he is really talking about the four largest newspapers that he does not control and that have some influence on public opinion: The Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica (which also owns a series of local newspapers), La Stampa and the business newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore, which together sell about two million copies a day, about 40 percent of the total. Nonetheless, as the country's most respected papers, they have an influence well beyond their sales numbers in orienting government policy and public opinion. Of these, only one major paper, La Repubblica, can be accurately described as anti-Berlusconi. The papers that Berlusconi really worries about are the Corriere della Sera and La Stampa, both of which have generally moderate, middle and upper-middle-class readership, made up of the kind of centrist voters who might be decisive in turning an election in favor of either left or right. Moreover, beyond their actual readership, they help create and orient public opinion in Italy's middle class as well as in political and industrial circles."
Stille 2007, p.306.

30 Dunăre, Hobolt 2018, this article groups La Stampa among mainstream European dailies that are centrist or slightly left-of-centre.

associated with Italy's northern industrial elite, particularly the Agnelli family (owners of Fiat). Unlike *Corriere della Sera* or *La Repubblica*, which were often at ideological odds, *La Stampa* maintained a moderate approach, balancing between institutional perspectives and public interest concerns.

The inclusion of these sources considers diverse perspectives, ensuring that my reconstruction of MNR's history is not shaped by a singular ideological or editorial viewpoint. However, a critical methodological approach is necessary when interpreting these sources. As research on political parallelism in media studies has shown, newspapers in Italy have historically maintained close relationships with political parties, economic elites, and state institutions.[31] Their framing of museum policies is therefore not neutral, but rather shaped by editorial decisions regarding which aspects of cultural heritage to highlight or downplay. In this context, it is important to recognize the institutional ties, political alignments, and economic interests.[32]

By engaging with these sources through a critical media analysis, this study aims to move beyond a simple chronological reconstruction of events, instead examining how institutional change in the museum sector was framed, debated, and understood within public discourse. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how MNR's development during this period was situated within broader national discussions on cultural policy, heritage management, and the role of museums in Rome.

Theories about museums and cultural policy shaped not only how I developed my research questions, but also how I read and interpreted both archival documents and media sources throughout this project. Rather than treating concepts like decentralization, institutional autonomy, or the impact of mega-events as abstract ideas, I used them as practical tools for making sense of the material I encountered.

For example, ideas drawn from new museology and debates on decentralization led me to look more closely at how terms such as

31 Artero 2015.

32 Hallin, Mancini 2004, pp.21–142.

valorization, *public engagement*, and *governance* appeared in everyday institutional correspondence and administrative reports.[33] In the Italian context, these concepts carry specific legal and administrative implications that go beyond their museological use. As Lorenzo Casini has shown in his analysis of *valorizzazione* and management within the cultural heritage sector, the term denotes not merely the enhancement of cultural assets but the intersection of administrative law, policy design, and institutional autonomy within a broader system of cultural governance.[1] I found that internal memos and meeting notes often revealed more about how museum staff and officials actually understood and applied these notions than official policy statements did.[34]

Work on the effects of mega-events, especially the Jubilee of 2000, prompted me to pay attention to documents and news coverage that linked the museum's development to wider changes in Rome and national heritage policy. In practice, this meant questioning how terms like "modernization" or "restructuring" were used to justify certain decisions, and asking what assumptions or priorities were shaping those choices.

Throughout, I tried to let theory act as a lens for noticing gaps, contradictions, or silences in the historical record, sometimes pointing me toward questions I would not otherwise have thought to ask. My aim was to build an analysis that reflected both the specifics of the MNR's history and the broader conversations happening in Italian and international museum studies.

This research also draws on a broad body of contemporary museum theory, especially recent scholarship on decentralization and the influence of major international events on cultural institutions.[35] By grounding my analysis in these frameworks, I was able to examine how MNR responded to changes in the political, economic, and cultural

33 See e.g., Volpe 2015; Cerquetti 2017.
34 Casini 2025, pp.211–266.
35 See: Anderson 2012; Montella 1992.

context, whether through new architectural projects, acquisitions, or curatorial policy.[36]

The thesis also relies on comparative case studies of museums in both Italy and abroad, alongside analysis of significant events such as the Great Jubilee of 2000.[37] This comparative approach helps clarify how local decisions at the MNR have been shaped by broader developments in museum governance and urban planning.[38] By considering these factors together, the study reveals the complex interplay between local circumstances and global trends in the evolution of the museum.

36 Casini, Barbati, Cammelli, Piperata, Sciullo 2018; Christillin, Christian Greco 2021; Lampis 2018.

37 For the theoretical framework on mega-events and their effects on urban cultural institutions, see: Roche 2000, chapters 1 and 6. For a discussion of how large-scale cultural events shape the public sphere and urban policy in European cities, see Sassatelli 2008, pp.25–41.

38 Bennett 1995.

CHAPTER I. The Museo Nazionale Romano and Rome's Post-Unification Transformation

Before turning to the detailed narrative that follows, it is useful to set the institutional journey of the Museo Nazionale Romano against its broader chronological arc. The table below lays out the major legislative, administrative, and curatorial milestones that have marked the museum's evolution from its late nineteenth-century foundation through to the cusp of the new millennium. Rather than providing an exhaustive list, this timeline is intended as an orienting guide, one that helps situate the complexities, delays, and accelerations described in this chapter within the wider patterns of Rome's urban and cultural history[39]:

Key Events in the History of the Museo Nazionale Romano 1889–2001

Year(s)	Event	Notes
1889	Foundation of the Museo Nazionale Romano at the Baths of Diocletian (Terme di Diocleziano)	Official inauguration; post-Unification nation-building
1896	First MNR guide book published	Sold for 1.50 lire

39 For a more detailed chronological overview, including major events in Italy and Europe from 1970 to 2001 that influenced cultural policy and the Museo Nazionale Romano, see the expanded timeline in Appendix 5 "Major Events in Italy and Europe (1970–2001) Influencing Cultural Policy and the Museo Nazionale Romano".

1901–1945	Expansion of collections and galleries at Terme di Diocleziano	Growth phase; integration of major archaeological finds
1911	11 rooms within Terme di Diocleziano were repurposed to host the 1911 Great Archeological Exhibition	Restorations and public interest grew, celebration to mark 15th anniversary of Italian Unification
7 May 1938	Adolf Hilter visits MNR with Mussolini, guided by Giuseppe Bottai and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli	MNR used as a spectacle to exercise diplomacy, power and reinforce ideological parallel between Fascist ambitions and ancient Rome
1939	Law n, 1089 (Legge Bottai) is enacted	The law mandated state oversight of cultural objects, nationalizing them as public property, directing affecting MNR's collections
1940	Wartime, closure of MNR was decreed	Rooms were emptied, objects locked in crates and transferred to protective shelters
1946	MNR reopens to the public post WWII	MNR resumes role as a central repository for Rome's archeological materials

1970s	Rising concern over urban development's impact on Rome's archaeology	Precipitated push for legal reforms
1981	Passage of Law 92/81 ("Legge speciale per Roma")	Exceptional funding and reforms for Rome's heritage sector
1980s	Reform and planning under Soprintendente Adriano La Regina; negotiations for new museum sites	Palazzo Massimo, Crypta Balbi, Palazzo Altemps
1983–1995	Legal and restoration process for expropriation and transformation of Palazzo Massimo	Prolonged negotiations; complex bureaucracy
1993	Ronchey Law introduces autonomy, public-private partnership, and sponsorship for museums	Major governance reform
1995	Official completion of expropriation of Palazzo Massimo	Paved way for full-scale restoration and new galleries

December 1997	Inauguration of Palazzo Altemps as part of the MNR network	Major public event
1998	Opening of Palazzo Massimo alle Terme as main archaeological gallery	Marked shift to a multi-site institution
2000	Jubilee Year: completion of major restorations, expanded public programming at MNR sites	Culmination of two decades of reform; international attention
June 2001	Official public opening of Crypta Balbi as the fourth main MNR site	Innovative urban archaeology and museum integration

1.1. The Unification and the Early Museo Nazionale Romano

Che cos'e, dunque, il 'patrimonio culturale'? E come è nato il ' modello Italia' a cui facciamo riferimento? Cominciamo dai musei. Essi non sono nati dal nulla, ma sono anzi l'evoluzione delle grandi collezioni di principi, papi e sovrani degli antichi Stati, collezioni che nacquero come un'ostentazione di gusto e di prestigio, intesa come elemento essenziale della sovranità. Anche i re medievali avevano naturalmente posseduto i loro palazzi e 'tesori', che spesso includono opere d'arte (in particolare gemme, manoscritti e oreficerie), accumulate per il loro valore monetario e per la loro rarità. Ma fra Quattro e Cinquecento nacque, e nacque in Italia, un nuovo tipo di collezione, che si fregiava in primo luogo di statue antiche recuperate nelle rovine di Roma e di altre città romane, a cui venivano aggiungendosi le opere di artisti contemporanei, viste come una costante gara con l'Antico. Per dimensioni e per natura, il collezionismo cambio faccia, e dalle corti venne diffondendosi anche presso cardinali e vescovi, aristocratici e mercanti, artisti ed eruditi, sempre con una connotazione di *status* sociale, ma anche con l'ambizione di fornire, ciascuno nella propria collezione, un' immagine di sè, una proiezione in figura del proprio gusto e del proprio ruolo. Le collezioni 'all'italiana' divennero rapidamente modello universale: re di Francia e d'Inghilterra e di Spagna, duchi bavaresi e arciduchi austriaci imitarono i principi italiani formando collezioni esemplari sulle loro, felici quando le circostanze consentivano di acquistare in blocco collezioni di un principe italiano (fu così che cospicue raccolte si mossero da Mantova a Londra, da Modena a Dresda, formando il nucleo di raccolte e musei ancor oggi gloriosi).[40]

The unification of Italy in 1861 signaled a pivotal moment for Rome, initiating its transformation into the nation's capital. After the unification, the decision was soon made to move the capital from Florence to Rome. [41] Prior to this shift, Rome had been relatively isolated in terms of economic, cultural, and political influence, its

40 Settis 2002, pp. 21-22.
41 Dyson, p. 81.

development constrained by the papacy's conservative stance toward the broader political and social transformations occurring across Italy and Europe. In 1871, with a population of approximately 226,022,[42] comparable to that of a small provincial town, Rome faced substantial demands to adapt physically and structurally to its new role. This adaptation included the construction of ministries, law courts, and other institutions emblematic of a unified state. Accompanying these institutional needs was a wave of new residents from politicians and civil servants to construction workers, each requiring housing and infrastructure within a rapidly modernizing urban landscape.[43]

In 1870, when Rome became the capital of Italy, there were no state museums at all in the city.[44] In that same year, in a letter addressed to the newspaper *La Perseveranza*, Minister Ruggiero Bonghi outlined the ideological program of what prominent archeologists Gherardo Gherardini[45] and Salomon Reinach[46] would later call "national archaeology". In her research, *I musei archeologici di Roma capitale,* Silvia Bruni recalls this pivotal passage from Bonghi, published on 3 October 1870, which offers a programmatic vision for the future of Rome's archaeological heritage under the newly unified Italian state. Writing just weeks after the Breccia di Porta Pia, Bonghi (a leading intellectual and political figure) articulated a decisive ideological rupture from the papal model of cultural stewardship. In doing so, he outlined the moral and civic imperatives of a new national archaeology rooted in scientific inquiry and historical consciousness. As he famously declared:

42 Silvagni 1872, p. 6.

43 Marinaro 2014, pp.10-11.

44 Jalla 2012, p.1; English version of the paper originally presented at the international conference “Lieux de mémoire, musée(s) d’histoire(s),” Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine and Institut National du Patrimoine, Paris, 19 June 2009.

45 Gherardo Ghirardini (1854–1920) was an Italian archaeologist whose work focused on the ancient Veneti and the Villanovan civilization. His excavations of the necropolises at Este and his publication La situla italica primitiva studiata specialmente in Este are considered important contributions to the study of Italy’s Iron Age. He held academic positions at the Universities of Pisa, Padua, and Bologna and served as Superintendent of Antiquities, roles through which he advanced the understanding of Italy’s early archaeological heritage. See: Treccani. "Gherardo Ghirardini." Enciclopedia Italiana. Treccani.it. Accessed 6 Dec. 2024.

46 Salomon Reinach (1858–1932), a prominent French archaeologist, philologist, and historian of art, was a leading figure of the Franco-Jewish establishment in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Of Jewish heritage, he was vice president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the most influential Jewish organization of the period, and played a key role in advancing its mission. Reinach's scholarship, which included manuals and repertoires on classical art, shaped the fields of archaeology and cultural history, while his public engagement reflected his dedication to both intellectual and social causes. See: Rodrigue 2004, pp. 1–36.

La Roma della Repubblica e dei Cesari va ricercata, ritrovata, rispettata più che non è stata dai Pontefici ... Questo suolo ci deve essere sacro; noi dobbiamo ricercare in esso le memorie, le tracce della più gloriosa era della Storia d'Italia; ricercarla come non è stato fatto finora, con l'intendimento di non usare le pietre e le colonne ad ornamento d'altri palagi e tempii, secondo la pratica dei secoli scorsi, ... ma per studio, per amore di scienza e d'arte, per quel delicato sentimento storico dell'antico, che è proprio del secolo nostro.[47]

This statement not only critiques past practices of architectural reuse under Papal Rome but also establishes a secular, nationalist, and preservationist ethos that would shape Italian cultural policy and museology in the decades to follow.

After 1871, at the national level, the most urgent problems that the government faced were the development of legislative measures for protection and the creation of specific administrative bodies, both central and peripheral, for the management of the immense archaeological and artistic heritage.[48] The city began a new era of rapid expansion. Whole districts had to be created to accommodate the influx of civil servants, administrators, lawyers, professionals, and workers arriving to operate the machinery of the new state. [49]

Following the capture of Rome, the newly established government dissolved the existing papal archaeological administration. In its place, they instituted the "Sopraintendenza per gli scavi di antichità e per la custodia dei monumenti della provincia di Rome." The national office assumed the responsibility of most of the major archeological sites and excavations in the city. [50] By 1872, the Bullettino Comunale started publishing the archaeological finds and research, but found it difficult to keep up with the mass amounts of new finds.[51] This marked the

47 Bruni 1991-1992, pp. 379.

48 Ibid.

49 See: Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma. Verbale della seduta del 4 febbraio 1880. Protocol no. 25994/1880. Archivio Storico Capitolino, Titolo 12 “Monumenti Scavi Antichità Musei”, fasc. 239; Bruni 1992, pp. 379–392;Francescangeli 2007.

50 Bocquet 2001, pp. 763–764;Bruni 2000, pp. 775–776.

51 “By 1876 Lanciani lamented that only the finds of the last six months of 1872 had found their way into print.” Lanciani 1988, p.1.

beginning of the state's significant involvement in archaeology in Rome, a role it continues to fulfill to the present day.

This epoch saw not only a significant political shift but also a profound transformation in the cultural and social landscapes, prominently influenced by developments in museology. As Rome emerged as the symbolic heart of the Italian nation, the city's historical and archaeological heritage became a focal point for both national identity and international scholarship.[52] The new capital status necessitated the development of infrastructure and public institutions, alongside a conscious effort to integrate Rome's ancient heritage into the national narrative.[53] The birth of the new Italian state and the conquest of Rome as its capital in 1861 coincided with the scientific professionalization of classical archeology and the development of evolutionist perspectives, played out on Roman soil in the interaction between the new state, papal authority and the interests of other European nation-states. [54]

Unlike other European capitals that had gradually adapted to the needs of a modern state,[55] Rome remained largely unchanged, described as "a small piece of hospitable and peaceful medieval times" appreciated by foreign travelers for its old-world charm. The task of transforming this ancient city into the political and administrative heart of Italy was daunting. As Aristide Gabelli, a prominent pedagogue of the time, remarked, it fell upon the Italians to make "this museum... the capital of their State." However, this ambitious vision proved difficult to realize, with Gabelli lamenting that "the first four years... were more or less wasted," as the new rulers found themselves overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task at hand.[56]

One of the key aspects of this integration was the focus on archaeological excavations and the establishment of museums. As

52 Macdonald 2003, pp. 1–16.; Arthurs 2012, pp. xxi–xxii.

53 Dumont 2011, pp. 23–24.

54 Westeijn 2017, p. 15.

55 By the time Rome became Italy's capital, cities like Paris, London, and Berlin had already modernized to fit the needs of centralized states. Paris under Haussmann's transformative redesign, London through gradual Victorian reforms, and Berlin with its imperial urban planning. Rome, by contrast, retained much of its old-world character well into the late nineteenth century. Briggs 1968, pp. 118–135; Jordan 1995, pp. 45–70.; Large 2000, pp. 90–105.

56 For an in depth account of the end of the risorgimento and the beginning of the unification of Italy, see: Mazzonis 1986, pp.82-94.

historian Christopher Duggan notes, the incorporation of Rome into the Italian state brought about an unprecedented engagement with the city's ancient past, driven by both nationalist fervor and scientific inquiry.[57] Archaeology was a crucial aspect of the notion of "remembering" Rome, and as a consequence an integral part of constructing the new Italian state and of legitimizing narratives of Western nationalism. [58]

In 1880, the Botanical Garden at Lungara, initially housing the Tiberino Museum, was deemed unsuitable for preserving paintings and was requisitioned by the Ministero della Guerra (Ministry of War) to establish a military college. This necessitated finding an alternative location for the museum's valuable collections, leading to the selection of the neglected and deteriorating Baths of Diocletian. The poor condition of the Baths, which had been repurposed into commercial spaces that compromised their architectural integrity, evoked criticism from Theodor Mommsen and protests from the monument conservation commission. In the report of February 4, 1880, the commission complained that much of the Baths had been reduced "to the use of shops, greatly depreciating the architecture, with the addition of doors, windows, and grilles that clash with the overall design, detracting from and diminishing its artistic beauty."[59]

1.2 The Creation of a National Roman Museum and its First Years

The requirement to create a 'Museum of Antiquities in the Capital of the Kingdom' was announced as soon as Rome became the capital of Italy in 1870. The urban expansion intended to adapt the city to its new role as capital city resulted in the discovery of numerous works, often of exceptional artistic value. The new Italian state also inherited the rich legacy of collections and art galleries that had developed over the

57 Duggan, 2013, pp. 118-123.
58 Westeijn, Whitling 2017, pp. 15-16.
59 Bruni 1991–1992, p.381.

centuries in the country's regions. [60]This confirmed the need for the establishment of a museum where the grandeur of the past could be displayed and explored, to celebrate the ambition of a nation that had finally been unified. The selection of Rome, the long-standing capital of the Church and a central symbol of Christianity, carried considerable symbolic weight. In making this choice, the Italian state positioned itself in deliberate contrast with the Church's traditional authority, asserting a secular and patriotic vision through the development of new architectural and monumental forms. This shift was also reflected in museographic practices, which began to move away from classical art-historical narratives to focus instead on previously undervalued aspects of cultural heritage.[61]

This period of archaeological fervor[62] coincided with significant changes in the management and distribution of existing antiquities collections. The Museum of the Jesuit Fathers at the Roman College, which housed a substantial collection established in 1651, became a focal point of this transition. The museum was established through the bequest of Alfonso Donnino da Toscanella in 1651. This collection was later significantly expanded by Athanasius Kircher[63] (1601–1680), who transformed the museum into an extensive cabinet of natural history and sciences. Under the directorship of Filippo Buonanni (1698–1735) and Contuccio Contucci (1735–1765), the antiquities section experienced substantial growth, primarily through donations, such as those from Cappocini in 1747. By the late 19th century, Rome's Museo

60 Trolio 2011, pp. 467; Trolio 2005; see also Jalla 1994, pp. 58–80. Jalla discusses the evolution of the Italian state museum system and its foundational tension between centralized state identity and regional-cultural specificity. Trolio goes on to state that "Their material and symbolic management was impeded by a paucity of resources in the public exchequers. The costs of unification and nation-building, in fact, had depleted the funds available to the government, which found it difficult to organize an adequate system of heritage protection.

61 Trolio 2011,p. 469.

62 One of the most significant excavations of this period was the uncovering of the Roman Forum. As historian Antonio La Regina highlights, "The systematic excavations of the Roman Forum from 1871 onwards were emblematic of the new Italy's ambition to root its modern identity in the glory of ancient Rome". These excavations not only provided invaluable insights into Roman history but also played a crucial role in the establishment and expansion of museums. See: La Regina 1995, pp. 1–10.

63 Father Athanasius Kircher devoted himself with unparalleled care and passion to building his museum of antiquities, science, archaeology, and curiosities. The museum evolved in parallel with Kircher's eclectic research activities. A vast network of correspondences facilitated the collection of materials from all over the world and of immense diversity. For example, many Jesuit provinces contributed artifacts documenting the peoples they encountered and their missionary endeavors.

See e.g., Lo Sardo 2001,p.10; De Grummond 1996, pp. 636–638.

Kircheriano, the only state-run museum at the time, struggled to adapt to emerging museological practices. Established as a public institution in 1873 under Law no. 1402[64], however, by the late 19th century, this approach was seen as outdated, with critics viewing the museum as a collection without clear scholarly direction.[65]

The limitations of the Kircheriano became apparent as archaeological finds surged due to Rome's urban expansion following its designation as the capital of unified Italy in 1870. Excavations linked to infrastructure projects produced vast quantities of artifacts, overwhelming the already crowded Collegio Romano. This influx exposed not only spatial limitations but also the need for a more specialized curatorial approach, aligned with the broader scientific classification trends in European museums.[66]

In 1875, Ruggiero Bonghi, Minister of Public Education, initiated a major restructuring of the Kircheriano, envisioning the Collegio Romano as a multidisciplinary cultural center. His plan reflected shifts in museum practice across Europe, favoring specialization over encyclopedic accumulation.[67] Bonghi's reforms dismantled the Kircheriano's encyclopedic model, transforming it into a network of specialized museums.[68] This shift mirrored broader museological trends, in which collections were increasingly categorized by discipline rather than amassed as universal repositories. The restructuring also reflected Italy's changing cultural policies, as museums evolved from

64 Legge 19 giugno 1873, n. 1402 extended Italian legislation on religious corporations and the conversion of real estate owned by ecclesiastical institutions to the Province of Rome. This law ordered the suppression of monasteries and convents in Rome, transferring their assets to the Italian state. The law also established the Giunta Liquidatrice dell'Asse Ecclesiastico di Roma, which was responsible for managing the expropriation and redistribution of ecclesiastical property in the province. A key provision was the creation of a special fund for charitable and religious purposes in the city of Rome, distinct from the national religious fund (Fondo per il Culto) that existed in the rest of the Kingdom of Italy. This special Roman fund was intended to support charitable and religious activities in the capital using the confiscated property from suppressed religious corporations.
Legge 19 giugno 1873, n. 1402. Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia, 25 June 1873, n. 157.
65 Bruni 1991-1992, pp.381-382.
66 Coates- Stephens 2009.
67 Post-1870, the antiquities collection was incorporated into the state's patrimony, leading to its dispersal among several institutions, including the Prehistoric-Ethnographic Museum L. Pigorini, il Museo Nazionale Romano, the Villa Giulia Museum, and the Museum of Palazzo Venezia. The lack of comprehensive inventory documentation has impeded a complete reconstruction of the museum's original collection. See: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana. Riscoperta di Roma antica. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1999, pp.495-496.
68 See: Delfino 2001, pp. 623–639; Moretti Sgubini 2000, pp. 36-38.

repositories of antiquities into centers for education and national identity formation.

Despite these changes, Kircheriano's institutional role remained undefined, with its collections gradually dispersed and no clear place for it within the new museum system.[69] The transformation of the Kircheriano exemplified how museum reorganization in post-unification Italy was deeply tied to urban development, national heritage policies, and evolving scholarly priorities. Ultimately, its dissolution laid the foundation for Rome's modern museum landscape, illustrating how museological thought and archaeological practice adapted to contemporary intellectual and political demands.[70]

Following the closure of the Kircherian Museum in 1882, its collections were gradually dispersed, with a significant portion transferred to the Cathusian Convent in the Baths of Diocletian.[71] Initially designated as a storage facility, the site was envisioned as a potential museum, but formal plans remained unrealized for decades. Under the supervision of Ettore De Ruggiero and Luigi Pigorini, key objects including inscriptions, mosaics, sculptures, and antiquities,were moved to the Terme, yet much of the collection remained sealed in crates at the Collegio Romano due to bureaucratic obstacles and lack of clear institutional direction.[72] "This new building was intended by planners to become the property of the Municipality, in which a large new Museum of Roman Antiquities should be house; but as difficulties arose which prevented the carrying out of the project it was suggested that a national museum instead of a municipal one should be founded in the same place" (Terme Diocleziano).[73]

By 1889, the creation of MNR provided a more defined framework, formally designating the Terme Diocleziano as a center for urban archaeology. However, the process of integrating Kircherian materials remained inconsistent. Between 1899 and 1914, further transfers took

69 See: Paribeni 1922, pp. 339–341; Bruni 1992, pp. 379–392.
70 There is an extensive and varied bibliography on the history of Museo Kircheriano, see:
Bartola 2004, pp. 297-356; De Ruggiero 1879; Findlen 1995, pp. 625–667; Lugli 1986, pp. 107–126.
71 Aurigemma 1963, p. 65.
72 Bruni 1992, pp. 335-341.
73 Aurigemma 1963, pp. 65-66.

place,[74] as documented in reports by Pigorini and De Ruggiero, which distinguished materials of different provenance, those from recent excavations, such as the Esquilino and Porta Maggiore, from those historically associated with the Kircherian Museum. Despite these efforts, a substantial part of the collection remained in storage, inaccessible to scholars and effectively removed from public engagement.[75]

The establishment and evolution of the MNR must be understood considering Rome's rapid urban development in the post-Unification period and the accompanying challenges of archaeological preservation.[76] Museo Nazionale Romano was created on 7 March 1889, established with D.M. 7/2/1889 in the monumental complexes of the Terme di Diocleziano[77] and the Certosa di S. Maria degli Angeli[78], with the explicit purpose of centralizing the government's holdings of antiquities, those acquired through excavations, purchases, and donations, both from within Rome and its surrounding province.[79] However, the path to its creation was neither linear nor inevitable. Rather, it was the product of institutional negotiations, shifting political priorities, and a complex relationship between local and national authorities regarding the management of cultural heritage. Art and history were valued by local elites concerned to promote territorial identities and become their political and cultural representatives. The museum thus became a means to distinguish and convey values primarily to do with a localitiy's social dimension.[80]

74 See e.g., Pietroletti 2008, pp.61-78.
75 Ibid.
76 See e.g.,Marini Clarelli 2024, pp. 109–129.
77 La Regina 1983, p. 11.
78 For an in-depth examination of the history and restoration efforts at the Terme di Diocleziano and the Certosa di Santa Maria degli Angeli, see Le Terme di Diocleziano / La Certosa di Santa Maria degli Angeli, edited by Rosanna Friggeri and Marina Magnani Cianetti. The volume provides a comprehensive overview of the complex's transformation from a monastic site to a museum space, detailing architectural interventions, structural consolidations, and museological adaptations from the late 19th century to the 2000 Jubilee. It also includes analyses of specific restoration projects, such as the Aula Ottagona, the cloisters, and the Aula X, and addresses the integration of modern exhibition techniques within the historical fabric: Friggeri, Magnani Cianetti 2015, pp.15, 29, 348–357.
79 Reggiani, Pisani Sartorio, Quilici 1984, p.117.
80 Trolio, 2011, p. 741.

The museum linked the legacy of ancient Rome with the notion of the nation. [81] In 1889, the Italian state initiated a formal reorganization of the archaeological heritage of the capital with the founding of the MNR. This institution was divided into two main sections: one housed in the former Certosini Monastery adjacent to Santa Maria degli Angeli, and the other located in Villa Giulia, near Via Flaminia. The two sections were distinct in character from the start. The museum at the Certosini Monastery focused on art and antiquities from the civilizations of Greece and Rome during the classical age, while Villa Giulia was dedicated to protohistoric and Etruscan antiquities from Lazio. [82]

The Museo Nazionale Romano, even from the time of its foundation, was the proud possessor of such treasures as the wonderful frescos and stuccoes of the Farnesina (1879) and unique sculptures like the head of the dying Persian (from the Palatine Antiquarium)[83], the Hermaphrodite[84], found in Rome in 1880, the Ephebe of Subiaco[85] (1884), the Bacchus of the Tiber[86] (1885), the Dionysus of the Villa Adriana[87](1887). [88]

Since its beginning, the museum continued to grow, many objects in the collection have origins that can be traced back to the collection assembled by the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, which was initially housed at the Palazzo del Collegio Romano. After Rome was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy on September 20, 1870, this collection was expanded with discoveries from the city and surrounding regions. Some of the items from these archaeological excavations were temporarily housed in Palazzo Salviati, where the Tibertine Museum was established. This museum held significant finds from the regulation and drainage works of the Tiber River, including

81 Westeijn, Whitling 2017, p.86.
82 Cappelletti 1999, p. 167.
83 Inv. 603.
84 Inv. 1087.
85 Inv. 1075.
86 Inv. 1060.
87 Inv. 622.
88 Aurigemma 1963, p.66.

artifacts from the Farnese Gardens and marble sculptures recovered from the antiquities of the Palatine Hill. [89]

The idea of a central repository for Rome's archaeological heritage was initially conceived in the 1870s as part of a broader effort to create a Museo Archeologico Nazionale. The debate surrounding its location and scope reflected deeper tensions between national and municipal authorities over the control of Rome's past. An early proposal in 1884 envisioned a single museum under municipal jurisdiction, but by 1887, a revised agreement placed greater financial responsibility on the state, shifting the institutional balance toward a nationalized model.[90]

The final decision was to house the museum in the Terme di Diocleziano, an adaptive reuse of one of Rome's most significant monumental complexes. This decision was driven as much by pragmatic considerations,including the availability of space,as by heritage concerns. The political rhetoric surrounding the project emphasized the symbolic importance of establishing a national museum in a Roman imperial structure, but in practice, the repurposing of the Baths of Diocletian as a museum involved significant compromises. For instance, while the Terme were designated as the museum's home, ongoing disputes over ownership and the legal status of the property led to prolonged negotiations between the state, the Certosini order, and the Comune di Roma.[91]

On July 21st 1891 the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* published an announcement to the public regarding a new museum proposal. The announcement:

Proposte della Commissione per le collezioni storiche e artistiche di Roma, ci telegrafano da Roma, 21 luglio, mattina: Li Commissione istituita per riunirò le collezioni storiche e artistiche di proprietà dello Stato esistenti Roma, ha deciso di proporrò un Museo alle Terme Diocleziano per raccoglioro lo antichità romano: uno alla villa Giulia

89 Ibid. 168-169.
90Reggiani, Pisani Sartorio, Quilici 1984, p.120.
91Ibid, pp. 118-119.

per le antichità finitime a Roma e per il Museo dei gessi; uno al palazzo delle Belle Arti per la galleria di arti moderne e l'Istituto di Bello Arti. [92]

In the same newspaper, five years later, in September 1896, *Corriere della Sera* published an article highlighting significant concerns regarding public engagement with art museums in Italy, focusing specifically on MNR. The article, titled "I nostri musei ed il pubblico" emphasized the low attendance rates and the limited impact these institutions had on the aesthetic education of the masses. The author, signing with the pseudonym "Polifilo," provides a critique on the context of museums in Rome at the end of the 19th century, honing in on the issues of Museo Nazionale Romano. [93]

Despite the introduction of an entrance fee some twenty years prior, which maintained relatively stable revenue across the country, the article noted that the majority of museum visitors were foreign tourists. It stated that "la massima parte, per non dire la totalità dei visitatori dei musei, è fornita dalla massa dei forestieri," and that "il 95 per cento è fornito dall'elemento straniero." This highlights a significant disconnect between local populations and their cultural heritage preserved in these museums.

The article refuted the idea that entrance fees were the primary barrier to local attendance, noting that even on free admission days, museums did not attract large numbers of local visitors. It questioned, "Qual è dunque la causa per la quale, malgrado tutte le cure per arricchire ed ordinare i musei e le gallerie, il nostro popolo si mostra tanto indifferente?"

Both direct and indirect causes for this lack of engagement were identified. Predominantly, the increased availability and appeal of alternative leisure activities were cited. The article remarked, "Una corsa di cavalli od anche semplicemente di biciclette, una canzonetta in voga, un café-chantant possono oggi muovere centinaia di persone," highlighting the challenge of competing with more immediately gratifying forms of entertainment. The article called for measures to

92 "Proposte della Commissione per le Collezioni Storiche e Artistiche di Roma." Corriere della Sera, 21-22 luglio 1891.
93 Polifilo. "I nostri musei ed il pubblico." Corriere della Sera, no. 251, 12–13 Sept. 1896.

enhance accessibility and engagement within museums. It stressed the importance of "spianare la via" for the public to understand the beauty, value, and significance of museum collections. Establishing a bond and familiarity between the public and art treasures was seen as essential to captivating visitors' minds.

MNR was used as an example, where inadequate signage and lack of informative displays significantly hindered visitor engagement. The only guiding indication was a simple metal sign with the faded inscription "MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO." Upon entering, visitors faced a vast collection of unlabelled artifacts, making it challenging to appreciate their historical and artistic value. The article noted, "Una legittima curiosità dei visitatori, anziché essere sconvolta, sarebbe senz'altro appagata se vi fossero spiegazioni chiare."

The article criticized the outdated and illogical arrangement of museum exhibits, which did not meet the rational requirements of modern museology. Issues such as poor restoration practices of ancient statues and the lack of systematic organization based on epochs or categories were highlighted. The article argued that without making museums more accessible and engaging, they would become "il cimitero dell'arte" rather than fertile grounds for intellectual and aesthetic education.

The First Guidebook of the Museo Nazionale Romano (1896)

The *Guida del Museo Nazionale Romano nelle Terme Diocleziano*, published in 1896 and sold for 1.50 lire, stands as the earliest official guidebook produced for the MNR. Though modest in both physical format and narrative scope, this small volume provides a foundational lens into how the museum envisioned its identity, its public, and its mission in the closing decade of the nineteenth century. It marks a crucial moment in the institutional history of the museum, offering insight into curatorial practices, interpretive strategies, and the nascent forms of state heritage communication in post-Unification Italy.

Printed just seven years after the museum’s opening to the public in 1889, the guide was conceived during a period of rapid collection expansion and political investment in the MNR as an emblem of national cultural authority. In a brief introductory note, the text situates

the museum within the repurposed spaces of the former Certosa di Santa Maria degli Angeli, framing its origin as both a modern institution and a product of historical contingency: "Fu aperto al pubblico nel 1889, essendo ministro l'on. P. Boselli; fu ampliato nel 1893, sotto il Ministero dell'on. F. Martini, ed ebbe ulteriore incremento nel 1895 per opera dell'on. ministro prof. G. Baccelli."[94]

Beyond its function as a visitor's guide, the 1896 Guida also served as a means of making the museum's holdings known to scholars and the wider public at a time when physical access to the collections remained limited. In this sense, the printed catalogue operated as a form of institutional outreach, extending the museum's reach beyond its walls and establishing a scholarly record that would remain a point of reference for decades.

From the outset, the museum is presented as the outcome of ministerial foresight and national investment, its development tied directly to state actors and state infrastructure. The guidebook goes on to describe the adaptation of the monastic cloister and cells for museological use, noting, for example, the conversion of the fraternal living quarters into intimate display spaces:

Nel lato nord ovest sono tuttora sei casette, ciascuna delle quali destinata ad un frate... Le collezioni di antichità... occupano le quattro ale del chiostro col giardino compreso in esse, 5 delle celle a nord ovest e 5 stanzette costruite nel lato di fronte.[95]

This close mapping between architectural space and curatorial narrative is one of the guide's most distinctive features. The text moves sequentially through spaces (*cortile*, *androne*, *chiostro*, *salette*, and *sale*) offering brief, formulaic descriptions of individual objects. These entries emphasize provenance, typology, and iconography, often grounding their significance in local discovery and historical reference. For example, a large crater-shaped vase is introduced in relation to both its physical resemblance to another known piece and its prior sitting in a Roman convent: "Nel mezzo è un grande vaso a forma di

94 Museo Nazionale Romano 1896, p.5.
95 Ibid, p.6.

cratere... esso stava nel cortile del convento de' ss. Apostoli, simile a quello esistente nel cortile di s. Cecilia in Trastevere."[96]

In some instances, inscriptions are presented with curatorial pride, framed as tools of historical reconstruction. A travertine *cippo* recording loans made from imperial capital to Roman citizens is described as: "un registro delle iscrizioni dei fondi per l'archivio del municipio colle seguenti indicazioni…"[97] This is followed by a breakdown of the ancient financial record, indicating names, boundaries, interest rates, and amounts, suggesting an antiquarian interest deeply rooted in textual analysis.

At times, the tone of the guide borders on reverent. Statues are described as "bellissimo," busts as "uno dei più conservati che si conosca," and specific works are singled out for their aesthetic refinement or documentary value. One example is the sarcophagus from the tomb of the Calpurnii Pisones, praised for its vivid thiasos scene: "Le movenze contorte delle menadi fanno svolazzare gli abiti che mal coprono i corpi… satiri e menadi danzano sfrenatamente accompagnandosi colla musica dei cembali, dei timpani e delle tibie."[98]

Though the language remains descriptive and largely neutral, these moments betray a museological ideology rooted in formalism, civic education, and nationalist historicism. The guide does not interpret antiquity through a social or anthropological lens; rather, it reinforces an idealized image of Romanitas, filtered through neoclassical aesthetics and archaeological authority.

Notably, the provenance of many objects is carefully recorded, with specific reference to locations in Rome and its immediate surroundings, e.g., the Via Appia, Palatine Hill, the Tiber, or the Ministero delle Finanze (Ministry of Finance). This local framing served to anchor the MNR as a museum of Rome itself and Rome as both archaeological field and symbolic center of the nation-state. In this way, the MNR distinguished itself from older universal museums such as the Museo

96 Ibid, p.7.
97 Ibid, p.24.
98 Ibid, p.98.

Kircheriano, from which it inherited part of its collection. In fact, the guide frequently notes when objects are "Dai depositi del Kircheriano,"[99] implicitly asserting a shift in institutional stewardship.

Equally revealing is the guide's silence. There is no discussion of the criteria for display, no mention of collection gaps, and no reflexivity about the act of musealization itself. Visitors were meant to read, admire, and absorb, not question. And yet, the guidebook (precisely because of its omissions) stands today as a valuable historical document. It reflects the period's curatorial habitus, its assumptions about the authority of objects, and the cultural logic of nation-building through archaeology.

The 1896 *Guida del Museo Nazionale Romano* provides more than just a room-by-room account of the museum's early displays. It offers a lens into the values, priorities and strategies of the MNR in its foundational phase. It can be seen as both a text and artifact, the guide is at the intersection of antiquarian tradition and the state's evolving role as a custodian of heritage.

Three years after the first guidebook was published, on January 6th, 1899, the Director of the School of Classical Studies in Rome, Richard Norton wrote to *The Times* of his view on the archeological policies and practices of the previous few years.[100] It was titled *The Condition of Historical Buildings in Italy* - to the `Editor of The Times.

In his letter to *The Times*, Richard Norton provides a pointed critique of Rome's archaeological preservation efforts, which offers valuable insight into the state of cultural heritage management in Italy at the turn of the 20th century, a context that heavily impacted MNR. Norton describes a cyclical pattern of enthusiasm followed by neglect, remarking that Rome is experiencing one of those "pleasant" but "disappointing" periods in heritage preservation. This observation is pertinent to understanding MNR's development, as it highlights a systemic instability in the preservation of Rome's ancient sites and institutions.

99 Ibid, p.11.
100 Lanciani 1988, pp. 241-247.

Norton's criticisms focus particularly on financial mismanagement and the poor allocation of resources, an issue that MNR has historically faced. He laments that although "plenty of money [is] spent," it is "shockingly wasted." For example, Norton points out that Minister Baccelli sanctioned the expenditure of "200,000 lire on the levelling and broadening of the roads all round the Colosseum"[101] instead of prioritizing funds for excavation or other critical preservation activities. This misallocation reflects a broader tendency within Italian heritage management at the time to focus on visible public works rather than the underlying needs of cultural institutions, which also affected the Museo Nazionale Romano's ability to fulfill its mandate as a guardian of Roman heritage.

Norton extends his critique to the management practices within Rome's museum system, and he mentions the Museo delle Terme (Museo Nazionale Romano) specifically:

In the case of the Museo delle Terme not only have many of the statues been ruthlessly torn from their proper surroundings, but they are in a large measure lost to the world. Mismanagement of museums is not uncommon in Italy, but it would be hard to find a worse case than in the Museo delle Terme. The narrowness of the rooms unfits the building for any but a very small collection, while the lighting of these medieval cells is so feeble that it is, in many instances, utterly impossible to see clearly the objects that are exposed. Take, for instance, the statue of Hermes found on the western side of the building. The light comes from a little window in the northern side of the room. The figure might as well be in a cellar. Furthermore, the room is so small that to render the figure visible at all it had to be placed close to the wall, so that its back is completely hidden. In a small corridor, about ten feet long by five feet broad are three very interesting fragments (two archaic heads and a torso) placed on a shelf some three feet above the ground. To see these one must sit on the floor, owing to the narrowness of the passage, or else be satisfied with a view of the top surface. The arrangement upstairs is little better. In a room where several fragments might be put, or at least one important piece, the

101 Ibid. p. 247.

centre of the floor is occupied by a large support, on which stands a small portion of the torso of a woman. It is of little importance and ought to give way to some piece such as the Hermes. Many very interesting fragments are still in the store-rooms.[102]

He further criticizes the lack of catalogues, noting that MNR's catalogue is "so slight as to be worthless."[103] This disorder and lack of accessibility exposes the deeper issues within the institution, revealing long-standing administrative neglect that limited MNR's capacity to serve as an organized, accessible repository of Roman antiquities.

Norton comments on the aesthetic choices within the Museo delle Terme (MNR), calling attention to its use of "red plush" and "hideous bases of coloured marbles" for statues, which he compares to the decor of a railway restaurant.[104] This remark highlights a lack of coherent presentation standards and a tendency to sacrifice historical authenticity for decor that was perhaps more aligned with contemporary tastes but at odds with the museum's role as a custodian of ancient art.

Norton's critique extends beyond individual institutions to the broader Italian political and cultural climate. He attributes the ineffective preservation practices to a flawed governance system, mentioning projects like the "carriage-road to Venice" and the threatened destruction of Florence's Ponte Vecchio as examples of misguided priorities. According to Norton, this governance structure "refuses foreign archaeologists the right to excavate in Italy," reflecting a nationalistic approach that isolates Italian institutions, including the Museo Nazionale Romano, from the international heritage community.

Norton's letter is a revealing perspective on the challenges faced by MNR and similar institutions at this time. His observations highlight the need for a reform in both administrative practices and cultural policy, reforms that would eventually become crucial in reshaping the institution's future. He states "The museums are in the hands of

102 Ibid. pp. 245-246.
103 Ibid. pp. 246.
104 Ibid. pp. 247.

altogether too many officials. There is one for the Palatine, one for the Villa Papa Giulio, one for the Museo delle Terme, and others for the Magazzino Archeologico. One energetic man would be amply sufficient to do all that is now done by four."[105]

The issues Norton describes are emblematic of the broader challenges within Rome's museum sector, emphasizing the complexities of balancing modern management with the demands of preserving an ancient heritage in Italy in 1899. His criticism of administrative practices and mismanagement within the museum is further backed up by the August 13th, 1906 newspaper article in Correre della Sera "Il Consiglio di disciplina per i disordini nel Museo Nazionale Romano" The account reveals significant disorder and alleged corruption within the museum's administration. It said:

Il Consiglio di disciplina per i disordini nel Museo Nazionale Romano (which was created to assess the responsibilities emerging from the investigation at the Museo Nazionale Romano), held its first session.The reading of the Commission's lengthy investigative report lasted three hours. Following this, the defenses provided by each of the officials referred to disciplinary judgment were read, with each charge against them having been detailed by the investigators.The Disciplinary Council then proceeded with oral proceedings and questioned the treasurer, Frezzolini. It appears that the great disorder reigning throughout the administration became evident. For example, it was noted that certain officials were known to abstain from their duties and, while collecting a salary without providing any service, were also receiving substantial additional remuneration for supposed "extraordinary services."[106]

By 1901, the MNR underwent a significant expansion with the acquisition of the Ludovisi Collection, originally assembled by Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi in the 17th century and is one of the most significant assemblages of ancient sculpture in Rome. It was originally housed in the Villa Ludovisi (a grand estate near Porta Pinciana owned

105 Ibid. pp. 246.

106 Translation of "Il Consiglio di disciplina per i disordini nel Museo Nazionale Romano." Corriere della Sera, 13 Aug.1906.

by the Boncompagni Ludovisi family). Many of these sculptures, discovered on the villa grounds, were extensively restored in the 17th century by leading artists such as Bernini and Algardi. However, by the late 19th century, Rome's rapid urban expansion put aristocratic collections like the Ludovisi at risk. In 1886, Prince Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi sold the villa for 14,546,000 lire, leading to the dispersal of the collection.[107] Theodor Mommsen famously criticized the lack of a preservation strategy, asking Quintino Sella,*«Ma che cosa intendete fare a Roma?Questo ci inquieta tutti..»*. [108]

In 1901, the Italian state intervened, purchasing ninety-five sculptures to prevent their loss to the art market. These works were then transferred to MNR, and housed in the cloister of the Certosa di Santa Maria degli Angeli.[109] The collection posed conservation challenges due to extensive Baroque interventions, including Bernini's polished surfaces and Buzzi's dramatic recompositions.[110] As later restorations revealed, early techniques, such as «*lucidatura con acqua forte e pietra pomice*», had irreversibly altered the original marble.[111] The acquisition of the Ludovisi marbles marked a pivotal moment in Italy's evolving approach to museum curation, shifting from private aristocratic ownership to national heritage preservation.

This addition enriched the museum's holdings and further reinforced its role as a major repository for Rome's classical heritage.The acquisition of the Ludovisi Collection, one of the most important private collections of ancient sculpture in Europe, added immense prestige to the museum and reshaped its public image. Roberto Paribeni later highlighted the collection's curatorial and symbolic relevance within the museum's evolving narrative.[112] However, despite

107 Giuliano 1992, p.5.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Sanzi Di Mino 1992, p. 227.
111 Ibid.
112 See Paribeni 1935, where Paribeni's detailed catalog situates the Ludovisi sculptures not only within the context of Roman art history but as central to the museum's identity as a national institution. His commentary reflects the early 20th-century ambition to present the museum as a unifying civic and cultural project.

this growth, the spatial limitations of the museum's original location at the Certosa became increasingly apparent.[113]

The museum had already expanded its exhibition spaces in 1893 and 1895, and the Ludovisi acquisition in 1901 marked another major milestone in this process.[114] Yet, the museum's holdings continued to grow, not only through acquisitions but also through shifts in territorial jurisdiction. The Soprintendenza alle Antichità (Superintendence for Antiquities), headquartered at the Certosini Monastery, gradually extended its authority beyond Lazio, incorporating material from a wider geographical area. However, this expansion was eventually curtailed by the establishment of new superintendencies and museums, including those dedicated to the Roman Forum and Palatine, Naples, Chieti, and the Early Middle Ages.

By 1911, the spaces within the Certosa proved insufficient to house the museum's expanding collections.[115] That year, eleven rooms within the Terme Diocleziano, located between Santa Maria degli Angeli and the cloister of the Certosa, were repurposed to host a major archaeological exhibition. These spaces, along with the smaller cloister, were later incorporated into the museum's permanent display. The 1911 Archaeological Exhibition also provided an opportunity to secure larger exhibition areas, facilitating the display of the Ludovisi Collection in four additional spaces within the minor cloister of the Certosa.[116]

The integration of the museum within the monumental architecture of the ancient thermal baths and the Renaissance cloister of 1565 (originally built for the Certosini monks) posed significant museographic challenges. These challenges required an overarching plan to liberate the ancient complex and create independent structures capable of adequately housing and displaying the collections.[117]

113 Cappelletti 1999, p. 167-169.

114 Aurigemma 1949, pp.14-15.

115 Paribeni, who would later become Soprintendente Archeologo di Roma, played a pivotal role in shaping the scientific direction of the Museo Nazionale Romano in the early 20th century. His publications (particularly those focused on the Ludovisi Collection and the Terme di Diocleziano) reflect an institutional shift toward scholarly cataloguing and state-oriented museography. See Paribeni 1924; Paribeni 1935.

116 Ibid.

117 Cappelletti 1999, p. 167-169.

The restoration of the Terme Diocleziano began ideally ever since Felice Barnabei, with noble perseverance and fervour, started to put into practice in 1889 a plan for the creation of the MNR, in the cloister (known as Michelangelo's Cloister).[118]

The Michelangelo Cloister, which was already being used as a depository for archaeological material unearthed during the construction of the nearby Ministero delle Finanze. The museum was intended to represent, compared to the large collections of the Capitoline Museums[119] and the Vatican Museums, the continuity of an illustrious tradition, from which the new unitary state museums wanted to differentiate itself. [120] The museum also received numerous other materials from pre-existing collections, such as the Kircherian Museum, and from acquisitions of sculptures and collections of reliefs belonging to noble Roman families, including the celebrated Ludovisi Collection. When it was established, the museum had access to a very small section of the Baths complex, which was occupied by an enormous range of institutions and activities, from the Margherita of Savoy Hospice for the Blind in Poverty, which was housed in the spaces belonging to the Charterhouse, to the famous Caffè Concerto al Diocleziano in Hall V.

Since its inception in 1889, public interest in restoring the Baths of Diocletian steadily grew, ultimately leading to the approval of the project by an Act of the Italian Parliament on July 11, 1907. Rodolfo Lanciani, along with the committee of the Archaeological Exhibition planned for the 50th anniversary of the Kingdom of Italy's proclamation, played a central role in the isolation and restoration of substantial portions of the Baths between 1908 and 1911.

118 Aurigemma 1963, p. 10.

119 It is worth clarifying the institutional distinction between State and municipal heritage authorities in Rome, as the two are often confused. The Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma (note the spelling with 'p') was a peripheral office of the national Ministry, responsible for the protection, excavation, and management of State-owned archaeological heritage, including MNR. The Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali (note the spelling with 'v'), by contrast, is the heritage authority of the Comune di Roma, overseeing municipal collections and sites, among them the Musei Capitolini. Though the two institutions operated in parallel and occasionally collaborated, their administrative frameworks, funding sources, and institutional mandates were distinct. The collections and sites discussed in this thesis fall under State jurisdiction unless otherwise indicated.

120 Ibid.

The Executive Committee for the 1911 Commemorative Festivities in Rome decided to hold the Great Archaeological Exhibition within the Baths to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Italian Unification, marking a significant moment for the complex. This decision allowed for a comprehensive clearing of the site, restoring it to its intended function as a monumental archaeological space, resonating with the ideals of national heritage and identity.[121]

L'istituzione del Museo Nazionale Romano rappresentò, un secolo fa, un momento significativo nel delineare la fisionomia delle funzioni culturali da attribuire alle capitale del nuovo Stato ed il ruolo che vi dovevano svolgere lo studio e la cura delle antichità. Erano quelli gli anni, del resto, in cui si attuava il lungimirante progetto di costituire nell'area centrale di Roma un comprensorio archeologico senza pari al mondo.[122]

Simultaneously[123], at the beginning of the 20th century, the houses facing onto Via delle Botteghe Oscure formed in fact two substantial blocks of property, belonging to the Vulpiani (numbers 18-20) and Guidi (23-31) families. In these years Giuseppe Marchetti Longhi started to carry out archeological investigations of the complex of the presumed Circus Flaminius. [124]

Slower and less happy was the development of the Classical Archeology Museum at the Baths of Diocletian. Its intended focus was less clear, and the primary attention of strong leaders like Barnebei was directed elsewhere. It was only the prospect of mounting a major archeological display to be part of the Universal Exhibition of 1911 that forced the authorities to start serious work at the Baths of Diocletian. In 1907 funds were provided for the final expropritation of any private

121 Aurigemma, 1963, pp. 10-11.

122 La Regina 1983.

123 Also, between 1883 and 1887, the imposing Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, situated across from the Terme Diocleziano, was constructed. The building was designed by architect Camillo Pistrucci in a style reminiscent of the late 16th century. It was commissioned by Jesuit father Massimiliano Massimo, the last member of the family that had owned the area before it was expropriated for the construction of the Stazione Termini. The building was originally intended to serve as a college for the Jesuits, a function it maintained until 1960. See Cadario, Giustozzi. 2020, p. 7.

124 This would later be discovered as Crypta Balbi and will be discussed later. See Vendittelli 2018, pp. 26-27.

structures still attached to the ruins. It took another decree in 1909 to get the process really moving.[125]

In 1909 a law established that archeological findings are public property known as "Legge 20 giugno 1909, n. 364" (Law No. 364 of June 20, 1909), or more commonly known as the "Legge Rosadi" (named after the Italian politician Giovanni Rosadi[126] and who was the Deputato del Regno d'Italia and the rapporteur for this law), established that all archaeological findings in Italy are considered public property, belonging to the state. The first really comprehensive Italian law on "movable or immovable things" with an "historical, archaeological, paleoanthropological or artistic interest". [127]

In 1927, 47 objects were deposited in the MNR originating from the Bufalotta estate, of which there was mention as coming from an underground deposit.[128] No other news about it appears in the excavation archives or in other reports dating back to the same time.

On 1 June 1939, the state enacted Legge n. 1089, commonly known as the Legge Bottai, which codified the protection of Italy's artistic and historical patrimony into a single legislative framework. The law placed all cultural artefacts under state oversight, effectively nationalising them as public property and prohibiting their unauthorised sale or export. For MNR, the practical consequence was twofold: it secured the legal basis for the museum's existing holdings and gave the state clearer mechanisms for acquiring new finds from ongoing excavations. The Legge Bottai would remain the foundational heritage protection law in Italy until the Codice dei beni culturali replaced it in 2004**.**

1.3 Museo Nazionale Romano: Expanding Heritage under Fascism

125 Dyson, p. 135; Aurigemma 1954, pp. 10-11.

126 See: Ranaldi 2012, pp. 23–37; Tittoni 1925.

127 Visconti 2019, p.161.

128 The Bufalotta estate, situated in the northeastern periphery of Rome, underwent significant development during this period. Several land parcels, including those of the Torrione estate, the Nuove Colonie Agricole Romane, and the Vigne Nuove area, were being developed towards the city. This expansion necessitated the construction of roads connecting Via Bufalotta with adjacent streets. See Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 1982, sez. "Lazio," IV.

The impact of Mussolini's regime and World War II on Rome and Italy's cultural heritage was indisputably profound, with severe repercussions for cultural institutions and museums, including the MNR. A comprehensive examination of this topic could easily constitute an entire thesis in its own right. However, given that this chapter serves as a historical overview leading up to the 1970s and 1980s, this research will not delve exhaustively into every political decision and its nuanced effects on the museum during Mussolini's era. Instead, it will focus on key decisions and events that had notable impacts on the museum, especially those that received significant media attention. This approach will provide a contextual understanding of how Mussolini's policies and the broader political climate influenced the museum's trajectory, setting the stage for the developments discussed in later sections.

Mussolini's fascination with the Roman Empire and its symbolism formed a central pillar of his ideological and political strategy, using ancient Rome as a tool to legitimize the fascist regime and to forge a narrative of continuity between the past and his vision for Italy's future. This admiration manifested in extensive appropriation and reinvention of Roman symbols, architectural forms, and cultural motifs, all aimed at evoking a sense of *romanità*. [129] The regime's manipulation of cultural heritage extended to establishing exhibitions, such as the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità,* where artifacts were presented in a context that celebrated Mussolini's rule as the inheritor of Rome's legacy.[130] Neglect of the country's museums grew even worse under fascism (1922-1943). Rather than museums, fairs and temporary exhibitions were better means for the regime to advance cultural policies with a view to building consensus.[131]

129 The concept of romanità, the essence and cultural legacy of Rome, was significantly advanced and shaped by the Istituto di Studi Romani under the leadership of its president, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi. This institute played a crucial role in both national and international discourse by organizing conferences dedicated to various dimensions of Rome and romanità. Moreover, it contributed to scholarly and public engagement with Roman culture through its publication of the journal Roma, which served as a dedicated platform for exploring and disseminating studies on the heritage and influence of Rome. For a chronological and thematic diachronic assessment of romanità's development, see e.g., Arthurs 2012.

130 Stone 1993, pp. 90-91.

131 Trolio 2011,p.46.

The wartime experience of Italy, particularly Rome, also foregrounded the collective and collaborative nature of cultural heritage preservation. From state officials to private citizens, the defense of Italy's artistic patrimony[132] required coordinated action, transcending the ideological aims of the Fascist regime.[133]

The *Corriere della Sera* article from June 25, 1937[134], provides a detailed account of the preparatory efforts behind the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*, an exhibition organized in Rome to mark the bimillennium of Emperor Augustus. The exhibition, held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, was designed to provide a "quadro compiuto dell'influenza e dello sviluppo della romanità nel mondo" (a comprehensive portrayal of the influence and development of Roman culture globally). Under the direction of Professor G.Q. Giglioli, preparations involved the careful selection and display of artifacts, casts, and reproductions sourced both nationally and internationally.

The article emphasizes the meticulous attention given to the preparation of these objects, describing how "i calchi sono generalmente patinati in modo da imitare perfettamente il colore delle varie pietre, del bronzo o dell'avorio" (the casts are generally patinated to perfectly imitate the color of various stones, bronze, or ivory). Such detailed presentation techniques suggest that the exhibition aimed to create a sense of authenticity and immediacy for its visitors. This approach is significant in the context of the regime's broader cultural policies, which used historical accuracy and vivid reconstructions as tools to communicate and legitimize a continuous Italian identity rooted in the Roman past.

Particularly notable is the article's reference to the *Museo Nazionale Romano* as a primary contributor of materials, along with the collection of Villa Albani, the Naples Museum, the Vatican, and ancient Ostia: "Altri calchi sono derivati dal Museo nazionale romano, dalla

132 Historians, journalists, and activists such as Antonio Cederna and Italo Insolera later critically examined the destruction and appropriation of cultural heritage under Mussolini's regime, highlighting the impact of Fascist urban policies on Rome's historical landscape. For an analysis of Mussolini's interventions in the city's fabric, see: Cederna 1978. For a visual and documentary account of Fascist-era transformations, see Insolera 2001.

133 Gallo 2023, pp. 58–65.

134 "La Mostra della Romanità." Corriere della Sera, 25 June 1937, p. 3.

collezione di Villa Albani, dal Museo napoletano, dal Vaticano, da Ostia antica, da tutte le regioni d'Italia". The inclusion of such prominent national institutions suggests an attempt to construct a cohesive narrative through artifacts sourced from across Italy, as well as from foreign institutions in Austria, Germany, Denmark, and Türkiye, illustrating the wide-reaching impact of Rome's legacy.

The *Corriere della Sera* article offers valuable insights into how the exhibition aligned with fascist cultural policy, using heritage to construct and reinforce a specific vision of national identity. By employing detailed reproductions, curated displays, and the authority of significant cultural institutions, the exhibition positioned modern Italy as the inheritor of Roman civilization, aiming to foster a sense of continuity and pride grounded in the ancient past.

During Mussolini's regime, MNR expanded its physical spaces and strategically grew its collections, acquiring artifacts that aligned with the cultural policies of the fascist state. These acquisitions were often facilitated by Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (Ministry of National Education) which played a key role in supporting and funding the collection of objects deemed valuable to Italian heritage. An article in *Corriere della Sera* (8 April 1935) highlights one such acquisition of ancient glassware by the museum, illustrating how the state's commitment to heritage preservation intersected with the museum's collecting practices According to the article, the Ministry acquired a selection of ancient glass pieces in various shapes and colors, each demonstrating the skill of ancient glassmakers. Among these items were a vessel shaped like a date, a balsamarium decorated with vertical spines inlaid with light-colored glass on a blue background, and an amphora with a thick, asymmetrical blue glass body. These additions enriched the museum's collection and aligned with the fascist state's aim to emphasize Italy's ancient heritage and craftsmanship as symbols of national pride. The acquisition of the ancient glass during this period reflects a broader agenda to emphasize the importance of Italian cultural heritage, particularly as a source of national pride and identity. By expanding the *Museo Nazionale Romano*'s collection with such objects, the state positioned the museum as a central institution that

could demonstrate the richness of Italy's ancient legacy. The careful documentation and exhibition of these objects, including those sourced from Gallic and Alexandrian influences, further reinforced Italy's connections to a vast cultural history, promoting the idea of Rome as a timeless and influential civilization.

As documented in another *Corriere della Sera* article[135], published right before the previously mentioned one, on 29 May 1937, covers the inauguration of eleven new sections at the museum, located in the ancient halls of the Baths of Diocletian. The article describes the museum as a 'unique museum' that blends historical architecture with open, garden-like spaces, where "le splendide collezioni d'arte sorgono tra i fiori" (splendid art collections emerge among the flowers). This integration of ancient architecture with curated collections aligned with the fascist regime's broader objective to position Roman heritage as a fundamental and living element of Italian national identity.

The article discusses the work of Giuseppe Moretti, then director of the museum, who, after two years of careful effort, successfully extended the museum's holdings and display areas. A notable addition was the "Rotonda di Via Gaeta," which had been cleared of obscuring materials to reveal its architecture and elaborate mosaic floor. This space included rare marbles, among them an Apollo statue from Anzio(Inv. 121302), described as belonging "indiscutibilmente... al gruppo delle opere prassiteliche" (undoubtedly... to the group of Praxitelean works). Moretti's efforts created what the article calls a "regno della bellezza", defining the *Museo Nazionale Romano* as a site of both aesthetic and historical significance.

Among the prominent exhibits was the *Sarcofago di Torre Nuova*, depicting the mythological encounter of Ariadne and Theseus on Naxos, surrounded by satyrs, maenads, and Hermes. The article describes this piece as having an "originale vivacità", drawing a parallel to a similar sarcophagus housed in Copenhagen. Other acquisitions from Torre Nuova included an anonymous temple dating to the late 2nd century BCE, which Moretti classified as an example of

135 "Undici nuove sezioni del Museo nazionale di Roma La rotonda di via Gaeta - Il sarcofago di Torre Nuova - Roma di Testaccio - Un frammento dell'Ara Pacis." Corriere della Sera, 29 maggio 1937, p.3.

'harmonious... slightly excessive Roman architecture'. These acquisitions added to the museum's collection of monumental artifacts and provided a context for understanding Rome's architectural heritage within everyday forms of Roman construction and design.

The museum's mosaic collection also saw considerable growth, with Moretti noting that the mosaics could, in theory, pave the Baths. Highlights included the *mosaico di Urbinum Hortense* and that of *Sette Camini*, each illustrating the diversity of Roman decorative arts. MNR acquired two monumental representations of Rome itself: the fresco *Roma Barberini*, gifted to the museum by Mussolini, and the *Roma di Testaccio*, a colossal alabaster figure. The latter, missing much of its face and arms, was carefully restored using a mask modeled after the *Minerva Carpegna*, a solution aimed at mitigating the visual impact of the damage without reconstructing its original features.

The article also notes the addition of a fragment from the *Ara Pacis*, depicting flamines (priests), recently excavated from beneath the foundations of the Palazzo Almagià. With the opening of extended galleries that housed new acquisitions, such as bronzes, ivory carvings, and marble statuettes, MNR sought to consolidate and display Rome's tangible cultural legacy.

This appropriation of Rome's past was not just rhetorical, but actively performed through high-profile displays, designed to link the Fascist state with imperial grandeur. A striking example of this took place during Adolf Hitler's visit to Rome in May 1938, when Mussolini, along with Giuseppe Bottai and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli[136], personally escorted the German leader on a tour of the Museo Nazionale Romano.[137] On May 7, 1938, they visited the Terme di Diocleziano,

136 In a markedly different political climate after the Second World War, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, by then an openly committed leftist, reflected bitterly on his role as Hitler's guide during the Führer's 1938 visit to Italy. In his mock-heroic yet deeply angry memoir, he recounted how, dressed in full Fascist uniform (blackshirt, fez, and armed with a pistol), he had fleetingly considered altering history by assassinating Mussolini and Hitler, but ultimately acknowledged that he lacked the courage to act.
See: Bianchi Bandinelli 1995.

137 This was not the only instance of when high-profile leaders visited MNR, 4 years earlier on 16 March, 1934, King Rama VII Prajadhipok of Siam, accompanied by a group of authorities, was photographed observing a sarcophagus during his visit to the museum at Terme Diocleziano.

reinforcing the regime's alignment with both the imperial past and the political alliances shaping Europe's future. Photographs from the Archivio Storico Istituto Luce (Historical Archive of the Istituto Luce), (see photos below) document this visit, visually underscoring how Fascist leaders deliberately curated their engagement with Rome's ancient heritage to stage themselves as heirs to its imperial authority.

This spectacle was more than an exercise in diplomacy, it was a calculated performance of power, reinforcing the ideological parallel between Mussolini's imperial ambitions and the grandeur of ancient Rome. By guiding Hitler through spaces of Roman history, the Fascist regime sought to project an image of cultural supremacy, positioning Italy not just as a partner to Nazi Germany, but as the spiritual and historical foundation of the new European order.



Fig. 1. Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Giuseppe Bottai at the entrance of the Museo Nazionale Romano at the Terme di Diocleziano,

See Archivio Storico Istituto Luce. Il re del Siam Rama VII Prajadhipok accompagnato da un gruppo di autorità mentre osserva un sarcofago durante la visita al Museo Nazionale Romano alle Terme di Diocleziano. 16 Mar. 1934. Archivio Storico Istituto Luce, photo code A00053305, www.archivioluce.com.

May 7, 1938. Photograph by Pietro Canton. *Archivio Storico Istituto Luce*, photo code A00082833.[138]

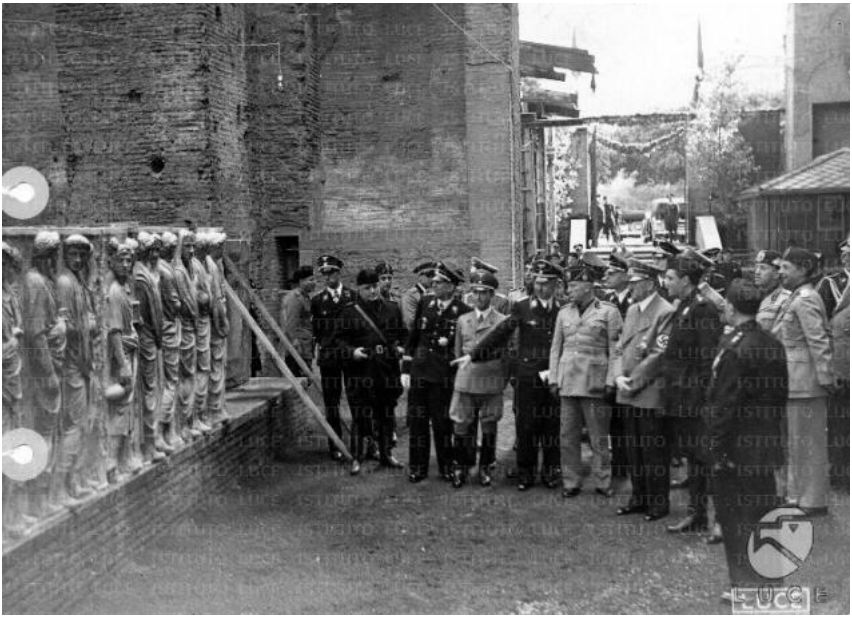


Fig. 2. Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli walking through the gardens of the Museo Nazionale Romano at the Terme di Diocleziano, May 7, 1938. Photograph by Pietro Canton. *Archivio Storico Istituto Luce*, photo code A00082838.[139]

1.4 Post WWII

The upheaval of World War II (1939–1945) necessitated the relocation of archaeological materials and art to protective shelters, a strategy echoed by museums across Italy as they confronted the realities of

138 Canton, Pietro. Hitler e Mussolini e Bottai sorridono all'ingresso del Museo Nazionale Romano alle Terme di Diocleziano. 7 May 1938. Archivio Storico Istituto Luce, photo code A00082833, www.archivioluce.com.
139 Canton, Pietro. Hitler, Mussolini e Bianchi Bandinelli attraversano il giardino del Museo Nazionale Romano. 7 May 1938. Archivio Storico Istituto Luce, photo code A00082838, www.archivioluce.com.

war.[140] In June 1940, upon Italy's entry into the war, the closure of MNR was decreed.[141] The risk of the museum being accidentally hit was too great, given the proximity of Termini Station and the numerous barracks located nearby. It was a matter of safeguarding both the safety of potential visitors and also that of the objects; thus, while the museum remained inaccessible from the outside, inside it bustled with activity. The rooms were gradually emptied, and the objects, locked in crates, were transferred to whatever was safest, from the arches of the Grande Aule delle Terme, which had been walled up and transformed into defensive rooms, to the wells of the Aule Olearie. An image, taken on January 29, 1943, depicts a gigantic hoist in the act of lowering a crate to place it among those already prepared for transfer.[142] By July 1944, the museum remained inaccessible to the public, yet it was by no means abandoned. Throughout these closing years of the conflict, the museum staff demonstrated a remarkable sense of stewardship, working with dedication to safeguard the collection as one might tend to a living organism under threat. Many works were transferred to secure sites, while others stayed behind, shielded within scaffolding and sandbags, a pragmatic response to the dangers facing the city. Archival photographs document these efforts: in one image, a man in a lab coat (likely a restorer) stands beside a protective structure, coordinating with colleagues whose presence is only faintly suggested in the background.[143] Another photo shows how the wide passageways between the Grandi Aule were walled up to transform them into tall protective spaces: the works, enclosed in crates, were placed between two layers consisting of a wall and a stack of sandbags supported by a tall piling.[144] Despite logistical challenges, the museum was spared catastrophic losses, although a few artifacts did incur damage. This enforced displacement provided an unexpected opportunity: upon return, the museum could reassess and reorganize its exhibitions with

140 Bottai 1938, pp. 429–430.

141 Circolare urgente riservatissimo. 1940. June 5. Ministro dell'Educazione Nazionale, Direttore Generale per le Antichità e le Belle Arti. In ACS, MPI, Dir. Gen. AABBAA, Divisione II (1934–1940), busta 92.

142 See Appendix 2.

143 See Appendix 1.

144 See Appendix 3.

greater systematic care, thus transforming a moment of crisis into a catalyst for institutional renewal.[145]

When the museum reopened in 1946, a new curatorial vision was implemented. Central to this approach was the preservation of the Ludovisi collection as a unified and intact entity. This collection, emblematic of a 17th-century princely assemblage, was showcased with restorations and integrations, some of which reflected the conservation standards of the time, though they remain subject to modern critique.

The museum's broader exhibition strategy focused on prioritizing a limited selection of works that were universally recognized for their intrinsic artistic value or their superior archaeological significance. In the halls of the Thermae, however, a more decorative approach prevailed, with sarcophagi displayed prominently.[146] This approach was particularly appropriate given the museum's vast collection of sarcophagi, one of the most comprehensive in the world, which further reinforced its status as a leading institution in the study and display of Roman funerary art.

This post-war reorganization was an important period in the history of the MNR, redefining its role as a custodian of both archaeological treasures and cultural heritage. As Rome emerged from the war, the preservation of cultural heritage became an urgent priority, with institutions like the MNR playing a central role in safeguarding and interpreting the city's archaeological legacy. This approach, characterized by a conservative strategy to protect and maintain historical sites, significantly contributed to the preservation of Rome's ancient character. However, it also fostered a dynamic where the historic center and key institutions began to function more as curated repositories of the past than as integrated elements of a living urban environment.[147] These post war years (late 1940s and 1950s) marked the beginning of a truly mass tourism in Rome and saw an unprecedented number of Americans come to Italy.[148] This placed considerable

145 See photo in Appendix 4 showing a snapshot of Michelangelo's Cloister in the post-war years.
146 Aurigemma 1949, p.15.
147 Higgins 2014, p. 198.
148 Wingenter 2010, p. 317.

pressure on Rome's built heritage. For MNR, managing this strain, alongside the extensive volume of objects and spaces requiring maintenance, raises important questions about the financial sustainability of conservation efforts and whether traditional strategies remain viable in addressing the evolving demands of a modern city.

In the aftermath of World War II, the MNR entered into a period of reconstruction and institutional reorganization, reflecting both Italy's broader postwar recovery and the evolving landscape of archaeological preservation. As Rome's urban fabric underwent substantial redevelopment, the museum faced mounting pressure to modernize its exhibition spaces, accommodate the influx of new archaeological discoveries, and align with emerging museological standards. While the immediate postwar years were primarily dedicated to gradual reopening and essential structural repairs, the 1950s marked a shift toward more intentional integration of the museum into Italy's national framework for cultural heritage management.

Francesco Colzi observes that, despite the significant transformation of Rome's infrastructure during this period, the spatial distribution of the city's tourism sector remained relatively stable. Notable exceptions included the expansion of guesthouses in the *Prati* district, near Saint Peter's Basilica and around *Termini* Station.[149] The growth of accommodations in the *Termini* area, in particular, increased accessibility and visibility for MNR, potentially attracting a broader visitor demographic and contributing to a rise in visitors.

In 1946, the museum reopened to the public, resuming its role as a central repository for Rome's archaeological materials.[150] However, the limitations imposed by its historic setting (the Baths of Diocletian) remained an obstacle to its modernization. The adaptation of monastic structures to museum spaces, an issue that had plagued the institution since its foundation, became even more pronounced as the collection expanded. By the early 1950s, efforts were underway to create more defined exhibition areas, particularly with the integration of the Farnesina Frescoes in 1952-53, a move that signaled an increasing

149 Colzi 2006, pp. 413-437.
150Reggiani, Pisani Sartorio, Quilici 1984, p.134.

emphasis on thematic display and conservation.[151] This integration was part of a broader trend in postwar Italian museology, in which institutions sought to move beyond the mere accumulation of artifacts toward more didactic and research-oriented approaches.

Architects like Carlo Scarpa played a key role in this transformation. Scarpa was part of an architectural movement in museum design that reinvented the display of Italian art in historic spaces, emphasizing educational narratives and interactive experiences. He believed that "if art is education, the museum must be the school," underscoring the institution's role in public enlightenment.[152] This postwar period saw Italian museums increasingly focus on thematic displays and contextualization of artifacts. This approach aimed to provide visitors with a more comprehensive understanding of cultural and historical contexts, moving beyond the traditional methods of artifact presentation.[153]

Despite these efforts, spatial constraints and competing institutional priorities continued to shape the museum's trajectory. The 1950s saw a growing encroachment of administrative offices within exhibition spaces, reducing the museum's ability to display its collections coherently. At the same time, structural reinforcements were necessary to maintain the integrity of the historic buildings, requiring careful negotiation between conservation and practical use. The Ludovisi collection, for example, remained largely intact during this period, but concerns over space necessitated the gradual relocation of certain pieces, including the famed Ludovisi "throne," which was moved to the 1926 annex in 1966.[154]

Another significant development in the postwar years was the museum's increasing engagement with numismatics and epigraphy. While earlier decades had seen a tendency to prioritize large-scale sculpture and architectural fragments, the 1950s marked a shift toward incorporating smaller artifacts into exhibition narratives, a reflection of

151 Ibid.
152 Lanzarini 2016.
153 Brodini 2021, pp.47-49.
154 Reggiani, Pisani Sartorio, Quilici 1984, p.134.

a broader scholarly trend emphasizing economic and administrative aspects of Roman life. By 1952, the museum had also begun rethinking its approach to provenance-based classification, continuing the work of Ettore De Ruggiero, who had previously grouped materials based on their archaeological context.[155] This reorganization was a response to spatial limitations and an attempt to align the museum's holdings with evolving academic methodologies.

At the same time, postwar Italian cultural policies played a role in shaping the museum's development. The 1950s were a period of increasing state investment in cultural heritage, driven in part by the need to restore Italy's international reputation as a custodian of ancient art.[156] The MNR, as one of the country's most significant archaeological museums, was both a beneficiary and a victim of these efforts. While funding allowed for some modernization initiatives, bureaucratic inefficiencies and competing interests often hindered large-scale reforms. The 1952-53 renovations, for instance, were limited in scope, addressing only select exhibition areas rather than undertaking a comprehensive overhaul of the museum's structure.[157]

Despite these challenges, this set the stage for later expansions and policy shifts. The 1950s solidified the museum's role as a site of both scholarly research and public education, even as its physical space remained constrained by the historic architecture of the Terme. These years saw the first attempts to balance conservation with accessibility, a challenge that would continue to define the institution's trajectory well into the late 20th century.

Between 1949 and 1950, the Ente Provinciale per il Turismo di Roma published a series of concise mini museum and gallery guides aimed at providing visitors with accessible and portable information about Rome's cultural institutions. Among the featured museums was *Le Terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano*, included alongside

155 Ibid, p.125.

156 On Italy's postwar investment and reputational repair, see Jokilehto 2011; see also Italy's early ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention (Law 7 June 1958, n. 279), which formalized that stance internationally.
Italia. Legge 7 giugno 1958, n. 279. Ratifica ed esecuzione della Convenzione dell'Aja del 14 maggio 1954 per la protezione dei beni culturali in caso di conflitto armato. Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1958.

157 Reggiani, Pisani Sartorio, Quilici 1984, p.134.

other major collections such as *La Pinacoteca e le Gallerie di Pittura del Palazzo Vaticano, Le Catacombe, I Musei di Scultura Egizio ed Etrusco della Città del Vaticano, Il Palazzo del Laterano e i Musei Lateranensi, I Musei Capitolini, Il Museo di Palazzo Venezia, La Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna*, and *Il Museo e la Galleria Borghese*. This initiative reflected a broader effort to enhance the accessibility of Rome's vast cultural heritage, catering to both tourists and scholars by consolidating essential information into a practical, transportable format.

As the reader flips through the guide, it becomes evident how the impact of the recent war is reflected in the text and its connection to objects within the museum. One example is the section on the exhibition *Bronzes Recovered From the Sunken Ships of Caligula in Lake Nemi.* The guidebook simply states "*Between 1895 and 1932, during efforts to lower the lake level by 21.50 meters, valuable bronze artifacts were recovered from the submerged ships. However, the two hulls retrieved between 1929 and 1932 were destroyed in the fire set by German troops*[158] *on the night of June 1, 1944."*[159] It then proceeds to list each object along with a short description.

While the ships themselves were irreparably lost, several objects and fragments from the ships had already been transferred to MNR. Among the most notable surviving objects were gilded bronze fittings, ornamental elements, and sculptural decorations, including reliefs depicting mythological scenes and stylized maritime motifs. Some fragments, such as cylindrical bronze rings adorned with lion heads, (*due ghiere cilindriche con teste di leone*, inventory numbers 33782 and 124754), were preserved in the museum's collection, ensuring that material traces of the ships remained accessible to scholars and the public.[160]

The destruction of the Nemi ships highlighted the vulnerability of cultural heritage during wartime. However, in the aftermath of World

158 Recent studies, such as the one by Flavio Altamura and Stefano Paolucci in 2023, have revisited the incident, analyzing unpublished documents and employing modern fire investigation techniques. Their findings indicate that the fire was more likely caused by Allied artillery shells accidentally striking the museum, rather than deliberate action by German troops. See e.g., Altamura 2023.
159 Aurigemma 1949, p.22.
160 Ibid,pp. 22-24.

War II, the Museo Nazionale Romano played a crucial role in safeguarding and interpreting the remaining artifacts, effectively transforming itself into a secondary custodian of the ships' legacy.

1.5 Heritage and Museum Evolution in 1970s–1990s Rome

By the 1970s, a series of converging factors had set the stage for a profound transformation in museums across Europe, including in Rome. The immediate post-war period had been dominated by reconstruction efforts and economic recovery, with priority given to infrastructure, housing, education, and the performing arts. By the early 1970s, these sectors had largely stabilized, allowing for increased attention and crucially, funding to be directed toward museums, which had remained largely neglected in previous decades.

At the same time, the rise of mass tourism[161] and an expanding leisure culture reshaped the cultural landscape. The advent of commercial jet travel had already revolutionized global mobility in the 1960s, but the introduction of wide-bodied aircraft in the 1970s, particularly the Boeing 747, significantly reduced costs and facilitated an unprecedented surge in international tourism. Museums, particularly those in heritage-rich cities like Rome, found themselves at the center of this shift, as cultural institutions were increasingly seen as key attractions for a growing global audience.[162]

However, beyond financial investment and tourism, it was the broader cultural and social upheavals of the 1960s (especially the events of 1968) that had the most profound impact on the role and perception of museums. Across Europe, traditional structures of power, from politics to education, were subject to intense scrutiny and demands for reform. Museums, long regarded as elite institutions that preserved and reinforced dominant cultural narratives, were no exception. Once viewed as static repositories of history, they now faced growing

161 There is an extensive bibliography on the rise of mass tourism in Italy and Europe from 1970 onwards, see: OECD 2011; Akat 1987, pp. 1–13; Dodds, Butler 2019, pp. 6–17; Tangi 1977, pp. 336–341.
162 Schubert 2009, pp. 56–57.

pressure to democratize, engage with contemporary society, and reassess their role in shaping collective memory. This period of critical reflection and institutional change marked the beginning of a museological revolution, setting the foundations for the transformations that would define the heritage sector in the decades to come. [163]

By the 1970s, figures like Cederna and Urbani, both archaeologists, journalists and activists, were well into voicing concerns about the deteriorating state of Rome's ancient monuments and the neglected condition of repositories holding countless historical and archaeological objects.[164] The 1980s and 1990s were transformative decades for the city's cultural heritage, characterized by significant efforts to preserve its monuments and redefine its historical identity in response to shifting sociopolitical dynamics. A key moment in this period was the 1980 inclusion of Rome's historic center on the UNESCO World Heritage List, a recognition that affirmed the city's global cultural significance and heightened the imperative for its preservation.[165] This recognition emphasized the city's unparalleled historical continuity, which encompasses ancient ruins, Renaissance and Baroque architecture, and Vatican extraterritorial properties, such as the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. The designation served as both an acknowledgment of Rome's historical significance and a catalyst for extensive preservation efforts.

During this period, major restoration projects focused on safeguarding the city's architectural and archaeological landmarks. Conservation work was carried out on iconic sites such as the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, and the Pantheon. These initiatives aimed to protect Rome's ancient heritage while adapting urban spaces to meet modern

163 Marwick 1998, pp.584-632.
This book offers a comparative analysis of the social and cultural shifts across Western societies during the 1960s. His examination of Italy highlights key developments such as industrialization, student activism, and the tensions between tradition and modernization, providing valuable context for understanding the societal changes that influenced Italian institutions and cultural policy during this period.
164 Cederna authored numerous articles highlighting the neglect and deterioration of Rome's archaeological heritage. Currently, the Archivio Antonio Cederna houses an extensive collection of his writings, specific articles from the 1970s addressing these concerns, see: Cederna 1965; Cederna 1957, p.13; Cederna 1963, p. 15.
165 "Historic Centre of Rome, the Properties of the Holy See in that City Enjoying Extraterritorial Rights and San Paolo Fuori le Mura." UNESCO Beni Culturali.

demands. Concurrently, urban revitalization projects targeted areas such as Piazza Navona and the Trident, including Piazza del Popolo and Piazza di Spagna, which were integral to enhancing the city's historic fabric and its accessibility for cultural tourism.

Similarly, the Museo di Roma in Trastevere, initially established as the Museo del Folklore e dei Poeti Romaneschi in 1977, underwent significant transformation. After a period of closure and refurbishment, the museum reopened with a renewed focus on late 18th- and 19th-century Roman life, featuring artworks and exhibits that documented the city's more recent cultural history. This shift reflects a broader trend within Roman cultural institutions to integrate modern museological practices while preserving the distinctiveness of local traditions.[166]

In the 1970s, the *Amici* group emerged as a pivotal force in shaping debates around cultural heritage legislation in Italy, particularly through their involvement in founding and directing *Dialoghi di Archeologia*. Formed by a collective of progressive archaeologists and intellectuals, the *Amici* sought to challenge the conservative institutional framework that had long dominated Italian archaeology. Their criticism was especially directed at the Commissione Franceschini (formally, the Commissione d'indagine per la tutela e la valorizzazione del patrimonio storico, archeologico, artistico e del paesaggio)[167], the first comprehensive postwar initiative aimed at reforming Italy's approach to the protection of cultural and historical patrimony. The *Amici* viewed the Commission's efforts as inadequate, accusing it of favoring bureaucratic efficiency over meaningful preservation and of failing to address the underlying structural issues affecting heritage management.[168]

166 See: Ashworth,Graham 2005.

167 The Franceschini Commission, officially known as the "Commissione d'indagine per la tutela e la valorizzazione del patrimonio storico, archeologico, artistico e del paesaggio," was established in Italy in April 1964 under the presidency of Francesco Franceschini. Its mandate was to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the state of Italy's cultural heritage and to propose structural reforms for its protection and enhancement. The Commission's work culminated in 1967 with the publication of 84 declarations, the first of which introduced the term "cultural property" (bene culturale) to describe "everything that constitutes material evidence having the value of civilization." This initiative marked a significant shift in Italian cultural heritage policy, emphasizing the importance of preservation and proactive management of cultural assets. See: Lambert 2010.

168 Iacono 2014, p. Art. 5.

Beyond critique, the *Amici* actively worked to influence cultural policy through direct engagement with legislative processes. They were particularly opposed to the privatization of cultural heritage management and expressed concerns over the liberalization of the circulation of archaeological materials, which they feared would exacerbate the illicit antiquities trade—an ongoing challenge for Italy's cultural sector. A central element of their activism was advocating for reform within the Soprintendenza system, calling for appointments based on scholarly merit and political independence to ensure that cultural heritage management was guided by expertise rather than administrative convenience.[169]

Pier Giovanni Guzzo, who was a member of the *Amici*, contributed to the broader discussions surrounding regional cultural heritage legislation during this period. His early engagement with debates on archaeological preservation and cultural policy preceded his later role as Director of MNR from 1981 to 1986.

The *Amici*'s legacy extended beyond policy debates, fostering a broader reevaluation of the role of archaeology and archaeologists in Italian society. Drawing inspiration from Marxist thought, particularly the works of Antonio Gramsci[170], that emphasized the social responsibility of intellectuals and the need to democratize access to cultural heritage. This perspective challenged the traditionally insular nature of archaeological practice, pushing for greater engagement with the public and a redefinition of archaeology's societal role. In doing so, the *Amici* contributed to a critical shift in Italian museological and archaeological discourse, one that would continue to influence heritage management strategies and cultural policy.

These decades represent a critical period in the evolution of Rome's approach to cultural heritage. Restoration projects and institutional reforms addressed the physical preservation of monuments and museums and redefined their roles within a contemporary urban and cultural framework. These efforts are just some examples of Rome's

169 Ibid.
170 Gramsci 1971.

ongoing negotiation between preserving its past and adapting to modern cultural and economic realities.

The analysis of museum attendance in Rome from 1977 to 1981 reveals significant trends and variations among different types of museums. The table below presents a historical series detailing the annual visitation numbers for State Museums, Municipal Museums, and Vatican Museums. During this period, the State Museums exhibited a notable increase in visitors, growing from 358,700 in 1977 to 471,029 in 1979, reflecting an annual growth rate of 5.9%. Municipal Museums also saw a consistent increase in attendance, rising from 704,00 in 1977 to 869,413 in 1981, with an annual growth rate of 5.4%.

Nella tab. 1.3 è riportata l'evoluzione della domanda nei Musei romani dal 1977 al 1981.

Tab. 1.3 Serie Storica Musei Romani

ANNO	MUSEI STATALI	MUSEI COMUNALI	MUSEI VATICANI	TOTALE
1977	358.700	704.000	1.471.201	2.533.901
1978	387.571	734.000	1.353.151	2.474.722
1979	471.029	773.775	1.717.609	2.962.416
1980	n.d.	n.d.	1.671.172	n.d.
1981	477.345	869.413	1.602.015	2.948.773
Tasso medio cresc.	5,9%	5,4%	2,2%	3,9%

In comparison to other popular museums in Rome, for example, the Vatican Museums, however, demonstrated consistent growth, with annual visitation increasing from 1,471,201 in 1977 to 1,771,609 in 1979, representing an annual growth rate of 2.2% This consistent rise underscores the Vatican Museums' continued appeal and resilience in attracting visitors, compared to the relatively stable yet lower growth rates observed in State and Municipal Museums.

Overall, the total museum attendance in Rome saw a compounded annual growth rate of 3.9%, emphasizing the increasing cultural engagement within the city. These trends highlight the distinct

dynamics within different types of museums and suggest varying factors influencing visitor behavior and museum popularity. The State and Municipal Museums, despite showing good growth potential, faced challenges in matching the visitor influx experienced by the Vatican Museums.

The table below from the same publication provides projections for future demand at the MNR. These projections span from 1984-2013, reflecting expected visitor numbers in thousands. The data indicates an initial gradual increase, with significant growth observed from the late 1990s onwards. Notably, the number of visitors projected for 2013 reaches 1,134,000, suggesting a substantial rise in museum attendance over the decades.

Tab. 1.2. Previsioni della domanda.

ANNI	N° VISITATORI M.N.R. in migliaia	ANNI	N° VISITATORI M.N.R. in migliaia
1984 - 1	0.	1999 - 16	859.
1985 - 2	0.	2000 - 17	877.
1986 - 3	0.	2001 - 18	894.
1987 - 4	500.	2002 - 19	912.
1988 - 5	528.	2003 - 20	930.
1989 - 6	557.	2004 - 21	949.
1990 - 7	587.	2005 - 22	968.
1991 - 8	619.	2006 - 23	987.
1992 - 9	653.	2007 - 24	1007.
1993 - 10	689.	2008 - 25	1027.
1994 - 11	727.	2009 - 26	1048.
1995 - 12	767.	2010 - 27	1069.
1996 - 13	810.	2011 - 28	1090.
1997 - 14	816.	2012 - 29	1112.
1998 - 15	843.	2013 - 30	1134.

The analysis indicates that by 1987, the demand for State Museums was projected to reach around 1,000,000 visitors, and the Vatican Museums were expected to retain over 60% of visitors by 1981. Several critical factors contribute to these projections including the instability to visit unique museum complexes, the high financial burden of acquiring MNR buildings, and the lack of new tourist demand until the MNR is

fully operational. This underscores the negative impact on Rome's cultural offerings, given the absence of a museum that comprehensively documents its history.

Without the implementation of these projects, the visitor flow to the Terme di Diocleziano complex is estimated using a 5.5% annual growth rate, based on an average coefficient (V/S) of 40 applied to 6,450 sqm of exhibition space. This could potentially attract 258,000 visitors. However, this demand value is not included in the economic analysis because it corresponds to a separate ongoing investment, likely referring to the phased redevelopment of the Terme di Diocleziano site, which at the time had not yet been fully integrated into the operational structure of the MNR.The total new exhibition space, calculated at 16,891 sqm for Palazzo Massimo and Altemps and 2,600 sqm at the Terme di Diocleziano. The remaining space is allocated for materials to be displayed in these palaces.

This data is sourced from the publication "Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano - Studio di Fattibilità per la Ristrutturazione e l'Allestimento dei Palazzi Massimo e Altemps", which provides a comprehensive analysis of museum attendance patterns and informs strategies for enhancing visitor engagement and management in Roman museums. [171] By the 1980s, Italian museums had begun to confront important questions regarding the communication of their collections, public accessibility, and the evolving nature of their relationship with visitors. This gradual evolution in institutional identity was shaped in part by legislative initiatives aimed at positioning museums as active agents in the implementation of cultural policy.[172] These reforms unfolded within the framework of a changing relationship between central government and local authorities, as increasing responsibilities for cultural heritage management were devolved to regional administrations. This decentralization process sought to redistribute powers and functions more evenly across the national territory.

171 Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano, Studio di fattibilità per la ristrutturazione e l'allestimento dei palazzi Massimo e Altemps 1983, pp 17- 18.
172 See: Bobbio 1992.

Key legislative and institutional milestones contributed to this restructuring. The reorganization of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali in 1988, followed by the enactment of the *Testo Unico dei Beni Culturali* in 1999 (the consolidated law on cultural heritage),[173] laid the groundwork for a systemic reconfiguration of the sector—an ongoing process that continues to evolve.[174] Further changes introduced in the 2000s brought about the formation of new advisory bodies and granted formal autonomy to individual museums. These developments, which will be examined in the following chapter, reflect a significant conceptual shift: at least on an institutional level, museums were reimagined as independent entities with both managerial and scientific authority.

Conclusion

Through this chronology we can see how MNR was born out of a complex convergence of post-Unification nationalism, urban transformation, and the evolving role of the modern museum in Italy. Conceived as a state institution meant to anchor Rome's ancient legacy within the framework of a newly unified nation, it was as much a political project as a cultural one—one that reflected the aspirations, contradictions, and limitations of the Italian state. From its origins in the adaptive reuse of monastic and imperial architecture, through its early collections assembled from dispersed ecclesiastical and aristocratic holdings, to its symbolic function as a museum of *Romanitas*, the MNR served not only as a repository of artifacts but also as a stage upon which the narratives of Italian identity were performed.

The analysis of its early years reveals the tension between antiquarian traditions and emerging museological practices, between the state's

173 The Testo Unico delle disposizioni legislative in materia di beni culturali e ambientali (Legislative Decree No. 490), enacted on October 29, 1999, was a significant consolidation of Italy's cultural heritage laws. This decree unified and streamlined existing legislation concerning the protection and management of cultural and environmental assets, aiming to enhance their preservation and valorization. It became effective on January 11, 2000. See Italia. Decreto Legislativo 29 ottobre 1999, n. 490. Testo unico delle disposizioni legislative in materia di beni culturali e ambientali. Gazzetta Ufficiale, no. 302, 27 Dec. 1999.

174 See: Cappelli 2002.

claims to cultural stewardship and its inconsistent institutional support. Critiques by contemporary observers like Richard Norton, as well as anonymous voices in the press, underscore the challenges of administration, public access, and museographic coherence that marked the museum's foundational decades. Despite these obstacles, the acquisition of the Ludovisi Collection and the gradual expansion of Terme Diocleziano as a museum site signaled a growing ambition to centralize and dignify the archaeological heritage of Rome under a national banner.

This section traced how MNR is a product and a protagonist of Italy's post-unification cultural landscape. The story of its institutional formation is not merely one of nation-building from above, it is also one of negotiations, failures, contested authority, and evolving curatorial ideologies. As the next chapter will explore, the late 20th century brought new pressures to the MNR, as political reform, shifting preservation paradigms, and museological critique prompted significant transformations. If the museum's birth was bound to the rhetoric of national unity, its later evolution would require reimagining its role within a more fragmented and pluralistic heritage landscape.

CHAPTER II. The Intersection of Politics, Preservation, and Museology: The Museo Nazionale Romano's Institutional Evolution in the Late 20th Century

It must be mentioned that while cultural heritage protection, the new archaeological and museological developments were going on in Rome during the 1980s and 1990s, simultaneously Italy was going through a period of dynamic political and economic changes, as well as shocking revelations[175], political violence[176] and social transformation. This thesis will not go into detail of the economic and political events that do not relate to the changes and protection in cultural heritage, as to not present a simplistic interpretation of historic events, however it is worth noting in order to understand the context in which these developments occurred. The tumultuous climate of Italy during this period, marked notably by the 'Mani Pulite' corruption scandal and the collapse of traditional political parties, had profound implications for public administration and funding priorities, including those related to cultural institutions. These broader societal shifts inevitably influenced the strategic decisions within the MNR, impacting funding, governance, and policy-making related to heritage conservation. Understanding this wider historical framework is essential for appreciating the complexities and challenges faced by the museum in navigating its operational and developmental pathways during these transformative decades.

2.1 Italy in Transition: Political, Economic, and Cultural Shifts in the Late 20th Century

175 For an exhaustive history of political, social and economic changes in Italy from 1980 -2001, see Ginsborg 2006.
176 See: Crainz 2003, pp.578-581, where this section of Il Paese Mancato delves into the dramatic years of political violence and social transformation in Italy during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It focuses particularly on the kidnapping and assassination of Aldo Moro, the crisis of traditional political parties, the rise of terrorism, and the broader cultural and economic shifts of the time. Also see Agnew 2020 for a critical analysis of urban transformation, symbolic geography, and political spectacle in Rome during the Berlusconi era.

The late 20th century marked a period of profound transformation for Italy, as the nation grappled with the effects of globalization, the decline of traditional political structures, and the challenges of cultural preservation in an evolving economic and social landscape.[177] From the 1970s through the early 2000s, Italy underwent a seismic shift in its political and institutional frameworks, influenced by broader global trends such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the erosion of the post-war economic order, and the rise of individualism. These developments not only reshaped Italy's political identity but also left a marked impact on cultural institutions like MNR. During this period, the museum navigated significant administrative restructuring, responded to evolving curatorial expectations, and adapted to broader European standards in museum governance and public engagement.[178]

This era witnessed the erosion of long-standing political structures, Agostino Giovagnoli labeled it a "degeneration of political ethics" and the crisis of major parties such as the Christian Democrats (DC) in *La Repubblica degli Italiani 1946-2016*. The dissolution of traditional political solidarity, coupled with the emergence of neoliberal ideologies, reflected a broader crisis in European governance, as Italy struggled to reconcile its post-war welfare state with the fiscal realities of globalization. The economic turbulence of the 1970s, marked by the oil crises and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system[179], placed additional strain on state institutions. As Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal policies gained traction across Europe, Italy was slower to adopt such measures, reflecting a resistance to "the rejection of

177 See Benedikter 2004, pp.2-3 where Benedikter discusses the ideological and legislative transitions in Italy's cultural governance, particularly surrounding Law 112/2002 and its impact on heritage institutions.
178 Alfano, Baraldi, Cantabene 2023, pp. 389–410.
179 The Bretton Woods system, established in 1944, sought to create a stable international monetary framework following World War II. Its primary objectives were to stabilize exchange rates, prevent competitive devaluations, and support postwar economic recovery. Developed under the leadership of John Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White, the system led to the formation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, institutions designed to promote financial stability and reconstruction. The system pegged global currencies to the US dollar, which was fixed to gold at $35 per ounce, and became fully operational by 1958 with the establishment of currency convertibility. However, persistent US balance-of-payments deficits and the resulting strain on dollar-gold convertibility led to its collapse in 1971 when President Nixon ended the dollar's link to gold.
See: Ghizoni 2024.

traditional Keynesian policies" that had underpinned much of its economic recovery post-World War II.[180]

However, Guido Crainz's analysis reveals that these political and economic changes were accompanied by a deeper cultural transformation, one marked by a progressive disengagement from collective identities in favor of private life, nostalgia, and consumer culture. The 1970s had been defined by political activism, mass movements, and ideological conflicts, yet by the 1980s, disillusionment with grand narratives became increasingly evident. As Nanni Moretti's *Ecce Bombo* (1978) captured, the leftist intellectual culture of the previous decade was in crisis, as former activists struggled to find meaning in a rapidly changing society.[181]

Crainz highlights how this cultural disengagement paralleled Italy's shift toward mass tourism, spectacle, and nostalgia. Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), for example, was emblematic of this shift, functioning as a "refuge in memory," a provocative reflection on the past that symbolized Italy's retreat from ideological engagement into nostalgia.[182] This commodification of history extended beyond cinema, as tourism and cultural heritage industries flourished, transforming historical sites and museums into objects of consumption rather than spaces of active engagement.

From the 1970s onward, Italian museum discourse (particularly concerning local institutions) underwent significant transformation. Prompted by new cultural policies and constitutional shifts toward decentralization[183], scholars and practitioners began to reassess the role of local museums. No longer dismissed as marginal, these institutions were increasingly recognized for their ability to narrate the specific histories and identities of their communities. This reevaluation demanded a rethinking of the museum's function, appearance, and modes of use, often challenging conventional expectations.[184]

180 Giovagnoli 2016, p.105.
181 Crainz 2016, p. 219.
182 Ibid.
183 Barbati, Cammelli, Casini, Piperata, Sciullo 2020, p. 79; see also p. 23.
184 Montella 2020, p. 330.

Local museums came to embody a distinct form of historiography, one rooted in place and shaped by community engagement.[185] Their strength lay in the close alignment between memory, territory, and material culture. As a result, the museum was reconceived as a dynamic locus of cultural continuity and interpretation, one capable of fostering new relationships between past and present.[186]

This shift followed two earlier phases of cultural "socialization": first, the Napoleonic requisitions; and second, the nineteenth-century museographic reordering of national collections. A third phase emerged in the late twentieth century, focused less on centralization and more on expanding the spatial and temporal scope of museum practice. Increasingly, attention turned to the museum's surroundings, dissolving the strict boundary between the interior and the external world, and emphasizing the continuum between the built environment, historical memory, and contemporary cultural life.[187]

The MNR, as a key institution in the preservation of Italy's archaeological heritage, operated within this evolving context. With increasing pressure to balance its role as a custodian of history against the demands of a globalizing cultural economy, the museum exemplified the intersection of politics and museology. This was a period in which museums were increasingly expected to function as both educational institutions and tourist attractions, requiring them to adapt to shifting cultural priorities.[188] As Crainz notes, the 1980s witnessed a general movement toward the privatization of public discourse, a shift that can be seen in the changing role of museums, which were compelled to redefine their purpose in an era that prioritized spectacle over historical engagement.

In the context of growing concern over the role of heritage institutions in late twentieth-century Italy, Adriano La Regina's 1979 lecture, *La Sopravvivenza dell'Antico a Roma*, delivered at the Campidoglio on the occasion of Rome's 2732nd birthday, offered a pointed reflection on the

185 See Dubini 2012, p.66, for a discussion on I Luoghi del Cuore as a bottom-up initiative that mobilizes public opinion to influence cultural policy decisions and prioritize heritage interventions.
186Montella 2020, p. 330.
187 Ibid.
188 Clarelli 2024, pp.33–36,70

challenges facing archaeological preservation. As Soprintendente dell'Antichità di Roma, La Regina addressed not only the physical deterioration of ancient monuments, particularly marble structures affected by urban pollution, but also the broader implications of cultural disengagement. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a critical relationship between past and present, suggesting that the ability to interpret antiquity meaningfully was integral to responsible cultural planning. The address highlighted the risk of allowing the ancient to persist merely as a static symbol, disconnected from contemporary civic and institutional frameworks. These concerns resonate with the debates that emerged in subsequent years regarding the role of national museums, including the MNR in mediating between historical conservation and modern cultural policy. La Regina's critique can be seen as both a reflection of the institutional tensions of the period and a call for more integrated and forward-looking heritage governance.[189]

By the late twentieth century, Italy's cultural institutions found themselves deeply intertwined with the era's political and economic changes. Not only did public funding for culture decline, but there was also a broader move to diversify sources of support. As the *Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends* notes, "public expenditure for culture has decreased, while efforts have been made to diversify funding sources and encourage private contributions".[190] This shift forced museums and other institutions to adapt to new administrative structures and market-oriented management models, reflecting both decentralization and the changing priorities of the Italian state.[191] The increasing emphasis on globalization and the weakening of state sovereignty created a complex environment for institutions tasked with preserving Italy's past.[192] This period reflected the tension between the individual and society, the past and the present,[193] making it a pivotal moment for institutions like the MNR to reimagine their roles in shaping and preserving cultural memory. As Crainz argues, the

189 La Regina 1979.
190 Council of Europe 2022, p. 9.
191 Ibid, pp.7-10.
192 Giovagnoli 2016, p.103.
193 Ibid, p.107.

emergence of mass media and sensationalist journalism reflected a profound transformation in public discourse, shifting attention away from collective struggles to personal spectacle and private dilemmas.[194]

The period from the 1970s to the 1990s in Italy was marked by profound political and social upheaval, as the decline of traditional political structures redefined the country's governance and cultural priorities. The breakdown of *centralità democristiana* and the evolving role of the DC were emblematic of these shifts. Giovagnoli notes, this period saw "il tramonto della centralità democristiana,"[195] a turning point that destabilized Italy's political landscape and opened space for competing ideologies and coalitions.

The Socialist Party (PSI), under the leadership of Bettino Craxi[196], capitalized on this political realignment by embracing a modernized approach that sought to "liberarsi da una vecchia tradizione anticlericale." Craxi's efforts to redefine socialism reflected broader trends of political pragmatism, as the PSI sought to position itself as a viable alternative to the DC. However, this era was not without conflict, as tensions within coalitions and between parties exposed the fragility of Italy's political system. The concept of "compromesso storico" attempted to mediate these tensions but often revealed deeper divisions, particularly between the DC and the PCI.[197]

Crainz argues that by the late 20th century, Italy had transitioned from a society defined by collective struggles to one characterized by individualism, mass consumption, and media spectacle.[198] MNR, like other cultural institutions, had to navigate these shifting priorities, balancing the demands of heritage preservation with the realities of a

194 Crainz 2016,p. 222.

195 Giovagnoli 2016, p.130.

196 Bettino Craxi (1934–2000) was a prominent Italian politician and leader of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) from 1976 to 1993. He served as Italy's Prime Minister from 1983 to 1987, becoming the first Socialist to hold this office since the founding of the Italian Republic. Craxi was a key figure in modernizing the PSI, seeking to distance it from its traditionally anti-clerical stance and positioning it as a centrist alternative to the dominant Christian Democrats (DC). His tenure as Prime Minister was marked by economic reforms, efforts to curb inflation, and a strong pro-European stance. However, his political career ended in controversy during the Tangentopoli corruption scandal in the early 1990s, which implicated Craxi and many other Italian politicians in widespread bribery and illegal party financing. See Ginsborg 2001, pp.123–145, 200–215.

197 Giovagnoli 2016, pp.126-129; Crainz 2003, pp. 581-597.

198 Crainz 2016),pp. 215-227.

cultural economy increasingly driven by tourism and entertainment. This period was a crucial backdrop for understanding the evolution of Italian museums, as they sought to preserve national identity while adapting to the forces of globalization and European integration.[199]

This period also witnessed significant debates over Italy's identity and its place in Europe. The Accordo di Villa Madama[200], finalized in 1984, represented a turning point in Church-state relations, as it sought to redefine the relationship between Italy and the Vatican in a rapidly changing social and political context. As Giovagnoli observes, this agreement symbolized "un passo importante verso la secolarizzazione," reflecting a broader trend of modernization and alignment with European norms.[201]

This period of transition and realignment for Italy, characterized by the decline of old political paradigms and the emergence of new challenges that would shape the nation's path into the 21st century. The interplay of economic, political, and social forces during this time provides a critical backdrop for understanding the broader transformations within Italy and its institutions.[202]

The Governance and Institutional Structure (1980–2000)

Between 1980 and 2000, the MNR operated within the highly centralized administrative framework of the then the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali.[203] During this time, the museum was not

199 Economic pressures further compounded these political challenges. The instability of the lira and the escalating public debt pushed leaders such as Guilio Andreotti to implement austerity measures aimed at reducing fiscal imbalances. Efforts to stabilize the economy included "una svalutazione della lira del 6%" in 1981 and the introduction of measures to curb inflation and align Italy with the European Monetary System." These measures, while necessary, highlighted the growing tension between economic modernization and the preservation of traditional political and social frameworks. Ibid, p.134.

200 The Accordo di Villa Madama, signed on February 18, 1984, between the Italian Republic and the Holy See, updated the 1929 Lateran Concordat to reflect changing social and political conditions. The agreement removed Catholicism as the state religion, introduced the "otto per mille" tax system to allow taxpayers to allocate part of their taxes to religious or cultural organizations, and provided families with more options regarding religious education in schools. This accord represented a pragmatic adjustment to Italy's legal and cultural frameworks, balancing the influence of the Catholic Church with the principles of pluralism and secular governance, while responding to the broader European context of modernization and integration.

For an in-depth analysis of the Accordo di Villa Madama, refer to: Ferrari 2024, pp. 55–65.

201 Giovagnoli 2016, p.142.

202 Morlino 2015, pp. 1–19; see e.g., Agnew 2002, pp. 188-215.

203 Barbati et al., Diritto del patrimonio culturale, p.19 (on the 1939 settlement and state centrality: "quadro istituzionale generale molto diverso da quello attuale, caratterizzato dalla totalizzante centralità del pubblico")

an autonomous institution, but functioned as a branch of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma; the state peripheral office responsible for archaeological oversight, excavation, and protection in the capital.

From 1976 to 2004, the position of Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma was Adriano La Regina, a pivotal figure in the development of Rome's archaeological policy.[204] La Regina's tenure encompassed the entire timeframe under discussion here, and his leadership shaped not only fieldwork and heritage protection in Rome but also the governance of museums under the Soprintendenza's control. As such, the MNR, according to the governance structure of many State archaeological museums in Italy at the time, was effectively directed through the office of the Soprintendenza rather than by a dedicated museum director. This meant that decision-making authority over collections, exhibitions, staffing, and budgeting remained centralized, with museum professionals often working under the administrative and scholarly direction of archaeologists embedded in the state bureaucracy.[205]

The MNR did not possess independent legal or financial status. Policy decisions, exhibition planning, and institutional strategy were subject to the administrative hierarchy of the Soprintendenza.[206] For example, for the entire 1980–2000 period, governance was effectively hierarchical:

Ministry (central) –> Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma (peripheral) –> Museum (four venues). [207]

204 Adriano La Regina's influence on the development of archaeological governance and museum policy in Rome has been widely acknowledged in both scholarly and institutional contexts. His tenure as Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma (1976–2004) was foundational in shaping the strategies of cultural heritage protection and acquisition during a period of major urban transformation. For reflections on his career and intellectual legacy, see Parola di archeologo (Espera Archeologia, 2009), which includes a contribution by La Regina himself as well as essays by colleagues such as Carandini; Coarelli; Dyson 2019, pp. 242-246; De Rossi 2009.

205 Abulafia 2017.

206See Dubini, 2012, pp.65-66. Dubini uses the Herculaneum Conservation Project to illustrate how clearly defined roles in public-private partnerships enable governance efficiency and autonomy. See e.g., Jelinčić, Tišma 2020, pp. 78–80, where Jelinčić and Tišma emphasize that inadequate governance models and limited institutional autonomy that often impedes the long-term sustainability of heritage institutions, particularly when decision-making is overly centralized.

207 Barbati 2020 pp. 96–102, also p. 88–90 on the birth and organization of MiBAC under d.lgs. 368/1998.

This governance model reflected the broader Italian tradition of museum management in which archaeological museums were structurally tied to mechanisms of heritage protection rather than independent cultural programming. Following the approval of the Legge 23 marzo 1981, n. 92 'Provvedimenti urgenti per la protezione del patrimonio archeologico della città di Roma', the MNR became an essential institution for the conservation and exhibition of objects unearthed during large-scale public works and infrastructure projects during the 1980s and 1990s,[208] such as metro excavations, road expansions, and urban renewal projects, which generated a wealth of new archaeological material funneled into its collections. Yet, while MNR and other museums served as critical repositories, their integration into the Soprintendenza system generally limited the scope for independent curatorial decision-making or the development of public-facing strategies.[209]

The financial structure of these museums further reinforced their dependent status, as all funding flowed through the Ministry via the Soprintendenza. The museum had no direct control over its own revenue or expenditures; income from ticket sales, temporary exhibitions, or publishing projects was pooled with that of other institutions and sites managed by the Soprintendenza.[210] Resources were then redistributed across a network of archaeological responsibilities, often prioritizing more urgent fieldwork or conservation needs. As a result, the MNR faced chronic underfunding for programming, staff expansion, and maintenance.[211]

Institutionally, the MNR was also fragmented. Although the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the gradual (re)opening of its four key sites (Terme Diocleziano, Palazzo Massimo, Palazzo Altemps, and Crypta Balbi), these venues remained administratively unified under the

208 Ibid.

209 Pirovano 2015.

210 Abulafia, 2017.

211 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. Nuove sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano: Studio di fattibilità per la ristrutturazione e l'allestimento dei palazzi Massimo e Altemps. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, settembre 1983. This official feasibility study from the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage outlines in detail the planning, costs, and objectives behind the restructuring and expansion of MNR in the early 1980s, providing clear evidence of the government's investment in cultural infrastructure and heritage management at that time.

Soprintendenza and did not have individual curatorial autonomy. Exhibition design and interpretive strategy were guided primarily by internal archaeologists, not by external museum professionals[212] or public engagement experts. This contributed to a largely didactic and object-focused museography, grounded in the scientific priorities of state archaeology rather than in broader debates about the role of the museum in civic life.

From a cultural policy perspective, the MNR during this period exemplified the Italian emphasis on *tutela*, the protection and scientific stewardship of cultural heritage, over experimentation, communication, or visitor-centered innovation. While the museum's collections expanded and its conservation work was commendable, it operated within a reactive framework, driven more by the flow of excavated material than by long-term strategic planning. Any exhibition programming or public initiatives were often tied to external state campaigns, such as the "Notte dei Musei" or commemorative events linked to Rome's anniversaries and religious celebrations.

The reforms of the mid-2010s are beyond the scope of this chapter, however are briefly discussed later, would later seek to correct many of these structural imbalances by introducing legal and financial autonomy[213], including the appointment of a full-time director and the establishment of a dedicated budget.

This centralized and often rigid administrative structure reflected broader inefficiencies and contradictions in Italian cultural heritage governance, which scholars such as Salvatore Settis have critiqued as symptomatic of persistent institutional fragmentation, bureaucratic inertia, and the chronic marginalization of museums within national cultural policy.[214]

212 In this context, "internal" refers to archaeologists who were employees of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and directly responsible for the collections and exhibitions at MNR. "External" refers to museum professionals or consultants from outside the state archaeological administration, such as architects, independent curators, designers, or public engagement specialists, who were not regularly involved in the museum's interpretive decisions. For more details, see Nuove sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano: Studio di fattibilità per la ristrutturazione e l'allestimento dei palazzi Massimo e Altemps 1983.

213 See Jelinčić, Tišma 2020, pp. 85-86 on the role of institutional reform in achieving sustainable governance.

214 See Settis 2002 ,pp. 79-86. Settis critiques the chronic contradictions of Italian public administration in the field of cultural heritage, noting that "sul fronte della gestione si registrano di continuo lentezze, impacci, burocratismi,

2.2 The Catalyst; The Museo Nazionale Romano and the Legge 92/81 "Interventi urgenti per la protezione del patrimonio archeologico della città di Roma"

In the years leading up to the enactment of *Legge 92/81 Interventi urgenti per la protezione del patrimonio archeologico della città di Roma*, a growing sense of urgency emerged within both scholarly and institutional discourse regarding the protection and valorization of Rome's archaeological and monumental heritage. A particularly revealing and prescient document of this moment is the aforementioned public address delivered on April 21, 1979 in Campidoglio by La Regina, then Soprintendente dell'Antichità di Roma (Superintendent of Antiquities of Rome), on the occasion of the city's 2732nd *dies natalis*.[215] The lecture captures the intellectual and civic frustration at the degradation of ancient monuments and, notably, the chronic institutional failure to adequately represent and interpret antiquity through a modern museological structure.

La Regina makes a case for understanding the condition of ancient Rome not only as a cultural or conservation crisis, but as a political and epistemological one. He laments the disconnect between Rome's vast archaeological richness and its institutional incapacity to transform that heritage into a coherent civic museum structure. "Non esiste proprio a Roma un vero museo moderno per le antichità romane e per l'arte classica"[216], he observes, pointing to a paradox that deeply undermines Rome's cultural mission. Despite the extraordinary quantity and quality of material held within public and private collections (much of it unavailable or inadequately exhibited) the city still lacked an institution capable of synthesizing and interpreting that patrimony for contemporary audiences.

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immediatezze visibili perché si riflettono sulla più importante interfaccia fra amministratore e cittadino, e cioè sui musei" (p. 80). He highlights how the centrality of tutela often comes at the expense of effective management and communication, with museums frequently subordinated to broader archaeological and administrative priorities.

215 La Regina 1979. pp. 5–14.

216 Ibid, p.11. "There does not truly exist in Rome a modern museum for Roman antiquities and classical art."

This was not simply a logistical problem, but one of cultural identity and historical continuity. The absence of a "museo funzionale, secondo le esigenze della ricerca, della didattica e della divulgazione" [217], was seen as symbolic of a wider malaise: a failure to project the past into the present as a meaningful component of civic life. MNR itself, La Regina argues, stood as a missed opportunity: "una struttura incisiva né nel produrre cultura né nel diffonderla" (a structure effective neither in producing culture nor in disseminating it)[218]. Although its origins were tied to the 19th-century project of building a national museum of ancient art in the new capital, by the end of the 1970s it had yet to fulfill its intended role.

La Regina's speech culminates in a call to action that was as cultural as it was political. He positions the need for a reinvigorated museological infrastructure at the heart of urban renewal and civic responsibility, arguing that "dobbiamo considerare questa un'aspirazione ancora attuale... per l'ambiente degli studi di antichità classiche ma anche per quello della cultura italiana nella sua dimensione più ampia" [219]. In this sense, the failure to establish a modern national museum for Roman antiquity was not simply an administrative oversight, but a broader reflection of the Republic's unfulfilled cultural obligations: "Rimane questa un'intenzione ancora da compiersi, e non v'è che da esprimere l'augurio che la Repubblica possa un giorno finalmente vantare il merito di aver dato a Roma il suo Louvre"[220].

When, just two years later, the Italian state enacted *Legge 92/81*, it marked a turning point in institutional priorities. The law's emphasis on *interventi urgenti* (urgent interventions) for the protection of Rome's archaeological heritage echoed the frustrations and ambitions articulated by La Regina in his 1979 address. Yet beyond emergency excavation and conservation, the law's long-term consequences lay in the reconfiguration of Rome's archaeological administration and,

217 Ibid. "a functional museum, responding to the needs of research, teaching, and public dissemination."
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid, p.12. "we must consider this an aspiration that remains current... for the field of classical antiquity studies but also for Italian culture in its broadest sense."
220 Ibid, p.13. "This remains an intention yet to be fulfilled, and one can only express the hope that the Republic may one day finally claim the merit of having given Rome its Louvre."

crucially, the revitalization of MNR as a multi-site institution with a renewed civic and scholarly mandate. La Regina's speech was a vital prelude or a cultural and rhetorical catalyst, to the very reforms that l.92/1981 would begin to set in motion.

In early 1981, Oddo Biasini[221], then Minister for Cultural Heritage, advocated for legislation aimed at enhancing the protection of archaeological sites and monuments. This legislation, which later became known as the Biasini Law (Legge Biasini), included provisions for an allocation of 180 billion lire specifically designated for restoration programs.[222] Another critical window onto the legislative debates that led to l.92/1981 can be seen through the official Senate report, Relazione della 7ª Commissione Permanente (Istruzione Pubblica e Belle Arti, Ricerca Scientifica, Spettacolo e Sport), VIII Legislatura, N. 951 e 883-A, dated 1 December 1980 and chaired by Relatore Spitella. This document not only consolidates the government's and the Senate's own proposals for "urgent measures for the protection of Rome's archaeological heritage," but it also gives unique insight into how Parliament framed the scale and urgency of the intervention.

From the beginning, the report situates Rome's situation as globally unique: "Nessun'altra città al mondo presenta una concentrazione così alta di beni archeologici di eccezionale valore storico e artistico, esposti quotidianamente a rischi di degrado e distruzione."[223]

This line signals a clear sense of crisis: the Commission makes no attempt to downplay the vulnerability or international responsibility

221 Oddo Biasini's role in the approval of l. 92/1981 reflects the broader trajectory of the Partito Repubblicano Italiano in the late twentieth century. A long-standing PRI figure with an academic background, Biasini had worked in cultural and educational policy before entering Giovanni Spadolini's orbit. Spadolini, the first Ministero dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali (1974–76) and later Italy's first non-DC Prime Minister, made cultural administration central to his modernising agenda, linking institutional reform to the protection of Italy's artistic and archaeological patrimony. Biasini's ministerial tenure drew on this republican tradition. For Biasini's early career, see e.g., Hahn 1982. On Spadolini's influence on national cultural policy, see Paolucci 1996, pp.102-105, who recalls his view that heritage constituted the core of Italy's identity: "Per Spadolini il patrimonio storico della Nazione era centrale nella sua idea dell'Italia […]"; and again, "L'Italia come luogo privilegiato per il fascino della bellezza […] era necessario dare alla questione dei beni culturali visibilità ed efficacia speciali." See e.g., Guasconi 2005; Rispoli 2018; Spadolini 1972.

222 See: De Lucia, Baffoni 2011, pp. 79-80; Filippi 2001, p. 170-172; Marroni 2008, pp. 28-29; Packer 1989, p. 140.

223 Senato della Repubblica, Relazione della 7ª Commissione Permanente (Istruzione Pubblica e Belle Arti, Ricerca Scientifica, Spettacolo e Sport), Relatore Spitella, Doc. VIII Legislatura, N. 951 e 883-A, 1 dicembre 1980, p.1. "No other city in the world presents such a high concentration of archaeological assets of exceptional historical and artistic value, exposed daily to risks of deterioration and destruction."

involved. Ordinary funding and administrative mechanisms are described as "manifestamente inadeguati," signaling that the normal Italian approach to heritage protection was simply insufficient for the scale of the problem facing Rome.[224] As a result, the Commission insists on the necessity for extraordinary measures, which is a recurring phrase throughout the text.

Another insteresting feature is the report's description of the cross-party parliamentary mood. The legislative process is depicted as unusually consensual: "Il provvedimento è stato sostenuto con ampio consenso da tutte le forze parlamentari, consapevoli della straordinarietà della situazione e della necessità di una risposta immediata".[225] This consensus was further shaped by international expectations. The Commission explicitly references pressure from UNESCO, arguing that "La tutela del patrimonio archeologico di Roma non riguarda soltanto l'interesse nazionale, ma risponde ad un impegno verso la comunità internazionale, come più volte sollecitato dall'UNESCO".[226] In other words, the debate is not only about local or national identity, but also about Italy's place in global cultural stewardship.

These passages show that the Senate's deliberations on l. 92/1981 were not a technicality, but an episode in which urgency, consensus, and a sense of exceptionalism were mobilized to push through measures that otherwise might have been blocked by bureaucracy. The record is a testament to how, in moments of perceived cultural emergency, Italian lawmakers have sometimes been able to overcome inertia and achieve broad agreement. This document serves not only as legislative history, but also as a case study in how heritage emergencies can shape political culture in contemporary Italy.

"Ancient Rome Crumbles under 20th Century Progress; Italians Boost Restoration Funds" reads a headline from the Financial Times, 28 January 1981 by Rupert Cornwell. Now the issue was catching

224 Ibid, p. 2.

225 Ibid. "The measure was supported with broad consensus by all parliamentary forces, aware of the extraordinary nature of the situation and the need for an immediate response."

226 Ibid, p.3. "The protection of Rome's archaeological heritage is not solely a matter of national interest, but responds to an obligation toward the international community, as UNESCO has repeatedly urged."

international attention. The catalyst to this aspirational project was the special law for the preservation of Roman archeological heritage (l. 92/1981)[227].

In the same Financial Times article, La Regina, is quoted as saying; “In just a few decades we are facing the complete loss of the most striking artistic and archeological heritage to be found anywhere in the world in a single city.” Over the years, a multitude of factors contributed to the decay of the landmarks and cultural institutions around the city. The combination of years of neglect, atmospheric pollution, such as acid rain, tetraethyl lead emitted by car exhausts, especially where years of heavy traffic flow near monuments, as well as the effect of the 1979 earthquake in the nearby Apennine mountains, where tremors were clearly felt in Rome, all have contributed to the obvious deterioration of monuments and archeological sites. “The marble is simply being turned to chalk” laments La Regina in the above-mentioned article. However, not only outdoor sites were in a state of ruin, cultural institutions holding some of the city’s most important ancient works were also in a state of decay.

La Regina was not the first, nor the last to discuss the problem of pollution on cultural heritage sites in Italy, in Giovanni Urbani's 1971 work, "L’intervento pubblico contro l’inquinamento " cultural heritage is conceptualized not merely as a cohesive system, an inseparable whole into its various parts but also as a vital resource responding to

227 Law 142/1981, promulgated on March 23, 1981, allocated a significant budget of 180 billion lire over the period from 1980 to 1984 for the enhancement of Rome's archaeological heritage. The legislation targeted excavation, maintenance, restoration, and valorization efforts, along with the funding of studies, surveys, museum setups, and educational and cultural promotion activities. The allocated funds were distributed primarily to three superintendencies: 168 billion lire to the Archaeological Superintendence of Rome, 2 billion lire to the Archaeological Superintendence of Ostia, and 10 billion lire to the Archaeological Superintendence of Southern Etruria. This law not only facilitated specific archaeological projects, but also permitted the purchase and expropriation of properties of public interest with historical and archaeological significance, adhering to earlier statutes such as the law of June 1, 1939, no. 1089. Moreover, the Minister for Cultural and Environmental Heritage was empowered to adjust the fund distribution through decrees, following consultations with relevant sector committees. Subsequent annual allocations were to be defined in the financial laws, providing a structured financial framework for ongoing and planned cultural initiatives. The law emphasizes the integration of cultural heritage management within broader urban and regional planning frameworks, underscoring the government's commitment to preserving and enhancing its rich archaeological legacy through structured, well-funded administrative practices.
Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato. “Il Portale Della Legge Vigente.” Normattiva, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn%3Anir%3Astato%3Alegge%3A1981-03-23%3B92. Accessed 13 May 2024.

human necessities. Urbani characterizes it as an irreplaceable 'raw material'" essential for both intellectual development and material well-being.[228] In the early 1960s, there emerged a heightened awareness of the values at risk due to the rapid and often unconsidered reconstruction efforts following World War II. Urbani observed that this period marked a recognition that the deterioration of cultural heritage was becoming a widespread issue, necessitating comprehensive measures to address the conservation of all existing works.[229] These concerns extended beyond individual artifacts to encompass the broader societal context in which the future of historical art was being determined.[230]

This growing concern for heritage conservation was also reflected in the founding of the association "Italia Nostra" in 1955, which was established with the specific aim of protecting Italy's cultural and natural heritage. In response to these pressing concerns, Luigi Gui, serving as Minister in the first center-left government, enacted Law No. 310 on April 26, 1964. This legislation established the "Commissione d'indagine per la tutela e la valorizzazione del patrimonio storico, archeologico, artistico e del paesaggio (Commission to Investigate the Protection and Exploitation of Our Historic, Artistic, and Landscape Heritage), assigning it the formidable task of completely revising the legal, administrative, and technical frameworks related to heritage conservation. Under the leadership of Francesco Franceschini, the commission concluded its work in 1967, culminating in the publication of three volumes entitled *Per la salvezza dei beni culturali in Italia* (1967).

While in 1972, UNESCO held the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* in Paris where The General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Recommendation concerning the Protection at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage[231].

228 Urbani 2000, p.23.

229 A complementary articulation of Urbani's scientific approach appears in the volume Problemi di conservazione (1973), edited by Urbani and published by the Istituto Centrale del Restauro, which emphasized the need for conservation methodologies grounded in scientific analysis, particularly in response to urban pollution and environmental pressures affecting Italian heritage. See Urbani 1973.

230 Urbani 2000, p. 18; Dragoni 2016, pp.123-140.

231During the 17th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris (17 October - 21 November 1972), a convention was adopted recognizing the increasing threats to cultural and natural heritage worldwide, not only from

This recognition of the significance of environmental impacts on cultural heritage sites had already surfaced in discussions long before the enactment of the 1981 law.

La Regina recounts in the proceedings of the international conference "Cultural Heritage between Conservation and Research" organized by the 'Unione Internazionale degli Istituti Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell' Arte in Rome:

The process was irreversible; transformed matter cannot ever recover its original structure. Since some of the most important historical monuments of Rome were affected by these destructive processes - for example, the arches of Titus, of Septimius Severus, of Constantine, the columns of Trajan and of Marcus Aurelius - such a serious situation caused the Italian government and Rome's municipal authorities to give full consideration to the problem, and effective measures were taken both for cleaning and consolidating the monuments and for improving the environment in which the monuments were positioned. In 1978, the problem of preserving monuments from atmospheric pollution arose in Rome for the first time ever, and that year also marked the first ever stir towards environmental awareness. Today, creating a space where city life is not in collision with its historical elements, still seems to be the greatest challenge in seeking to protect our cultural patrimony. [232]

Another one of those institutions that was in a state of despair, arguably one of the country's most important, as it is the largest state collection of antiquities, was the Museo Nazionale Romano, located exclusively at the Terme di Diocleziano. It was clearly in dire need for

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traditional decay but also from changing social and economic conditions. The convention emphasized that the disappearance of any item of heritage impoverishes the heritage of all nations globally. It notes that existing international conventions were insufficient and thus the need for a more effective system of protection was essential. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention established mechanisms for the collective protection of heritage of outstanding universal value, emphasizing international cooperation and assistance to complement national efforts. This legal framework underlined the shared responsibility of protecting such heritage, advocating for modern scientific methods in its conservation efforts and reinforcing the role of international collaboration in safeguarding the world's cultural and natural treasures.
UNESCO, "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage," adopted November 16, 1972, in proceedings of the General Conference, Seventeenth Session, Paris, October 17 - November 21, 1972.
232 La Regina 2006, p. 9.

restorations of the Terme structure itself, as well as a reorganization of the works housed there, as well as in storage, was long overdue.

National newspaper *Corriere della Sera* reported as early as 5 February 1970, a headline: "*In Rovina Il Museo Nazionale Romano delle Terme; Il Lazzaretto delle Antichità / The National Roman Baths in Ruins; The Lazaretto of Antiquities*". Journalist Antonio Cederna[233] publishes an article that goes on to paint a picture of the state of the museum at that time. He writes how two thirds of the 140 thousand items inventoried are inaccessible to the public and how famous statues are stored in cardboard crates. It reports the major lack of funding and personnel to adequately run the museum, due to serious insufficiency and the precarious static conditions of the entire building. The most famous section, The Ludovisi Collection located in the "chiostro piccolo" is closed because the structure of the quadriportico are unsteady. Famous sculptures from the Suicide Gaul, to the Erinni Ludovisi are notable to be seen. The article goes on to state how unsafe the building itself is, from shaky floors to the roof needing to be redone and how objects are stored haphazardly, arranged as best as possible and not open to visitors, hundreds of epigraphs piled up awaiting definitive arrangement and how the materials from the immense warehouses has been piled up on wooden planks for decades. Rooms that were used for exhibitions are destined for the most urgent restorations. This article

233 Antonio Cederna (1921–1996), archaeologist, journalist, and activist, was a central figure in postwar debates on urban planning and heritage conservation in Italy. Through his writings in Il Mondo, Corriere della Sera, la Repubblica, and L'Espresso, he exposed the threats posed by unchecked urbanization and speculative development to Rome's historical fabric. His advocacy played a crucial role in shaping landmark policies, including the 1965 Piano Regolatore, which established the Via Appia Antica as a protected area, and the Legge Roma Capitale (L. 396/1990), which facilitated urban conservation initiatives. A strong proponent of integrating archaeological heritage into modern urban planning, Cederna collaborated with leading figures such as Luigi Benevolo, Vezio De Lucia, and Italo Insolera on the Progetto Fori, an ambitious plan to reimagine the relationship between ancient and contemporary Rome. His influence extended into public administration, serving as a city councilor in Rome and later as a member of Parliament (1987–1992), where he contributed to legislation on land use and cultural heritage management. Cederna's vision remains highly relevant today, as reflected in the extensive bibliography on his contributions to the preservation of Rome and Italy's cultural heritage. His writings, particularly I vandali in casa (1956), continue to be foundational texts in Italian heritage discourse. Scholars have explored his activism and intellectual legacy in works such as Antonio Cederna. Archeologo, giornalista, uomo, poeta. Scritti per Roma (2006) and Antonio Cederna. Una vita per la città, il paesaggio, la bellezza (2011). His role in shaping Rome's urban policies is also discussed in Modern Rome: From Napoleon to the Twenty-First Century, where Italo Insolera highlights his influence on debates over conservation and urban expansion (Insolera, 340). As Rita Paris has noted, Cederna's legacy extends beyond his writings, his relentless efforts to safeguard Rome's archaeological and environmental heritage influenced generations of policymakers and preservationists. See: Cederna, 2006; De Lucia, Pullara, 2011; Insolera 2021.

paints the picture that instead of a museum, it's more like a kind of historic-artistic hospital: which reflects a well-known, chronic, ancient inability, at a national level, to provide worthily for the fate of our most precious cultural heritage. Cederna ends the article as a sort of cry for help - "Ma ci vuole un piano, un programma, un progetto: tutte cose che oggi mancano. *But we need a plan, a program, a project: all things that are missing today*." [234]

Nine years after the 1970 article, the same newspaper narrates how the situation worsened as an old iron support beam collapsed in January 1979, resulting in the museum having to temporarily close until June, and only then, reopening some sections.[235] In the same year, Cederna reiterates "only a courageous plan, still missing, can promote the expansion and a more rational organization of the museum."[236]

MNR was only one of the various institutions that by 1980, so desperately needed attention. The state of the Roman museums was an increasing embarrassment to Italian archeologists and cultural administrators. They were now then involved in the wider cultural scene of the European Union and were well aware of museum development in other major European capitals.[237]

La Regina's Vision and the Ideological Foundations of Legge 92/1981

These early years in the 1980s marked a critical inflection point in Rome's approach to cultural heritage policy, coinciding with the broader shift toward state-led intervention in urban preservation and archaeological management. As mentioned before, central to this shift was Adriano La Regina, whose preservation ideology laid the

234 In this article, Cederna leverages his characteristically sarcastic and incisive prose to critique the handling of urban planning and cultural heritage preservation in Rome, which is a continued theme in his style of journalism. In various articles, he specifically targets the detrimental impacts of modern traffic on ancient sites and the controversial urbanistic interventions from the Fascist era. Cederna's commentary in the Corriere della Sera reflects broader themes explored in his seminal work, Mussolini Urbanista, where he provides a scathing analysis of Fascist urban policy and its lasting scars on Rome's landscape. The book and article combined offer a compelling critique of the challenges and missteps in managing Rome's urban and historical identity in the face of modernization and political agendas. See: Cederna 1981.

235 Fra una settimana riaperto il museo delle Terme di Diocleziano." Corriere della Sera, 26 June 1979.

236 Cederna 1979.

237 Dyson 2019, p.256.

conceptual groundwork for the extraordinary legislative intervention represented by l.92/1981.

In an article published that same year *Roma, la conservazione dei monumenti antichi*—La Regina offered a candid and urgent assessment of the cultural and material risks facing the city. He warned that "poche volte come oggi Roma ha visto incombere il pericolo del proprio dissolvimento."[238] His use of "dissolvimento" was not metaphorical: it referred both to the chemical degradation of Rome's ancient monuments, due to environmental pollution, and to the broader symbolic unraveling of Rome's status as a universal city. What was at stake was not just the physical erosion of historical surfaces, but the "dissolvimento della sua dimensione universale."[239]

This argument, both civic and archaeological, was premised on the idea that the city's ancient monuments formed the foundation of a collective cultural identity that extended beyond national borders. La Regina insisted that Roman monuments, even when studied or admired for their aesthetic or antiquarian value, retained a living political and symbolic relevance. As he wrote, monuments like the Arch of Titus or the Column of Trajan "hanno anche un valore simbolico per il collegamento ideale di Roma stessa con tanti altri popoli."[240] They were material agents in the negotiation of contemporary European and, more broadly, global identity.[241]

He pointed, for example, to how the Arch of Titus functions as a site of memory for the Jewish people, or how the Column of Trajan represents "gli avvenimenti che condussero alla formazione della cultura daco-romana."[242] For La Regina, these objects were not just Italian, but universal. Their destruction, whether by neglect, pollution, or speculative development, was not just a national failure but a betrayal of global cultural memory.

238 La Regina 1981, p. 5.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 as La Regina suggested in his reference to "il collegamento ideale di Roma stessa con tanti altri popoli." Ibid.
242 Ibid.

La Regina's essay effectively previews the law's operational priorities: "Conservazione dei grandi monumenti marmorei… consolidamento statico dei grandi complessi architettonici della città… sistemazione definitiva delle collezioni del Museo Nazionale Romano… espropri di complessi monumentali urbani ed extraurbani… valorizzazione dei complessi archeologici per il loro uso da parte del pubblico e diffusione dell'informazione scientifica e culturale."[243]

These were not routine administrative or technical objectives. They reflected a vision in which decisions about conservation, restoration, and the presentation of archaeological sites were inseparable from questions of civic identity and institutional responsibility. For La Regina and his contemporaries, safeguarding Rome's monuments was both a technical challenge and a moral imperative, one tied to the city's place in collective memory and public life. The risk, he warned, was not only the loss of material culture but of the "possibilità di conoscenza," (the possibility of knowledge) a danger he likened to "il rogo di un archivio ancora inesplorato" (the burning of an archive still unexplored).[244] The past, if allowed to disappear, would not only be irretrievable but unknowable, a rupture in historical consciousness.

An often-overlooked yet vital aspect of the legislative process behind the l.92/1981 is the depth of parliamentary debate and the concrete input of individual lawmakers. The dossier "Legge speciale per Roma" signed by Senator Learco Saporito, captures the deliberative spirit and the sense of collective urgency present in parliamentary discussions between 1980 and 1982.

Saporito's report opens by explicitly acknowledging the exceptional nature of Rome's archaeological patrimony: "Nessuna altra città al mondo si trova a custodire un patrimonio così vasto e così esposto a rischi continui"[245]. He stresses that the usual legislative tools were

243 Ibid, p.8. "Conservation of the great marble monuments... structural consolidation of the city's major architectural complexes... definitive arrangement of the collections of the Museo Nazionale Romano... expropriation of monumental urban and extra-urban complexes... enhancement of archaeological complexes for public use and dissemination of scientific and cultural information."

244 Ibid, p.6.

245 Saporito, Learco. "Legge speciale per Roma." Archivio Antonio Cederna, fascicolo 1438, 1980–1982, p.1. "No other city in the world finds itself safeguarding a heritage so vast and so exposed to continual risks."

insufficient: “La situazione straordinaria di Roma richiede strumenti straordinari, sia sul piano finanziario che normativo”[246]. These reflect a shared concern in Parliament that only a dedicated, well-funded law could hope to address the scale of crisis facing Rome’s antiquities.

What stands out in the document is the awareness that legislative intervention required not only technical planning but also political consensus. The text states the need for “una mobilitazione corale di tutte le istituzioni coinvolte,” and repeatedly refers to the parliamentary will to ensure the law was not watered down by routine bureaucracy: “Non possiamo permetterci che l’urgenza del momento venga soffocata dalle solite lentezze amministrative”.

Perhaps most significant, Saporito directly connects the law’s passage to parliamentary debate, describing the process as “frutto di un ampio confronto e della collaborazione tra Camera e Senato, maggioranza e opposizione”.[247] This is repeated in the summary: “Il provvedimento ha raccolto un consenso trasversale, segno della volontà condivisa di tutelare l’identità storica di Roma”[248].

The Saporito dossier is a reminder that behind significant legislation, like l.92/1981, were not only experts and superintendents but also parliamentarians, negotiating, debating, and, at moments, openly calling for extraordinary measures. The document’s language captures the anxiety and ambition of the era; “una risposta concreta ad una emergenza che non può più essere rinviata”.[249] Including this parliamentary perspective enriches our understanding of the law as a product of both technical expertise and genuine political negotiation.

Further Parliamentary debates from 1980–1981 show that Italian lawmakers were acutely aware of the challenges facing museum and heritage policy. In the 7ª Commissione Pubblica Istruzione (7th Commission on Public Education), senators often expressed dissatisfaction with temporary measures and stressed the need for

246 Ibid. “The extraordinary situation of Rome requires extraordinary measures, both financial and regulatory.”
247Ibid, p.2. “the product of a broad debate and of collaboration between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, majority and opposition.”
248 Ibid. “The measure gathered cross-party consensus, a sign of the shared will to protect Rome's historical identity.”
249 Ibid. “a concrete response to an emergency that can no longer be postponed.”

structural reform. During a discussion Spitella stated that while everyone recognized the urgency of action, the commission would have preferred "un provvedimento di legge più organico inteso al riordinamento generale,"(a more comprehensive legislative measure aimed at a general reorganisation) rather than continued reliance on "interventi tampone" (stop-gap meaures).[250]

Debates on underwater archaeology made clear that the Senate did not accept the status quo. Senator Maravalle highlighted the "carente ed insufficiente" support for underwater sites and said plainly, "credo allora di dovermi dichiarare totalmente insoddisfatto.[251] Maravalle also called for the government to involve new professional expertise and local organizations, stating, "bisogna prestare maggiore attenzione a questo nuovo fenomeno".[252]

This urgency also appears in the official Senate report on measures for protecting Rome's archaeological heritage, which stresses that "la situazione straordinaria di Roma richiede strumenti straordinari, sia sul piano finanziario che normativo," and insists that "non possiamo permetterci che l'urgenza del momento venga soffocata dalle solite lentezze amministrative".[253]

These debates show that Parliament was not passive: lawmakers openly challenged insufficient policy, demanded accountability, and pushed for both immediate resources and long-term structural changes in the management of Italy's cultural heritage.

2.3 Interventi Urgenti per la Protezione e per la Valorizzazione del Patrimonio Archeologico di Rome

A year after Cederna's 1979 Corriere della Sera article[254], on 1 November 1980, the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma presented

250 Senato della Repubblica. "7ª Commissione Permanente – Resoconto stenografico n. 30, 25 Febbraio 1981," p. 356, Archivio storico del Senato,

251 Senato della Repubblica. "7ª Commissione Permanente – Resoconto stenografico n. 34, 1 Aprile 1981," pp. 418–419, Archivio storico del Senato.

252 Ibid, p.419.

253 Senato della Repubblica, VIII Legislatura (N. 951 e 883-A), "Relazione della 7ª Commissione Permanente (Istruzione pubblica e belle arti, ricerca scientifica, spettacolo e sport)," 1 Dicembre 1980, pp. 2–3.

254 Cederna, Antonio. "La mostra del San Michele riapre il dibattito sugli errori del passato senza prospettare soluzioni per il futuro: Centro storico: un cimitero di palazzi illustri in abbandono." Corriere della Sera, 30 July 1979.

the report "*Interventi Urgenti per la Protezione e per la Valorizzazione*[255] *del Patrimonio Archeologico di Roma / Urgent Interventions for the Protection and Enhancement of the Archaeological Heritage of Rome*" where it thoroughly documented and listed key heritage and cultural sites and institutions that urgently needed intervention, or otherwise could be lost to ruin.[256]

The document's premise began by noting that in 1973, the Archaeological Superintendency of Rome received an allocation of 5 billion lire, distributed over five years, for the consolidation, restoration, and extraordinary maintenance of monuments and extensive ancient monumental complexes, as stipulated by Law No. 671 of October 18, 1973: Extraordinary provision for consolidation, restoration, or maintenance works on ancient monuments of Rome[257] dated 19 October 1973. The modest funding provided at that time, in comparison to the extensive needs for restoration and conservation, barely allowed for the execution of partial maintenance on some of Rome's ancient monuments and limited static consolidation in areas where the risk of structural collapse was most significant. However, Law No. 671 expired in 1978, and since that time, the Soprintendenza's needs for intervention have been even less adequately addressed by the Ministry's ordinary appropriations.

255 Lorenzo Casini defines valorization as "the set of activities aimed at promoting awareness of the cultural asset and ensuring the best conditions for its use and public enjoyment," distinguishing it clearly from protection, which is instead focused on conservation and regulatory control. This distinction, formally introduced by Legislative Decree 42/2004 (Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio), reflects a shift in cultural heritage governance toward more integrated and use-oriented approaches. See Casini 2016, p. 85.

256 La Regina, Adriano. "Interventi Urgenti per la Protezione e per la Valorizzazione del Patrimonio Archeologico di Roma." November 1, 1980. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 60, fasc.5.

257 Legge 18 ottobre 1973, n.671. Extraordinary allocation for consolidation, restoration or maintenance works on ancient monuments of Rome: Article 1. For consolidation, restoration and extraordinary works maintenance of the ancient monuments and monumental complexes of Rome and of the urban and extra-urban areas of the city whose maintenance is entrusted to the Superintendency of Antiquities of Rome, the sum of 5,000 lire is assigned, on an extraordinary basis, to the Ministry of Public Education million to be divided into five annual installments of 1,000 million lire per year, starting from 1973.

Article 2. The annuity due to the Fund referred to in art. 7 of the decree-law of 23 January 1958, n.8, converted into law 23 February 1958, n. 84, is reduced by 1,000 million lire for each of the years from 1973 to 1977. The relative availability is intended to cover the burden deriving from the application of this law. The Minister for the Treasury is authorized to make the necessary changes to the budget with his own decrees. This law, bearing the seal of the State, will be included in the official collection of laws and decrees of the Italian Republic. Whoever is responsible for observing it and ensuring it is observed as state law is obliged.

The financial needs are then reiterated, by explaining how The Archaeological Superintendency of Rome, tasked with the responsibility of overseeing a large concentration of ancient structures and archaeological sites, confronts significant financial challenges.[258] The need of necessary maintenance and restoration far exceeds the allocated funding exposing a critical gap in resources. Initially, a comprehensive plan necessitating over one thousand billion lire was proposed to address the extensive decay of Rome's archaeological heritage, exemplified by deteriorating marble monuments, the partially closed Palatine, and the decaying Museo Nazionale Romano.

In response, a realistic, gradual recovery plan was developed, aimed at specific objectives with a total estimated cost of 250 billion lire over five years. This plan, however, was reduced to 180 billion lire due to budget constraints, averaging 36 billion lire annually. Despite maintaining original restoration and protection goals, the plan had to significantly scale back expropriations and acquisitions, notably affecting the potential establishment of the Appia Park.[259] This adjustment is an example of the precarious balance between preserving cultural heritage and the practicalities of financial limitations. Any further cuts to the revised budget would critically undermine the entire recovery initiative, demonstrating the fragile intersection of cultural stewardship and economic feasibility in maintaining Rome's archaeological legacy.

The document, authored by Adriano La Regina, concluded with a section entitled "Character of the Intervention Plan." The goal of this plan was not solely to halt the significant decay of the archaeological heritage; it also sought to reveal and harness the economic and cultural value inherent in this heritage.

The operational approach for implementation diverged from traditional practices, which typically focused on the availability of funds for non-coordinated expenditure items. Instead, it emphasized

258 On the fiscal motivations for restructuring and analysis of how economic constraints drove privatization and the establishment of new governance models see Benedikter 2004, pp.3–4.

259 See Appendix 6 Ministerial Decree Recognising the Archaeological Zone of Via Parigi (adjacent to the Terme di Diocleziano), Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, n.d. [ca. 1987]. The decree extended state protection under Legge 1089/1939 to remains discovered beneath Via Parigi, adjoining the Terme Diocleziano, illustrating the expansion of protected archaeological zones administered by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

simultaneous interventions across all areas of the office's expertise, aiming to achieve specific, clearly defined objectives. These included:

- The restoration of ancient monuments and monumental complexes;
- The development of extensive state-owned archaeological parks;
- The renovation of Museo Nazionale Romano;
- Systematic exploration of lands impacted by construction and major public works to support appropriate urban planning and accommodate urban development needs;
- The acquisition of archaeological sites at significant risk of devastation;
- The dissemination of scientific information sought by the public, which also served as a crucial foundation for fostering widespread appreciation for cultural heritage protection.

This strategy's comprehensive approach to preserving and enhancing the archaeological heritage, demonstrated the importance of an integrated and objective-oriented methodology in cultural heritage management.

The third section of the document titled *Ristrutturazione, Allestimento e Valorizzazione del Museo Nazionale Romano e di altre Collezioni Archeologiche,* where La Regina breaks down each space of Terme Diocleziano that needs restoration, along with the essential budget.

The section titled "*Consolidamento di materiale archeologico e sua sistemazione in nuove sedi"*[260] details the necessary processes of consolidation, restoration, and exhibition setup for archaeological materials, underscoring the need to sometimes relocate these artifacts to appropriately equipped temporary or permanent facilities. La Regina mentions the example of the Ludovisi - Boncompagni Collection, to

260 La Regina, Adriano. "Interventi Urgenti per la Protezione e per la Valorizzazione del Patrimonio Archeologico di Roma." November 1, 1980. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 60, fasc. 5, p. 59. See Appendix 7.

demonstrate the complexity of managing large-scale archaeological collections.

In the context of recent developments in archaeological practice, the document recounts that "Le ricerche e gli scavi nel Lazio...hanno portato alla scoperta e all'esplorazione di una importante serie di complessi protostorici" (Research and excavations in Lazio...have led to the discovery and exploration of a significant series of protohistoric complexes). These discoveries, made primarily in areas undergoing urban development around Rome, include notable sites such as Castel di Decima, Gabii - Osteria dell'Osa, Laurentino, and La Rustica.

The impact of these discoveries extended beyond the academic community, engaging the public through major exhibitions such as the *Civiltà del Lazio Primitivo*[261], held in 1976, and later, "Ricerca su una comunità del Lazio protostorico"[262] in 1979. The document notes that the feedback from these exhibitions made it "indispensable" to establish a new museum sector dedicated to the protohistory of Lazio. This sector would facilitate a comprehensive display of the cultural development in the region, allowing for the permanent exhibition of a wide selection of materials recovered from various complexes.

Furthermore, the document suggests that the creation of this protohistoric section in MNR should coincide with the museum's overall restructuring. It proposes that "La creazione del settore per la protostoria del Lazio nel Museo Nazionale Romano deve essere previsto in occasione della ristrutturazione generale di questo" (The creation of the sector for the protohistory of Lazio in the Museo Nazionale Romano must be planned during the general restructuring of this institution), which may involve expanding into new spaces linked to those already in use. This strategic integration would ensure that the museum not only preserves but also effectively interprets the rich archaeological heritage of the Lazio region. The budget quoted was 4.000.000.000 lire.

261 Civiltà del Lazio Primitivo was an exhibition held in Rome at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in 1976, curated by the Institute of Etruscan and Italic Studies, Committee for Lazio Archaeology. See: Colonna 1976.
262 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma 1979.

2.4 Legge n° 92/81 and the Museo Nazionale Romano

Immediately following the law being passed, in April 1981, the Soprintendente alle Antichità di Roma presented the *Programma Relativo agli Esercizi Finanziari 1980 -1981* which breaks down into detail each component that needs funding with an estimate in lire.[263]

The document detailed a critical need for structural consolidation at MNR, pinpointing it as the pivotal element of a broad restoration and enhancement strategy launched by the Ministerial Decree 10 March, 1980. This strategy extended its focus from the ancient architectures of the Terme Diocleziano to include Renaissance additions and modern constructions, such as exhibition halls. It highlighted the essential role of "integrating didactic activities and the meticulous documentation and cataloging of artifacts within the museum's operational breadth," emphasizing a holistic approach to cultural preservation and engagement.

Emphasizing a multidimensional strategy, the document portrayed the museum's initiative as encompassing both the restoration of structures from various eras and the functional reutilization of spaces, with a strong focus on educational programs and public engagement. This plan included the expansion of storage for the museum's vast sculpture collection and the adaptation of spaces for display and conservation purposes, aiming to bridge the museum's organizational gaps by promoting a coherent artifact classification system to enhance public access and educational value.

The program places particular emphasis on the structural consolidation of the ancient buildings, which had suffered extensive damage over centuries. The need for urgent restoration is primarily directed toward sections of the complex near Via Cernaia and Via Parigi, areas identified as crucial for their historical layers. Excavations in these parts

263 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Programma relativo agli esercizi finanziari 1980-1981, 1981, pp. 1-3.

are prioritized to "recover the ancient layers"[264], which form the basis for the reorganization of spaces currently being used for exhibitions, such as the present Planetarium. The report stresses that this consolidation is essential not only for preserving the ancient structures but also for enabling their continued use as functional museum spaces. The document notes the importance of balancing the preservation of recent additions, (the Hall of Michelangelo and the modern exhibition rooms), while ensuring that these spaces complement the ancient architecture.

The document's vision for the restoration of the complex is characterized by a phased approach. Given the scale of the intervention required, it states that the museum will not be reopened in its entirety upon completion of the first phase of work. Instead, "certain sections of the museum will be restored and opened to the public progressively"[265] as the project continues. This strategy is designed to manage the complexities of restoring such a large site while ensuring public access to parts of the museum throughout the process. In particular, the report mentions the importance of identifying groups of rooms to be completed and considered distinct parts of the museum, allowing for flexibility and continued operations despite ongoing work.

One of the key areas of focus is the reorganization and restoration of the museum's collections, particularly its extensive sculptural holdings, such as the Ludovisi sculptures. The document notes the importance of ensuring the "cleaning and preservation of sculptures not placed in the cloister" and the careful placement of these works within the new museum layout. This emphasis on cataloging and conserving the collections shows the Soprintendenza's commitment to ensuring that the museum's holdings are not only well-maintained but also properly documented and displayed to enhance their educational and cultural value. Scientific records and detailed cataloging are deemed essential to the long-term preservation and exhibition of these works.

264 Direct quote from page 1 of the document: "Si procederà allo scavo del settore compreso tra Via Cernaia e Via Parigi, al fine di recuperare i livelli antichi."
265 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Programma relativo agli esercizi finanziari 1980-1981. April 1981, p. 2.

The report also states the importance of addressing the administrative and logistical needs of the museum. The Michelangelo Cloister is identified as a key area for expansion to accommodate the offices of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, following the relocation of its Lazio office. Alongside this, there is a focus on upgrading the museum's infrastructure, particularly through the installation of communication systems, electrical services, air conditioning, and heating, which are deemed necessary for the museum's operational sustainability. This administrative reorganization is presented as a crucial step for ensuring that the museum remains functional and accessible to both staff and visitors in the long term.

In aiming for a more integrated museum experience, the project described the need for archaeological exploration to "recover ancient levels and enrich the museum's narrative scope." This endeavor was intended to include detailed planning for the Ludovisi collection's conservation and the development of a scientifically robust cataloging system to aid in artifact preservation and knowledge dissemination.

This outlined strategy sought not just to mitigate the physical deterioration of the monumental complex but also to rationalize space usage, as stated, to secure the museum's sustainability and educational significance. The strategy thus positioned the museum not only as a repository but as an institution with educational and civic responsibilities.

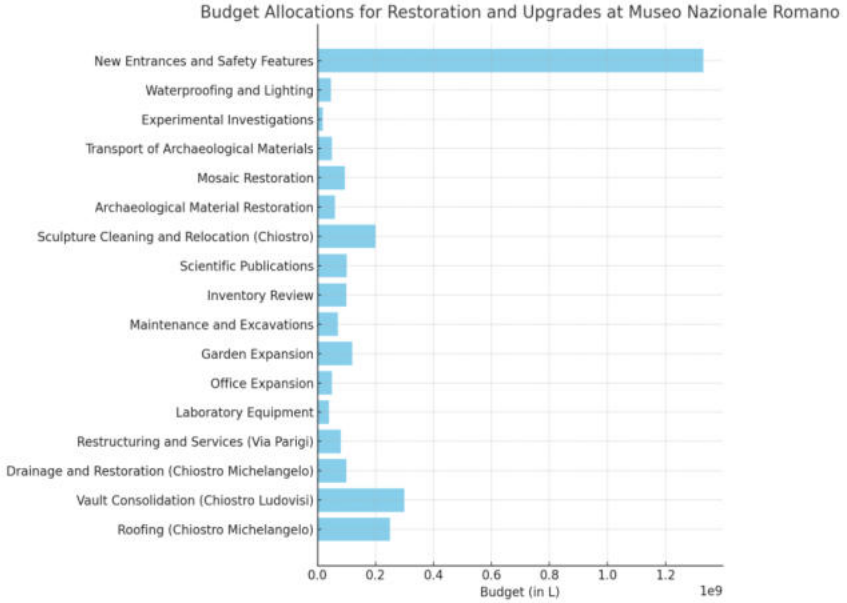
The report included detailed room-by-room tables for the Terme di Diocleziano, listing the restorations required in each space alongside cost estimates. These tables made it possible to identify the museum's priorities and to gauge the financial scope of the project. By analyzing these tables, it was possible to gain insight into the state of the museum at that time, identifying which specific rooms were assessed and what priorities were established for the musealization process. This detailed breakdown served as a crucial tool for planning and prioritizing the museum's restoration and enhancement projects, offering clear and structured insights into the financial and operational scope of the

necessary improvements to preserve and augment the museum's structural and cultural integrity.[266]

The table and chart below are based on the budget breakdown extracted from the *Programma relativo agli esercizi finanziari 1980-1981*, revealing the restoration priorities identified for the museum at that time. The most substantial allocation was for the New Entrances and Safety Features, with a budget of L. 1.33 billion. This major expenditure reflects the importance placed on upgrading the museum's infrastructure to manage visitor flow and enhance security systems, ensuring the protection of its collections and the safety of its visitors.

Significant investments were also made for the cleaning and relocation of sculptures within the Chiostro, with L. 200 million allocated, and the consolidation of ancient vaults in the Chiostro Ludovisi, with L. 300 million dedicated to ensuring their structural integrity. The report further reveals attention given to essential preservation efforts, such as the roofing and drainage systems of the Chiostro Michelangelo and the restoration of mosaics in the museum halls.

266 Details discussed in the Baths of Diocletian case study.



On July 10, 1981, at the Collegio Romano, the sector committees for Environmental and Architectural Assets, Archaeological Assets, and Artistic and Historical Assets convened to discuss the proposal of a convention between the Central Institute for Restoration (Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali (Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Heritage) and the Guido Donegani Institute S.p.A. of Novara. This convention was aimed at executing a research program to analyze the conservation status of the Colonna Antonina in Rome. The session, chaired by Professor Decio Gioseffi[267], was marked by a concerted effort among the sector committees to align their initiatives with the mandates of the Special Law of 1981, which aimed to foster the protection and enhancement of Rome's cultural heritage. The discussion, as recorded in the minutes, significantly hinged upon the allocation of a substantial budget, laid out in the law, to drive the evolution of Rome's archaeological framework. The committees'

267 Professor Decio Gioseffi was an Italian art historian who made significant contributions to the field through his work and teaching. He was associated with the University of Trieste, where he served as a professor. His expertise and research primarily focused on various aspects of art history, and he was highly regarded in academic circles for his knowledge and scholarly contributions.

discourse *"i Comitati di settore, esaminata la documentazione agli atti"* indicates a thorough examination of the legislative directives and an in-depth analysis of the budgetary provisions earmarked for various projects.[268]

The meeting's deliberations on the financial plan were particularly consequential. La Regina's intervention highlighted the allocation of approximately 50 billion lire as indicated by l.92/1981 for the biennium, earmarked for the archaeological superintendency. This budget was foundational for the intended restoration and restructuring of the MNR, as well as for the acquisition of new premises to accommodate the museum's expansion.

Central to this financial discussion was the acquisition of Palazzo Altemps. The committee members expressed their provisional approval for the acquisition of the palazzo, with the intent to go deeper into the usage proposals for the building. The importance of this acquisition is underscored by the statement, *"I Comitati di settore si esprimono favorevolmente anche sull'acquisizione di Palazzo Altemps,"* showcasing their intention to enhance the cultural and historical narrative of the museum through strategic property acquisitions.[269]

The minutes reveal a commitment to address the acquisition of the ex-Collegio Massimo, viewing it as a strategic move to expand the museum's physical space. This decision was not merely about property acquisition; it reflected a broader vision for urban redevelopment and the creation of a cohesive cultural axis. The committees' discussions examined the potential of this property to requalify the urban landscape, enhancing the connection between the museum and the surrounding historical sites.

268 Collegio Romano, "Verbale della Seduta Congiunta, 10 luglio 1981," Comitati di settore per i beni ambientali e architettonici, per i beni archeologici e per i beni artistici e storici. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Roma, Italia, p.1.

269 Collegio Romano, "Verbale della Seduta Congiunta, 10 luglio 1981," Comitati di settore per i beni ambientali e architettonici, per i beni archeologici e per i beni artistici e storici. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Roma, Italia, p. 4.

Architect Maria Cristina Costa's[270] dissent recorded in the minutes underlines the diversity of viewpoints in the committee and the complexity of balancing property acquisition with broader cultural and strategic considerations of the Special Law's implementation. Her concerns bring forth the critical discourse regarding the manner in which cultural initiatives were being prioritized, ensuring that the acquisitions and budgetary allocations served a wider cultural vision and not just expansion for expansion's sake. Her concern was duly recorded: *"venga messo a verbale il suo dissenso dalla conduzione della discussione."*[271]

The financial dimension of the session's deliberations is further evidenced by the report that "la Soprintendenza ha già approntato perizie per una somma di circa 15 miliardi," indicating that appraisals for projects worth approximately 15 billion lire had already been prepared. This demonstrates an expeditious approach to channeling the funds allocated by the Special Law towards immediate cultural heritage needs and emphasizes the proactive stance taken by the archaeological superintendency.

In September 1981, the Superintendency issued a follow-up document that laid out a detailed budget not only for the physical restoration of each site but also for didactic activities and accompanying materials. What stands out here is that educational programming, publications, and the cataloguing of collections were being costed alongside structural work, treated as line items rather than afterthoughts. Up to this point, the budgetary discussions had been dominated by questions of acquisition and construction; the September document signals a shift in how the Superintendency conceived of the project. Didactics and

270 Arch. Maria Cristina Costa has played a significant role in the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage in Italy, particularly in Rome. A graduate of the Politecnico di Milano in 1962, Costa has made significant contributions to the conservation of architectural and urban heritage. Her extensive work is outlined in her Curriculum Vitae con in evidenza i lavori matildici, where she highlights key projects, including her involvement with the Consiglio Nazionale per i Beni Culturali ed Ambientali (1975-1988) and the Comitato di Settore per i Beni Ambientali ed Architettonici (1979-1988). These roles positioned her at the forefront of national heritage policy. Her expertise in territorial planning has informed major conservation efforts, including projects for the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and her involvement in the Museo Nazionale Romano, where she influenced restoration practices and contributed to the safeguarding of significant Roman monuments. Costa's work not only preserves physical structures but also maintains the cultural narratives embedded within Italy's historic landscape.

271 Ibid.

visitor experience were no longer separate concerns to be dealt with once the buildings were ready. They were built into the financial planning from the outset, folded into the same legislative framework that was funding the restoration itself.

We can see how Adriano La Regina's efforts, mentioned previously, to bring the issues of pollution and the deterioration of sites and monuments in Rome to the attention of the Italian government were then championed and echoed in the European Parliament in the *Report on the Protection of the Architectural and Archaeological Heritage*.[272] La Regina, as an archaeologist, was particularly vocal about the destructive impact of pollution on ancient monuments in Rome, such as the sulphation of limestone, marble, and brick, which accelerates their decay.[273] His warnings found a powerful platform in the work of key political figures such as Oddo Biasini and Vincenzo Scotti, who emphasized these concerns to the European Parliament. The Italian government's initiatives reflected La Regina's observations, further advocating for the preservation of Italy's cultural heritage in the face of environmental challenges.

During this period, the Italian government, represented by key figures such as Oddo Biasini and Vincenzo Scotti, played a critical role in advocating for the preservation of cultural and architectural heritage within the European Parliament. Italy, a country rich in historical and archaeological treasures, recognized the increasing threat to its cultural assets, particularly following devastating events such as the southern Italy earthquake of 1980, which severely affected historical sites like Pompeii and numerous other monuments across the Campania and Basilicata regions.

During his presentation to the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information, and Sport, Oddo Biasini stressed the urgency of the situation. Biasini emphasized that the deterioration of cultural

272Hahn 1982.

273 Although not central to the legislative trajectory traced here, it is worth noting that the museum's internal publications of the period were already moving toward a more contextual and didactic presentation of collections. La Regina's 1979 catalogue of ancient sculpture framed objects within their archaeological and historical settings, reflecting an emerging attention to audience orientation that would later reappear in valorizzazione debates of the 1980s and 1990s. See Giuliano 1979.

heritage was not just an Italian problem but a European one, due to the interconnected nature of European identity and cultural history. The Italian government sought to highlight the pressing need for a coordinated European effort to prevent further loss of invaluable sites that represented not only Italy's historical narrative but also the shared European heritage.

La Regina's specific concerns about pollution are echoed in this report's discussion on the degradation of architectural materials. As the report notes, "groups of buildings, temples or historic sites constituting a harmonious whole with their surroundings have been ruined by the hideous buildings of invading suburbs or are being attacked and progressively disfigured by the pollution created by our civilization of industry and machines". This pollution particularly affected ancient stones like limestone and marble. The report calls for detailed research into the causes and processes of "the sulphation of limestone, marble and brick," stressing that "detailed research in this field should be carried out at Community level". These concerns are directly in line with La Regina's warnings about the rapid deterioration of Rome's monuments under similar environmental stresses.

The report reinforces the relevance of key measures outlined in the motion for a resolution to address these challenges, particularly points (c) and (d). These points are directly relevant to the preservation of Rome's ancient sites and monuments. Point (c) calls for effective measures to improve the quality of the environment in areas of architectural interest, which includes actions such as "creating pedestrian precincts and parks, placing restrictions on advertising, protecting the grounds of stately homes, [and] eliminating sources of pollution". This is critical for a city like Rome, where the juxtaposition of ancient monuments with modern urban life puts immense pressure on the preservation of its historic fabric. Point (d) further emphasizes the need for public resources and private incentives to be made available to support conservation efforts. These recommendations align with the broader Italian push for both local and European support in preserving the cultural heritage of Rome and beyond.[274]

274ibid, p. 5.

Vincenzo Scotti, the Italian Minister for Cultural Assets at the time, echoed these concerns during a meeting with the same committee. Scotti proposed a comprehensive plan that aimed to integrate the restoration of historical sites with broader economic development strategies, particularly in the Mezzogiorno region. His vision was to leverage the restoration of cultural assets as a means of fostering tourism and regional economic revitalization. Scotti's plan highlighted specific circuits of historical significance, such as those linking the worlds of Homer and Virgil, and the Norman-Swabian era, which would be developed into tourist routes supported by European funding.[275]

In his speech on June 2, 1981[276], as referenced in the report,[277] Biasini reinforced the importance of formulating a common strategy to save the architectural and archaeological heritage. The rapporteur quotes Biasini's assertion that "there is a need not only for the harmonization of the different bodies of legislation and municipal regulations but also of the financing regulations and financial estimates". Biasini stressed that such harmonization would guarantee efficient management and foster the creation of a common market of specialized firms, involving professionals such as architects, art historians, and town planners, alongside skilled labor in the crafts. This coordinated effort, according to Biasini, would enable every state to benefit from the preservation of cultural heritage on a broader scale.

The Italian government's approach was also grounded in the belief that preservation efforts should be more than an economic burden. Restoring cultural heritage sites was presented as a vital investment, not only in safeguarding the past but also in creating new employment opportunities. Restoration projects were labor-intensive and required the engagement of local craftsmen and industries, offering a way to combat unemployment, particularly in regions devastated by natural disasters. This emphasis on restoration as both a cultural and economic

275 Ibid,p. 24
276 Summary of speech by Oddo Biasini, Italian Minister for Cultural Assets and Environment, Notice to Members, PE 73.437, 2 June 1981.
277 Ibid, p. 22.

strategy was a key element in Italy's appeal to the European Parliament.

Furthermore, the Italian government actively sought European support through specific funds such as the European Social Fund and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. Italy called for the establishment of a dedicated European Historical Monuments and Sites Fund to provide ongoing support for heritage conservation efforts across member states. This European-level initiative was essential to ensure that the preservation of architectural and archaeological heritage was a shared responsibility.

Italy's efforts, led by Biasini and Scotti, but also championed by La Regina and Cederna, were instrumental in shaping the broader European discourse on cultural heritage preservation. By framing the issue within the context of European identity and economic development, the Italian government succeeded in elevating the conversation beyond national borders, positioning the protection of cultural heritage as a crucial component of Europe's collective future.

A Case Study in Public Acquisition: The Torso Strohl-Fern and Law 92/81

The acquisition of the so-called Torso Strohl-Fern by MNR in the 1980s represents a paradigmatic example of heritage governance shaped by the special emergency funding law n. 92/1981. This case study reveals the complex administrative choreography behind even a single object entering the state collections, illustrating how bureaucratic diligence and cultural valuation converged under the broader pressures of preservation, legality, and public interest.[278]

The torso in question, a grey marble male figure described in the purchase contract as a "torso virile acefalo in marmo grigio" ("headless male torso in grey marble"), had been in private hands for decades, deposited in the former Franchetti studio at Villa Strohl-Fern. Following the death of Lidia Trenin, the co-owner of the torso, her heir and co-owner Giuseppe Cellini, together with the appointed legal

278 See Appendix 8 for documents relating to the acquisition of the Torso Strohl-Fern,

curator Avv. Saverio Cacciola, initiated the sale to the Italian State. The torso was physically transferred to the MNR on 16 November 1983, and later formally inventoried on 17 May 1985 under the number 371281. [279]

The official declaration of transfer and inventory, signed by the Soprintendente Adriano La Regina, succinctly confirmed this movement of the object from private to public hands: "Si dichiara che in data 17-5-1985 il torso virile acefalo, già depositato presso il Museo Nazionale Romano il 16-XI-1983, è stato inventariato con il n. inv. 371281."[280] This document not only signals the bureaucratic milestone and also marks the culmination of a more complex negotiation across state and private actors that had begun several years prior.

The acquisition process unfolded across nearly three years of correspondence, ministerial approvals, legal certifications, and fiscal negotiations. At its core was the direct application of l.92/1981, which enabled emergency funds for the safeguarding and acquisition of archaeological material in Rome. In a 1983 letter to the Ministry, the Soprintendenza Archeologica framed the proposed acquisition as congruent with market value and cultural necessity, highlighting the work's quality and provenance: "E' qui pervenuta offerta in vendita per L. 3.000.000 (tremilioni) di una testa in marmo del II sec.d.C., [...] le dichiarazioni dell'attuale proprietario, sig. Aldo Viola, sembrano corrispondere al vero, e pertanto sembra legittimo procedere all'acquisto."[281] Although this letter concerned another acquisition, the language is consistent with the justification for the Strohl-Fern torso, demonstrating how bureaucratic templates governed these transactions.

The 1985 contract of sale between the State and the sellers, Prof. Giuseppe Cellini and Avv. Saverio Cacciola, representing the late Trenin, set the price at twenty million lire, paid in equal parts to each

279 La Regina, Adriano. "Dichiarazione," 30 April 1985, Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2.
280 Ibid.
281 La Regina, Adriano. "Museo Nazionale Romano - Proposta acquisto scultura in marmo II° sec. d.C.," 17 May 1983, Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2.

co-owner.[282] The agreement was clear in asserting the exclusive and uncontested ownership of the sellers, guaranteeing the torso's provenance and legal status: "I venditori garantiscono l'assoluta ed esclusiva proprietà dell'opera, la libertà da ogni peso e vincolo, impegnandosi in caso contrario a rispondere dei danni."[283]

It is worth noting that the choice to pursue this acquisition under l. 92/1981 also reflects the broader strategic role of the MNR at the time. As new spaces such as Palazzo Massimo and the renovated halls at the Terme Diocleziano were opening to the public, there was institutional pressure to enhance the collection with objects that were both aesthetically significant and well-documented. The torso's clear provenance, respectable condition, and historical resonance made it a fitting addition. Its acquisition also demonstrates the degree to which the Soprintendenza sought to assert control over material heritage circulating within Rome's more elite private spheres.

The bureaucratic file also contains Cellini's handwritten statements, one of which dated 1 December 1984, provides a rare glimpse into the non-linear biography of the object. Cellini recalls that the torso had once been located in a niche within the ruins of the Casino del Bosco di S. Grato, an annex of the Villa Borghese gardens, and that it came into his family's possession following salvage operations: "Il torso era in una delle nicchie ricavate negli archi di scarico delle mura [...] portato nella mia villa di Bracciano - Vigna Ceis - dove sono stati depositati diversi materiali."[284] This account reinforces the often informal paths through which ancient objects entered private collections in the twentieth century, only to be later reintegrated into public heritage.

Cellini's correspondence also reveals his own self-perception as a steward of cultural property. In his letter to La Regina dated 5 December 1982, he proposes the sale not only in financial terms but also as a cultural duty: "Data la qualità formale del torso e la preziosità del marmo [...] dichiaro di essere pronto a trasferirlo al Museo

282 La Regina, Adriano, Giuseppe Cellini, and Saverio Cacciola, "Contratto di Compravendita," 7 November 1985, Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2.
283 Ibid.
284 Cellini, Giuseppe handwritten declaration, 1 December 1984, Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2.

Nazionale Romano per un opportuno esame scientifico."[285] The use of language here suggests a negotiation shaped not solely by economic value but also by cultural prestige, in which the state's acquisition is framed as a logical and even honorable outcome.

In 1986, final authorizations confirmed the payments to Cellini and Cacciola. As recorded in the document dated 20 June 1986, the Ministry authorized the transaction, splitting the 20 million lire payment evenly between the two parties: "è stato disposto [...] il pagamento di somma di L. 10.000.000 a favore del Prof. Giuseppe Cellini, e [...] dell'Avv. Saverio Cacciola, nella sua qualità di curatore della eredità giacente della Sig.ra Lidia Trenin."[286]

This archival case study demonstrates how even a single acquisition within the MNR was deeply embedded in a broader legal and political infrastructure, shaped by national legislation, local institutional processes, and individual actors navigating complex successions and curatorial responsibilities. The torso's journey (from niche to villa, studio to museum) exemplifies how emergency interventions like l. 92/1981 not only enabled preservation but also demanded new levels of transparency, fiscal accountability, and inter-agency coordination. It is also a counterpoint to high-profile exhibitions or dramatic discoveries, showing how much of Italy's public heritage has been shaped quietly, through paperwork and persistence. This case contributes to a fuller understanding of museum expansion and the state's proactive approach to cultural heritage acquisition during the 1980s.

2.5 Creating the 'Golden Age' of Rome

The new profound interest in re-establishing Rome's cultural heritage sites brought excitement, but also criticism, which would be seen in the countless national and international articles documenting the progress (or lack thereof) in Italy's capital during the next two decades. In the

285 Giuseppe Cellini, letter to Adriano La Regina, 5 December 1982, Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2.

286 Anna Maria Reggiani, "Acquisto tramite trattativa privata," 20 June 1986, Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2.

preface of *Archaeology, Ideology, and Urbanism in Rome from the Grand Tour to Berlusconi,* Stephen L. Dyson refers to this point in time as a 'golden age' of excavation, site restoration, museum development and publications aimed at scholars and the general public. [287]

"Thus the 1980s will be remembered as the decade of monuments shrouded in scaffolding and green netting. This period had a revolutionary impact on the understanding of ancient art and architecture because scholars were able to study monuments nose-to-nose rather than just through engravings, photographs and binoculars."[288]

Throughout the decade, the interplay between media coverage and cultural heritage activities was crucial in shaping public perception. News outlets served as a bridge between the archaeological community and the public, reporting on the progress, as well as the occasional delays, in the excavation and renovation of historical sites. A case in point is the article from 'La Stampa' on September 22, 1984, which offers insight into the pace and tone of updates provided to the public regarding museum developments:

Risveglio al museo

L'altro ieri, a Rome e' accaduto un fatto quasi miracoloso. Alle Terme di Diocleziano, un timido segno di vita del Museo Nazionale Romano, da tempo in catalessi: in una sala recentemente restaurata, un'esposizione dal titolo *'Dagli scavi al museo'* dopo anni di effimero e di chiusure di musei pericolanti, un segnale d'inversione di tendenza. Gli aruspici sono al lavoro per capire se si tratta, realmente, del primo vagito di quel progetto che dovrebbe portare ad una organica sistemazione di tutti i musei archeologici di Roma. Per adesso scrutano annusano e levano gli occhi al cielo, sperando in altri segni di benevolenza statale.

Perché, in definitiva, il futuro dipenderà dall'atteggiamento dello stato. Se continuerà a considerare quisquilie questi problemi oppure se riconoscerà che sono una cosa importante. Fra l'altro, lo specchio del livello di cultura esistente in Italia. Infatti, volere o no, il degrado

287 Dyson, 2019, p. xiii.
288 Coulston, Dodge 2000, p. 9.

terzomondista della capitale inevitabilmente finisce per diventare l'immagine dell'intera nazione. Particolare curioso, in questa mostra sono esposti reperti rinvenuti durante i lavori per la costruzione del ministero delle Finanze e di quello per le Telecomunicazioni. Con linguaggio cifrato, un modo per dire: decidetevi ad aprire la borsa e, quanto ai tempi ricordatevi che non siamo piu ai tempi della diligenza bensi nell'era telematica.[289]

The protection of archaeological areas in Rome was reinforced not only for immediate sites but also for surrounding and adjacent zones. A notable example is the correspondence between Soprintendente La Regina, and the Legal Office of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali in 1986, regarding the enforcement of The Decreto Ministeriale of October 31, 1985.[290]

In these letters, La Regina addressed the issues concerning itinerant vendors around the Colosseum and the visual and structural preservation of the area. He referenced the activities of street vendors, stressing the impact on the "ingombro delle strutture" and requested their removal from the vicinity. In one letter, La Regina clarifies that the decree "precisa che l'attività esercitata dai rivenditori non può essere consentita se non in condizioni che non disturbino l'ingombro visivo."

The correspondence highlights the interpretation of the decree, which reinforced that the Colosseum and its surroundings should be safeguarded to maintain the integrity of the ancient monumental complex. In another letter, dated 22 April 1986,[291] La Regina insisted that “si ribadisce la necessità… che si proceda alla revoca delle concessioni esistenti” to prevent unauthorized activities from undermining the heritage site's protection.

289 Vincitorio 1984.

290 D.M. 31/10/1985, refers to a ministerial decree that established specific archaeological protection regulations in Rome, particularly aimed at safeguarding key archaeological areas, including the surroundings of the Colosseum. The decree imposed restrictions on activities that could negatively affect the integrity of these areas, such as the operation of itinerant vendors. It emphasized maintaining the historical and visual integrity of the archaeological sites, prohibiting activities that could interfere with the preservation and proper use of these spaces.

291 La Regina, Adriano. “Oggetto: Roma – Area archeologica centrale, vincolo archeologico indiretto ed ordinanza 2.4.1986 del Sindaco del comune di Roma.” Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 22 Aprile 1986.

La Regina further emphasized the broader scope of the decree, which included not only the Colosseum but also the surrounding areas like the Via Sacra and the Arch of Constantine. He consistently pointed out the incompatibility of modern urban pressures with the delicate archaeological and historical integrity of these spaces, urging strict enforcement of legal protections to safeguard these zones.

To expand on the previous correspondence regarding the protection of archaeological areas, another relevant document from July 21, 1986, highlights how the application of the *Decreto Ministeriale* (D.M.) 31/10/1985 was discussed in relation to requests from vendors in Rome. Adriano La Regina addresses the *Associazione Rivenditori* to clarify that decisions regarding exceptions or derogations from the D.M. do not fall within the local *Soprintendenza's* jurisdiction, but must be handled centrally. This reinforces the Soprintendenza's limited administrative authority under national decrees, emphasizing strict adherence to central regulations concerning the protection of Rome's archaeological zones.

This communication further showcases the complex interplay between local authorities and the central administration in enforcing protective measures around significant archaeological sites. For instance, in the July 1986 correspondence, La Regina states: *"non rientra tra le competenze degli Uffici periferici… l'ordine proviene dall'Amministrazione Centrale."* This clarifies that such decisions must be processed by the central authority, reinforcing the need for centralized control over heritage management around critical archaeological areas.[292]

Another correspondence dated for later that year on November 11, 1986, from Adriano La Regina, references the protection of the Colosseum, Arco di Costantino, and Via Sacra under Law No. 1089 of June 1, 1939[293], which safeguards objects of artistic and historical

292 Adriano La Regina, "Oggetto: Applicazione del Decreto Ministeriale 31/10/1985." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 21 July 1986. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

293Legge 1 Giugno 1939, n. 1089 - Tutela delle Cose di Interesse Artistico o Storico was designed to protect the nation's cultural heritage by regulating the preservation, cataloging, and export of objects of historical and artistic value. Its implementation during the Fascist period was primarily motivated by the need to safeguard cultural assets from potential loss or illicit trade during times of social and political upheaval. The law introduced state oversight over restoration, transfer, and ownership of such items, marking a critical step in the development of Italy's modern heritage preservation framework.

interest. La Regina mandates restrictions on public and vehicular access to protect these areas from activities incompatible with the archaeological context. Notably, La Regina encloses a map that highlights the areas in question, drawing particular attention to the zones immediately surrounding the Colosseum to clarify the extent of the protected zone.[294]

2.6 Analysis of the 1990 "Commissione per la Riforma del Sistema Museale Nazionale"

The Commissione per la Riforma del Sistema Museale Nazionale, convened for the first time on 14 giugno 1990, represents a significant moment in the history of Italian regulation and management of state museums. Established under the Decreto ministeriale del 31 maggio 1990 and presided over by Senatore Luigi Covatta, the commission was tasked with evaluating and proposing structural reforms to Italy's sistema museale nazionale. This initiative emerged at a time of growing discussions on museum autonomy, governance, and financial sustainability, reflecting broader transformations in Italian cultural policy.[295]

The commission included a wide range of figures from academia, cultural institutions, and administrative bodies, demonstrating an interdisciplinary approach to museum reform. Among its members were Giulio Carlo Argan, an art historian and former mayor of Rome; Pierluigi Castagnoli, a leading archaeologist; Antonio Paolucci, later director of the Vatican Museums; and Paolo Portoghesi, an architect known for his work on historic preservation. Other key figures included Andrea Emiliani, Francesco Sisinni, Attilio Stazio, and

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Legge 1 Giugno 1939, n. 1089 - Tutela delle Cose di Interesse Artistico o Storico. Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1939, www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:1939-06-01;1089. Accessed 2 Oct. 2024.

294 Adriano La Regina, "Oggetto: Roma – Colosseo, Arco di Costantino, via Sacra – tutela archeologica (legge 1.6.1939, n. 1089)." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 11 Novembre 1986. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma. See Appendix 9.

295 Verso il Sistema Museale Nazionale: Il Museo Statale tra Funzionamento e Norme. Edited by Laura Barbiani, Stefano Rapisarda, Paolo Silvagni, and Roberto Tornei. Ufficio Studi della Camera dei Deputati, January 1991.

Emanuele Emmanuele, alongside specialists in legal and economic aspects of cultural management.[296]

The minutes of this first meeting reveal both the ambitions and the challenges the commission faced. Senatore Luigi Covatta opened the session by emphasizing the urgency of its task, noting that its work needed to be completed by 31 dicembre 1990: "Poiché la Commissione dovrà terminare i suoi lavori entro il 31 Dicembre 1990, anche la calendarizzazione degli stessi dovrà avere scadenze ben precise".[297]

To ensure that discussions reached a wider audience, the Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Culturali, in collaboration with the Associazione "Amici dei Musei", organized a series of roundtable discussions that would culminate in a national conference:

Parallelamente ai lavori della Commissione, per assicurare un'adeguata risonanza agli stessi, l'Ufficio Centrale per i Beni AAAA e S., in collaborazione con l'associazione 'Amici dei Musei', ha organizzato una serie di Tavole rotonde, che sfoceranno in un convegno nell'ambito delle settimane dei BB.CC.[298]

This initiative reflects an attempt to engage civil society in museum reform, marking a shift toward a more participatory approach in heritage policy.

One of the central themes discussed was the need to differentiate between types of museums within the sistema museale nazionale. Senator Covatta proposed that reform efforts be divided into two working groups, addressing musei d'arte contemporanea separately from musei archeologici e parchi: "Poiché all'interno del problema unitario relativo al sistema museale vi sono due specificità: quella relativa ai Musei di Arte contemporanea e quella relativa ai Musei e ai parchi archeologici, propone di costituire due gruppi di lavoro a latere".[299]

296 Italy, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. Riforma del Sistema Museale Nazionale – Verbale n. 1. 14 June 1990. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 61, p.1.
297 Ibid, p. 2.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.

This distinction reflects an institutional awareness of the different challenges faced by contemporary art institutions which require flexible exhibition spaces and curatorial approaches and archaeological museums, where conservation and public access take precedence.

Several structural challenges were identified as priorities for reform, including:

- **Personale e relazioni di lavoro**: personale: OO.SS. dei lavoratori e associazioni dei tecnici
- **Sponsorizzazioni e coinvolgimento del settore privato**: sponsorizzazioni: (associazioni che rappresentano l'utenza) UPA, Confindustria, Confcommercio, ABI, ANIA
- **Strategie di comunicazione pubblica**: comunicazione: editori, settori della comunicazione audiovisiva, poligrafico di stato
- **Sicurezza nei musei**: sicurezza (considerata più ampiamente come problema di tutela)

The presence of representatives from industrial and commercial associations such as Confindustria, Confcommercio, and ABI (Associazione Bancaria Italiana) shows the growing emphasis on partenariati pubblico-privati in museum management. This trend, later formalized in the Legge Ronchey (1993), sought to supplement state funding with private investment, though it also raised concerns about the potential commodification of cultural heritage.

One of the most contentious debates within the Commissione was the question of autonomia museale. The commission considered three possible governance models:

1. "Indipendenza gestionale" – administrative independence from the Soprintendenze.
2. "Indipendenza totale" – a fully autonomous model, similar to major international museums.
3. A mixed or intermediate model, balancing state oversight with managerial flexibility.

As the document states:

Per quanto riguarda la questione dell'autonomia ritiene che si debba esaminare sotto tre aspetti: indipendenza gestionale; indipendenza totale che è propria dei Musei stranieri; una formula intermedia per coniugare correttamente il rapporto tra pubblico e privato.[300]This debate foreshadowed later reforms that granted greater financial and managerial independence to institutions like MNR, while maintaining key functions under state control.

Dr. Augusta Monferini raised concerns about the economic sustainability of museums, criticizing previous policies for their failure to protect cultural assets:

La Dr.ssa MONFERINI si rammarica vivamente dell'incalcolabile perdita (centinaia di miliardi) per il patrimonio artistico italiano, soprattutto per quanto riguarda l'arte del 19° secolo, causata dalla miope politica del Ministero delle Finanze sulla defiscalizzazione dei patrimoni d'arte.[301]

Her statement signals llathe chronic underfunding of Italian museums and the lack of effective tax incentives for cultural heritage preservation.

Dr. Alessandra Mottola Molfino questioned the terminology of the commission's mandate, expressing doubts about the very concept of a sistema museale nazionale: "Esprime le sue riserve sulla parola 'sistema', poiché ritiene che ogni Museo sia un'opera d'arte a sé stante collegata con il territorio. [302] Mottola Molfino's objection pointed to a friction between centralized state oversight and the autonomy of individual institutions.

The 1990 Commissione represented a serious attempt to reform the sistema museale nazionale, though it revealed how difficult consensus on these questions would be. However, the tensions and disagreements, particularly regarding autonomia museale, public-

300 Ibid, p.8.
301 Ibid.
302 Ibid, p.9.

private partnerships, and the definition of a national system, reveal the challenges of reaching consensus in museum policy reform.

The report also highlights the challenges posed by the rigid bureaucratic structures governing national museums, particularly in relation to staffing, budget allocation, and decision-making authority. It critiques the *Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archeologici, Ambientali, Architettonici e Storico-Artistici* (UCBBAASA) for maintaining a centralized approach that often led to delays and inefficiencies in museum management. This centralized model had a direct impact on the MNR, which, despite its importance, faced difficulties in securing the necessary resources for conservation projects and exhibition enhancements. The text notes that "la gestione accentrata delle risorse finanziarie e umane ha spesso ostacolato interventi tempestivi e adeguati alle esigenze specifiche dei singoli musei"[303], a statement that aligns with archival records documenting the museum's struggles in securing funding for the restoration of key collections during this period.

The emphasis on economic sustainability, autonomy, and institutional restructuring foreshadowed key developments of the 1990s, including the Legge Ronchey (1993). Yet, many of the core issues raised; chronic underfunding, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the struggle for institutional independence remain unresolved today, marking the ongoing complexity of balancing heritage preservation with economic and administrative pragmatism.

2.7 Rome Renewed: Urban Development and Museological Expansion

Until the mid-1990s, Italian state museums were managed directly by national or local governments, with no autonomous budget, spending power, or revenue. They were managed in the light of traditional conservation and the availability of their collections to the public.[304]

303 Ibid, p.23.
304 Alfano 2022, p.102.

On April 11th, 1991, Franco Carraro[305] (Mayor of Rome 1989-1993), released the report titled "Programma degli Interventi per Roma Capitale," presented in compliance with Law No. 396 of 15 December 1990, *Interventi per Roma, capitale della Repubblica*[306], the Mayor of Rome articulated a comprehensive plan aimed at the rationalization and modernization of the city, addressing a long-standing need. This document opened a new phase in Rome's urban development, marking the commencement of serious discussions and actions towards rejuvenating the city's infrastructure and administrative frameworks.[307] The report emphasized the historic failure to modernize and optimize Rome's urban layout, a deficiency that had persisted despite the city's profound historical and cultural significance. For the first time since becoming the capital of Italy, the need for the state to actively engage in Rome's development was recognized, necessitating specific legislative and procedural instruments to facilitate the envisioned transformations.

Historically, Rome had been an exemplar during its Imperial era and through the Renaissance, contributing iconic sites such as the Capitoline Hill, the Forum, and the Corso to the concept of a capital city. These sites had transcended their geographical confines, becoming symbols of the city's grandeur. Despite Italy's struggles for independence and national unity, Rome's role as the capital had not

305 Franco Carraro, a distinguished figure in Italian politics and sports administration, has demonstrated a dynamic political trajectory over several decades. Initially, Carraro was a member of the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, PSI) until its dissolution in 1994. Following this period, he aligned himself with the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) from 2011 to 2013. Since 2013, he has been affiliated with Forza Italia, reflecting his continued engagement in the political landscape. Carraro's tenure as Mayor of Rome from 1989 to 1993 was a significant chapter in his extensive career, marked by his transition through various political affiliations.

306 Law 396/1990, titled Interventi per Roma, capitale della Repubblica, established a special program of interventions to support Rome in its role as the national capital. It provided funding for infrastructure, cultural heritage preservation, and urban development, including the "Programma degli Interventi per Roma Capitale," which coordinated major projects across the city.

See: Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana 1990; Senato della Repubblica 2002.

307 The political landscape of the early 1990s forms an essential backdrop to the reforms discussed in this chapter. Between 1992 and 1994 the post-war party system collapsed under the combined pressures of corruption scandals, economic strain, and a referendum that ended multi-preference voting. The Christian Democrats fell below 30 percent in the 1992 elections; Falcone's assassination and the resignation of Bettino Craxi accelerated the crisis. The short-lived Amato and Ciampi governments were followed in 1994 by the unexpected ascent of Berlusconi's Forza Italia, supported by the newly reconstituted Alleanza Nazionale. Contemporary observers likened the restructuring of the Italian system to the disintegration of the Fourth French Republic. These upheavals set the administrative and fiscal context in which cultural policy, museum governance, and the redevelopment of Rome were negotiated. See Parker, Gundle 1996, pp.1-8; Bosco, McDonnell 2013; Newell 2019; Diodato, Niglia 2019, Viroli 2012; Shin, Agnew 2008.

been adequately supported by the necessary infrastructural developments.

The 1991 report critiqued the long-standing national negligence towards Rome, which had seen the city subjected to critiques rather than receiving support. It highlighted the legislative shift where the Italian Parliament recognized the urgent need for Rome to upgrade its facilities to meet the demands of a modern capital, capable of standing in competition not merely on the basis of its historical heritage but as a vibrant, functional urban center.

The report pointed out that the absence of a coherent and ambitious urban strategy over decades had been a major factor in the city's challenging circumstances. It noted that neither the Italian State had effectively tackled the issues concerning its capital, nor had the municipal administration developed a city planning policy that acknowledged Rome's unique role and requirements as the national capital. This historical overview set the stage for the proposed interventions, which aimed at fundamentally redefining Rome's architectural and functional identity to reflect its status and potential as Italy's capital.

On July 14th, 1992, Corriere della Sera illustrates the growing anticipation of the public to see the final re-organization and expansion of the 'new' MNR with the new seats at Palazzo Altemps and Palazzo Massimo:

BENI CULTURALI / Per due mesi il ministero ha proposto visite guidate nei cantieri dei musei Aspettando il '94 Una mappa dì tutti i «lavori in corso»

Si è appena concluso il tour d'arte proposto dal ministero per i Beni culturali che, con numerose visite guidate, ha delineato la mappa di cantieri e restauri ora attivi in città. Ma com'è la situazione oggi per chi vuole compiere un tour culturale? Ecco una panoramica dei nostri spazi museali, tra speranze e «lavori in corso». Palazzo Massimo, da cui dipende la sistemazione del nuovo Museo Nazionale Romano, sarà in completa attività solo il prossimo anno. Questo permetterà di liberare le

Terme di Diocleziano e procedere a ritmo serrato con il loro restauro-riordino (le Terme saranno pronte nel '94). Per il terzo polo del museo, Palazzo Altemps al quale è destinata la Collezione Ludovisi, i soldi di Roma Capitale ci sono: ma anche questa parte del museo sarà funzionante nel '94. Scadenza che dovrebbe vedere ultimata l'opera di restauro e risanamento anche per la Galleria Borghese. Continuano i lavori alla Galleria nazionale d'Arte moderna e alla galleria d'Arte antica di Palazzo Barberini parzialmente chiusa perché costretto a un difficile condominio con il circolo ufficiali. C'è poi Palazzo Poli, accanto a Fontana di Trevi, che dovrebbe assicurare alla Calcografia nazionale uno spazio adeguato alle esigenze del ricchissimo istituto ma da tempo i lavori sono bloccati, nonostante i 36 miliardi del finanziamento Pio. Entro il 1993, invece il Museo nazionale etnografico «Pigorìni» sarà visitabile.[308]

As urban and museological restructuring gathered momentum in Rome during the late 1980s, institutional reforms at MNR were not limited to spatial expansion or legislative reorganization. Alongside these transformations, cultural authorities also began experimenting with new technological infrastructures designed to modernize museum operations and enhance public access.

Technological Modernization and Digital Futures in Late-1980s Italian Museology

In the late 1980s, the MNR found itself at the center of institutional restructuring and physical expansion, and also at the frontier of a national experimentation with digital technologies in the cultural sector. An example of this emerging orientation is the correspondence surrounding a major donation from IBM Italia, which proposed the creation of a digital information system for the museum's future venue at Terme Diocleziano.

The first institutional acknowledgment of IBM's intent is documented in a letter dated 23 November 1989, signed by Dr. Gustavo Vicentini,

308 "BENI CULTURALI / Per due mesi il ministero ha proposto visite guidate nei cantieri dei musei Aspettando il '94 Una mappa di tutti i «lavori in corso»," Corriere della Sera, section Cronaca di Roma, subsection Beni Culturali, July 14, 1992.

IBM Italia's Director of Communications and Public Relations. Addressed to Soprintendente Adriano La Regina, the letter confirms the company's decision "di donare una serie di elaboratori elettronici e di programmi software per la creazione di un sistema informativo a disposizione del pubblico e degli studiosi nella nuova sede del Museo Nazionale Romano." Notably, Vicentini stresses the symbolic and paradigmatic value of the initiative: "Si tratta di un progetto importante che costituirà un esempio altamente innovativo di utilizzo dei mezzi informatici in ambito museale."[309] This framing aligns the donation with a broader institutional push to reimagine the museum as an accessible, pedagogically effective, and technologically enabled public space.

The Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali quickly endorsed the proposal. On 23 January 1990, the Ufficio Centrale authorized the donation, allowing the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma to "accettare gli elaboratori elettronici ed i relativi programmi donati… per la creazione di un sistema informativo, per il pubblico e gli studiosi, nella nuova sede del Museo Archeologico Nazionale Romano."[310] The museum's role was being redefined not only in terms of spatial or curatorial development, but also in terms of its informational infrastructure (a theme that would come to dominate cultural policy in the following decades).

This gesture toward digital modernisation should be read alongside the broader institutional shifts taking place in those same years. From the second half of the 1980s, the Ministry began to test new forms of coordination among state museums, encouraging the creation of *sistemi museali* built around a *polo centrale* and a set of peripheral sites. Cities such as Rome, Florence, and Naples became the main sites for these experiments, which aimed to rationalize management, strengthen public access, and give greater thematic coherence to collections dispersed across multiple locations. Within this landscape, MNR occupied a particularly position: its transition to a multi-site structure

309 Vicentini, Gustavo. Lettera a Adriano La Regina: Donazione IBM Italia per la nuova sede del Museo Nazionale Romano. 23 Nov. 1989. Busta 82, fasc. 2, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.
310 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. Roma – Museo Archeologico Nazionale Romano. Donazione I.B.M. Italia. 23 Jan. 1990. Busta 82, fasc. 2, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma

forced the administration to confront problems of organization, communication, and public service that the new "systemic" approach was meant to address.[311] The IBM donation can be situated within this reformist horizon, where digital infrastructure began to be seen not only as an internal tool for collections management, but as a vehicle for inter-museum communication and visitor orientation. The museum's role as a testing ground for such innovations is underscored in La Regina's own communications to the Ministry, which describe the IBM offer as consistent with the goals of the new institutional model.[312]

This moment anticipates many of the principles articulated in Montella's contemporaneous writings, particularly his insistence on the need for museums to function as "servizi pubblici essenziali" with standardized performance benchmarks.[313] In his 1989 lecture *Il progetto e l'occasione*, Montella argued that museums must equip themselves with adequate tools to perform "le funzioni fondamentali di conservazione, comunicazione e fruizione"[314]an equation that necessitated, among other things, both staff professionalization and technological modernization. The IBM initiative can be read as a material prefiguration of the performance-based, user-oriented standards that Montella would advocate for in the years leading to the 1990 Commissione per la Riforma del Sistema Museale Nazionale.

That this partnership emerged from a private-sector actor further speaks to the complex interplay between public cultural institutions and corporate philanthropy in this period.

While such collaborations could raise questions about privatization and the shaping of cultural priorities, in this case IBM's involvement appears to have been welcomed as an opportunity to overcome the infrastructural deficits that plagued many Italian museums.[315] Vicentini's letter explicitly frames the donation as a contribution to "la

311 See Montella 1993; Jalla 1994; Clarelli 1989, pp. 85–104; and the documents of the Commissione per la Riforma del Sistema Museale Nazionale 1990, which elaborate the ministry's early proposals for coordinated museum systems and multi-site organisational models.

312 La Regina, Adriano. Comunicazione al Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali riguardo alla donazione IBM. 9 Feb. 1990. Busta 84, fasc. 2, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

313 Montella 1990, pp. 33–40.

314 Ibid, p. 39.

315 See e.g.,Pignatti 2022.

qualità della ricerca scientifica in questo settore," casting it as a public good rather than a branding exercise.

Ultimately, this event examines a moment of pragmatic optimism in which technological innovation was mobilized as part of a larger rethinking of the museum's public mission. The case shows how even before formal digital transformation strategies were implemented on a national scale, Italian cultural authorities were experimenting with new paradigms of access, information, and service delivery, often through partnerships that blurred the lines between state responsibility and private initiative.

2.8 Legge Ronchey 1993

Over these decades, the Italian approach to managing cultural heritage and its institutions increasingly drew inspiration from the Anglo-Saxon model by granting autonomy, performance targets, managerial directorates, and board oversight.[316] An initial move in this direction was evident with the enactment of *legge 2 agosto 1982, n. 512*[317]. However, it was the *legge Ronchey*, named after Alberto Ronchey, the Italian Minister for Cultural and Environmental Heritage who proposed it, that significantly advanced the involvement of the private sector and private interests within spaces such as museums. The law was crucial in reforming the management and enhancement of Italy's cultural heritage, particularly focusing on museums, libraries, and archives. Ronchey once characterized museums as "the General Motors of Italy."[318] The Ronchey Law, effective from January 16, 1993, which converted the decree-law of November 14, 1992 (No. 433), addresses the operational needs of state cultural institutions, including museums,

316 See Alfano 2023; cf. Farneti 2011.

317 The Legge 2 agosto 1982, n. 512, introduces tax exemptions for properties designated for cultural uses, such as public museums, libraries, archives, and similar institutions, provided these properties do not generate income for the owner. It extends these benefits to the cadastral income of public parks and gardens or those whose conservation is recognized as of public interest by the Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Property owners must declare a lack of income to qualify for these exemptions. Additionally, the law updates the assessed income values for properties of historical or artistic interest and specifies penalties for unauthorized changes in use.
Italia. Legge 2 agosto 1982, n. 512. Regime fiscale dei beni di rilevante interesse culturale. Normattiva, 8 agosto 1982.

318 Fanelli 1993, pp. 6-7.

libraries, and archives. Officially sanctioned and integrated into Italy's legal framework, this law broadened the functional scope and operational capabilities of these institutions.

Key aspects of the law include provisions for enhanced surveillance and the ability to manage facilities facing operational challenges or overcrowding. The Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali is granted the authority to reassign staff temporarily to support institutions in need, particularly those with periodic overcrowding or specific management challenges.

The law introduced measures allowing the use of volunteer organizations to supplement staffing for cultural and environmental heritage. It also facilitated the creation of temporary employment contracts to mitigate staffing shortages, directly responding to operational exigencies and it extended visiting hours and introduced modern amenities and merchandising in Italian museums for the first time. These changes were inspired by French, British and U.S. models and aimed to improve visitor experience and generate revenue for cultural sites. [319]

Antonio Cederna's article *Promemoria per Ronchey* (Memorandum for Ronchey) (*La Repubblica*, 18 July 1992) offers a critical assessment of Italy's cultural heritage administration in the period immediately preceding the introduction of the Legge Ronchey. Cederna's memorandum distilled a decade of frustration with ministerial mismanagement and the chronic underfunding of Italy's heritage sector. He warned that the ministry had become "pesantemente burocratizzato," and noted that the central technical institutes together operated on "circa 4 miliardi (l'equivalente del costo di duecento metri di autostrada)," a comparison meant to underline the structural inadequacy of state investment.[320] Addressed to the newly appointed Minister for Cultural Heritage, Alberto Ronchey, the piece functions as a public memorandum outlining institutional shortcomings that, in Cederna's view, required urgent attention. Written by one of Italy's most prominent heritage commentators, the article provides valuable

319 Richards 1996, pp. 167–169.
320 Cederna 1992, p.32, sezione cultura.

insight into the policy context in which museum reforms were being discussed and anticipated.

Cederna begins by reviewing what he sees as the major failures of Ronchey's predecessors. He critiques the *giacimenti culturali* project, an initiative intended to support digital cataloguing of heritage assets, as an ineffective and poorly managed operation that benefitted IT companies without contributing meaningfully to the protection or understanding of cultural property. He also draws attention to the dispersal of funds under Law 449/1987, which allocated substantial resources to heritage interventions but, according to Cederna, resulted in over 2,000 fragmented restoration projects, many of which were influenced by local political interests rather than broader conservation priorities.

The article is particularly relevant in the context of the 1990s reorganization of the MNR as it highlights issues that directly affected institutions like the Terme Diocleziano. Among these are the chronic underfunding of technical bodies such as the soprintendenze and central institutes, and the limited operational capacity of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. Cederna notes that the combined annual budget of central technical institutes was equivalent to the cost of building just 200 meters of motorway, illustrating the scale of underinvestment in the sector. These concerns were closely linked to the delays and logistical challenges faced during major museum restorations and expansions in Rome during this period.

Cederna also outlines seven key areas where he believes reform is needed. These include the protection of public expertise within the ministry, the defense of existing legal frameworks for heritage protection in the context of European integration, and the resolution of ambiguities in the management of ecclesiastical cultural assets. He strongly opposes long-term loans of artworks abroad, citing the poor condition of museum infrastructure and lack of secure storage and display space as more pressing issues. He also refers specifically to Palazzo Barberini, noting that half of the building was occupied by the *Circolo ufficiali*, and calls for its return to museum use, an example of how institutional space and heritage policy were often in conflict.

In relation to museum access and sustainability, Cederna raises concerns about overcrowding, inadequate staffing, and insufficient visitor services. He suggests measures such as scheduled access and even the possibility of visitor limits, what he calls a *"razionamento programmato della fruizione"* to address the physical strain on museums caused by mass tourism. These reflections are especially pertinent to Rome's major institutions in the early 1990s, which were undergoing extensive restoration while remaining partially open to the public.

While the *Legge Ronchey* would soon introduce reforms aimed at improving museum services, particularly through the outsourcing of ancillary services to private concessionaires, Cederna's article reflects a different set of priorities. Rather than promoting public-private partnerships, he calls for increased ordinary funding, stronger internal capacity, and greater investment in public institutions. In this respect, his position represents a more traditional vision of state-led heritage governance, one that remained skeptical of market-based solutions.

Cederna's *"Promemoria per Ronchey"* is therefore a useful source for understanding the broader critical discourse around museum and heritage policy in the early 1990s. It aids us in understanding the structural and administrative challenges facing the sector at the time, while also articulating specific proposals for reform. Its relevance to the history of MNR and the Terme Diocleziano in particular, lies in its documentation of the wider political and institutional conditions that shaped the implementation of large-scale restoration projects in Rome.

On January 15th 1994 La Stampa published *Voglio di museo con pazienza*, an article that communicated to the public the ongoing challenges in the full implementation of the Ronchey Law one year on after its enactment, shedding light on the complexity of integrating private investments into the management of cultural heritage under the new legislative framework. The media portrayal of this situation emphasized the gap between the law's ambitious goals and its practical outcomes, highlighting bureaucratic delays and the cautious approach of private investors who are wary of the yet-to-be-finalized regulatory environment. This narrative in the media plays a crucial role in informing the public and potentially influencing further policy

discussions and adjustments, illustrating the critical watchdog role of the press in monitoring the application of significant reforms and holding decision-makers accountable for their promises and commitments.

Eugenio La Rocca, Sovrintendente alla Antichità e Belle Arti Comune di Roma presented Un Sistema Museale per il Comune di Roma in *I Siti Archeologici un Problema di Musealizzazione all'Aperto Secondo Seminario di Studi Roma* (Gennaio 1994) where he notable said:

I have no intention of elaborating on what has already been widely discussed about the needs of museums, their peculiarities in relation to similar services and analogous institutional realities, and the unavoidable need for a modernization in the presentation of collections and their accessibility. However, I must highlight a fact: the extraordinary quantity and quality of historical, artistic, and cultural assets housed in the museums of Rome is unmatched in the world in terms of their peculiar formula. Rome's heritage is immense (Bronze and precious metals, for example), preserved in municipal museums, and represents a unique patrimony on both the Italian and international stages. From this, the need arises for a specific organizational and administrative structure to ensure the effective management and promotion of such a unique cultural heritage.

That said, there is no doubt that such an organizational system requires time and significant financial resources to come to fruition. In addition to this, there is also a challenge: Rome lacks a traditional structure for local government or municipal self-management. The coordination of the museum system must not only be efficient but also innovative, ensuring that the city's assets are well integrated into both the national and international frameworks.

The connection between museums, centers, and territories is vital. More than ever, Rome must meet the challenges of not only preserving its vast historical and cultural patrimony but making it accessible to all, while simultaneously addressing contemporary issues such as urban growth and modernization.

The next step is to attract investments and direct them towards enhancing the city's unique museum offering. Adequate financial backing will enable Rome's museum system to remain relevant, ensuring that the resources required to operate these facilities are available, and to meet the evolving demands of modern civilization. [321]

La Rocca, whose work focused on the Municipality of Rome, expressed the need for resources to reorganize, structure, and support museums and cultural institutions. His sentiments were also reinforced by Italy's then-Minister of Cultural Heritage, Antonio Paolucci, in an article published in *Il Sole 24 Ore* on July 23, 1995: *Italian museums require a systematic and widespread* "functional restoration" intervention. It is necessary to make the public collection system more efficient by improving reception, modernizing structures, enhancing scientific resources and educational potential, and identifying all the possible and useful opportunities for profitable economic activities. The Italian cultural system has long been committed to this objective, and in this direction, the Ronchey administration has made significant progress with the law n. 4 of 1993.[322]

Paolucci writes that The fundamental tool for realizing the modernization of the Italian museum structure is autonomy, which must be understood as the recognition de jure of the museum's institution, with clear areas of technical-scientific specificity and managerial responsibility within a desirable greater operational freedom from territorial superintendencies. This is because the primacy of the superintendencies, those indispensable "guardians of protection" within which the museum must perform its role, cannot in any way be questioned. He clarifies that despite all of this (the autonomy of the museums, within the autonomy of the superintendencies) will be the subject of the "great reform," now impossible to propose. Within the temporal and operational limits that this "technical" government knows it has, it is important to give signals and move in the right direction. Whoever comes after will do the rest, as long as effective indicators are set right from the start.

321 Translation of La Rocca 1995, pp. 15-16.
322 Paolucci 1996, p.25.

In retrospect, following the 2015 reform of Italian museums, it's clear that what Paolucci envisioned in the 1990s regarding museum autonomy was a precursor to the significant changes we now see in the Italian cultural sector. In his 1995 statement, Paolucci argued that the modernization of the Italian museum system required granting museums greater autonomy—not in opposition to the territorial superintendencies but in collaboration with them. His vision emphasized the importance of recognizing the technical-scientific and managerial roles of museums, along with operational freedom, while maintaining the superintendencies' protective oversight as essential guardians of cultural heritage.

What Paolucci hinted at, the idea that such a reform was "impossible" at that time seems, in hindsight, like an acknowledgment of the bureaucratic and political challenges that prevented large-scale changes in the 1990s. He stressed the need to take small, deliberate steps, setting up a framework for future reforms. The 2015 Italian museum reform, spearheaded by then-Minister of Cultural Heritage Dario Franceschini, reflects many of the goals Paolucci aspired to. The reform sought to professionalize museum management, increase autonomy for directors, and promote a more dynamic cultural system.[323]

Franceschini's reforms introduced the creation of museum hubs with dedicated directors and separate budgets, making museums more accountable and allowing them to function more efficiently, which was precisely the kind of managerial autonomy that Paolucci advocated. The reform's focus on decentralization and modernization echoes Paolucci's vision of a system where museums are empowered to fulfill their cultural roles with more independence while remaining aligned with overarching policies aimed at preservation and protection.

In this context, Paolucci's call for autonomy within a collaborative framework between museums and superintendencies anticipated the

323 Italian state museums are given technical and scientific autonomy and carry out functions of curatorship and enhancement of the art collections in their care, ensuring and promoting their access to the public. Autonomous museums have their own statute and draw up their financial statements. They can also put in place their own agreements with public bodies and centres of research. The public service provided by the museum and the relative standards are listed and published in a Charter of Services. (Ministerial Decree No. 44, Art. 1, paragraph 3, of 23 December 2014 'Organizzazione e funzionamento dei Musei Statali')

structural changes we now see shaping Italian museums, finally giving them the space to operate with the agility and managerial freedom he deemed necessary, while preserving their commitment to safeguarding heritage. His proposal, therefore, laid the groundwork for the long-term transformations realized two decades later.

We can see how legislative reforms aimed at improving the management and preservation of Italy's vast cultural heritage were being frequently discussed in the early 1990s. These reforms were central to discussions held at (the above mentioned) Secondo Seminario di Studi Roma - *I siti archeologici. Un problema di musealizzazione all'aperto* (1994). Along with La Rocca who was mentioned above, one of the key contributors to these discussions was Bruna Amendolea[324], Head of the Archaeological Heritage Office for the Province of Rome, whose presentation provided a critical assessment of the effects of recent laws on local autonomy and their implications for cultural heritage management.

Amendolea's reflections, as presented in the seminar proceedings, focused on the profound changes introduced by Law 142 of 1990, which redefined the relationship between the central government and local authorities. This law granted substantial autonomy to municipalities and provinces, allowing them to take a more active role in the preservation and management of cultural assets. Before the introduction of Law 142, local entities had been largely dependent on centralized control, which often resulted in bureaucratic delays and ineffective interventions. As Amendolea noted, the absence of local authority in these matters often meant that initial project efforts were "vanificato il lavoro progettuale iniziale"[325], or nullified by the lack of institutional competencies.

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324 Bruna Amendolea is an Italian archaeologist known for her significant contributions to the preservation and documentation of cultural heritage in Italy. She served as Responsabile Ufficio Beni Archeologici Settore Cultura Provincia di Rome (Head of the Archaeological Heritage Office for the Province of Rome), particularly during the 1990s. In this role, she played a crucial part in advocating for decentralized management of archaeological sites, emphasizing the importance of local authorities taking responsibility for their cultural heritage. Amendolea was involved in efforts to incorporate archaeological mapping and urban planning, as seen in her publication Carta archeologica e pianificazione territoriale: un problema politico e metodologico (1999), where she addressed the political and methodological challenges of integrating heritage preservation into modern planning.

325 Amendolea 1994, p. 11.

2.9 Decentralization and the Management of Cultural Heritage: Legislative Decree of March 31, 1998

In Italy, it was only at the end of the 1990s, with the legislative decrees 31 March 1998, no. 112 and 29 October 1999, no.490 ("Unified Text of Legislative provisions concerning cultural and environmental assest"), that it was explicitly stated on a legislative level that cultural assets serve the 'public interest'. This aimed to address existing gaps by focusing on access to public cultural institutions, entrance fees, facilitated enjoyment, and involving all levels of government and private individuals in promoting the constitutional value of culture.[326]

The Legislative Decree of March 31, 1998, n. 112,[327] represents a key moment in Italy's approach to public administration and governance, particularly regarding the management of cultural heritage. The decree 31 March, 1998 . 112, which aimed to reorganize the functions of the state through decentralization, reflected broader trends in European governance during the late 1990s, such as subsidiarity, regionalism, and local autonomy. The decree transferred many administrative responsibilities from the central government to local authorities, fundamentally reshaping how Italy manages its rich cultural assets.

The Legislative Decree 112/1998, enacted within the framework of the Bassanini Laws (1997)[328], aimed to address the inefficiencies of centralized governance by distributing powers to regions, provinces, and municipalities. This shift reflected the principle of subsidiarity, which holds that public functions should be handled by the lowest level of authority capable of addressing them effectively. The decentralization movement was part of a larger trend across Europe, where nations sought to reconcile the need for a strong national

326Casini 2011, p.198.

327 Decreto Legislativo 31 marzo 1998, n. 112: Conferimento di Funzioni e Compiti Amministrativi dello Stato alle Regioni e agli Enti Locali. Gazzetta Ufficiale, Serie Generale, n.116, 21 May 1998,

328 In a footnote of: Bassanini 2008, p. 3, Bassanini reminds that the Bassanini reforms were not only driven by the ruling coalition but were also supported by opposition parties and local government officials. The widespread political and institutional support for these reforms helped ensure their success and implementation, contributing to a more decentralized and efficient public administration in Italy.

identity with the growing importance of local governance in public administration.

Legislative Decree 368/1998[329] formally established the MiBAC reorganzing the ministry and acknowledging museums (and a few libraries) as distinct units within the state structure.[330] By the end of 2000, these reforms -combined with a 2001 Ministrial "Atto di Indirizzo" on museum standards - set the stage for more autonomous and professionally managed museums. Italian scholarship noted that change was slow incredibly, a 1885 royal decree on museum ticketing was only finally repealed in 1997, when entrance "tasse" were replaced by modern tickets. [331]

One of the most significant areas affected by this decree was cultural heritage management. Italy faced the challenge of maintaining and promoting its heritage amidst growing pressures from tourism, urbanization, and financial constraints. The decentralization of cultural heritage management under Legislative Decree 112/1998[332] was seen as a way to streamline the oversight of Italy's cultural resources by bringing decision-making closer to the communities and regions most directly involved with these assets.

Under the decree, regional and local governments were granted greater responsibilities for the maintenance, conservation, and promotion of cultural heritage sites.[333] The aim was to utilize local knowledge and

329 Decreto Legislativo 20 ottobre 1998, n.368 "Istituzione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attivita' Culturali" - merged heritage and cultural activities into a single ministry (MiBAC). It also re-emphasized museum improvement: the new Ministry was to ensure national coordination of museums and even contemplated special autonomous museum units (art.8). This structural change reflected a broader vision of cultural management, integrating conservation with proportion of culture.

330 Barbati et al., Diritto, pp. 88–91 (d.lgs. 20 ottobre 1998, n. 368; subsequent organisational regulations culminating in d.p.c.m. 2 dicembre 2019, n. 169.

331 Casini 2014.

332 Legislative Decree No. 112 of March 31, 1998 (Decreto Legislativo 31 marzo 1998, n. 112), published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale No. 92 on April 21, 1998, Ordinary Supplement No. 77, is a pivotal Italian law that decentralizes administrative functions from the central government to regional and local authorities. As part of the "Bassanini Reforms," the decree aimed to enhance local autonomy, improve administrative efficiency, and bring government services closer to citizens by transferring responsibilities in key areas such as education, healthcare, transportation, environmental protection, and economic development.

333 On the regionalisation of cultural-heritage competencies under D.Lgs. 112/1998, see Aedon 2/1998, "Beni e attività culturali / Lombardia," which outlines the transfer of administrative functions to regions and provinces (esp. art. 148). See also the Rapporto sull'attuazione regionale del d.lgs. 112/1998 (LUISS 2002), which describes the decree's effects as a "quasi totale regionalizzazione della materia."

resources to ensure that management practices were tailored to the specific needs of each area. For example, a regional government might be better positioned to address the specific conservation requirements of a medieval church or an archaeological site than a distant national authority, due to its proximity and more immediate knowledge of local conditions.[334] While the decentralization process aimed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of cultural heritage management, it also brought challenges. One of the key issues was the uneven distribution of resources and expertise across Italy's regions. Wealthier and more urbanized regions, such as Tuscany and Lazio, were often better equipped to handle the complex demands of heritage management. They had access to more financial resources, specialized personnel, and established networks of tourism and cultural promotion. Conversely, poorer or more rural regions, particularly in southern Italy, condifaced significant obstacles. These areas often lacked the technical expertise, funding, and institutional infrastructure required to properly maintain and promote their cultural heritage.

While decentralization was intended to enhance local autonomy, it risked creating fragmented and inconsistent approaches to heritage conservation. The absence of a unified national strategy raised concerns that regional and local governments might prioritize immediate economic gains, such as from tourism, over the long-term preservation of cultural sites. In some cases, this led to tensions between MiBAC and regional authorities, as the central government maintained a role in supervising and coordinating heritage conservation efforts to ensure compliance with national and international standards.

This period also sparked intense reflection within the Italian scholarly and policy community on what decentralization should mean in cultural terms. Montella[335]who had long been a leading advocate of integrated cultural policy offered a pointed critique of the post-1998

334 See Cellini, Cuccia, Ferrante 2024.

335 Massimo Montella (1934-2011) was a distinguished Italian scholar in cultural heritage management and museum studies. He served as a full professor of Economics and Management of Cultural Heritage at the University of Macerata and founded the journal Il capitale culturale. Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage. His career included significant contributions to the development of regional museum systems, notably the "Sistema Museale Regionale" in Umbria, recognized as one of Europe's most significant initiatives in this field. In recognition of his impact, a study day was held to honor his legacy, with proceedings published in 2022.

reforms, especially the division between tutela and valorizzazione enshrined in Decreto Legislativo 31 marzo 1998, n. 112. He argued that this legal bifurcation "assegna[va] i rispettivi compiti a due distinte istituzioni: allo Stato la prima, alle Regioni la seconda," separating protection from enhancement in a way that undermined the governance needed for cultural heritage.[336]

For Montella, the decentralization effort not only stalled but also suffered from a lack of institutional imagination and follow-through. While initial laws like the L. 142/1990 and D.Lgs. 112/1998 formally encouraged shared governance, the actual political and administrative processes fell short. Regional authorities often failed to assert a coherent alternative model and instead "si accomodano alla sopravvivenza," retreating from systemic reform in favor of piecemeal, short-term measures.[337]

Montella's critique is especially relevant for understanding how museums, especially national institutions like MNR, were positioned in a shifting and at times contradictory governance landscape. Although museums were increasingly recognized as "istituti dotati di autonomia speciale" by the late 1990s (D.Lgs. 368/1998 and later DPR 233/2007), Montella notes that the lack of a shared national vision meant many institutions remained "monchi per se stessi," fragmented in structure and limited in scope.[338]

Recognizing the need for a coherent national framework to guide the decentralized management of cultural heritage, the Italian government passed Legislative Decree 29 October 1999, n. 490[339], which consolidated and updated existing laws on cultural and environmental heritage. This decree, often referred to as the Consolidated Text of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, served as a comprehensive legal code that established the guiding principles and practices for the management of cultural assets.

336 Montella 2020, p.340.
337 Ibid, p. 342.
338 Ibid, p.350.
339 Decreto Legislativo 29 ottobre 1999, n. 490: Testo Unico delle Disposizioni Legislative in Materia di Beni Culturali e Ambientali. Normattiva, https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:decreto.legislativo:1999-10-29;490. Accessed 30 Sept. 2024.

Decree 490/1999 addressed several key issues that arose from the earlier decentralization efforts. It reinforced the central role of the state in setting minimum standards for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, even as it delegated day-to-day management to local authorities. The decree provided a legal framework that ensured consistency and oversight across regions, preventing local governments from neglecting long-term conservation in favor of short-term economic gains. It also mandated that significant decisions related to cultural heritage—such as the modification, sale, or leasing of historical assets—would require the approval of the central government or its representatives, thus safeguarding national interests.

2.10 Creation of the 'Polo Museale' System

In the 1990s, Italy introduced the concept of the 'Polo Museale' which is essentially museum hubs or clusters managed under unified direction. This development was partly a response to decades of fragmented oversight, where state museums functioned as peripheral units of the ministerial Soprintendenze. Starting in the late 1990s, reform efforts aimed to 'catch up' with international best practices by granting leading museums more autonomy.[340] A notable early step was the creation of a Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici Pompei 1997, an experiment in autonomous site management. The experience of Pompeii opened the door to new legislative measures. Article 8 of *D. Lgs. 20 ottobre 1998, n. 368* granted the *Ministero* the authority to establish *soprintendenze speciali*, "dotate di autonomia scientifica, finanziaria, organizzativa, contabile," in cases where they had jurisdiction over complexes of cultural assets "distinti da eccezionale valore archeologico, storico, artistico o architettonico."[341] Soon after special superintendencies for museum networks - informally called *poli museali* were established in major cities like Rome, Florence, Naples and

340 On the shift toward autonomy beginning in the late 1990s and framed with reference to international best practices, see Alfano 2023, pp. 97–131. For a later stage of this process, culminating in the autonomy reforms of 2014, see Marzano, Castellini 2018.
341 Bonini 2007.

Venice[342]. For example, the Florence state museums were collectively branded the Polo Museale Fiorentino, including the Uffizi, Accademia, Palazzo Pitti and Bargello and other institutions. By March 1998, all ancillary services across the Polo Museale Fiorentino's 13 museums were being managed by a single private concessionaire, reflecting the new unified approach. In Rome, a similar concept was applied to the city's museums: a Polo Museale di Roma began to take shape by grouping museums under a special local director.[343] Though full administrative autonomy for museums was limited prior to 2000, the polo museale framework was an important institutional innovation of the 1990s, laying groundwork for the greater museum autonomies formalized in reforms of the 2000s. This system signaled a shift towards managing museum collections as coordinated networks rather than isolated, department-run sites.

While the 1990s saw the gradual emergence of *poli museali* as informal administrative clusters within Italy's state museum system, it was not until the 2014 MiBACT reform that these hubs were formally codified and given a clear juridical and managerial framework. As legal scholar Lorenzo Casini argues, the reform introduced through D.P.C.M. 29 agosto 2014, n. 171[344] signified a crucial shift: it no longer treated museums as mere appendages of the *Soprintendenze*, but as "soggetti," institutional actors with distinct administrative responsibilities, technical-scientific autonomy, and public missions.[345] This was operationalized through the creation of the Direzione Generale Musei, supported by regional museum hubs (*poli museali regionali*), each charged with coordinating the valorization, accessibility, and enhancement of state museums within their jurisdiction.

342 Dainelli, Sibilio Parri 2012, p. 95.

343 This would then evolve into the Polo Museale del Lazio in 2014, then the Direzione Regionale Musei structure.

344 The reform introduced by D.P.C.M. 29 agosto 2014, n. 171 (Regolamento di organizzazione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo) reorganized the internal structure of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism. It established new central and peripheral offices, including the Direzione Generale Musei and poli museali regionali, formally recognizing the autonomy of major state museums and redistributing responsibilities between museum management and the Soprintendenze. The decree aimed to separate the functions of tutela (protection) from those of valorizzazione (enhancement), to improve public accessibility, governance, and administrative efficiency within the Italian museum system.
Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. D.P.C.M. 29 agosto 2014, n. 171: Regolamento di organizzazione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo. Gazzetta Ufficiale Serie Generale n. 274, 25 November 2014.

345 Casini 2014.

However, Casini's otherwise celebratory framing of this transformation raises important questions. While he emphasizes the shift toward a more rationalized, functionally specialized system of museum governance, the reform also entrenched a managerial logic that arguably reproduces older hierarchies under a new guise. For example, although the *poli museali* structure aimed to streamline and decentralize operations, the directors of these hubs were still centrally appointed, and their mandates subject to the broader directives of the Ministry. Casini's assertion that the reform "liberates" the superintendencies by transferring museum management to separate entities[346] risks overlooking the blurred boundaries that continue to exist between *tutela* and *valorizzazione*, especially in regions where heritage sites and museums are deeply interwoven.

Casini situates the reform within a broader effort to bring Italy in line with international museum standards, and to respond (albeit belatedly) to criticisms voiced as early as the 1950s by figures such as Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, Cesare Brandi and Giulio Carlo Argan.[347] Yet the Italian case remains fundamentally shaped by its territorial model of cultural administration, wherein museums are not only heritage institutions but nodes within complex urban and archaeological systems. In this light, the *polo museale* may be seen less as an emancipatory structure and more as a pragmatic compromise: an attempt to impose managerial coherence on a decentralized, historically stratified landscape of cultural governance.

The reform's emphasis on uniform standards and accountability through structures like the *Direzione Generale Musei* introduces a tension between centralization and contextual responsiveness.[348] While the national museum system fosters integration and professionalization, it may also marginalize local curatorial voices and

346 Ibid.

347 See: Argan 1965; Brandi 1957.

348 Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, "STANDARD MUSEALI: Atto di indirizzo sui criteri tecnico-scientifici e sugli standard di funzionamento e sviluppo dei musei (art. 150, comma 6, D.L. n. 112/1998)," Museologia Scientifica, nuova serie 1(2), 2007, pp. 70–71.

underplay the diversity of institutional missions across different regions and collections.[349]

While reforms were incremental and often hindered by bureaucratic inertia, as Casini describes it, a *lentissimo sviluppo*.[350] This period set the stage for the structural overhauls that would follow in the 21st century. Longstanding critiques from figures such as Franco Russoli, who in the 1970s decried the lack of managerial autonomy in Italian museums, gained renewed urgency as international pressures and changing visitor expectations underscored the inefficiencies of purely state-controlled institutions.[351] The introduction of the Ronchey Law in the early 1990s provided a turning point, initiating public-private partnerships in museum services and modernizing visitor engagement through outsourced educational programming, publications, and other amenities.[352] This shift, however, was not without controversy, as debates emerged over the balance between public mission and private management, a tension that persists in contemporary museum policy.

Parallel to these legal and administrative developments, scholars in museum studies and cultural economics began examining Italy's tests of autonomy in state museums, tracking their roots to late 1990s initiatives. Research published in *Aedon* by Severini and Forte highlights how these experiments in managerial independence, while still constrained by ministerial oversight, marked an ideological break from prior conceptions of museums as mere repositories of national patrimony.[353] By the end of the decade, various ministerial directives sought to streamline museum operations and address inefficiencies. The *Circolari* and *Direttive* issued between 1998 and 2000, such as Circolare Ministeriale 16 July 1998, n. 312, which established a framework for heritage education; Circolare 6 July 1999, n. 127, which supported cultural publications and conferences; and Circolare 27 August 1999, n. 146, which set guiding principles for the application of

349 Montella points out that many stakeholders view the national museum system as potentially undermining the autonomy of local museums, a contradiction that is especially evident in some national policy interpretations. See: Montella 2020, pp. 255–256.

350 Casini 2009.

351 Russoli 1973.

352 Maresca 2004, pp. 45-58.

353 Severini 2003.

Article 5 of Law 352/1997 to the restoration and maintenance of protected cultural assets,[354] signal a growing institutional understanding of the need for consistent practices in collections management, climate control, and public outreach. These efforts culminated in the *Atto di Indirizzo sui criteri tecnico-scientifici e sugli standard di funzionamento e sviluppo dei musei*, commissioned by Minister Giovanna Melandri in 2000 and formally issued in 2001. Known as the "Melandri guidelines," this directive established professional benchmarks that codified best practices across Italian museums, signaling a definitive shift from fragmented bureaucratic control to a more coherent, policy-driven approach.[355]

By the close of the 20th century, Italian museums were no longer merely passive custodians of heritage but were increasingly recognized as dynamic cultural institutions operating within a new management paradigm. The legislative, financial, and administrative transformations of these decades laid the foundation for the broader restructuring of Italian museums that would accelerate in the 21st century, culminating in the 2014 reforms.[356] While challenges of governance, funding, and conservation remain, this period was a

354 Circolare Ministeriale 16 July 1998, n. 312, Prot. 29814/BL, "Accordo quadro sull'educazione al patrimonio culturale"; Circolare 6 July 1999, n. 127, "Contributi per pubblicazioni e per convegni di rilevante interesse culturale" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 22 July 1999, n. 170); Circolare 27 August 1999, n. 146, "Criteri direttivi per l'applicazione dell'art. 5 della legge n. 352/1997 – Contributi in conto interessi per interventi di restauro, conservazione e manutenzione" (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 6 Sept. 1999, n. 209).

355 Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali. Atto di Indirizzo sui criteri tecnico-scientifici e sugli standard di funzionamento e sviluppo dei musei. 10 May 2001.

356 The 2014 "Franceschini Reform" represents a pivotal turning point in the modern history of Italian museums. As Lorenzo Casini explains, this reform, enacted through DPCM 29 August 2014, n. 171, established a true national museum system by granting legal and financial autonomy to a core group of major state museums. Museums like MNR, previously administered as bureaucratic offices within the broader heritage sector, were recognized as institutions in their own right, capable of managing their own budgets, programming, and strategic direction. The reform also created the Direzione Generale Musei and a network of regional poli museali to promote integration, professional standards, and public engagement across the country. While some critics saw this as a rupture in the traditional Italian symbiosis between museums and their territories, Casini argues that the shift was not only long overdue but essential for aligning Italy with international practices. This new governance framework places greater emphasis on research, education, and community engagement, responding to criticisms that Italian museums had long been slow to adapt to contemporary cultural, technological, and educational demands.

Other scholars, such as Alfano, Baraldi, and Cantabene, have evaluated the impact of these reforms and found that increased autonomy and more flexible management have contributed to improved visitor numbers and enhanced financial performance, particularly for the newly autonomous institutions. At the same time, significant challenges persist, including chronic underfunding, shortages of qualified staff, and the complexity of integrating a national policy with the deep local diversity that characterizes Italy's heritage landscape. For further discussion and assessment of these reforms, see e.g., Casini 2014; Alfano, Baraldi, Cantabene 2023, pp. 389–410.

critical juncture in the evolution of Italian museology; one that redefined the role of museums in relation to both the state and the public.

2.11 Cultural and Economic Pressures in Heritage Management

During the 1980s and 1990s, cultural heritage management in Rome faced increasing challenges as the preservation of archaeological sites needed to be balanced with the demands of mass tourism. The document *Roma Archaeologia*, presented by Roberto Cecchi, Secretary General of *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*, on December 7, 2010, at the Musei Capitolini in Rome for the The Progetto Millennium - Roma Capitale 2010-2020[357], provides a comprehensive analysis of heritage preservation policies during this period, leading up into the 2000s.[358] Cecchi's document examines how cultural and economic pressures shaped the approach to conservation, as tourism to key archaeological sites like the Roman Forum, Palatine Hill, and the Colosseum surged during this decade.

However, while policymakers outlined ambitious plans to modernize and protect Rome's archaeological heritage, the operational reality for key sites remained critically under-resourced. Internal correspondences from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, addressed to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, reveal the acute challenges faced in safeguarding Rome's most significant archaeological sites amid severe budgetary constraints.[359]

In a letter dated 13 November 1995, La Regina explicitly warns of the "situazione estremamente precaria" in which the Baths of Caracalla, Domus Aurea, and the Palatine-Forum area found themselves,

357 The Progetto Millennium - Roma Capitale 2010-2020 was an ambitious urban development plan initiated by the city of Rome, focusing on sustainable growth, urban renewal, and cultural and touristic enhancement. The project prioritized improvements in infrastructure and the strategic reuse of historical sites, particularly targeting revitalization in both the city center and peripheral areas. It promoted collaboration among architects, urban planners, and municipal agencies, aiming to create a more accessible, appealing environment for both residents and tourists. Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali 2024.

358 Cecchi 2010.

359 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. 13 Nov. 1995. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Prot. n. 20654. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Stanza 4.

particularly in terms of nighttime security.[360] Following a theft at the Baths of Caracalla, La Regina describes the monument as effectively abandoned after dark: "Il numero del personale di vigilanza in servizio è appena sufficiente a garantire l'apertura ordinaria del sito, lasciando scoperto completamente il turno notturno".[361]

The problem extended well beyond a single site. La Regina's correspondence reveals that the Colosseum, despite being one of the most heavily monitored monuments, continued to suffer from "furti e atti di vandalismo che compromettono l'integrità materiale del monumento".[362] The letter emphasizes how the Palatine-Forum complex, encompassing over forty hectares of archaeological remains and marble deposits, was patrolled by a mere five personnel units per night, rendering any effective protection "impraticabile".[363]

These communications reveal how economic austerity measures severely compromised the operational capacity of key sites in Rome. La Regina's closing remarks convey a palpable frustration with the Ministry's inaction: "La situazione non consente neppure l'apertura ordinaria dei complessi suddetti, attualmente garantita solo grazie all'impiego di personale precario".[364]

Such a statement can illustrate the disconnect between policy rhetoric and practical implementation, an example of how heritage protection in the 1990s remained precariously dependent on insufficient staffing, inadequate security measures, and temporary personnel.[365]

Roman authorities introduced a series of measures to mitigate the effects of mass tourism, including the establishment of defined visitor pathways and timed entry systems to sites like the colosseum, the

360 Ibid.

361 Ibid.

362 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. 13 Nov. 1995. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Prot. n. 20655. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Stanza 4.

363 Ibid.

364 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. 13 Nov. 1995. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Prot. n. 20656. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Stanza 4.

365 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. 13 Nov. 1995. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Prot. n. 20654, 20655, 20656. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Stanza 4.

roman forum and the Palatine Hill. These measures were essential to regulate the flow of visitors and minimize damage to the fragile archaeological structures. In addition to these physical controls, the project emphasized the growing role of heritage tourism[366] as a means of generating revenue to support conservation efforts. By implementing entry fees and controlled visitor access, the authorities were able to fund restoration projects, a strategy that reflects the broader commodification of cultural heritage during this period.

This approach aligns with the objectives of cultural heritage laws like the *Legge Ronchey*, which sought to increase public access to heritage sites while promoting private sector involvement in heritage management.

This period, thoroughly examined in Roberto Cecchi's *Roma Archaeologia*, was defined by the growing necessity of integrating private investment into heritage initiatives, driven by increasingly limited public resources. Cecchi emphasizes that "la crescente dipendenza da partnership private è emersa come una risposta strategica alla limitatezza dei finanziamenti pubblici per il patrimonio culturale,"[367] showing how financial constraints compelled heritage authorities to rethink traditional management models and pursue collaborative strategies that could both safeguard and sustain Italy's cultural assets.

One of the most illustrative examples of this shift was the sponsorship agreements established for the restoration of the Colosseum. As Cecchi notes, this initiative became emblematic of the potential for private investment to contribute meaningfully to state-managed heritage projects without undermining public oversight.[368] These agreements demonstrated that "gli investimenti privati potevano contribuire alla salvaguardia del patrimonio culturale, garantendo al contempo che le

366 Cultural and Heritage Tourism as defined by Ted Silberberg (1995) is a tool of economic development that achieves economic growth through attracting visitors from outside a host community, who are motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution. See Silberberg 1995, pp. 361-365.
367 Cecchi 2010, p.10.
368 Barbati et al., Diritto, p. 87

autorità pubbliche mantenessero il pieno controllo sulla gestione".[369] This collaboration set an important precedent, showcasing how financial contributions from private entities could coexist with the state's authority over cultural sites, shaping a model for future partnerships.

Beyond addressing economic necessities, Cecchi argues that these partnerships reflected a broader institutional strategy aimed at preserving the integrity of cultural heritage management while adapting to contemporary financial realities. He asserts that these collaborations allowed the state to "bilanciare la necessità economica con la responsabilità culturale, assicurando che la conservazione del patrimonio rimanesse allineata con gli interessi nazionali".[370]

The public-private partnership model that emerged in the 1990s thus represented a significant innovation in Italian cultural policy. By engaging private entities in the preservation process, the state was able to leverage additional financial resources while maintaining ultimate control over heritage management. Cecchi's analysis explains how these partnerships reflected a broader shift in governance, where traditional notions of state responsibility were redefined by economic necessity and institutional reform.

The introduction of the *Legge Ronchey* further solidified this transformation by formally recognizing public-private partnerships as a solution to the growing financial constraints faced by Italy's cultural institutions. Cecchi describes this legislative shift as a "nuova strategia di collaborazione tra pubblico e privato, volta a superare le difficoltà economiche nella gestione del patrimonio culturale".[371] The law institutionalized the mechanisms that allowed private sponsorships, such as those seen in the Colosseum's restoration, to provide vital funding while ensuring that public institutions retained control over decision-making processes.

369 Cecchi 2010, p.12.
370 Ibid, p. 14.
371 Ibid, p. 10.

These partnerships not only secured the resources necessary for critical restoration projects but also demonstrated the potential for collaborative governance in the cultural sector. Cecchi's analysis of this transformative period illustrates how economic pragmatism and cultural responsibility were carefully balanced, setting a precedent that would shape the management of Italy's archaeological and cultural heritage for the future.

Conclusion

The period from 1981 to 2000 marks a turning point in the history of MNR, not simply in terms of its physical restoration or institutional expansion, but in how it came to embody the broader transformations taking place in Italian cultural policy. Against a backdrop of political volatility, economic restructuring, and growing European integration, the museum's trajectory reveals the complex entanglement of preservation and governance, as well as the ideological tensions underlying museum reform in late 20th-century Italy.

What emerges most clearly from this period is the gradual shift from a system centered on tutela (a model rooted in protection and scientific stewardship) to one increasingly oriented toward valorizzazione: accessibility, public engagement, and economic viability. This transition was neither linear nor uncontested. On the contrary, it was shaped by competing visions of the museum's role: as a civic institution, a tourist attraction, a site of scholarly production, and a symbolic node in the construction of national identity. MNR, functioning throughout these years under the centralized control of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, found itself constrained by the very structures designed to safeguard heritage. And yet, it was within these constraints that the seeds of reform were sown.

The legislative innovations of the 1980s, particularly the Legge 92/81, offered a critical financial and administrative lifeline. The law's emphasis on planned, multi-phase interventions at the MNR signaled a shift toward integrated strategies in heritage management,

encompassing restoration, documentation, public education, and institutional reorganization. The subsequent decade, marked by the Legge Ronchey and the debates of the 1990 Commissione per la Riforma del Sistema Museale Nazionale (Commission for the Reform of the National Museum System), saw the emergence of new governance paradigms, including public-private partnerships and early proposals for museum autonomy. These developments, while framed as technocratic reforms, were deeply political, reflecting anxieties over state inefficiency, the rise of managerial rationality, and the perceived need to modernize Italy's cultural infrastructure in response to global pressures.

The creation of the *poli museali* framework, particularly in cities like Rome and Florence, further crystallized these trends. The museum was no longer conceived as an isolated repository of patrimony but as part of a networked system, subject to logics of branding, efficiency, and public accountability. Yet, as this chapter has shown, such reforms did not dismantle existing hierarchies so much as rearticulate them. The persistence of central ministerial oversight, the blurred boundaries between tutela and valorizzazione, and the structural inertia within the Soprintendenze all expose the contradictions embedded in Italy's museological modernization.

In this sense, the history of MNR during these two decades is not only a study in institutional development, it is a lens through which we can examine the broader dynamics of Italian statecraft, cultural policy, and the negotiation of modernity. The museum's transformation (from the neglected ruins of the Terme Diocleziano to a multi-site, internationally recognized institution) was achieved not through radical rupture but through a slow, contested, and uneven process of reform. This process reflected Italy's ambivalent position between tradition and innovation, centralization and decentralization, preservation and commodification. It is precisely in these tensions that the significance of the MNR's evolution must be understood.

CHAPTER III. The New Sites of Museo Nazionale Romano

3.1 The Museo Nazionale Romano as a Dispersed Urban Museum

The new organization of the Museo Nazionale Romano, after 1981 can be argued as creating a new *dispersed museum*[372] throughout the capital, as a museum that covers the history of Rome through various epochs.

The decision to divide the museum into several seats seems consistent with the characteristics of the city, whose archeological heritage is spread all over. In the course of centuries it became almost impossible to distinguish one Roman collection from another, because they were all the result of continual cross exchanges.[373]

While the new organization of the various seats was being established, the label *museo diffuso*[374] was not used in contemporary MNR documents; only in recent years has it circulated informally in institutional parlance.[375] By 2000, the term 'polo[376] archeologico romano' was used in the foreword of *Crypta Balbi - Fori Imperiali,* penned by then mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli[377] as well as in *Il nuovo museo archeologico di Roma*.[378] In practice the MNR operates as one museum with several addresses: each site holds its own coherent story, and together they can become an itinerary; Terme di Diocleziano

372 The term dispersed museum reflects contemporary museum theory that emphasizes networked or decentralized museological models, particularly suited to urban contexts with layered historical landscapes like Rome. As Smith Bautista and Balsamo argue, the "distributed museum" represents a spatially extended framework for engaging public memory across multiple sites. Garlandini similarly highlights how Italian museums are increasingly conceptualized as interconnected nodes of interpretation and conservation. See Bautista, Balsamo 2016; Garlandini 2015, pp. 54–65.

373 Scoppola 1997, p.6.

374 See e.g., Gravano 2014, p.114; Montella 2020,p. 299.
For the term being used with reference to digital languages and technologies in museums see: Taiuti 2011, pp. 39–47; and for innovative ways museums are engaging with the public, with reference to post-COVID19 strategies, see: Montanari 2022.

375 Author conversation with Stéphane Verger (Director, MNR), Rome, December 2024; conversations with MNR staff, 2024–25 (personal communications). No use of the label appears in MNR planning texts of the 1980s–1990s reviewed by the author.

376 polo can be translated to hub or centre.

377 Rutelli 2000. Foreword.

378 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma 1989, p.6.

(protohistory through late antiquity), Palazzo Massimo (the classical core), Palazzo Altemps (the history of collecting), and Crypta Balbi (Rome's medieval/post-classical city).

More than a decade earlier, however, the institutional framework for this reorganization had already been articulated. In 1989, the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma published *Il nuovo Museo archeologico di Roma*, which outlined the plan for the new MNR system. Interestingly, we can see from the list below, numbers 4,6,7,8 and 9 are not part of the MNR system, but were originally destined to join the 'poli':

The Locations of the Museo Nazionale Romano[379]:

1. The building that once served as the Collegio Massimo is set to be the central headquarters of the museum system. It will showcase artifacts pertinent to the artistic culture of the classical age, with a particular emphasis on the aesthetic preferences observed in imperial and aristocratic villas. The museum's layout will reflect the development and the underlying ideals and political narratives of the period. Additionally, the palace will host the museum's main administrative body and provide supplementary facilities such as study rooms, conservation and restoration workshops, a library, and refreshment areas.
2. The traditional container of the Baths of Diocletian, with the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli and its monastic appurtenances. Completely restored and converted into a museum, it will exhibit the artistic decoration of the imperial baths and the production of portraits, reliefs, urns, and funerary steles reflecting the taste of a broad social fabric from the late Republic to the early centuries. The museum's rich collection of sarcophagi will also be housed here, along with a

379 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma 1989, p.6.

substantial protohistoric sector and an epigraphic-antiquarian section.

3. Palazzo Altemps, already acquired and to be restored near Piazza Navona. The Renaissance origin of the building makes it suitable to document the great collecting that developed in Rome from the 15th century onwards, exemplified by the Ludovisi collection, and its influence on contemporary artistic production.

4. Crypta Balbi[380], with the adjacent complex of houses on Via delle Botteghe Oscure. This hub will bridge the exhibition activities of the museum system and those of excavation and research, serving as a place for sheltering, studying, processing, and restoring materials. These functions are also necessary to protect other locations from an uncontrollable and overwhelming influx of artifacts.

5. The former papal arsenal at Porta Portese. After restoration, the building overlooking the Tiber will be used to illustrate the commercial function of the river, also intended as a leading theme of the economic and private life of the city.

6. The Palatine Antiquarium. It will be reopened to testify to the artistic culture of the imperial palaces.

7. The Forum Antiquarium. Renewed, it will continue to exhibit the archaeological documentation of the Forum valley, constantly enriched from prehistory to the Middle Ages.

8. The former barracks of S. Croce in Gerusalemme. It will serve as an archive for archaeological materials available to scholars.

9. The Domus Aurea. It will exhibit evidence of Nero's residence, of which substantial sculptural and architectural materials

380 Based on this document, Crypta Balbi had been incorporated into the list of sites forming part of the new MNR network. However, earlier documentation, such as the 1982 Program for the Implementation of Law 92/1981, lists Crypta Balbi under the budget allocation for the centro storico, rather than under the designation Museo Nazionale, where, by contrast, the Palazzo ex Massimo is already included.
La Regina, Adriano. Provvedimenti urgenti per la protezione del patrimonio archeologico di Roma – Legge 23.3.1981, n. 92; e.p.c. programma 1982. 9 Dec. 1981. Busta 42, fasc. 1, Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

remain, as well as Republican-era findings discovered beneath the imperial settlement's subsoil.

While the initial vision for the MNR included the former papal arsenal at Porta Portese, the Forum Antiquarium, S. Croce in Gerusalemme, and the Domus Aurea,[381] these locations were ultimately not incorporated into the museum network.[382]

Despite the ambitious framework for the MNR as a multi-site museum, the 1990s were characterized by prolonged delays, funding gaps, and bureaucratic hurdles that hindered the completion of key sites. This gap between concept and reality is effectively captured in a 1992 article by Sergio Rinaldi Tufi in *Corriere della Sera*. Tufi's article conveys both the frustration and the enduring hope that the museum network might one day be fully realized. Tufi uses a powerful metaphor to illustrate the ongoing delays:

Si lavora da dieci anni, e si lavora sodo. Un'intera generazione di giovani funzionari della Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma sta spendendo gli anni più fervidi della propria carriera nella ristrutturazione del sistema museale romano... Ma il traguardo è lontano; o meglio: sembra sempre che siamo all'ultima curva, e che poi scorgeremo il rettilineo d'arrivo, ma sappiamo già che invece troveremo un'altra curva, forse un'altra ancora, e il traguardo si allontana in una specie di supplizio di Tantalo.[383]

The article shows the sense of repeated setbacks and deferred completion that characterized the MNR's development throughout the decade. Although the museum network was conceptually outlined in the 1980s, progress remained uneven, with major sites like Palazzo Massimo and Crypta Balbi still incomplete in 1992.

381 La Regina accounts in Roma: interventi recenti e prospettive future published in the year 2000, that there are major monumental complexes still awaiting adequate investments, both for conservation aspects and for enhancement, he lists the Domus Aurea as one of them, as well as listing other sites such as; Palazzo dei Cesari, Terme di Caracalla, Terme di Traiano, Circo Massimo, Aurelian Walls, via Appia, villa dei Sette Bassi, and the aqueducts.
La Regina 2000, pp. 11–12.

382 No official determination explaining the exclusion has surfaced in the documentary record. Author's interview with Adriano La Regina (former Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma), Rome, 26 May 2024: he attributed the outcome to ultimately political and financial decisions at the ministerial level.

383 Tufi 1992.

Funding shortfalls were a persistent problem. Tufi references the impact of insufficient financial resources, noting that despite significant investments, projects were left unfinished:

Sei miliardi stanziati, in teoria, dal 1986 non sono stati ancora effettivamente erogati: e così i lavori a Palazzo Massimo, ormai avanzatissimi, si sono bloccati al momento di passare all'allestimento definitivo. Occorrerebbero altri ventitré miliardi per adibire a servizi e laboratori un edificio adiacente, ma non si sa ancora da dove ricavarli.[384]

This reflects the discrepancy between allocated funds and actual disbursements, a recurring issue that hampered the museum's progress. The delays at Palazzo Massimo are emblematic of the broader financial instability that affected not just the MNR but many cultural projects in Rome during this period.

Staffing was another major issue. Despite the expansion of museum sites, the number of custodial and security staff remained inadequate. Tufi highlights this discrepancy, quoting La Regina's frustration: "Che ci possiamo fare, sembra chiedersi sconsolato La Regina, se Capua ha in servizio 200 custodi, e la Soprintendenza di Roma solo 180?"[385] This imbalance between expanding infrastructure and insufficient staffing created significant challenges for museum operations, a situation that persisted throughout the 1990s and directly affected the museum's ability to manage the new sites effectively.

Nevertheless, there were moments of cautious optimism. Silvio Panciera, then coordinator of the Epigraphic Department at Terme Diocleziano, expressed the hope that the section could open in time for the 1997 International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy.[386]

For Panciera, the proposed opening of the Epigraphic Department represented an opportunity to re-establish the MNR as a scholarly hub, aligning the museum's academic ambitions with international visibility. Tufi's article conveys a lingering sense of uncertainty about

384 Ibid.
385 Ibid.
386 Ibid.

whether these projects would indeed reach completion, a sentiment depict the precarious state of cultural heritage funding and project management in Rome at the time.

This source conveys the tension between aspiration and reality in the development of the museum network. It encapsulates both the public's anticipation for the completion of the museum system and the persistent challenges faced by the Soprintendenza in realizing these plans. The article closes with a poignant reminder of what the new MNR could become, if only the funds and institutional support materialized: "Ma invece vale la pena di pazientare ancora: il convegno del Palaexpo ci ha confermato che il sistema museale; se mai arriveremo a vederlo nel arco delle nostre vite, saprà ripagarci di questa lunga attesa."[387] This closing statement reflects both persistent hope and frustration, capturing the complicated reality of the MNR's transformation as it straddled the line between conceptual framework and incomplete execution.

Despite the setbacks outlined, the vision for the dispersed museum network remained central to its institutional strategy. The development of this new museum network coincided with the rise in mass tourism.[388] In the discourse of modern mass tourism, the often-invoked topos of the Eternal City marks Rome as a capital fixed in the present time, as well as a place of multiple pasts to be visited. [389] Read through cultural-geography, the exhibition's narration did not merely mirror a pre-given past; it actively helped construct and negotiate meanings, memories, and belongings around Rome-as-place, shaping how the city could be perceived and lived.[390] Creating the network of MNR seats, visitors were able to experience the varied histories of Rome, both in site specific contexts like Crypta Balbi and Terme Diocleziano, or in designed museum pathways in historic buildings (i.e. Palazzo Altemps and Palazzo Massimo). [391]

387 Ibid.
388 See e.g., Urry 2011, pp. 31-48.
389 Mazzoni 2010, p.14.
390 Miggiano 2025, pp.11-12.
391 See Falk, Dierking 2013.

If we consider the path through Rome via the new MNR experience, starting from Terme di Diocleziano, moving across the street to Palazzo Massimo, then to Palazzo Altemps and finishing at Crypta Balbi, the total journey is roughly 3.6 km, and less than an hour walking distance. As visitors move between sites, they experience changes in architectural styles, urban planning, and historical layers, which are curated not just by the museum's exhibits but also by the routes they traverse across the city.

The walkable distance between these venues integrates physical activity into the learning experience[392], promoting a more dynamic form of engagement that contrasts with the static nature of traditional museum visits.[393] This physicality adds an experiential layer to the learning that occurs, enhancing memory retention and making the historical exploration more vivid and personal, as stated by Dyson:

He and his staff [Adriano La Regina] decided to create a group of "theme museums" rather than a single mega-complex. That approach would better suit the increasingly diverse interests and tastes now operating under the aegis of archeology and museum studies. It would also create varied, manageable displays for a public which no longer had the grim durability of the Victorian tourist. The new museum would be located at different places around the city, providing diverse points of contact with the visitor. [394]

Reflecting on the rationale behind the multi-site structure of the MNR, Adriano La Regina offers his personal, nuanced perspective that ties museological practice to the urban and archaeological fabric of the city. In a 2005 interview[395], he explains:

(Interviewer) Q:*Parlando dei musei, come giudica adesso l'esperienza di dividere il Museo Nazionale Romano in più sezioni?*

(La Regina) Concretamente, al di là delle imposizioni teoriche, era l'unica soluzione praticabile perché, ovviamente, la quantità del patrimonio artistico e archeologico del

392 See e.g., Ingold, Tim, Vergunst 2008.
393 See Katerina 2016.
394 Dyson 2019, p.260.
395 La Regina 2009, pp. 51–52.

Museo Nazionale Romano avrebbe bisogno di una struttura immensa che non esiste al centro di Roma né è pensabile costruirla. Intanto il museo originale è rimasto lì, alle terme di Diocleziano, e non è stato sminuito, anzi c'è ancora tanta di quella roba... Io mi sono sempre meravigliato che dopo aver fatto Palazzo Massimo, Palazzo Altemps, la Crypta Balbi e il Museo del Palatino, dove abbiamo riportato le sculture che stavano alle terme, le terme siano comunque sempre piene come un uovo! Si potrebbero fare anche altri dieci musei. Quindi era un passaggio necessario... secondo me da preferire anche teoricamente per il carattere della città di Roma, dove le antichità romane non sono qualcosa che si può andare a vedere e studiare come a Berlino, come a Parigi, come in qualunque grande museo del mondo, dove è bene che i pezzi siano riuniti e, in qualche modo, messi in rapporto. Qui i documenti presenti nel museo sono una parte minoritaria rispetto alla documentazione diffusa nella città. L'archeologia di Roma è 90% la città, e poi neanche il 10% si trova nei musei. Allora il rapporto è con la città ed è bene che anche le sedi espositive siano integrate nel maggior modo possibile con la città stessa e che questa integrazione vi sia anche fra i materiali e le sedi, come nel caso di Palazzo Altemps: una collezione antica di scultura che trova sede in un palazzo antico, che aveva ospitato un'altra collezione di cui è rimasto solo qualche frammento, ma che era stato in qualche modo sistemato per ospitare una grande collezione di scultura antica oltre che una grande biblioteca, finita poi in Vaticano. Questo è un modo per metterli in risalto reciprocamente.Reciprocamente si mettono in risalto le antichità e i caratteri storici successivi dello studio delle antichità nel Seicento, nei secoli passati. Se si va a Palazzo Altemps si trova qualcosa di ben più ampio che l'esposizione di una collezione. Si va a vedere la collezione e si va a vedere anche il palazzo. Il rapporto che vi è stato fra la cultura moderna, rinascimentale, postrinascimentale, e lo studio del mondo antico: questo è un aspetto particolarissimo di Roma. Le altre città hanno le loro fisionomie e aspetti particolarissimi.[396]

396 (Interviewer) Q:Speaking of museums, how do you now evaluate the experience of dividing the Museo Nazionale Romano into multiple sections?
(La Regina) Practically speaking—beyond theoretical considerations—it was the only workable solution because, obviously, the amount of artistic and archaeological heritage held by the Museo Nazionale Romano would require an immense structure, which doesn't exist in central Rome, nor is it conceivable to build one. In the meantime, the original

The structure of this chapter follows the sequence in which the four main sites of the Museo Nazionale Romano are presented in the 2005 guidebook[397] edited by Adriano La Regina. The guide begins with Palazzo Massimo, followed by the Baths of Diocletian, then Palazzo Altemps,[398] and concludes with Crypta Balbi.

3.2 Palazzo Massimo

By 1885, the area around Termini railway station, like Rome as a whole, had changed significantly. Following its designation as the capital, the city expanded in all directions. The municipal urban regulatory plans (*Piani Regolatori*) of 1873 and 1882 aimed to manage the early stages of urban sprawl but led to the loss of the remaining parts of Villa Massimo[399]. The villa's old casino, or Palazzetto Felice, located at the

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museum remains at the Baths of Diocletian, and it hasn't been diminished—on the contrary, there's still an incredible amount of material there... I've always been amazed that even after establishing Palazzo Massimo, Palazzo Altemps, the Crypta Balbi, and the Palatine Museum, where we relocated many of the sculptures that used to be at the Baths, the Baths themselves are still packed to the brim! We could probably create another ten museums. So this was a necessary step... in my view, also preferable on a theoretical level, given the character of the city of Rome, where Roman antiquities aren't something you can just go and see and study as you would in Berlin, or Paris, or any major museum in the world, where it makes sense for the pieces to be gathered and displayed in relation to each other. Here in Rome, the objects in the museum represent only a small fraction compared to the wealth of materials scattered throughout the city. Roman archaeology is 90% the city itself, and less than 10% is found in museums. So the relationship is with the city—and it's a good thing that the exhibition sites are as integrated as possible into the fabric of the city. That integration should also apply to the relationship between the materials and the buildings that house them. Take Palazzo Altemps, for instance: it holds an ancient sculpture collection in an ancient palace, which had previously housed another collection (now mostly lost) though the building had already been arranged to host a large collection of classical sculpture and a major library, which eventually ended up in the Vatican.This reciprocal highlighting of both the ancient works and the historical character of antiquarian scholarship from the seventeenth century and beyond—that's the value. When you visit Palazzo Altemps, you find more than just an exhibition of a collection. You go to see the collection and the palace. The relationship between modern, Renaissance, and post-Renaissance culture and the study of the ancient world, this is something very particular to Rome. Other cities each have their own character and unique features, but Rome's is truly distinctive.

397 La Regina 2005.

398 Omitted from this research is the The Palatine Museum, which was included in La Regina's 2005 guidebook. Museo Palatino, inaugurated in 1997, was managed initially by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and, during this period, was briefly considered part of the Museo Nazionale Romano network due to its thematic and territorial connections. However, it remained institutionally distinct and was later brought under the jurisdiction of the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo e l'area archeologica centrale di Roma, established in 2009. In 2017, following the Ministerial Decree of 23 January 2016, the museum became part of the newly autonomous Parco archeologico del Colosseo, which also includes the Colosseum, Roman Forum, and Domus Aurea.

399 On Leonardo Bufalini's 1551 map of Rome, Monte della Giustizia near Termini is labeled Altissimus Romae Locus ("the highest point in Rome"). According to 16th-century legend, the site was part of Maecenas' ancient gardens, and a structure referred to by Bufalini as Turris Maecenatis was believed to be where Nero sang as Rome burned below. This symbolic significance likely influenced Cardinal Felice Peretti di Montalto's decision to construct his villa there in 1578,

corner of the newly laid-out Via Cavour near Santa Maria Maggiore, was demolished in 1886. In response, the Jesuit Massimiliano Massimo, son of the Prince of the Massimo family, constructed Palazzo Massimo alle Terme between 1883 and 1887. Over a century later, this building would be converted into a museum, becoming part of the Museo Nazionale Romano. This development in some ways mirrored the dispersal of the seventeenth-century *Wunderkammer* of the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, which had been removed from its original home at the Jesuit Collegio Romano and scattered after Italian unification. For the Massimo family, Palazzo Massimo became the sole remaining trace of their historic villa. [400]

The Palazzo Massimo, a quintessential 19th-century edifice situated in Piazza dei Cinquecento, underwent a comprehensive restoration process to serve as the new central premise of the Museo Nazionale Romano. Historically, this building housed the Massimiliano Massimo educational institution, which itself was a direct successor to the ecclesiastical school established in 1551 by Ignatius of Loyola. This school was originally administered by the Jesuits of the Roman College.[401]

The confiscation of ecclesiastical properties by the nascent Italian state in 1870 precipitated the loss of the school's original site. Subsequently, the institution sought refuge in the Villa Peretti, constructed under Pope Sixtus V and owned by the Massimo family adjacent to the Termini station. Following the destruction of the villa due to urban planning mandates of 1883, a new facility was constructed on the same site. This new structure was named in honor of its Jesuit benefactor.

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completed three years before he became Pope Sixtus V in 1585. After Sixtus's death in 1590, the villa passed to his heirs, with Cardinal Alessandro Montalto commissioning significant embellishments, including Bernini's Neptune and Triton (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum). Following the extinction of the Montalto line, the villa changed hands several times, becoming Villa Negroni in 1696 under Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Negroni. In 1781, damage to the Aqua Felice aqueduct, built by Sixtus V, led to the estate's sale. After brief ownership by Giuseppe Staderini, it was acquired by Marquis Camillo Francesco Massimo in 1789 and renamed Villa Massimo by the time the first train arrived at Termini station in 1862. See:
Weststeijn 2017, pp. 37-49; Culatti 2009, p.7; Massimo 1836.

400 Weststeijn 2017, p. 73.

401 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma 1983, p.8.

Architect Camillo Pistrucci, son of engineer Francesco Maria Pistrucci and previously employed by the Massimo family, was commissioned to design the building. His design exhibited a neo-Cinquecento style, distinguished by its restrained elegance and proportionate architectural composition, featuring a total of six floors, inclusive of a basement, two main floors, and two mezzanine levels.[402]

The Acquisition

Because of the urgent need for suitable spaces to house and display the vast collections of the MNR, which had been accumulating without adequate facilities. The intention of expansion was to create congruent containers for the museum's content, aligning with other archaeological areas within Rome's historic center, ensuring a comprehensive and integrated exhibition of archaeological materials. The goal was to ensure that the exhibition of materials, ordered by functional and chronological classes and excavation areas, was not isolated from the city's monumental archeological sites but rather "connessa tra loro dall'unita del fine, che è quello di construire un museo della testimonianza archeologica della storia dell'antica città di Roma e del suo immediato territorio."[403] This integration was seen as essential for maintaining the continuity between Rome's ancient history and its present-day cultural landscape.

In 1983 the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma published 'Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano - Studio di fattibilita per la ristrutturaione e l'allestimento dei palazzi Massimo e Altemps - the feasibility study for the renovation and furnishing of the Massimo and Altemps buildings that thoroughly documented the project to create the new seats of MNR. In the introduction, Adriano La Regina provides an in-depth overview of the foundational steps and strategic vision for the reorganization and enhancement of the museum. He emphasizes the importance of acquiring Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps as critical elements in

402 Cadario, Matteo, Giustozzi 2020, p.7.
403 Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano, p. 13.

the museum's expansion and its role in preserving and presenting Italy's archeological heritage[404]:

> *Con l'acquisizione del palazzo Massimo in Piazza dei Cinquecento e del palazzo Riario Altemps Gallese il Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali ha determinato le concrete premesse per il grande riordinamento del Museo Nazionale Romano, che viene cosi a disporre degli spazi da destinare al notevole incremento delle collezioni ed ai nuovi compiti che un moderno museo deve oggi espletare.*
>
> *L'istituzione del Museo Nazionale Romano rappresentò, un secolo fa, un momento significativo nel delineare la fisionomia delle funzioni culturali da attribuire alla capitale del nuovo Stato ed il ruolo che vi dovevano svolgere lo studio e la cura delle antichita. Erano quelli gli anni, del resto, in cui si attuava il lungimirante progetto di costituire nell'area centrale di Roma un comprensorio archeologico senza pari al mondo.*
>
> *Al programma di creare un museo capace di sostenere il confronto con l'immagine delle collezioni storiche vaticane e capitoline non corrispose in realtà la capacità di organizzare adeguatamente l'immensa mole di materiali che rapidamente vi confluirono per le scoperte dovute, soprattutto, alla trasformazione urbanistica di Roma. Con lo smantellamento delle collezioni e con il loro ricovero per la protezione bellica iniziò poi per il Museo un lungo periodo di decadimento, così grave da cancellare ogni sua significativa presenza nel campo degli studi e nell'attenzione del grande pubblico italiano e internazionale.*
>
> *Ora, al volgere di un secolo dalla sua istituzione, il Museo Nazionale Romano è oggetto di un programma di riordinamento, basato sulla rielaborazione critica dei suoi contenuti e delle sue funzioni, nel quadro dei provvedimenti urgenti per il patrimonio archeologico di Roma (legge 23 marzo 1981, n. 92). I finanziamenti attualmente disponibili consentiranno il ripristino, con totale destinazione a sede espositiva, del complesso monumentale delle Terme di Diocleziano, i*

404 Ibid, Introduction

cui lavorari sono già in corso, la migliore sistemazione delle collezioni esistenti negli antiquari del Foro e del Palatino, l'esposizione della collezione Ludovisi nel Palazzo del Quirinale, come hanno d'altra parte già consentito di acquistare i palazzi Massimo ed Altemps per l'ampliamento del Museo.

La definizione dell'intero programma presuppone ora il finanziamento dei lavori necessari per il restauro dei due edifici e per il loro allestimento museale. Il presente studio di fattibilità analizza costi e ricavi di tale operazione, e l'analisi dei dati computabili dimostra, una volta di più, che gli investimenti nel campo culturale possono essere buoni investimento se affidati ad un progetto realistico e coerente con le prospettive di una politica della cultura. Quel che non è determinabile è invece il valore di un patrimonio storico su cui è possibile fondare produzione e diffusione di conoscenza. Per questo aspetto il giudizio trascende, in ultima analisi, la sfera economica.

Adriano La Regina

Roma, settembre 1983

The decision to acquire these palaces was driven by several critical factors. Firstly, it aimed to restructure, in congruent containers. This move was essential to prevent the progressive degradation of archeological materials and to utilize the technical capacities of the Superintendency effectively, which had already initiated restoration and reconstruction efforts in anticipation of new exhibition spaces.[405] The project to renovate Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps, and to incorporate them into the Museo Nazionale Romano system, was approved by the Comitato di Settore per i Beni Archeologici del Consiglio Nazionale per i Beni Culturali ed Ambientali, as recorded in the minutes of 22 July 1982.[406]

The project was drawn up by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma in collaboration with experts from various Italian universities, in

405 Ibid, p.11.
406 Ibid, p. 19.

full agreement with the Comune di Roma[407], the Provincia di Roma, and the Regione Lazio, and with the technical contribution, regarding the Palazzo ex Massimo of Bonifica S.p.A. and ITALEDIL of the IRI–ITALSTAT group. The plan for the refurbishment of Palazzo Altemps was produced by the technical offices of the Soprintendenza on the basis of studies by the A.P.S.A. The project did not require any external authorization, since the Ministry the sole competent authority in the matter, as provided for by Legge n. 1089 del 1° giugno 1939; moreover, these palazzi occupy an entire city block and are therefore provided for in the variante di P.R.G. (Piano Regolatore Generale) for changes of use.[408]

In an official letter marked "Urgentissimo"[409] and dated 29 December 1981, addressed to the Minister of Cultural and Environmental Heritage, Vincenzo Scotti, Adriano La Regina, then Soprintendente alle Antichità di Roma, outlines a critical proposal for the development and expansion of Museo Nazionale Romano. His emphasis on urgency reflects both the time-sensitive nature of the opportunity and the importance of the project in safeguarding Rome's archaeological heritage. This document offers significant insight into the administrative and cultural efforts underway during the early 1980s to elevate the museum's status as the preeminent repository of ancient Roman history, emphasizing its global cultural significance.

The letter references Legge n. 92 del 23 marzo 1981, which focused on the protection of Rome's archaeological patrimony. La Regina identifies the implementation of this law as key to revitalizing the museum's collections and enhancing its cultural vitality. He argues that, given the richness of its collections, the Museo Nazionale Romano holds the potential to be recognized as the most important archaeological museum in the world, representing the history of ancient Rome from its inception to its prominence as the capital of a global empire. In his

407 The collaboration between the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma (a State body) and the Comune di Roma (which operated its own heritage authority, the Sovrintendenza Capitolina) illustrates the interinstitutional coordination that major heritage projects in Rome routinely required.

408 Ibid.

409 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera all'On. Vincenzo Scotti, Ministro per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. 29 dic. 1981. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Prot. n. 9922. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 42, fasc. 1. See Appendix 11.

words, the museum could become *"il più importante museo archeologico del mondo,"* due to its ability to showcase *"la nostra conoscenza di Roma antica dal momento della sua formazione fino a quando essa ha svolto il ruolo di capitale universale."*

The "urgentissimo" speaks to the time-sensitive nature of the proposal, particularly regarding the acquisition of the ex Collegio Massimo, a historic building adjacent to the Terme di Diocleziano, as a solution to the museum's growing spatial constraints. The rapid expansion of the museum's collections over the preceding decades had created a pressing need for additional space, and the opportunity to purchase the ex Collegio Massimo was seen as a rare and crucial chance to significantly expand the museum's capacity. This acquisition would enable a large portion of the museum's collections to be housed and displayed in a coherent and enhanced setting. As La Regina explains, acquiring this building would allow *"una cospicua parte delle collezioni del Museo Nazionale Romano"* to be restructured and displayed in accordance with a plan aimed at *"la massima riqualificazione dell'ambiente urbano."*

The letter reveals that this proposal had been examined by *i Comitati di settore del Consiglio Nazionale per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali,* which unanimously supported it during a meeting on 10 July 1981. The committees expressed a favorable opinion on the acquisition, as noted in their report: "non sono emerse valide alternative, invitano l'Amministrazione ad aprire le trattative per l'acquisto dell'ex Collegio Massimo." The endorsement from the committees expresses the cultural and urban significance of the expansion, aimed not only at enriching the museum but also at enhancing the surrounding urban environment, particularly the complex of the Terme di Diocleziano and the ex Collegio Massimo.

La Regina also emphasized the strong public and scholarly support for the project, referring to the "notevole interesse e l'approvazione riscontrata" from both the public and international cultural communities. He emphasizes that the acquisition was both urgent and opportune, given the owners' willingness to sell the building, a circumstance he describes as "fortunata e irripetibile" for exercising the

state's diritto di prelazione as outlined in Legge n. 1089 del 1 giugno 1939. This legal framework allowed the state to expedite the acquisition process, which La Regina viewed as essential to advancing the museum's development and reducing delays.

Finally, La Regina requests that Capitolo 8012 of the 1982 budget be increased by 30 miliardi di lire to finance the acquisition, showing the significant financial commitment required to secure the building. He appeals to the Minister to understand "l'importanza dell'obiettivo," suggesting that the Minister should liaise directly with the Ministero del Tesoro to secure the necessary funding.

The acquisition of the ex Collegio Massimo was not only crucial for the museum's future development but also represented a rare alignment of opportunities that had to be seized swiftly. As such, La Regina's insistence reflected both the administrative and cultural stakes of the situation. The proposal, if realized, would enable the museum to better manage and display its vast archaeological wealth and further enhance its standing on the global stage.

This gives a glimpse into a key moment in the history of the museum, revealing the strategic efforts to expand the museum and enhance its global standing and its role in Rome's cultural and urban revitalization. As such, this document not only addresses internal challenges but also reflects the larger ambitions of the Italian state to preserve and promote its archaeological heritage on an international scale.

Financial Considerations and Cultural Investment in the Restructuring of the Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Massimo and Altemps)

Palazzo Massimo, constructed in the 19th century, was chosen for its monumental character and cultural potential (Palazzo Altemps was also chosen for the same reason). The plan entailed a complete restoration of these structures to adapt them for museum use, ensuring that their architectural characteristics were preserved. The acquisition and subsequent restoration were seen as vital steps in transforming these historical buildings into functional museum spaces that could meet modern exhibition standards while preserving the historical

integrity. The project to get the palazzo in adequate shape to function as a museum included the installation of modern technological systems such as electrical, air conditioning, heating and water distribution, and the installation of all necessary equipment for technological services and elevators.

The executive project for the consolidation, restoration, and restructuring of Palazzo ex Massimo contains several key interventions. These included:

- Consolidation works, the creation of internal structures, and roof refurbishment.
- Installation of comprehensive technological systems, including primary and secondary electrical connections, air conditioning, heating, and water distribution.
- Completion of all internal finishing works and the installation of necessary equipment for technical services and elevators.

The estimated total cost of the planned works in 1983 was 30,800 million lire. This figure includes unforeseen expenses, which were evaluated at 627.65 million lire. Additionally, excluding the VAT at 2% (based on Legge n.457 del 5.8.1978), the VAT amounted to 616 million lire. Upon completion, the project would provide a net usable area of 14,456 square meters, allocated as follows:

- Exhibition space: 3,761 sqm
- Auditorium, meeting rooms, libraries: 1,223 sqm
- Office space: 1,590 sqm
- Laboratories: 1,164 sqm
- Hallways (including ticket offices): 3,670 sqm

- Services and technological centers: 2,505 sqm
- Garage and access ramps: 543 sqm

The expected execution time for the realization of the complex of the above-mentioned works was 36 months, starting from April 1984 and therefore until April 1987.[410]

A radical renovation of the building was entrusted to Costantino Dardi the Palazzo opened to the public in 1998.

The *Piano Finanziario* within published within the Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazional Romano - Studio di fattibilità per la ristrutturazione e l'allestimento dei palazzi Massimo e Altemps (1989), includes various charts specifically concerning the new installations at Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps, provides a revealing insight into the financial and cultural stakes involved in such an ambitious project.[411] While the analysis centers around financial sustainability, it also implicitly speaks to the broader socio-cultural objectives embedded in the preservation and promotion of national heritage.

One of the more striking figures in the report is the internal rate of return (IRR) of 2.7%, a figure that falls significantly short of the 12% discount rate deemed necessary for the project's financial viability. This lower return, however, is not merely an economic shortcoming but reflects the distinctive nature of investments in cultural heritage. The study identifies four primary factors justifying this low return:

1. The restoration and conservation of two buildings under the oversight of the *Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma* within Rome's historic center,
2. The preservation of artistic and archaeological materials that testify to the city's long and complex history,

410 Ibid pp.13-16.
411 See Appendix 14.

3. A contribution to the cultural enrichment of the public, and
4. The stimulation of tourism, an industry that remains vital for Rome's economy[412]

These factors demonstrate how that the worth of the project cannot be fully captured through financial metrics alone. The relatively low IRR reflects the project's commitment to the public good and its emphasis on accessibility to cultural heritage. The projected admission fee of 4,000 lire, although considered high in relative terms, is insufficient to offset the costs of the project entirely, yet it serves the larger goal of maintaining access to one of Rome's most significant cultural institutions. [413]

Further financial projections explore the potential for increased revenues through higher tariffs. A scenario involving a 50% increase in entry fees could raise the IRR to 12.4%, bringing the project closer to the desired financial equilibrium. However, such measures introduce complex ethical considerations surrounding access to cultural heritage. How far can one raise the cost of admission before the museum's role as a public cultural institution is compromised? This balancing act between financial sustainability and public accessibility remains a central theme of the project's planning. [414]

The feasibility study ultimately argues that despite the financial challenges, the cultural and social value of the project justifies its continuation. The anticipated shortfall in revenues is expected to be mitigated through state subsidies, reflecting Italy's long-standing tradition of viewing cultural heritage as a public responsibility.[415] This approach aligns with broader European trends in heritage management, where economic viability is often secondary to the preservation of cultural memory and identity.[416] In this sense, MNR is not just a financial investment but a critical act of cultural stewardship.

412 Nuove sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano, Piano Finanziario, p. 42.
413 Ibid.p. 42
414 Ibid. p.45
415 Settis 2010 for canonical argument that Art. 9 of the Italian Constitution makes protection of landscape and cultural heritage a public duty.
416 See e.g., Zagato 2015.

Palazzo Massimo Restructuring

The restoration work on Palazzo Massimo was carried out, under concession, by Bonifica S.p.A.[417] and Imco, both companies within the IRI-ITALSTAT group and to a design by the architect Constantine Dardi. [418] Bonifica S.p.A., emerging as a significant force in Italy's post-World War II reconstruction, played a crucial role in revitalizing the nation's infrastructure and promoting sustainable development. As a subsidiary of the state-owned conglomerate Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale (IRI), specifically under the ITALSTAT holding, the company became instrumental in executing large-scale projects that fostered economic growth and modernization.[419] In the case of the Palazzo ex Massimo, Bonifica S.p.A. drafted the restoration project with consultancy from Architect Paolo Cercato. [420]

The study and inventory of the archaeological materials were conducted by a team of experts, including Dr. Silvana Balbi De Caro, Dr. Maria Rita Di Mino, Dr. Rosanna Friggeri, Dr. Leila Nista, Dr. Rita Paris, and Dr. Maria Sapelli. The coordination of the project was managed by Architect Giovanni Bulian and Dr. Pier Giovanni Guzzo. This collaborative effort not only restored a significant historical building but also showcased the expertise and resources of Bonifica S.p.A. within the larger context of Italy's cultural and infrastructural development.

The restructuring of the Palazzo Massimo is detailed in the architectural plans and maps presented in the document *Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano - Studio di Fattibilità per la Ristrutturazione e Allestimento dei Palazzi Massimo e Altemps*.[421] This document outlines key architectural and logistical modifications to the museum, with a focus

417 Founded in the mid-20th century, Bonifica S.p.A. was established during a period when Italy was grappling with the immense task of rebuilding its economy and infrastructure after the devastation of World War II. The IRI, founded in 1933, was a government initiative aimed at rescuing and restructuring failing banks and industrial companies. Within this framework, ITALSTAT functioned as the holding company responsible for managing enterprises in the engineering and construction sectors, providing strategic oversight and resources to its subsidiaries, including Bonifica S.p.A, see: Castronovo 2012.

418 La Regina 2011, p. 11.

419 Ibid.

420 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma 1983.

421 Ibid. pp. 157-169.

on balancing the preservation of the building's historical integrity with the need for modernization.

One of the most significant changes in these plans is the creation of two underground levels, designed primarily for technical operations such as storage and conservation laboratories. These lower levels allow the upper floors to be reserved for public exhibits, ensuring that the museum can display its collections while maintaining the necessary infrastructure for preservation and research. The careful placement of conservation facilities underground demonstrates the project's commitment to preserving the museum's historical architecture while accommodating the needs of a modern institution.

The ground and mezzanine floors are designed to optimize visitor flow through the exhibition spaces. The plans show a central courtyard surrounded by galleries, allowing for a logical progression from one exhibit to the next. Vertical circulation is a prominent feature of the design, with staircases and elevators providing easy access between floors.

Another crucial element of the restructuring is the integration of modern technical systems, particularly on the roof level, where air conditioning and ventilation units are placed. These technical upgrades ensure that the museum can meet contemporary standards for artifact conservation without compromising its historical character. This approach allows the museum to maintain the environmental conditions necessary for preserving sensitive artifacts while preserving the building's architectural integrity.

The restructuring of Palazzo Massimo also reflects broader cultural policy trends of the late 20th century, particularly the influence of Italy's Legge Ronchey, which promoted public-private partnerships in the management of cultural heritage sites (see previous chapter). Although the architectural plans do not directly mention these partnerships, the scale and scope of the project suggest that such collaborations were likely involved. The emphasis on visitor-friendly features and the economic sustainability of the museum aligns with the

goals of cultural heritage management during this period.[422] As noted by Pencarelli, Cerquetti, and Splendiani, "the mission of museums has progressively evolved, shifting from the conservation of cultural assets as the main objective, to a growing attention to economic sustainability, audience development and the improvement of visitors' experience."[423]

The restructuring not only expanded the museum's capacity but also ensured that it could continue to function as both a public exhibition space and a research and preservation center. This analysis is based on the detailed plans and maps provided in the *Studio di Fattibilità* document, which serve as a key source for understanding the architectural and logistical considerations of this important cultural project.

Administrative Conflict and Delays in the Final Expropriation of the Palazzo Massimo Complex (1996)

By the mid-1990s, despite substantial investment and progress, part of the Palazzo Massimo complex remained entangled in a protracted dispute over the forced expropriation of properties on Via Amendola and Via Massimo D'Azeglio. These properties, already decreed for expropriation by the Prefect of Rome in 1991, had not yet been vacated, leading to escalating tensions between state authorities and private occupants.

In October 1996, the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma sought to enforce the expropriation order in order to complete safety-related maintenance and consolidation works mandated by the Vigili del Fuoco. As noted in the correspondence from the Questura di Roma, the Soprintendenza, represented by Adriano La Regina, requested "assistenza F.P. per transennare fronte edificio prospiciente via Amendola ed per rientrare, contestualmente, in possesso locali occupati da taluni esercenti commerciali."[424] Despite the urgency, the Questura denied the request for public force, citing the unresolved legal status of the occupants who had been acknowledged as having full property

422 See e.g., Belfiore 2006.

423 Pencarelli, Cerquetti, Splendiani 2016,p. 35.

424 Questura di Roma. Fax to Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. 5 Oct. 1996. Prot. n. 006410. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1.

rights by the Tribunale Civile di Roma (sentenza 10 ottobre 1995), as well as the absence of prior consultation with merchants and local authorities as stipulated in a 1996 meeting of the Comitato Provinciale di Sicurezza Pubblica.[425]

The refusal of public security support created a bureaucratic impasse. A fax sent from the Soprintendenza Archeologica to the Nucleo Tutela Carabinieri outlined the situation bluntly: "l'Ufficio scrivente è stato impedito di procedere alle operazioni di transennamento necessarie per procedere agli interventi di manutenzione e consolidamento."[426] The Soprintendenza maintained that their inability to act endangered public safety and hindered essential conservation works, especially given that they had secured municipal authorization to occupy the public land for ninety days. Nonetheless, protests from local merchants (who claimed ownership over the commercial spaces and resisted the erection of barriers) effectively blocked the implementation of these safety measures.[427]

Further internal memos emphasized the precarious position of the Soprintendenza. In one letter, the office "declina ogni responsabilità in ordine a danni derivanti a cose e/o persone" as a result of the deteriorating condition of the building and the state's inability to act.[428] Despite the allocation of 4.5 billion lire from the Ministry's 1994–1992 residual funds (Cap. 8030 A.F. 94, residui '92), the Soprintendenza reported being "attualmente impossibilitato ad utilizzare [i fondi] per le ragioni su esposte."[429]

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425 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Esercizio Commerciale Bar on Via Amendola. 5 Oct. 1996. Prot. n. 23714. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1.
Prefettura di Roma. Letter in response to request for intervention, 9 October 1996. Prot. n. 11179/1913/93. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1.

426 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Internal communication regarding inability to carry out transennamento works, 8 October 1996. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1.

427 Di Bene, Anna. Report on Transennamento Attempt. 7 Oct. 1996. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1.

428 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Letter from Prof. Adriano La Regina to Avvocatura Generale dello Stato and Ministero delle Finanze, 8 October 1996. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1.

429 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Communication to the Prefettura di Roma regarding assistance from Forza Pubblica, 7 October 1996. Prot. n. 23683. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1; La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al Nucleo Tutela Carabinieri e al Comune di Roma riguardante impedimenti alle operazioni di transennamento e alla procedura di esproprio.
7–9 Oct. 1996. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Busta 87, Fasc. 1, Rome. See Appendix 12.

A detailed handwritten report by *Arch. Di Bene* on 7 October 1996 captures the situation at street level.[430] On that morning, the Soprintendenza's technical staff, accompanied by the contractor Tonelli, arrived on Via Amendola to begin the planned installation of scaffolding and safety barriers along the façades designated for consolidation. The operation, authorized by the municipality, was to mark the formal repossession of the expropriated properties. However, the activity was immediately met with opposition from several shopkeepers, who contested the works and physically obstructed access to their storefronts.

He accounts that the absence of public security forces (whose assistance had been formally requested but not granted) made it impossible to proceed. In an attempt to mediate, Di Bene contacted the relevant offices of the Questura and the Prefettura, but, in the absence of official authorization to intervene, the Soprintendenza had to suspend all work on-site. The note concludes with a recommendation to convene an inter-office meeting between the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, the Questura, the Prefettura, and the Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Culturale of the Carabinieri, in order to coordinate future action and prevent further confrontation with the commercial tenants.

The report conveys the degree to which even routine preparatory tasks, such as erecting safety barriers, had become dependent on inter-institutional negotiation. What should have been a straightforward technical operation was transformed into a procedural standoff, emblematic of the administrative fragmentation that accompanied many heritage interventions in Rome during the 1990s.

These documents demonstrate the extent to which the museum's development was embedded within a wider matrix of urban policy, civil litigation, and institutional authority. They reveal a situation in which even a flagship cultural project backed by national funding could be stalled by local resistance and administrative complexity. The challenge lay not only in restoring an historic building but in

430 See Appendix 13.

navigating the tensions between different levels of government, legal jurisdictions, and private stakeholders.

This is an example of how heritage-making is never just a technical or aesthetic process; it is also political, shaped by negotiations of power, legality, and space.[431] The 1996 standoff at Palazzo Massimo is an example of how heritage-making is never just a technical or aesthetic process; it is also political, shaped by negotiations of power, legality, and space. Even in moments of institutional transformation and cultural investment, unresolved questions of ownership and occupation could derail progress, reminding us that the museum, as an institution, is also a contested site of urban governance. As Kylie Message observes, "the museum has become a political arena for negotiating competing claims to cultural representation, space, and legitimacy, especially in contexts of urban redevelopment and institutional restructuring."[432]

Managing Commercial Operations within Cultural Heritage Sites: The Case of the Bar at Palazzo Massimo

The following event concerning the bar within MNR at Palazzo Massimo alle Terme demonstrates the challenges of managing cultural heritage sites that include commercial operations. Managed by Fabi Palmerino for 28 years, the bar was closed on February 21, 1991, following a decision by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. This closure, executed through the sealing of the premises, marked the beginning of a protracted dispute involving unresolved utility charges and contractual ambiguities.

The primary issue centered on significant debts related to electricity bills issued by ENEL, Italy's national electricity provider. According to ENEL's communication dated September 21, 1993, unpaid invoices totaled 742,992 lire, with an additional 315,324 lire in accrued interest. These charges stemmed from periods both before and after the closure of the bar. Despite ENEL's repeated attempts to recover the debt,

431 See e.g., Smith 2006; Harrison 2013.
432 Message 2006, p. 116.

Palmerino denied responsibility, asserting that no electricity had been consumed since the bar's closure. In a letter dated March 30, 1993, Palmerino stated: *"Non avendo più consumato luce, prego codesta di esaminare benevolmente ed assolvermi di questo debito che non mi appartiene."*[433] He further emphasized that the sealing of the premises by the authorities in 1991 rendered him unable to access or operate the bar.

The Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, as evidenced by multiple correspondences, was actively involved in mediating the dispute. In a letter dated October 23, 1993, addressed to ENEL and Palmerino, the Director of Division VI confirmed the timeline of events, noting that the bar had been sealed in February 1991. The letter requested detailed updates and clarification to resolve the matter, highlighting the administrative complexity of the situation.[434] This document involves the Soprintendenza's role in navigating the dispute while addressing the financial and operational implications for the museum.

Located within Palazzo Massimo, the bar operated in a space central to one of Rome's most significant cultural institutions. The museum presented a unique context for commercial activities. The integration of a commercial bar within a museum setting served to enhance visitor services but also necessitated careful oversight. The sealing of the bar in 1991, coupled with the subsequent dispute over utility bills, is an example of the administrative challenges of managing supporting services within a heritage context.

The correspondence between ENEL, Palmerino, and the Soprintendenza reveals divergent perspectives on liability. While ENEL pursued legal avenues to recover the outstanding debt[435], Palmerino consistently argued that his responsibility ended with the closure of the

433 Fabi Palmerino. Letter to ENEL - Zona di Roma. 30 Mar. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.
434 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. "Roma - Museo Nazionale Romano - Ex bar-posto di ristoro gestito dal Sig. Fabi Palmerino." Addressed to the Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma. 23 Oct. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.
435 ENEL - Zona di Roma. Letter to Fabi Palmerino. 1 Sept. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

bar.[436] The Soprintendenza's position, reflected in its communications, was primarily one of facilitation, as it sought to clarify the circumstances surrounding the bar's closure and the subsequent utility charges.[437]

This episode brings into focus the frictions that arise in the management of cultural heritage institutions, particularly when commercial operations intersect with the museum's public mandate. What surfaces is not a matter of simple administrative oversight but a deeper structural tension between institutional ideals and market exigencies. As Luca Zan observes in his analysis of cultural governance in Italy, "Italian cultural institutions are increasingly forced to navigate conflicting pressures: the need to preserve public service mandates while securing alternative funding through private partnerships."[438] The financial dispute at hand must therefore be situated within this broader field of negotiation, where economic imperatives increasingly contend with cultural stewardship. In this dynamic landscape, the role of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma emerges not as a passive administrator but as a strategic mediator tasked with managing operational continuity while arbitrating among diverging institutional and external interests.

Personele

In preparation for the opening of Palazzo Massimo as a new headquarters for MNR, the logistical challenges of staffing were a primary concern. In a letter dated April 18, 1990, Soprintendente Adriano La Regina, addressed the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali to request the allocation of custodial staff. Highlighting the significance of the new museum space, La Regina emphasized its potential to complement and compete with other prominent Roman institutions, such as the Vatican Museums and the Capitoline

436 Fabi Palmerino. Letter to ENEL - Zona di Roma. 30 Mar. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

437 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. "Roma - Museo Nazionale Romano - Ex bar-posto di ristoro gestito dal Sig. Fabi Palmerino." Addressed to the Ministero dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali. 2 Oct. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

438 Zan 2006, pp. 27–45, p. 30.

Museums, and outlined the specific staffing needs for the planned four exhibition floors and potential evening operations.

It stated that 90 custodians were required, split between day and night shifts. For daytime operations, 35 units were necessary per shift, and for nighttime security, 20 units were allocated. Additionally, the document noted that if evening opening hours were to be implemented, the number of custodians required would increase by 20 units. [439]

The response letter from Maria Rita Di Mino[440], dated shortly after the initial correspondence, provided further clarity on the staffing needs. Di Mino's letter broke down the requirements more comprehensively, specifying that each shift (daytime and evening) would require around 40 custodians per shift to adequately manage the museum's four exhibition floors, including the Medagliere. She proposed that if two shifts were implemented (daytime and afternoon), a total of 80 units would be necessary. Should the museum extend its operations into the evening, the total requirement would rise to 120 custodians. In addition, for night-time security, 20 rotating units would be needed, and 15 clerks were outlined for administrative functions, bringing the total personnel requirement to 140 units.[441] This response emphasizes the operational complexity and the significant staffing considerations that accompanied the expansion of the museum, reflecting the complicated personele planning that went into accommodating the new headquarters at Palazzo Massimo.

These correspondences point to the kind of behind-the-scenes planning that rarely appears in public-facing narratives but is essential to the

439 La Regina, Adriano,Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Roma: Palazzo Massimo, Nuova Sede Museale – Servizi di Custodia. 18 Apr. 1990, Prot. 5239. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 138, Fasc. 39.

440 Maria Rita Di Mino has made significant contributions to the Museo Nazionale Romano, particularly during the late 20th century and early 2000s. She was actively involved in curating and researching the museum's collection, focusing on Roman antiquities. Her notable work includes the documentation and exhibition of Roman terracottas and decorative sculptures from the Terme di Diocleziano. Di Mino also played a central role in curating the collection from the Villa della Farnesina, housed in Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, with major publications on this work appearing in 1998. Her efforts from the 1980s through the early 2000s have had a lasting impact on the preservation and understanding of Roman artifacts. See: Sanzi Di Mino 1998.

441 Di Mino, Maria Rita. Risposta ai requisiti per il personale di custodia per Palazzo Massimo. 1990, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 138, Fasc. 39.

functioning of a new institutional site. What emerges is a picture of a museum still in the process of becoming, where custodial and clerical demands are not simply technical concerns but central to sustaining daily operations and making possible an expanded public programme, including evening openings. The repeated emphasis on staffing, on who would be present, when, and in what capacity, speaks to a broader institutional priority: to make the museum more accessible, more efficient, and ultimately more capable of handling the pressures of growth during a period of major structural transformation.

The Reorganization of Collections and the Role of Palazzo Massimo

The initiative to create a cohesive and accessible narrative of Roman history and material culture within a modern museological framework. Archival *verbali di consegna* (delivery records) from 1991 to 1994 document the transfer of artifacts from various storage and display sites, including the Chiostro Ludovisi, the Antiquarium del Palatino, and excavation areas such as the Domus Tiberiana, to Palazzo Massimo and other institutional spaces. These records show the logistical and curatorial processes behind this transformation.

Many of the objects transferred to Palazzo Massimo and the Antiquarium del Palatino were originally housed in the Chiostro Ludovisi (a small cloister located in the *certosa,* or charterhouse in Museo Nazionale Romano's original site, the Terme di Diocleziano complex). For example, marble sculptures and busts such as the *Apollo tipo Anzio* (inv. 124721), *Igea tipo Hope* (inv. 1085), and *Testa di Massimino il Trace* (inv. 52681) were stored in crates (*casse*) at the Chiostro Ludovisi before their relocation. Terracotta fragments and smaller objects, particularly those from the Domus Tiberiana, were stored closer to their excavation site until they were moved to Palazzo Massimo. The Antiquarium del Palatino also served as an interim storage and exhibition location for imperial-era artifacts before their eventual transfer.

The delivery records, dated between May 6, 1991, and November 4, 1993, provide a detailed list of the objects transferred, their inventory

numbers, and their original storage locations.[442] Significant transfers included:

To the Antiquarium del Palatino:

- *Apollo tipo Anzio* (inv. 124721 and 553) – May 6, 1991, from Chiostro Ludovisi[443]
- *Canefora in basalto* (inv. 1048-1053-1056) – May 6, 1991, from Chiostro Ludovisi
- *Igea tipo Hope* (inv. 1085) – May 6, 1991, from Chiostro Ludovisi
- *Statua di Afrodite Landolina* (inv. 138) – October 25, 1994, from Chiostro Ludovisi[444]
- *Testa di Massimino il Trace* (inv. 52681), *Testa femminile traianea* (inv. 52634), and *Testa di donna tiberiana* (inv. 623) – March 1, 1993, from Chiostro Ludovisi[445]

To Palazzo Massimo alle Terme:

- *Testa di Efebo* (inv. 56316), *Testa di greco morente* (inv. 4283), and *Testa di persiano morente* (inv. 603) – May 27, 1991, from Chiostro Ludovisi[446]
- Terracotta fragments from the Domus Tiberiana, including:
    - *Testa maschile con pettinatura 'a rollo'* (inv. 375847) and *Testa femminile frammentaria con sakkos* (inv. 379561) – November 4, 1993[447]

442 See Appendix 21 and 22.

443 Di Mino, Maria Rita. Verbale di consegna, 6 maggio 1991. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 136, fascicolo 22. Indirizzato a Maria Antonietta Tomei.

444 Di Mino, Maria Rita. Verbale di consegna, 25 ottobre 1994. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 136, fascicolo 22. Indirizzato a Maria Antonietta Tomei.

445 Di Mino, Maria Rita. Verbale di consegna, 1 marzo 1993. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 136, fascicolo 22. Indirizzato a Maria Antonietta Tomei.

446 Di Mino, Maria Rita. Verbale di consegna, 27 maggio 1991. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 136, fascicolo 22. Indirizzato a Marina Sapelli Ragni.

- *Frammenti panneggio tipo Artemide Colonna* (inv. 381422, 381423, 381417) – November 4, 1993. [448]

The movement of these objects exhibits the curatorial strategies employed to define the roles of Palazzo Massimo and the Antiquarium del Palatino. The Antiquarium del Palatino became a space dedicated to artifacts associated with the Palatine Hill and imperial Rome, emphasizing monumental sculptures and architectural elements. In contrast, Palazzo Massimo was envisioned as a broader space where artifacts from various contexts (imperial, domestic, and religious) could be presented together to offer a more comprehensive view of Roman life.

The documentation of these transfers reflects the importance of cataloging and preservation in the reorganization process. Each object was recorded with precise inventory numbers and detailed descriptions to ensure its proper handling and placement. Key individuals, such as Maria Rita Di Mino, Maria Antonietta Tomei, and Marina Sapelli Ragni, oversaw these movements, highlighting the collaborative efforts required for such an undertaking.

The creation of Palazzo Massimo as a modern exhibition space addressed the need to centralize and reinterpret Rome's material heritage. By integrating large-scale sculptures, such as the *Testa di greco morente* (inv. 4283), with smaller terracotta fragments and domestic objects, the museum provided a platform for both scholarly research and public education.

Palazzo Massimo's establishment not only addressed the practical imperatives of storage and display, but also made visible a broader commitment to reframing ancient heritage for contemporary publics. The archival materials show an institution attempting to balance its scholarly obligations with its responsibility to a wider audience, a negotiation that aligns with what Eilean Hooper-Greenhill describes as the museum's shift from exclusive custodianship to a model in which

447 Di Mino, Maria Rita. Verbale di consegna, 4 novembre 1993. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 136, fascicolo 22. Indirizzato a Marina Sapelli Ragni.
448 Ibid.

academic authority is reshaped to resonate publicly.[449] This dual role was further expressed in the museum's collaboration with other institutions across Rome, working to diffuse its holdings into sites deemed historically and thematically appropriate.

In the conclusion of *Termini. Cornerstone of Modern Rome*, part of the Collection of The Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome, the author poses a thought-provoking question regarding the future of the ancient ruins surrounding Termini Station and their connection to Palazzo Massimo and the MNR. The question challenges the extent to which these ruins, as integral parts of Rome's urban and historical fabric, align with or potentially disrupt the museological integrity of the MNR. This inquiry invites reflection on the complex interplay between the preservation of archaeological sites in situ and their integration (or lack thereof) into the curated narratives of institutionalized museums:

The Sevian wall is an open-air unique but at the same time generic reference to premodern 'universal' Roman antiquity and to the ancient defense of the city's, and its perceived historical value as the extended arm of Italy's central station has varied considerably. The cornered stones of the wall - increasingly decontextualized and marginalized within the actual station complex indirectly formed a larger museal context (Terme Diocleziano and Palazzo Massimo) without being directly musealised or even actively acknowledged. This larger context is itself in flux: it remains to been seen whether or not the Palazzo Massimo, the Massimo family's main marker at Termini, will remain part of the present nucleus of Roman national museums, or if this organization will again focus on the ruined remains of what has given the site its name: the *Terme* of Diocletian. [450]

Looking at Palazzo Massimo from the vantage point of its inauguration in the late 1990s, its role within Rome's urban and cultural fabric invites reflection. Established as a central node in the MNR, Palazzo Massimo was envisioned as a modern space to showcase some of the most significant pieces of ancient Rome. However, as the decades have passed, the museum's position within a rapidly evolving urban and

449 Hooper-Greenhill 2000.
450 Weststeijn, Whitling 2017, pp. 152-153.

cultural context raises questions (like in the quote mentioned above) about how it can remain relevant and accessible to both its local and global audiences.

Situated near Termini Station, Palazzo Massimo occupies a transitional space between the ancient and modern city. Its proximity to archaeological remnants like the Servian Wall suggests a potential to forge connections between the museum's curated interior and the lived, fragmentary history of the surrounding urban landscape. However, these connections remain open, with the museum largely focused on its carefully ordered galleries rather than its immediate external environment. The question, however, extends beyond mere spatial adjacency: how might Palazzo Massimo articulate a more active dialogue with the material and cultural traces of ancient Rome that surround it, a question that remains central amid the ongoing transformation of MNR and the redefinition of its role within the city's cultural landscape?

Another challenge was the shifting makeup of the museum's audiences, a change that becomes particularly legible around the turn of the twenty-first century. New patterns of global tourism, alongside a resurgent popular interest in Roman antiquity, brought a more international and heterogeneous public to Palazzo Massimo; visitors whose relationships to the classical past varied widely in both depth and familiarity. As Falk and Dierking remind us, "visitors do not come to museums as blank slates, but with prior knowledge, cultural expectations, and specific motivations that shape their engagement."[451] In this light, the museum's interpretive strategies can no longer rest on assumptions of uniform classical literacy. While the collection continues to draw attention for its richness, the institutional challenge is increasingly one of translation: how to activate the material past for audiences who seek more than passive admiration, who come instead with the expectation that these objects might speak to lived experience, identity, and the textures of Roman daily life.

451 Falk, Dierking 2013, p. 24.

Palazzo Massimo was officially opened to the public in 1995, when only the ground floor could be visited, while work on the upper two floors and basement were completed in 1998.[452] The reopening in June 1998 represented an important phase in MNR's wider restructuring. Contemporary reporting positioned the event within a broader agenda of cultural policy and institutional renewal. As seen in *La Repubblica*, the reopening followed "una gran corsa" to complete the works in time, reflecting what Ministro per i Beni e le Attività Culturali Walter Veltroni described as a 'scelta metodologica'.[453] This model, he claimed, had already produced successful outcomes at Palazzo Altemps and the Galleria Borghese, and in this case served as evidence of "un'Italia che sa prendere impegni e rispettarli, cosa rara in una politica troppo spesso fatta solo di parole."

The article also highlighted the technical and architectural aspects of the intervention, describing how spaces recovered during late nineteenth-century riverbank excavations had been integrated into the museum using "tecniche e procedimenti della più moderna museografia." Giuliani called Palazzo Massimo "il vero e migliore museo della città antica," emphasizing its capacity to display high-value archaeological material under appropriate conservation conditions, including "caveau antimissili." These innovations were presented not only as a response to practical conservation needs but also as part of a renewed commitment to public access and museological visibility. The article positioned the museum as the "terzo polo del Museo nazionale Romano," complementing the Terme Diocleziano and Palazzo Altemps and forming part of a more coherent institutional structure.

While the ambitious architectural restoration of the palazzo was symbolic within Rome's renewed museum network, by the eve of the Jubilee year, fundamental issues of public accessibility remained unresolved. The city's museum policy, praised only a year earlier in *La Repubblica* for its rapid expansion and new cultural infrastructures

452 La Regina 2011, p. 11.
453 Giuliani 1998, Roma edition, p. 9.

funded through lottery revenues,[454] stood in contrast to on-the-ground realities. In September 1999, the *Comitato Pro Handicap* of Nettuno and the *Federazione Italiana Sport Disabili* staged a protest in front of MNR, denouncing the continued architectural barriers faced by disabled visitors. As reported in the same newspaper, demonstrators emphasized that while Rome was preparing to welcome millions of pilgrims for the Great Jubilee, its major cultural sites (including Palazzo Massimo) still excluded citizens with disabilities from full participation. The protest's slogan, "Pensiamo anche ai disabili e progettiamo insieme luoghi uguali per tutti,"[455] encapsulated their demand for inclusive civic space, challenging the exclusionary legacy of past design choices.

The museum's main entrance featured imposing marble steps and an inaccessible intercom, forcing wheelchair users to rely on a closed secondary entrance and the intervention of staff. Architect Gianni Saulle, an expert in disability access, criticized the restoration process for its failure to consult with disabled communities, noting that accessibility should not be treated as an afterthought or "a separate entrance," but as a fundamental design principle. This protest highlights the tension between the celebratory narrative of cultural modernization and the practical realities of public access. It also reveals a blind spot in the rhetoric of museum reform and valorization during the 1990s: while new standards and policies emphasized educational outreach and public service, they did not always translate into inclusive, user-centered architectural practice.

3.3 The Baths of Diocletian - Terme di Diocleziano

There is arguably no other site in Rome where such large remains from the republican period can be found in situ.[456]

454 "Due nuovi musei con i soldi del lotto," La Repubblica, 1 Apr. 1998, p. 8. Sezione: Roma.
455 Schwarz 1999, p. 6. Sezione: Roma.
456 Westeijn, Whitling 2017, p. 12.

The construction of Terme Diocleziano started sometime between 298 and 306 AD[457]. The structure was actually commissioned by Diocletian's co-emperor Maximian and finished during the reign of his successor Constantius, were the largest thermae in the late antique city. [458] By the time it was finished (sometime between May 305 and July 306), both Diocletian and Maximian had already abdicated.[459] In Salvatore Aurigemma's 1963 English guidebook, *The Baths of Diocletian and The Museo Nazionale Romano*, he details the history of the Baths of Diocletian, drawing attention to an inscription commemorating their inauguration. This inscription, now part of MNR's collection, comprises eight fragments from multiple copies of the original. Seven of these fragments have been carefully reassembled to form a single inscription, with the missing sections filled in with cement to create a coherent piece. The full text of the inscription is preserved thanks to a transcription by the 'Anonymous' of Einsiedeln, who documented it during a visit to Rome between 750 and 850 AD reads:

Our Lords Diocletian and Maximian, invincible and divine lords, fathers of the Emperors and Caesars, and our invincible and divine lords Constantius and Maximian, and Severus and Maximin, noblest Caesars, dedicated to their beloved Romans these auspicious Baths of Diocletian, after purchasing the necessary premises suitable for such a magnificent and remarkable work, and furnishing them with the most sumptuous ornaments,,. (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, VI, 1130). [460]

The complex encompassed much more than the baths alone. Spanning over fourteen hectares, it included libraries, gymnasiums, and large vaulted rooms designed for physical training, recitals, and discussions. Additionally, a vast apsidal exedra provided a space for sports and tournaments, serving as a significant meeting area that contributed to the social life of Rome. The baths, representing the final monumental work of pagan Rome before the advent of Christianity, remained

457 For detailed historical accounts of the Baths of Diocletian, from their ancient foundation until XX century, see: Paribeni 1929, pp.5-49; Aurigemma 1946, pp.3-10; Tagliamonte 2002A pp.7-18; Serlorenzi, Laurenti 2002, pp.53-89.
458 Westeijn, Whitling 2017, p. 30.
459 Aurigemma 1963 p. 7.
460 Ibid. p. 7.

functional as long as their aqueduct, which supplied water until 537 AD, when it was severed by the Ostrogothic king. In the centuries that followed, the site gradually fell into decay.[461]

Theodor E. Mommsen references Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) in his work on Petrarch's conception of the "Dark Ages," where Petrarch recounts his experience visiting the Baths of Diocletian in 1341:

We used often to stop at the Baths of Diocletian; sometimes we even climbed upon the vaulted roof of that once magnificent building, for nowhere is there a healthier air, a wider prospect, or more silence and desirable solitude. There we did not talk of business nor of private or public affairs on which we had shed tears enough. As we walked over the walls of the shattered city or sat there, the fragments of the ruins were under our very eyes. [462]

In 1560, during the pontificate of Pope Pius IV and in the wake of the opening of Porta Pia and the construction of the street of the same name, plans for the renovation and reuse of Diocletian's Baths gained serious consideration and became the subject of significant debate. Among the proposals, it was the vision of Antonio Duca, a priest, that ultimately materialized. Pope Pius IV, informed of Duca's aspirations through his nephew, Jacopo Duca, a young sculptor and apprentice of Michelangelo, decided to act on the proposal to transform the Tepidarium of the Baths into a church.[463] In March of that year, the pope formally announced his decision, connecting the project to the legend that the baths had been built by Christian martyrs enslaved under Roman rule.[464] He dedicated the new church to Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri, weaving the narrative of Christian sacrifice into the monumental classical architecture. In John Lewis Heilbron's *The Sun in the Church, Cathedrals as Solar Observatories,* Heilbron translates into English a quote by Pius IV: "We have decided to convert to the

461 Westeijn, Whitling 2017, p. 30-31.
462 Petrarch, Fam. 6.2 quoted from Theodor E. Mommsen, 'Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages"', Speculum 17,2 (1942)pp. 226-242.
463 La Basilica Ritrovata. Curated by L. Gaudenzi and P. Lo Sardo, photographs by F. Amantea, E. Ciavoni, S. Ferrante, and R. Stephenson, drawings by L. Micozzi, Promit SRL, published by La Meridiana Editori, 2024. Text from Tav. X. Exhibition visited on 19 November 2024.
464 Westeijn, Whitling 2017, p. 32.

purposes of religion the Baths of Diocletian, which were built with the blood and sweat of the faithful for the convenience and pleasure of idolaters by an impious tyrant and a most cruel enemy of the church."[465]

By the 19th century, while the church of Santa Maria geli Angeli e dei Martiri was active, however the area of the baths was still in a state of decline. In 1819, Matthew Dubourg produced a depiction of the grand ruins of the Baths of Diocletian, capturing admirers as they observed the overgrown and unkempt remnants of the ancient structure. Dubourg, a British artist based in London, was renowned for his landscape views, book illustrations, and portrait miniatures. The depiction of the Baths of Diocletian originates from his work *Views of the Remains of Ancient Buildings in Rome, and Its Vicinity*, first published in 1820 and later reissued. This publication is regarded as one of the finest examples of Roman color-plate view books.[466] Dubourg's portrayal of the massive ruins is characterized by a restrained composition, and the subtle hues achieved through the aquatint technique impart a delicate and refined quality to the scene.[467]

In 1901, the Carthusian monastery adjacent to the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli was secularized, paving the way for the establishment of a national museum dedicated to Roman archaeology.[468] This transformation marked a turning point in the musealization of the Baths of Diocletian, which gained renewed focus during the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of Italian unification in 1911. Rodolfo Lanciani[469] played a pivotal role in leveraging antiquity for political purposes, particularly through his involvement in the large archaeological exhibition staged at the Baths as part of the cultural festivities celebrating the Italian nation-state. At this time, the Termini

465 Heilbron 1999,p. 155.
466 Marshall 2002, p. 99.
467 See Appendix 10.
468 See e.g., Clarelli 2023, pp. 122- 125.
469 Rodolfo Lanciani (1845–1929) was a leading archaeologist and topographer during the late 19th century, a period of significant urban transformation in Rome following its designation as Italy's capital in 1871. As director of excavations at the Roman Forum and secretary of Rome's archaeological commission, Lanciani had extensive access to discoveries, many of which were documented before being lost to modernization. His major works, including Forma Urbis Romae (1893–1901) and Storia degli Scavi (1902–1910), remain essential references for the study of ancient Rome, reflecting his commitment to recording and interpreting the city's archaeological heritage amidst rapid change. See e.g., Dixon 2019.

area became a significant public space for showcasing Rome's imperial past, coinciding with Italy's brief colonial expansion, marked by the conquest of Libya. [470]

In the years leading up to the exhibition, the Baths of Diocletian exemplified the prevailing archaeological practice of "liberating" ancient ruins from later architectural additions. Corrado Ricci[471], then General Director of Antiquities and Fine Arts (*Antichità e Belle Arti*), was a major advocate for this approach. In the broader early 20th-century context of revitalizing classical antiquity to serve modern national identity, Ricci developed ambitious plans to isolate and restore significant Roman sites by removing surrounding structures and reassembling ancient fragments.[472] While his plans for the Baths of Diocletian were less extensive, they reflected similar goals. Since the mid-18th century renovation of Santa Maria degli Angeli, the baths had gradually been obscured by newer constructions. In preparation for the 1911 exhibition, Ricci's proposal to free the baths from these later additions was realized, revealing their architectural grandeur and creating a vast space near Termini station for the exhibition and he also oversaw the restoration of the façade of the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli.[473]

The exhibition curated by Lanciani explained the scale and influence of the Roman Empire, emphasizing the cultural and political achievements of ancient Rome across Europe and the Mediterranean. The display combined original artifacts with numerous plaster casts, some sourced internationally, and was arranged within the vaulted halls of the Terme Diocleziano. The exhibition's layout aimed to present a cohesive narrative of Rome's imperial power and its cultural

470 Westeijn, Whitling 2017, p. 86; Rietbergen 2012, pp. 56-102.
471 Corrado Ricci (1858–1934) was a prominent Italian art historian, archaeologist, and cultural heritage administrator. He served as Direttore Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti from 1906, where he was instrumental in establishing the first comprehensive laws for the protection of Italy's cultural heritage, culminating in the 1909 legislation. Ricci played a pivotal role in major restoration projects and oversaw key archaeological interventions in Rome, such as the excavation of the Fori Imperiali and the creation of Via dell'Impero (now Via dei Fori Imperiali).
See: Nastasi 2025; Vive. Cultura.gov.it. "Corrado Ricci Archive." Ministero della Cultura, accessed May 9, 2025.
472 Ricci 1913.
473 Friggeri 2015, p. 16.

legacy, reflecting the broader effort to position Rome as a symbol of continuity and unity during the celebrations of Italian unification.[474]

Transforming Spaces

As outlined in chapter 1, which offers a more detailed chronological account of the Terme Diocleziano's layered development, the complex has long served as a site of architectural palimpsest, one shaped by successive episodes of use, abandonment, and ideological reinvention. From its imperial origins and late antique decline to its Christian repurposing and eventual musealization, the site accumulated both material and symbolic density. By the late twentieth century, however, this same density; physical, historical, and interpretive, had come to obscure coherent engagement with the space. It is within this context that the 1981 special law (Legge 92/81) emerges not simply as a funding mechanism, but as a cultural inflection point. Under its auspices, the Baths became the subject of renewed institutional attention, with interventions increasingly oriented toward reconciling the monumental fabric of the site with the demands of modern museology. The reorganization of spaces such as the Aula della Minerva (later renamed the Aula Ottagona) should be read as part of this shift: an attempt to rearticulate the legibility of the complex through architectural and curatorial strategies that respected the site's stratigraphy while adapting it for contemporary display.

A letter dated September 29, 1987, from Soprintendente Adriano La Regina to various administrative bodies outlines the authorization to adapt the Aula della Minerva for museum purposes. This project, described as part of a "programma generale di ristrutturazione e ampliamento previsto nell'ambito della legge speciale per la tutela e la valorizzazione del patrimonio archeologico di Roma" (general program of renovation and expansion under the special law for the protection and enhancement of Rome's archaeological heritage), highlights the

474 See Iannantuono 2022, pp. 95–114.

integration of infrastructural upgrades into the broader cultural agenda of the period.[475]

At the heart of this renovation was the dismantling of the existing Planetarium equipment housed in the Aula, a process that involved significant logistical coordination. In a *fonogramma* dated October 12, 1987, La Regina communicated the planned start date for dismantling operations as October 19, 1987, emphasizing the necessity of preserving the machinery intact for potential future reassembly.[476] By November 20, 1987, another *fonogramma* confirmed that the dismantling and packaging had been "quasi ultimate" (nearly completed), ensuring that the equipment would be stored securely pending further instructions.[477]

The conversion of what is now known as L'Aula Ottagona illustrates a broader institutional effort to reimagine the Terme di Diocleziano as a versatile cultural hub. By integrating exhibition spaces into the former thermal complex, the Museo Nazionale Romano expanded its capacity to present its collections while simultaneously preserving the architectural heritage of the site. The project shows how targeted legislation, such as the 1981 special law, enabled institutions to modernize their spaces and adapt to contemporary expectations of accessibility and education.

Architectural Innovation and Museological Transformations

The transformation of the Aula Ottagona was emblematic of a broader cultural and architectural recalibration unfolding at the Terme Diocleziano in the final decades of the twentieth century. What began as a logistical necessity, clearing obsolete equipment and repurposing underused volumes, soon evolved into a deeper exercise in

475 La Regina, Adriano. "Roma: Demanio Artistico, Storico e Archeologico – M.N.R. – Terme di Diocleziano – Allestimento museale dell'Aula della Minerva (Planetario) – Smontaggio e imballaggio apparecchiature di proiezione." Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26, 29 Sept. 1987.
476 La Regina, Adriano. "Fonogramma: Comunicazione avvio smontaggio apparecchiature Planetario giorno 19 ottobre 1987." Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26, 12 Oct. 1987.
477 La Regina, Adriano. "Fonogramma: Completamento smontaggio e imballaggio apparecchiature Planetario." Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26, 20 Nov. 1987.

museological rethinking. The challenge was not merely one of spatial adaptation but of interpretative alignment: how to render legible a complex that had long resisted coherence, and how to do so without effacing the site's accumulated temporalities. It is within this shifting framework that the work of Giovanni Bulian must be situated. His interventions, initiated in the 1980s, reflect a confluence of architectural sensibility and institutional ambition, wherein restoration became inseparable from narrative construction. The following section considers Bulian's role in shaping this transitional moment where architectural innovation and museological transformation converged in the redefinition of one of Rome's most monumental historical sites.[478]

The project began in earnest in 1980 as part of broader initiatives to address the deterioration and underutilization of Rome's monumental heritage. Bulian notes the urgency of this work, emphasizing the need to intervene where "l'abbandono e la frammentazione degli spazi avevano reso difficile una lettura coerente del complesso storico."[479] His architectural interventions aimed to restore the legibility of the complex, reconnecting fragmented spaces and reinterpreting them within the framework of a modern museum environment. This approach required a nuanced understanding of the site's historical layers and the socio-political context in which it operated.[480]

One of Bulian's key strategies was the integration of conservation with innovative museological techniques. He advocated for a "dialogo continuo tra passato e presente," ensuring that the ancient structure remained at the forefront while accommodating the needs of a contemporary audience.[481] This philosophy guided the redevelopment of exhibition spaces, the restoration of key architectural elements, and the incorporation of new technologies to enhance visitor engagement. For instance, the reorganization of spaces such as the Aula Ottagona provided a more cohesive narrative for the museum, linking the

478 Candilio 2015, p. 29.
479 Fantone 2000, p. 10.
480 See e.g., Plevoets, Van Cleempoel 2019, pp. 4–6.
481 Fantone 2000 p. 12.

grandeur of the imperial baths with the archaeological artifacts on display.[482]

A significant milestone in the redevelopment was the unveiling of new exhibition areas in 1991, which included spaces dedicated to early Christian epigraphy and Roman funerary art. These exhibitions, Bulian explains, were designed to "rendere accessibile una parte fondamentale della storia di Roma che altrimenti rimarrebbe nascosta"[483]. This careful curation demonstrated the potential of the Terme di Diocleziano not just as a site of preservation but also as an active participant in the dissemination of cultural knowledge.

Bulian also highlights the importance of collaboration in the project, working alongside archaeologists, art historians, and engineers to ensure a multidisciplinary approach to the museum's redevelopment. This collaboration extended to engaging with the public, as the project aimed to create a museum experience that was inclusive and educational.[484]

One of the first exhibitions held at the Terme di Diocleziano after the re-opening was "Antiche Stanze". The "Antiche Stanze" exhibition (from December 1996 to June 1997), was a critical intervention in the MNR's engagement with the history of Rome's urban transformation. Curated by Mariarosaria Barbera and Rita Paris, the exhibition was organized by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, with contributions from institutions such as the Comune di Roma, Musei Capitolini, the Vatican Museums, and the British School at Rome.

By focusing on frescoes and mosaics unearthed during the construction of Termini Station, the exhibition engaged directly with the historical consequences of infrastructure expansion on Rome's archaeological record. Given that the Terme di Diocleziano is physically embedded in the urban fabric of Rome's main transportation hub, the exhibition functioned as a site-specific meditation on the impact of modern urbanization on the city's ancient past.

482 Ibid,p.12-13.
483 Ibid, p. 13.
484 Ibid, pp. 10-19.

The objects displayed in "Antiche Stanze" originated from the mid-Imperial Roman structures uncovered during the construction of Termini Station, first in the 1860s and later, more extensively, in the post-war period between 1947 and 1949. These excavations revealed remnants of Roman domus, balnea (bathing complexes), and decorative schemes, which rather than being integrated into urban planning, were either destroyed or hastily extracted for museum storage. The exhibition itself acknowledged this loss: *"Non sappiamo se sia stata più eccezionale la sopravvivenza, fino a tempi recenti di tali antiche testimonianze o il fatto che, dopo distruzioni e incurie, se ne possa oggi ricostruire l'identità e renderla nota."*[485]

This statement shows the paradox that defined much of Rome's 20th-century archaeological policy: on the one hand, the city remained a global symbol of historical continuity; on the other, its rapid modernization repeatedly placed archaeological heritage in direct conflict with urban development.This reflection on loss and recovery naturally leads to the question of how such archaeological traces were documented in the first place, and by whom such acts of preservation were made possible.

One figure who played a crucial role in documenting and advocating for the preservation of these excavations was Anton Luigi Pietrogrande, an archaeologist who worked on the Termini excavations between 1947 and 1949. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Pietrogrande resisted the pressures to prioritize development over preservation, working to document and salvage as much as possible before much of the site was lost. His meticulous records, including photographs, watercolor reconstructions, and excavation notes, provided an invaluable resource for later restorers and curators. The exhibition explicitly acknowledged his contributions: *"A Lui, dunque, con indescrivibile stima e riconoscenza, dedichiamo questo lavoro."*[486] By focusing on Pietrogrande's legacy, the exhibition also positioned itself as an act of institutional memory, acknowledging the labor and resistance of past archaeologists who fought against the destruction of

485 Mariarosaria, Paris 1996, Presentazione.
486 Ibid.

Rome's heritage. The historical injustices of urban development, where archaeological remains were often sacrificed in the name of progress, were thus countered through the act of recovery, research, and museum display.

Another critical aspect of the exhibition was its emphasis on restoration methodologies, reflecting ongoing debates in conservation theory over how institutions should approach damaged or incomplete artifacts. Rather than aiming for visual perfection or seamless reconstruction, the restoration work adhered to a principle of cautious intervention, seeking to recover the potential unity of the object while resisting the impulse to fabricate historical or artistic coherence.[487] This approach, grounded in a conservation ethic that values both material authenticity and interpretive transparency, positioned the exhibition within a larger disciplinary shift toward reflexive museology and critical restoration practice. The exhibition was developed with contributions from Saverio Tranquilli, who supervised the curation of the exhibition's design, while Marina Magnani Cianetti oversaw the display installation at the Terme di Diocleziano. The restoration of the frescoes and mosaics was carried out by Annunziata D'Elia, Luigi Mamone, and Bruno Schifano, along with Jarmila Bolokova.[488]

Many of the frescoes and mosaics had remained in museum storage for decades, where conditions led to further deterioration. As noted in the restoration analysis: "Alcune pitture risultano meno leggibili oggi che non nelle fotografie eseguite al momento dello scavo."[489] The acknowledgment that certain frescoes were more legible in excavation photographs than in their restored state raises critical questions about the interventions applied to archaeological material over time. The curatorial strategy of displaying these works alongside documentation of their excavation and conservation history underscored the constructed nature of museum narratives, revealing not only what is preserved, but how it is framed for contemporary audiences.

487 Brandi 2005.
488 Mariarosaria, Paris, 1996, p. 214.
489 Ibid, 213.

The restorers themselves faced technical and ethical dilemmas in handling these works. Given their already fragile state, interventions focused on stabilization rather than reconstruction, with the use of "tratteggio" techniques to distinguish original surfaces from modern restorations.[490] This approach aligned with contemporary museum ethics, which emphasized transparency in conservation processes rather than attempting to recreate a falsely complete image of the past.

The Antiche Stanze exhibition did more than reconstruct the archaeological history of Termini, it positioned the museum as a critical voice in the ongoing dialogue about preservation, urbanization, and historical memory. By curating the exhibition at the Terme di Diocleziano, directly adjacent to Termini Station, the MNR was able to actively engage with the physical and historical transformations of the city. As Rita Paris concluded in her introduction:

"Senza la coscienza e il rispetto del passato non si costruisce alcun futuro degno di entrare a far parte della storia."[491] This statement is both a reflection on past archaeological losses and a call to action for future preservation efforts. The exhibition framed Termini as a place of transit, and also as a contested space where Rome's ancient, modern, and contemporary identities converge.

The 1991 Catalogue ROTVNDA DIOCLETIANI

To fully understand the 1991 exhibition layout of the Terme di Diocleziano, an examination of contemporary catalogs offers essential insights into curatorial approaches and historical context. The 1991 catalog, *Rotunda Diocletiani: Sculture decorative delle terme nel Museo Nazionale Romano*, is particularly informative, as it presents a structured analysis of the decorative sculptures within the Baths of Diocletian. Curated with technical rigor by Daniela Candilio and Maria Rita Di Mino, this catalog situates each sculpture within the broader framework of Roman infrastructure and museological practices of the period. Specifically, the catalog offers an in-depth study of the placement and orientation of sculptures in the Aula Ottagona,

490 Ibid, 214.
491 Ibid, p.9.

reflecting the interpretative choices that shaped the 1991 exhibition, including how ancient artistic forms were integrated with the spatial and architectural elements of the Baths to create a cohesive narrative, especially focusing on the *Aula Ottagona.*

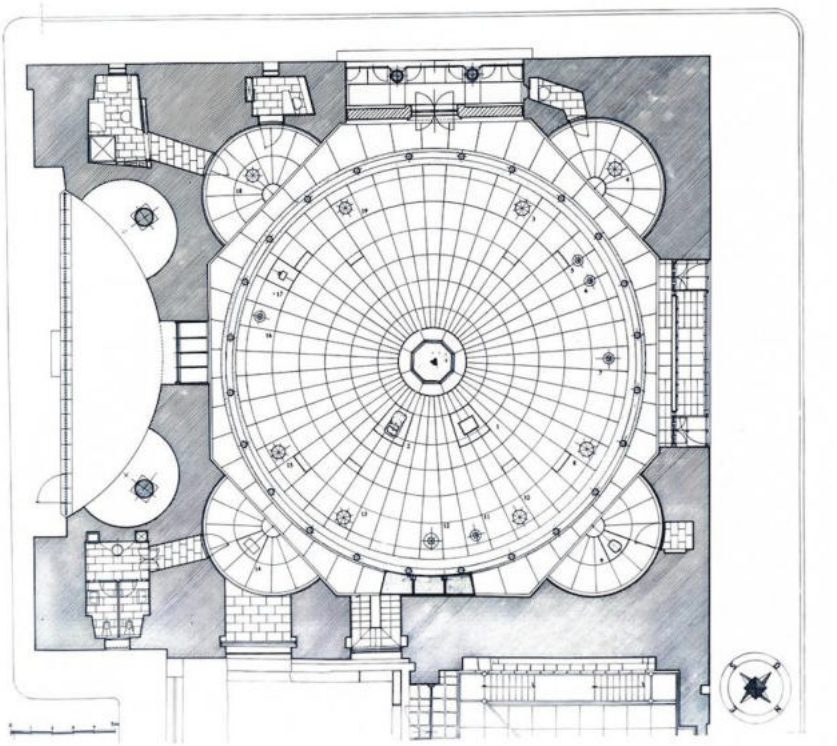
The *Aula Ottagona*, part of the Baths' complex, originally occupied a prominent location in the western corner of the central structure, mirroring a now-destroyed symmetrical space on the eastern side. This hall's architecture is notable for its external square form, which transitions into an octagonal shape internally, connected by four large niches at each corner. Its dome, preserved in full, is an example of an "umbrella" structure, built with a cruciform base and composed of eight ribbed segments that meet in an octagonal ring at the apex. This particular dome type, also seen in the entrance pavilion at the *Piazza d'Oro* in Hadrian's Villa, utilizes ribbed edges that divide each segment, a design choice indicative of structural experimentation in late Roman architecture.

The *Aula Ottagona* also included two large arched windows, positioned to the south and west, which would have allowed significant natural light and warmth to enter, possibly creating a comfortable environment for bathers.[492] The placement of entrances and windows suggests that the hall connected the outdoor garden (*xysti*) with gymnasium spaces and the heated caldarium, reinforcing its role as an intermediary space. According to architectural historian Guglielmo De Angelis D'Ossat, this layout indicates the hall might have functioned as a minor frigidarium, suitable for visitors transitioning between gym activities and the caldarium. [493]

Centuries of alterations, especially its conversion to a granary in the late 16th century, have complicated the structural reading of the site. The destruction of the ancient floor, as documented by Gismondi[494], exposed multiple construction phases, with Diocletian-era walls integrating pre-existing Roman structures. Elements in *opus latericium* and *opus caementicium* appear aligned with the complex's orientation,

492 Paribeni 1932, pp. 11-12.
493 De Angelis D'Ossat 1933, pp. 12.
494 Gismondi 1929, pp. 385.

suggesting earlier buildings may have influenced its design. Additional traces, such as *opus reticulatum* walls and a road segment near Via Parigi, indicate that the site embodies a complex architectural history, blending early imperial and Flavian elements beneath the Diocletian foundations.[495]



Terme di Diocleziano. Aula ottagona. Presentazione dell'allestimento:
1) "Principe" ellenistico. 2) Pugilatore. 3) Statua virile tipo Doriforo. 4) Statua di Herakles. 5) Erma arcaistica di Apollo. 6) Erma arcastica di Hermes. 7) Testa del satiro anapauomenos. 8)Statua virile, tipo Hermes di Andros. 9) Statua tipo Afrodite anadiomêne. 10) Statua di Afrodite Cnidia. 11) Testa di giovane. 12) Testa di Asklepios. 13) Statua di Afrodite Cnidia. 14) Statua di Apollo Liceo. 15) Torso virile. 16) Testa di giovane atleta. 17) Erma di Q. Ennius. 18) Statua di Afrodite da Cirene. 19) Statua togata acefala

The image above from *Rotunda Diocletiani: Sculture Decorative delle Terme nel Museo Nazionale Romano*[496] depicts the layout of the Aula Ottagona in 1991 - it was curated to highlight classical sculptures

495 Candilio 1991, pp. 25-29.
496 Di Mino 1991, p.26.

within the architectural context. This layout, organized the sculptures to create a thematic and narrative experience that echoed Roman cultural and aesthetic values. The octagonal room, with its domed ceiling and large alcoves, offered a structured setting for displaying key artworks, each strategically positioned to reflect the ideals of heroism, divinity, and athleticism.

At the center was the Hellenistic Prince (inv. 1049), serving as the focal point of the room, demonstrating power and poise.[497] Surrounding this central figure were thematic pairings, such as the Boxer (in. no. 1055), a symbol of athletic strength and respectability (*kalokagathia*).[498] Nearby, sculptures of Herakles (inv. 106164) and Apollo (inv. 56442) represented contrasting divine ideals, blending concepts of composure,[499] resilience and intellect. The peripheral positioning of Aphrodite statues, like the Aphrodite Cnidia (inv. 48133) and Aphrodite of Cyrene[500] (otherwise known as the Venus of Cyrene[501]), introduced an elegant, softer and feminine[502] contrast to the masculine depictions in the central area and emphasizing beauty.[503]

Other figures, such as Hermes of Andros and various athlete representations, reinforced the curatorial narrative of physical and spiritual vigor, further accentuating the Roman values of excellence and vitality. This layout no longer exists in its original form, as museum display practices have evolved. However, the 1991 arrangement remains a significant example of how the MNR utilized spatial organization to create an immersive historical and educational experience, carefully positioning each sculpture to draw connections between the ancient past and the architectural legacy of the Baths of Diocletian. This former layout is a reflection of the museum's approach

497 Cadario 2011, p. 24; Di Mino1991, p. 60.
498 Cadario 2011, p. 28.
499Candilio 1991, p. 66.
500 MNR inventory number before restitution no. 72115.
501 A more detailed account of the Venus of Cyrene, its colonial-era discovery, contested museum placement, and eventual restitution to Libya in 2008 is included in the appendix. The case offers a complex example of how archaeological artifacts, particularly those acquired during imperial expansion, can become entangled in debates over postcolonial accountability, curatorial visibility, and the long afterlives of state collections. See Appendix 19.
502Aurigemma 1963 p. 104.
503 Candilio 1991, p. 78.

to integrating artifacts within their architectural context, illustrating both scholarly interpretation and artistic presentation.

Specialised catalogues of this kind served a purpose beyond the strictly academic. With much of the Terme di Diocleziano still closed and its collections out of reach for most visitors, printed publications became one of the few means by which this material could circulate at all. They allowed the curatorial and conservation work underway at the MNR to reach a wider audience, and ensured that significant holdings did not remain known only to those with direct access to the storerooms and study collections.

The developments of those particularly linked to the 1981 special law and the museum's restructuring initiatives, demonstrate how legislative frameworks and curatorial strategies intersected to reshape the site's role within the museum network. Through targeted restorations, reconfigurations of space, and exhibitions such as *Antiche Stanze*, Terme di Diocleziano has become a central venue for presenting Rome's urban and archaeological transformations. In this context, the site serves as a repository of material culture and also as a case to understand shifting museological priorities in relation to architectural reuse, (Roman) urban memory, and institutional identity.

3.4 Palazzo Altemps

The Renaissance-era Palazzo Altemps, acquired by the Italian State in 1982 and entrusted to the Archaeological Service of Rome, has become a key site for housing historic collections of ancient sculpture within MNR. Among these collections, the Boncompagni Ludovisi stands out as particularly significant. The decision to dedicate this palazzo to the museum's section focused on the history of collecting antiquities aligns with its historic role.

Palazzo Altemps did not emerge as a singular, unified architectural project but rather evolved across distinct historical phases. Its initial construction and subsequent expansions, spanning from the late 15th to the late 16th century, were not conceived as a cohesive whole. These

two periods of development are separated by significant historical, economic, social, and urban transformations, making it difficult to view them as part of a continuous process. Instead, they correspond to two distinct moments of intense architectural activity in Rome: the era of Sixtus IV and the later urban expansion under Gregory XIII, during which the city experienced substantial growth.

The architectural interventions led by Girolamo Riario in the late 15th century and, later, by Cardinal Altemps in the 16th century can be understood as deliberate efforts to redefine and enhance the urban landscape through new typological approaches. In both instances, these projects were closely tied to broader urban restructuring initiatives, including land consolidation, the expansion of property boundaries, and the creation of new streets, reflecting the evolving ambitions and strategies of Rome's elite in shaping the city's fabric. [504]

In 1568, the palace was acquired by Cardinal Marco Sittico Altemps, a nephew of Pope Pius IV, who initiated a renovation under the architect Martino Longhi. Longhi's work included the creation of a distinctive courtyard and an innovative roof gallery adorned with elaborate reliefs. This structure, considered the first architectural example of the tower-belvedere style later imitated across Rome, was crowned with obelisks and the heraldic ibex of the Altemps family. Reflecting a tradition rooted in the antiquarian practices of the diaetae statuariae[505] aristocratic residences enriched with ancient statues and marbles, the palace's grand frescoed rooms and painted loggias served as a display space for a remarkable sculpture collection. Today, 15 of these statues have been returned to their historical positions in the courtyard's porticoes and the grand staircase leading to the Biblioteca Altempsiana. [506]

The Boncompagni Ludovisi Marbles and Curating the Collection

504 On the architectural phases and late sixteenth-century renovations of Palazzo Riario Altemps, see i.e, Festa Milone 1977–78, pp. 13–38.

505 Diaetae statuariae is a Latin phrase that can be translated as "rooms for statues" or "sculptural galleries." It refers to spaces, typically in Roman architecture or villas, specifically designed to display statues or sculptures. The term originates from diaeta (a private chamber or room) and statuariae (relating to statues). See e.g., Clarke 1991.

506 La Regina 2005, p. 111.

The Boncompagni Ludovisi marbles are among the most celebrated ancient sculpture collections from Rome's aristocratic families. Assembled between 1621 and 1623 by Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi for his villa on the Quirinal Hill, the collection surpassed even the grandeur of the Borghese family's holdings. Many of the pieces were originally acquired from other prominent families, such as the Cesi, Cesarini, Orsini, and Altemps, connecting the collection to Palazzo Altemps. The Cesi family's Museum Antiquarium, once housed in their palace in Borgo, played a pivotal role in shaping the collection, as evidenced by Francisco de Hollanda's renowned drawings, which contributed to the international fame of these sculptures.

Restorations carried out by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Alessandro Algardi in the early 17th century enhanced the collection's influence on Baroque art. The Ludovisi sculptures inspired generations of artists, including Poussin, Canova, and Velázquez, whose "Mars" was directly influenced by the Ludovisi Ares. The collection's fame extended beyond Rome, with its works appearing in European engravings, small bronzes, and paintings. The widespread urban development following Rome's designation as Italy's capital in 1870 led to the villa's destruction and the dispersal of its treasures. Fortunately, the Italian state acquired much of the collection in 1901, initially exhibiting it in the cloister of the Museo delle Terme. Due to the cloister's deteriorating condition, however, public access was restricted.

Following extensive archival research and meticulous restoration, the collection was reassembled for exhibition. Iconic works such as *The Suicide of the Galatian*, *Orestes and Electra*, and the Ludovisi *Grand Battle Sarcophagus* exemplify the collection's artistic and cultural significance. These masterpieces not only influenced Johann Joachim Winckelmann's aesthetic theories but also remain central to classical art history. [507]

In 1982, may have been the first time the public was getting a glimpse of what the future would be for the Ludovisi Collection and a potential new location as part of the growing Museo Nazionale Romano. July

507 Ibid, pp. 112-113.

24th, 1982, Corriere della Sera published an article by Pietro Lanzara[508] which chronicled the proactive developments surrounding the Museo Nazionale Romano subsequent to the 1981 legislative advancements. The article emphasizes the deliberate endeavors to incorporate the Ludovisi collection within the confines of the Quirinale, foregrounding an ambitious narrative of cultural enrichment in Rome. The narrative articulated by Lanzara points to the anticipated transformation of Rome's cultural heritage landscape, mirroring the contemporary rejuvenation of Paris's Louvre.

The introduction paragraph of the article reads;

La Presidenza della Repubblica ha già manifestato la sua disponibilità a ospitare nel Quirinale la sezione del Museo nazionale romano destinata a raccogliere le collezioni storiche. E' ora In corso 10 studiò per l'esposizione della collezione Ludovisi. Si apre così la prospettiva di offrire a Roma un museo straordinario, che questa città può bene meritare, oggi, mentre a Parigi si porta a compimento la trasformazione del Louvre: sono parole, abbastanza recenti, del Soprintendente archeologico di Roma, il professore Adriano La Regina. A distanza di pochi mesi, la prospettiva prende consistenza, il sogno potrebbe diventare realtà entro l'anno. In questi giorni, il Consiglio Nazionale dei Beni Culturali si esprimerà definitivamente sul progetto di sistemazione della collezione Ludovisi, attualmente abbandonata e irraggiungibile nel Chiostro grande del Museo delle Terme, in alcune sale del Quirinale. Poi, la decisione esecutiva, toccherà al ministro dei Beni culturali, probabilmente, entro novembre. [509]

Central to this discourse is the institutional and governmental backing for this initiative, as Lanzara quotes, "La Presidenza della Repubblica ha già manifestato la sua disponibilità a ospitare nel Quirinale la sezione del Museo nazionale romano destinata a raccogliere le collezioni storiche." Demonstrating the collaboration aimed at revitalizing and leveraging the Ludovisi collection, which had been relegated to the shadows within the Museo delle Terme's Chiostro Grande.

508 Lanzara 1982.
509 Ibid.

The Quirinale proposal, however, did not materialise. The plan encountered resistance on multiple fronts, not least Federico Zeri's pointed critique in La Stampa (March 1982), in which he condemned the move as a retrograde reversal of the modern museum's hard-won separation from political power, reducing the collection to what he termed an "art appendage to power." In the years that followed, the project was quietly set aside. It was only in the late 1980s that attention shifted decisively towards Palazzo Altemps as the permanent home for the historical collections, a solution that would ultimately be realised with the palace's inauguration in December 1997[510].

Highlighting the legislative foundation of this initiative, Lanzara notes, "La realizzazione di questi punti in tempi definiti, dicono al ministero, rientra nell'attuazione della legge speciale su Roma." This legislation marked a shift in Rome's cultural framework, promoting a decentralized museum model that integrates administrative entities with open-air archaeological sites.

Lanzara's discussion extends to the meticulously restored artworks and the "Roman Inscriptions" sections, highlighting the care and scholarly rigor applied to the Ludovisi collection's conservation. The text focuses on prominent pieces within the collection, including the "Galata Suicide" and the "Ludovisi Throne," examining their historical significance and their contribution to the construction of Rome's cultural memory.

The project for the new seat of Palazzo Altemps published in *Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano* (1989)[511] was based on study findings, a sworn expert report, cost estimates, and surveys carried out from 1975 to 1978, by the Head of the Technical Office of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, Dr. Ing. Mario Caiola), Arch. Dr. Francesco Scoppola with the consultancy of Dr. Antonino Currò and Dr. Gaetano Messineo of the Archaeological Superintendency of Rome; collaboration of Arch. Dr. Patrizia Grossi and Arch. Dr. Gian Luigi Vimercati Sanseverino; and the coordination for the functional design

510 On Zeri's critique of the Quirinale proposal, see Chapter 4, section 4.1
511 Nuove Sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano 1989.

of museum installations and offices respectively by Dr. Pier Giovanni Guzzo and Dr. Paola Zaccagni.

The report demonstrates how the project involved the following interventions:

- restoration and extraordinary maintenance works (structural restorations, roof restoration, static consolidation, and restoration of facades);
- restoration of sculptures, plasters, fixtures, decorations, and furniture;
- review, adaptation, and replacement of systems, equipment, and services.

The total projected cost for the implementation of the aforementioned interventions was estimated at £13,000 million. This figure included allowances for unforeseen expenses and was calculated net of VAT, which was set at 2%, amounting to £260 million. The project was scheduled for completion within a 36-month timeframe, commencing in April 1984 and concluding in April 1987.

The execution of the previously mentioned interventions resulted in a net area of 12,325 square meters, allocated as follows:

- Exhibition spaces: 4,323 square meters
- Offices: 2,455 square meters
- Various public services: 914 square meters
- Systems and services: 1,851 square meters
- Warehouses and laboratories: 2,782 square meters

To solidify the project proposal, a series of handwritten unpublished documents preserved in the Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma are a series of official correspondences from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma regarding the historical and curatorial considerations surrounding the relocation and exhibition of the Ludovisi Collection at Palazzo Altemps in Rome. These letters, dated from 1987, outline the planning and decision-

making processes related to the preservation, presentation, and interpretation of the collection within the Palazzo.

One of the documents, dated May 21, 1987, authored by La Regina, is addressed to Dr. Sapelli, Dr. Guzzo, and Arch. Scoppola. The document discusses the planning and considerations involved in curating the Ludovisi Collection at Palazzo Altemps.

La Regina emphasizes the necessity of revising the exhibition layout for the Ludovisi Collection at Palazzo Altemps. These revisions are informed by the expertise of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali and are meant to adapt the collection's display to the unique architectural context of Palazzo Altemps. The goal is to present the artifacts in a manner that respects their historical significance while also integrating them harmoniously into the Palazzo's architectural environment.[512]

The document suggests the inclusion of additional historical visual materials, such as 17th and 18th-century views, (possibly engravings or paintings?), to enhance the exhibition. La Regina proposes integrating works by artists like Piranesi, which depict monuments related to the Ludovisi Collection. This approach aims to provide a broader historical and artistic context, enriching the narrative of the exhibition by connecting the classical past with its later representations in art.

La Regina discusses the importance of including textual and visual aids that would guide visitors through the exhibition. He mentions the potential inclusion of modern interpretations of classical themes, which would create a dialogue between ancient and contemporary art. This strategy would not only enhance the educational value of the exhibition but also offer insights into the enduring influence of classical antiquity on modern artistic practices.

This correspondence reflects the ongoing process of collaboration among the involved experts. La Regina suggests that the proposed revisions and strategies are to be finalized in further discussions with

512 La Regina, Adriano. "Lettera a Dr. Sapelli, Dr. Guzzo e Arch. Scoppola riguardante la revisione dell'allestimento della Collezione Ludovisi a Palazzo Altemps." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 21 mag. 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

Dr. Sapelli, Dr. Guzzo, and Arch. Scoppola. This collaborative approach ensured that all aspects of the exhibition were carefully considered and agreed upon before implementation, reflecting the meticulous planning required for such an important cultural project.[513]

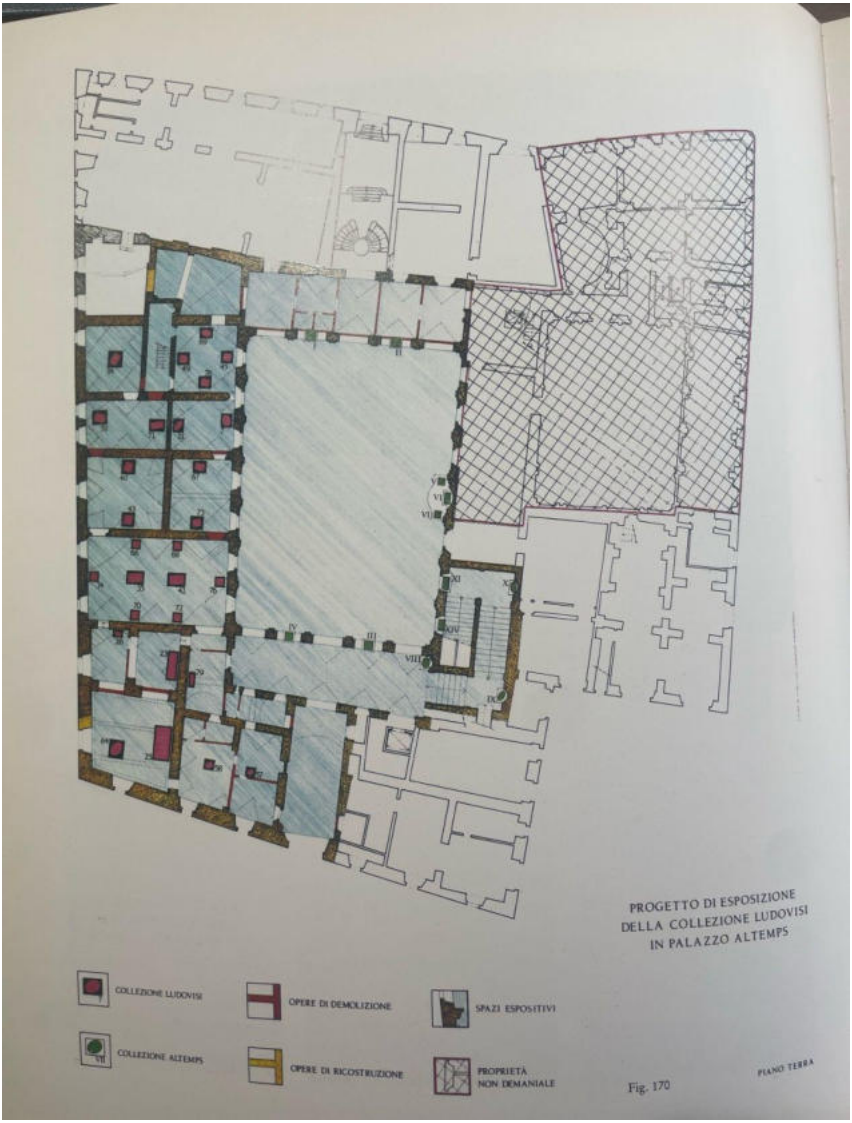
Another key document that exemplifies the challenges of curating historical collections within an architectural context is a letter dated March 23, 1987, from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. This correspondence, focused on the reorganization of the Ludovisi Collection at Palazzo Altemps, provides important insights into the collaborative processes and logistical considerations necessary for the adaptation of a historical building to meet the needs of a modern museum space.

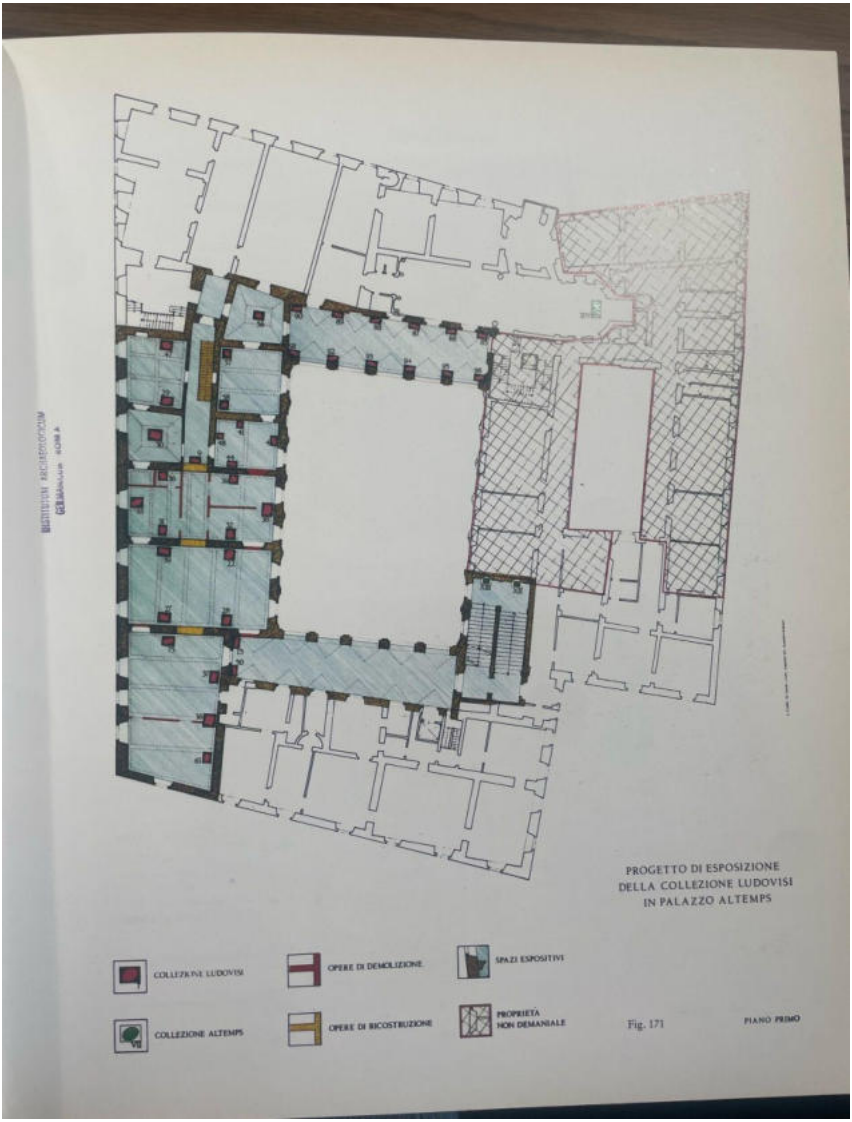
The letter outlines a proposal for the reorganization of a portion of the Ludovisi Collection within the Palazzo, serving as a follow-up to previous communications between the *Soprintendenza* and the Ministry. The document opens by reaffirming the importance of continuing the discussions regarding the placement of the collection, noting that the current plan is in response to earlier directives. It specifically mentions that it follows up on prior correspondence: “facendo seguito alla precedente lettera di questa Soprintendenza.” This indicates a deliberate, ongoing dialogue between the institutions to refine and finalize the exhibition’s layout.

One of the central themes of the letter is the need for revisions and adjustments to the initial layout of the collection. The *Soprintendenza* explains that several "aggiustamenti sulla disposizione dei pezzi" (adjustments to the arrangement of the pieces) were necessary to accommodate practical concerns that arose during the planning process. These revisions were not simply logistical but involved careful consideration of the relationship between the collection and the architectural features of Palazzo Altemps. The letter emphisized the challenges of presenting ancient artifacts within a historic space, reflecting the complexities of exhibition design in such a context.

513 La Regina, Adriano. "Lettera a Dr. Sapelli, Dr. Guzzo e Arch. Scoppola riguardante la revisione dell'allestimento della Collezione Ludovisi a Palazzo Altemps." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 21 mag. 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

This demonstrated the importance of maintaining the architectural and historical integrity of the Palazzo. The letter refers to colored drawings that were created to visualize the proposed layout and ensure that the exhibition would harmonize with the building's aesthetic and structural elements (see images below). The incorporation of these drawings demonstrates the care taken to maintain a balance between preserving the architectural heritage of the site and providing a clear, engaging display of the Ludovisi Collection.


PROGETTO DI ESPOSIZIONE
DELLA COLLEZIONE LUDOVISI
IN PALAZZO ALTEMPS
COLLEZIONE LUDOVISI
COLLEZIONE ALTEMPS
OPERE DI DEMOLIZIONE
OPERE DI RICOSTRUZIONE
SPAZI ESPOSITIVI
PROPRIETÀ
NON DEMANIALE
Fig. 170
PIANO TERRA



The mention of "alcuni aggiustamenti sulla disposizione dei pezzi" suggests that these adjustments were a product of input from multiple stakeholders, all of whom were invested in the success of the project. Such coordination was essential not only for logistical reasons but also

to ensure that the expertise of various institutions was integrated into the curatorial decisions.

It lastly addresses the inherent tension between creating an effective exhibition space and preserving the historical authenticity of Palazzo Altemps. The document emphasizes that the adjustments were made with the intention of adhering to the exhibition criteria, while also preserving the historical and architectural character of the building. This challenge, of modernizing a space while respecting its past, is central to the narrative of Palazzo Altemps' transformation into a museum. The process reflects the broader tension between conservation and innovation that often arises when historical buildings are repurposed for new functions.

Another handwritten document dated October 6, 1987, from the *Soprintendenza Archeologica* di Roma (La Regina) refers to the proposed plans concerning the *Collezione Ludovisi* and the preparation for its display within Palazzo Altemps. The letter appears to be directed to Dr. Sapelli, discussing critical aspects related to the positioning and exhibition of the artifacts. The author mentions the necessity of determining specific areas for the distribution of the sculptures, likely addressing the concerns over both the aesthetic and structural integrity of the displays.[514]

In it, it suggests that the proposed layout for the exhibition was under careful consideration, particularly regarding the spatial distribution of the Ludovisi sculptures. The author points out that it is crucial to ensure that the placement of these works does not compromise the structural or visual aspects of the exhibit, emphasizing the need for balance between the architectural environment and the artifacts.

Two specific technical aspects are highlighted here, as engineers report and the consideration of the environmental impact, which is well inline with La Regina's previous concerns with the environment of Rome and the risks environmental impact poses to its archeology. It also

514 La Regina, Adriano. "Lettera al Dr. Sapelli, riguardante la distribuzione e l'esposizione della Collezione Ludovisi." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 6 ott. 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

references the need for an engineer to provide a detailed analysis of the dimensions and load-bearing capacities concerning the artifacts' placement. This would ensure that the floor and display structures can adequately support the weight and size of the sculptures without causing damage to the historical building.

There is also a call for an environmental assessment, possibly to address concerns about factors like humidity, temperature, and light exposure, which could affect the preservation of the artifacts. Indicating an awareness of the balance required to maintain the integrity of these ancient sculptures while on display.

La Regina expresses the need to finalize these proposals in collaboration with Dr. Sapelli and other relevant parties, in an ongoing, consultative process. This collaboration would ensure that all aspects of the installation are meticulously planned and agreed upon before proceeding, reflecting the careful and methodical approach necessary for such an important cultural undertaking.

This document is indicative of the meticulous planning involved in transforming Palazzo Altemps into a suitable venue for the Ludovisi Collection. It helps us understand the complexity of integrating historical artifacts into a historic setting, requiring both technical expertise and collaborative decision-making. The letter is a snapshot of the broader efforts during the late 1980s to preserve and present one of Rome's most important archaeological collections within the context of its rich architectural heritage.[515]

Before those prescriptions could be tested in situ, a more prosaic limit asserted itself: the building was still lived in and commercially used. Turning a sixteenth-century palazzo into a museum required not only calculations and conservation protocols but the prior reordering of occupied spaces. In practice, design and engineering advanced only as quickly as contracts, clearances, and, where necessary, removals. It is at this junction, between curatorial intent and the stubborn fact of

515 La Regina, Adriano. "Letter to Dr. Sapelli, Regarding the Distribution and Exhibition of the Ludovisi Collection." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 6 Oct. 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

tenancy, that the Evictions and Adaptations in the Creation of Palazzo Altemps begins.

Evictions and Adaptations in the Creation of Palazzo Altemps

The transformation of Palazzo Altemps into a museum under the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali was a defining chapter in the museological history of Rome. Acquired by the Ministry in 1982 through a decree of preemption signed by Minister Scotti, the building was designated to house the *Dipartimento di Storia del Collezionismo* as part of the Museo Nazionale Romano. This acquisition was justified by the particular interest of the State in acquiring this property for its cultural heritage.[516] However, the process of converting Palazzo Altemps into a museum was complicated by the presence of existing tenants, including the restaurant "La Maiella," and required significant negotiations and administrative efforts.

One recurring issue was the presence of tenants occupying key areas of the Palazzo, including private residences and commercial establishments. A memorandum from 12 June 1987, written by Adriano La Regina, described how the restaurant *La Maiella* obstructed restoration efforts. He explained that its occupation of critical areas made it impossible to carry out necessary structural interventions, such as cement injections for the façade, and pointed out that the restaurant's kitchen was not compliant with regulations, facing directly onto the courtyard.[517] This situation was described as an impediment to the transformation of the building into a functional museum space (a detailed discussion of this case will follow in a later section).

Efforts to evict the tenants and reclaim the building were fraught with legal and logistical difficulties. A memorandum from 19 January 1989 detailed the precarious state of some parts of the structure, where vaulted ceilings and foundations required urgent stabilization. Workers

516 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. 9 Apr. 1992. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 132, Fasc. 11.

517 La Regina, Adriano. "Minuta: Roma – Demanio pubblico – Ramo artistico, storico, archeologico. Palazzo Riario Altemps Gallese – Rilascio locali." 12 June 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

were unable to proceed without first addressing the building's structural instability, described as "puntellare dal basso…le strutture pericolanti."[518]The document went on to state that "non è assolutamente possibile procedere oltre al successivo consolidamento […] senza puntellare dal basso (cioè dagli ambienti non ancora consegnati) le strutture pericolanti,"[519] making clear that access to the remaining occupied areas was a prerequisite for safely continuing restoration.

The letter also warned that further division of the state-owned portion of Palazzo Altemps would "comprometterebbe gravemente le caratteristiche tutelate dell'immobile," citing both legal and architectural limitations on the property's subdivision. From a museological standpoint, the authors emphasized that the building had been acquired with the express intent of restoring its original function as a space for displaying collections of antiquities. "Gli ambienti che si renderebbero non disponibili," they wrote, "sono appunto, per la maggior parte, le sale voltate quattrocentesche con peducci in pietra lavorata e stemmi, risalenti al periodo di proprietà Riario."[520]

The document ended by pointed to functional concerns, particularly regarding visitor access and safety. It described the unresolved issue of emergency egress, noting the absence of an external staircase and highlighting the importance of restoring a disused internal stairwell: "è stato pattuito il ripristino dell'accessibilità di una rampa di una scala rinascimentale caduta in disuso […] per consentire, in caso di emergenza, una soddisfacente evacuazione rapida dell'immobile."[521] These obstacles reflected not only the material conditions of the building but also the tension between bureaucratic inertia and the urgent need to prepare the space for public access and museum use.

Despite these challenges, the vision for Palazzo Altemps remained ambitious. The building was intended to house key collections, such as the Ludovisi and Del Drago sculptures, as well as materials relating to the history of collecting. The use of rooms such as the "sale voltate

518 Currò, Antonino, and Francesco Scoppola. "Progetto di Restauro e Sicurezza: Palazzo Altemps." 19 January 1989. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11. See Appendix 15.
519 Ibid.
520 Ibid.
521 Ibid.

quattrocentesche con peducci in pietra lavorata e stemmi, risalenti al periodo di proprietà Riario" was seen as integral to the museum's objectives, combining the historical significance of the architecture with the collections it would display.[522] These spaces were part of a broader plan to integrate the Palazzo into MNR as a site where the past could inform and engage the present.

Adriano La Regina's writings emphasized the dual purpose of the Palazzo's transformation: preserving its historical and architectural heritage while creating a space for cultural engagement and intellectual exchange. In his correspondence, he described the Palazzo not only as a location for conservation but as a living space that could connect its historical character to contemporary cultural discourse. His commitment to ensuring that the ancient and modern could coexist in a meaningful dialogue is evident throughout the documentation.[523]

The process of transforming Palazzo Altemps into a museum reflects the broader challenges of heritage management in Rome during this period. Legal battles, tenant evictions, and the structural restoration of the building were intertwined with the cultural ambitions of creating a space that could serve both academic research and public access. These documents offer a window into the complexities of repurposing a historic building and the vision that guided its adaptation into a modern museum.

The Establishment of the Museum and *La Maiella*

The *La Maiella* restaurant, located at Piazza S. Apollinare 45/46, had been operating in the building for over two decades under lease agreements with the previous owners. With the Ministry's acquisition of the building, the restaurant became a focal point of conflict, as its activities were deemed incompatible with the planned museological use of the premises. In correspondence dated April 9, 1992, Soprintendente Adriano La Regina explicitly stated that "the current use of the premises as a commercial activity is incompatible with the

522 La Regina, Adriano. "Minuta: Roma – Demanio pubblico – Ramo artistico, storico, archeologico. Palazzo Riario Altemps Gallese – Rilascio locali." 12 June 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11. See Appendix 16.
523 Ibid.

building's intended role as a museum" and recommended that the concession for "La Maiella" not be renewed.[524]

At the same time, the Ministry sought to manage the logistical and spatial demands of the new museum project. In 1987, for instance, La Regina, then Soprintendente, was authorized to relocate his official residence from the Palatino to a service apartment in Palazzo Altemps. This decision facilitated the expansion of the library adjacent to his previous quarters and symbolized the Ministry's broader efforts to reorganize and consolidate institutional spaces within the building.[525]

The restaurant "La Maiella" remained a complex issue throughout the redevelopment process. While temporary permissions for outdoor seating were granted under strict conditions[526]for example, limited to the summer season without the possibility of extension,[527] the Ministry maintained that the restaurant's presence impeded progress on the museum project. Financial disputes further complicated the relationship. The restaurant's rent obligations were contested, leading to interventions by the Ministry to clarify payment terms and resolve arrears.

Ultimately, the Ministry's position culminated in an eviction notice issued in November 1992. The notice cited the need to "liberate the premises for public use as a museum" and underscored the urgency of completing the redevelopment of Palazzo Altemps[528]. Soprintendente La Regina emphasized that delays in vacating the premises would negatively impact the entire museum system[529], particularly given the interconnected nature of restoration works and the broader museological program.

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524 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. 9 Apr. 1992. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 132, Fasc. 11. Author's translation from the original Italian correspondence.

525 Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. Letter to the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. 7 Aug. 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 132, Fasc. 11.

526 See Appendix 17 for photo.

527 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. 24 July 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 132, Fasc. 11.

528 Intendenza di Finanza della Provincia di Roma. Ordinanza di Sfratto to S.a.s. La Maiella. 19 Nov. 1992. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 132, Fasc. 11.

529 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to the Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. 10 Dec. 1992. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 132, Fasc. 11.

This protracted negotiation between the Ministry and the restaurant exemplifies the challenges of balancing heritage preservation with the rights of existing tenants. While the Ministry pursued its goal of creating a cohesive museological space, it also had to navigate legal, financial, and operational obstacles. The resolution of the "La Maiella" case and the eventual redevelopment of Palazzo Altemps allowed the building to fulfill its role as a museum. This illustrates the broader tensions inherent in adapting historical buildings to contemporary cultural uses, exemplifying the interplay between preservation, institutional priorities, and existing social and economic structures.

The protracted process of reclaiming Palazzo Altemps from its previous commercial occupants (particularly the restaurant *La Maiella*) acts as a case of the bureaucratic and infrastructural obstacles that shaped the transformation of historic buildings into museum spaces in late twentieth-century Rome. Despite the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali having exercised its right of preemption (*diritto di prelazione*) on the property as early as 1982 (D.M. 2.8.1982), the building remained partially occupied for over a decade. The restaurant's tenancy, located on the ground floor and mezzanine with direct access from Piazza S. Apollinare 45, posed persistent delays to the adaptive reuse of the palazzo. As noted in a 1987 memo, the continued presence of *La Maiella* "impedisce la prosecuzione dei restauri della facciata in quanto rende impossibile operare dall'interno delle iniezioni di malta cementizia causa la presenza all'esterno della cortina di mattoni antica."[530]

A series of eviction proceedings culminated in a formal ordinance issued in November 1992 by the Intendenza di Finanza, explicitly ordering the administrative removal of *La Maiella* due to the incompatibility of commercial activity with the palazzo's designated museological function. The document emphasized that the occupation was in conflict with the broader project to create public access points, ticketing areas, cloakrooms, and group reception spaces linked to the

530 La Regina, Adriano, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali – Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Lettera al Ministero delle Finanze, 12 June 1987. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc 11.

new MNR site, particularly its Dipartimento di Storia del Collezionismo.[531] The process remained contentious, however, and as late as 1993, the tenants had filed appeals with the regional administrative court (T.A.R. Lazio), prompting the state to reiterate the urgency of regaining control of the premises. A 1993 internal note reaffirmed that the building had been acquired specifically for museum use, and cited a 1992 memo from the Soprintendenza which warned of "l'estrema urgenza di poter disporre dei locali in oggetto."[532]

The resolution of the *La Maiella* case marked a formative moment in both the logistical and symbolic consolidation of Palazzo Altemps within the institutional framework of the MNR. The restaurant's eviction cleared the way for comprehensive restoration and the integration of core collections (most notably the Ludovisi marbles) into a setting where architectural heritage and museological narrative could finally converge. At the same time, the case points to the broader complexities of museological development in historic urban environments, revealing the layered administrative, legal, and cultural negotiations that such projects entail. As Palazzo Altemps transitioned from contested space to museum site, these negotiations were essential to ensuring that the building could both preserve its historical identity and meet the evolving needs of a modern cultural institution.

The Relocation of Archaeological Offices and Residences at Palazzo Altemps

As part of the broader effort to modernize and expand MNR, significant administrative decisions were made regarding the relocation of state-owned accommodations occupied by La Regina, *Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma*. These documents, drawn from the *Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma*, reveal the logistical and bureaucratic challenges surrounding this transition. At the heart of the decision was the need to relocate the service

531 Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. Ordinanza di sfratto in via amministrativa, prot. n. 74752/92, 19 November 1992. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc 11.
532 Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. Risposta al ricorso presentato da "La Maiella", prot. n. 1761/93, 24 February 1993. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc 11.

accommodation at the Antiquarium Palatino, which La Regina had been using, to make way for the expansion of the adjacent library. This library had been developing into a specialized repository of Greek and Latin texts, epigraphy, and papyrology, furthering its mission to provide an unparalleled resource for scholars of classical antiquity.

The Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali emphasized the necessity of the relocation, noting that ongoing structural renovations to the Antiquarium would render the accommodation uninhabitable. As stated in a communication dated July 19, 1987, the ongoing work included reinforcing floors and ceilings and reorganizing collections to meet the library's expanding needs. The letter specified that these renovations would require intervention on the accommodation, rendering its continued use impossible.[533] Palazzo Altemps was identified as the new location for La Regina's accommodation, a move that aligned with the broader institutional plans to integrate the historic building into the Museo Nazionale Romano.

Located at Via S. Apollinare 8, the proposed space within Palazzo Altemps consisted of three rooms, a mezzanine, and related facilities. The decision to allocate these spaces was part of a carefully considered strategy to establish the Palazzo as a central hub for archaeological and cultural activities, reinforcing its role within the national museum's infrastructure. On August 7, 1987, the Ministry requested the transmission of building plans to the Technical Office of the Treasury, a procedural step necessary to finalize the transfer and facilitate the preparation of lease agreements. The Ministry's letter reflects the administrative complexity of this endeavor, involving multiple governmental and cultural bodies to ensure the successful execution of the relocation.[534]

533 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. "Lettera: Alloggio demaniale a titolo oneroso occupato dal Soprintendente archeologico di Roma – Trasferimento." Authored by Adriano La Regina, addressed to the Direttore Generale dell'Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Architettonici, Artistici e Storici. 19 June 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

534 Intendenza di Finanza di Roma. "Pos. 94-P-9/16 – Roma – Palatino. Alloggio demaniale a titolo oneroso occupato dal Soprintendente archeologico di Roma – Trasferimento in alloggio Palazzo Riario Altemps." Authored by Dott. Aldo Tozzi, addressed to the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. 7 August 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

La Regina was actively involved in the discussions surrounding the move, as evidenced by a handwritten draft dated March 11, 1987. In this document, he detailed his request for authorization to use the new accommodation as a service office, emphasizing the importance of maintaining institutional functionality during the transition.[535] The request reflects his pragmatic approach, ensuring that his professional needs were met without compromising the larger objectives of the Superintendency. La Regina's involvement also shows the nature of the decision-making process, which required the coordination of multiple stakeholders to address both practical concerns and the strategic goals of the institution.

The relocation process, however, was not without its challenges. The correspondence from July 3, 1987, highlights the financial and legal complexities of the transfer, including the preparation of lease agreements and the verification of logistical feasibility. The Ministry's directive to allocate the new accommodation "a titolo oneroso"[536] (on a cost-recovery basis) further illustrates the fiscal considerations involved. Despite these challenges, the decision to relocate the accommodation to Palazzo Altemps symbolized the Superintendency's commitment to integrating the building into its institutional framework.

This series of documents reveals not only the logistical intricacies of relocating a high-ranking official's accommodation, but also the broader cultural and institutional implications of such a decision. The move from the Antiquarium Palatino to Palazzo Altemps was emblematic of the evolving priorities of the MNR during this period, as it sought to balance historical preservation with the demands of modern scholarship and administrative functionality. As evidenced by the strategic relocation and adaptive reuse of institutional spaces, MNR

535 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. "Lettera: Roma – Palatino. Alloggio demaniale – Trasferimento." Handwritten correspondence authored by Adriano La Regina, addressed to the Direttore Generale dell'Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Architettonici, Artistici e Storici. 11 March 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

536 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. "Lettera: Roma – Palatino. Alloggio demaniale a titolo oneroso occupato dal Soprintendente archeologico di Roma – Trasferimento." Authored by the Direttore Generale, addressed to Adriano La Regina. 3 July 1987. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.

increasingly embraced a nuanced model of stewardship, one that sought to reconcile the imperatives of historical preservation with the operational exigencies of contemporary scholarship and administration. This delicate balancing act is emblematic of a broader disciplinary shift observed in cultural heritage management, where, as Carter and Grimwade have argued, sustainable heritage practice necessitates an ongoing negotiation between conservation ethics and functional adaptation within institutional frameworks.[537] Similarly, Longstreth mentions the importance of integrating cultural landscapes into preservation practice, not as static relics, but as evolving environments responsive to the interpretive needs of scholars and the infrastructural demands of modern governance.[538] Here, it becomes clear that the transformation of Palazzo Altemps was not merely a physical or structural project but a carefully orchestrated effort to redefine its role within Rome's cultural heritage landscape.

The Conservation, Transport, and Installation of the Ludovisi Collection at Palazzo Altemps: A Case Study

In the 1932 guidebook *Le Terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano* by Roberto Paribeni[539] describes the Collezione Ludovisi as one of the most notable collections in Rome. Originally held in private ownership and created by cardinal Ludovisi (1621-1623). The collection's origins are traced back to Ludovico's acquisition of vast land holdings and artistic treasures. In this guidebook Peribeni emphasizes the enduring importance of the collection, especially the presence of the Throne of Aphrodite, a piece considered one of the jewels of the collection.[540]

When the Ludovisi Collection was reinstalled at Palazzo Altemps in the 1990s, the project went well beyond the usual logistical and budgetary concerns. It reflected a shift in how the museum approached its role,

537 Carter, Grimwade 1997, pp. 45–54.
538 Longstreth 2008.
539 Paribeni 1928.
540 For an overview of key scholarship on the Ludovisi Collection, see e.g., Paribeni 1932; Bartman 2015; Albl 2023; Vermeule 1963.

not just in preserving ancient objects, but in rethinking how they should be interpreted, presented, and understood within a changing museum environment. This initiative, while institutionally specific, mirrored broader currents in the conservation and curation of antiquities that emerged during the late twentieth century, a period marked by the increasing professionalization of conservation ethics and the destabilization of objectivist curatorial narratives. As Pearce has noted, museum collections in this era came to be seen not as neutral repositories of material culture, but as discursive assemblages whose interpretive frameworks were inextricably linked to institutional authority and cultural policy.[541] Concurrently, Lavine and Karp's analysis of exhibition practices underscored the ideological entanglements of display, highlighting a turn toward reflexivity and the political implications of curatorial choice.[542] Within this critical landscape, the conservation strategies documented in the Palazzo Altemps project reveal a pronounced sensitivity to both the physical integrity of ancient objects and the interpretive narratives through which they would be publicly encountered. This dual imperative resonates with Clavir's observation that conservation during this period was not only a technical discipline, but also a culturally constructed practice, mediated by shifting values and stakeholder expectations.[543] The invoices, technical reports, and logistical records surrounding the Ludovisi installation thus function as more than bureaucratic artifacts; they serve as a lens through which one can apprehend the intellectual labor involved in reconciling the material demands of conservation with the evolving curatorial ambitions of late twentieth-century museology.

The Ludovisi Collection, required specific packaging and conservation measures to ensure the preservation of the statues during their relocation. According to the project documentation - a detailed list of invoices related to the transportation and setup of the Ludovisi

541 Pearce 1992, pp.73-75.
542 Lavine, Karp 1991,pp. 1–10.
543 Clavir 1998, pp. 1–5.

collection[544] the first phase of this operation involved the construction of custom packaging solutions, designed to protect the delicate surfaces of the marble works. Each item in the collection was evaluated for pre-existing structural weaknesses, with interventions aimed at reinforcing fragile points through supportive materials and bracing techniques.

The documentation itemizes the tasks required for each statue, listing the construction of wooden crates and cushioning systems for statues of varying sizes. For example, the transportation of statues from the Ludovisi 1st Lot, as detailed in the invoice, required the creation of crates with internal linings tailored to each artifact's specific dimensions. The invoice records a significant expenditure for this aspect of the project, with each piece of conservation labor meticulously accounted for, including the reconstruction of earlier packaging that had deteriorated over time (as evidenced by the line item labeled "restauro di precedente imballaggio").

By the early 1990s, the coordination and planning for the transportation of works and the exhibition layout of Palazzo Altemps was in full swing. In a series of correspondences, from arch. Francesco Scappola on behalf of the Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma (Adriano La Regina), to coordinate with dr. M. Grazia Benini at the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali and also between the Ufficio Gabinetto Commissario Straordinario. These documents, dated October 27 and 28, 1993, focus on the transportation of a section of the Ludovisi Collection, which includes ancient statuary, from the back of Terme di Diocleziano, Museo Nazionale Romano (located at Piazza delle Finanze, 1) to Palazzo Altemps. The *Soprintendenza Archeologica* requests a police escort to ensure the safe and secure transfer of these valuable artifacts.

The transfer was scheduled for October 29, 1993. The operation was highly time-sensitive, with the transport beginning at 11:00 AM from Piazza dei Cinquecento and expected to arrive at Palazzo Altemps by 12:00 PM. This precision is crucial given the need to coordinate with

544 "Palazzo Altemps - Trasporto e Allestimento delle Collezioni di Scultura Antica ed Altre Opere Accessione." Museo Nazionale Romano, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, date unknown, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

multiple teams and avoid disruptions in the city. The documents provide specific details about the vehicles involved in the transport, including the license plates and the names of the drivers. For example, two trucks from the transport company Montecovi, with specific license plate numbers, are mentioned along with the drivers' names, Stefano Minguzzi and Tito Mannina. Such details are critical for ensuring accountability and for coordinating with police escorts.

In one correspondence dated 28 October 1993, there was a request to close Via S. Apollinare to traffic and clear parked cars in Piazza S. Apollinare from 1:00 PM to 6:00 PM. This extended time window indicates the meticulous care required for unloading and positioning the sculptures within Palazzo Altemps. Clearing parked cars would be necessary to maneuver the trucks and safely unload the delicate objects. Involvement of the state police and municipal police highlights the level of security needed to protect these artifacts from potential threats, such as theft or damage, during transit.

An additional document from 1993 also from October 1993, provides further context on the transportation of the Ludovisi Collection and the necessary coordination between various government departments. It shows the involvement of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, the Ministero dell'Interno (Ministry of the Interior), and the Dipartimento della Pubblica Sicurezza (Department of State Police). This high-level coordination reflects the importance of the Ludovisi Collection and the need to manage its transportation with the utmost care. The document stresses the dual goals of ensuring public safety and preserving the integrity of the transported artifacts. This coordination clearly illustrates the careful documentation and communication required between the *Soprintendenza Archeologica* and the various municipal and state bodies. This record-keeping ensures that all parties were informed and that the transport was executed according to plan.

It becomes clear that the transportation of objects required close coordination between various local authorities. For instance, letters were addressed not only to the *Comando VV.UU.* but also to the *Circoscrizione I* and the *Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali*,

ensuring that all necessary parties were aware of and involved in the process. This extensive collaboration illustrates the complex institutional landscape in which such transfers were carried out, as well as the need for precise planning. Traffic closures and parking restrictions were implemented on Via S. Apollinare and the surrounding streets on each transfer day to facilitate the unloading of the sculptures and ensure they arrived safely at their destination.

Another significant aspect mentioned in the documents is the ceremonial aspect of the transfers. For the transfer on May 9, 1994, it was noted that the Mayor of Rome and the Minister for Cultural and Environmental Heritage, Alberto Ronchey, would be present for a public ceremony marking the opening of the exhibition of the Ludovisi Collection at Palazzo Altemps.[545] Here, the importance of the Ludovisi Collection is seen as both an archaeological project and a public event meant to showcase the cultural wealth of the city and the nation, reflecting what Carol Duncan has described as the museum's role in staging civic ritual and national self-representation.[546] The participation of high-level officials highlights the symbolic importance of the collection's transfer.

The 1994 correspondences regarding the transportation of the Ludovisi sculptures provide a rich and detailed narrative of the extensive logistical, institutional, and ceremonial efforts involved in relocating the collection to Palazzo Altemps.[547] They reveal the complexity of moving valuable and large-scale archaeological artifacts through a densely populated urban environment, as well as the critical importance of security and inter-institutional collaboration in such

545 Scoppola, Francesco. Lettera alla Comune di Roma sull'inaugurazione della sede di Palazzo Altemps del Museo Nazionale Romano. 15 May 1997. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Archivio MNR, Roma. Consulted in the Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.
546 Duncan 1995, pp.1–3, 8–13.
547 De Angelis, Matilde. Lettera al Comune di Roma riguardante il trasferimento della Collezione Ludovisi al Palazzo Altemps. 3 May 1994. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Roma. Signed on behalf of Soprintendente Adriano La Regina. Consulted in the Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma; De Angelis, Matilde. Lettera al Comune di Roma riguardante il trasporto della Collezione Ludovisi al Palazzo Altemps. 16 Apr. 1994. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Archivio MNR, Roma. Signed on behalf of Soprintendente Adriano La Regina. Consulted in the Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

operations.[548] Additionally, these documents illustrate the cultural significance of the Ludovisi Collection, not only as a significant archaeological collection, but as a focal point of public and governmental attention, requiring the involvement of local authorities and national heritage organizations. These letters are essential for understanding the processes involved in integrating a major archaeological collection into the architectural and cultural framework of Palazzo Altemps, marking a significant moment in the building's transformation into one of the museums's new locations.

In the process of transferring significant portions of the Ludovisi Collection from the Museo Nazionale Romano (headquartered at the Terme di Diocleziano) to Palazzo Altemps, a detailed logistical plan was implemented between 1993 and 1994. The table below presents a chronological overview of the key transport operations undertaken during this period, summarizing the dates, number of items, and specific artifacts involved in each transfer. This data provides insight into the complexity and scale of the project, which involved the careful movement of large-scale ancient sculptures and architectural elements. The transfer included prominent pieces such as the *Galata*, the *Dioniso e satiro*, and significant architectural columns, among others.

Ludovisi Collection Transport from Museo Nazionale Romano to Palazzo Altemps

Date	Number of Pieces	Description
12/13 maggio 1993	26 pezzi	da Palazzo Ruspoli (in esposizione al pubblico dal 5 dicembre 1992 al 30 aprile 1993)
29 ottobre 1993	3 pezzi	Galata 8608, Dioniso e satiro 8606, Sarcofago grande 8574
14 dicembre 1993	7 pezzi	Inventario nn. 8653-8637-8649-8646-8626-8619-8622
14 febbraio 1994	10 pezzi	Inventario nn. 8612-8585-8641-8569-8573-8600-8589-8583-8563-2001957
29 marzo 1994	4 fusti di colonna	4 fusti di colonna completi di base; 2 basi circolari di marmo moderno (senza numero inventario)
11 aprile 1994	12 pezzi	Inventario nn. 8638bis-8591-8588-8605-8605-8598-8578bis-8647-8648-8644-8640-8607
12 aprile 1994	2 colonne	2 colonne in granito (nn. 177-183); 4 colonne in cipollino e 3 basi senza inventario
19 aprile 1994	12 pezzi	Inventario nn. 8623-8629-8582-8615-8613-8618-8625-8610-8628-8634-8652-8609
4 maggio 1994	4 pezzi	Inventario nn. 8578bis-8578ter-8589bis-8636bis; 1 colonna in granito grigio (inv. n. 640)

In reference to another correspondence regarding transportation of works is a document, dated December 17, 1996, addresses the logistical

548 De Angelis, Matilde. Lettera al Comune di Roma riguardante il trasporto della Collezione Ludovisi ad Altemps. 27 May 1997. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Roma. Signed on behalf of Soprintendente Adriano La Regina. Consulted in the Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

arrangements necessary for transporting a major sculpture to MNR (it does not specify the name of the object), housed in Palazzo Altemps. The letter is issued by La Regina and Dr. Matilde De Angelis and is directed to various municipal authorities, including the Mayor's Office, local police, and traffic control units.[549]

The transportation was scheduled for December 18, 1996, with preparations beginning early in the morning at 7:30 AM. This specific timing is crucial as it likely avoids peak traffic hours in Rome, minimizing disruptions and ensuring that the sculpture can be moved without significant delays. The document requests the closure of Via S. Apollinare to all traffic. This road closure is necessary to facilitate the safe passage and unloading of the sculpture at Palazzo Altemps. Given the narrow and historically significant streets of Rome, such closures would be vital in preventing any accidents or damage to objects during transit.

Movement and Installation within the Exhibition Space

Once transported to Palazzo Altemps, the statues required careful installation within the newly designed exhibition spaces. The detailed invoices of *Trasporto e Allestimento delle Collezioni di Scultura Antica ed Altre Opere Accessione*[550] refers to the specialized labor involved in positioning these ancient statues within their designated locations, a task that was both physically demanding and intellectually complex. Museum staff had to balance aesthetic considerations with structural and safety concerns. The invoice documents a series of labor-intensive tasks associated with the movement and final positioning of the Ludovisi marbles. In this phase, skilled workers and conservators

549 De Angelis, Matilde. Lettera al Comune di Roma riguardante il trasporto della Collezione Ludovisi al Palazzo Altemps. 17 Dec. 1996. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Archivio MNR, Roma. Signed on behalf of Soprintendente Adriano La Regina. Consulted in the Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

550 Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. Trasporto e allestimento delle collezioni di scultura antica ed altre opere accessione di proprietà dello Stato presso la nuova sede del Museo Nazionale Romano in Palazzo Altemps. 14 Feb. 1996. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Archivio MNR, Roma. Consulted in the Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

collaborated to ensure that each statue was not only secure, but displayed in a way that enhanced its visual and historical significance.

The installation of the second lot of Ludovisi sculptures confronted the museum with a series of practical and technical obstacles, above all the problem of moving large blocks of marble within the fragile fabric of a Renaissance palazzo. The invoices make repeated reference to carico e movimentazione delle sculture, recording the hire of rigging devices and, in some cases, cranes, to hoist the heavier works into their assigned positions. Such notations are revealing, not only of the costs involved, but of the scale of the operation itself, which demanded the coordination of conservators, engineers, and skilled labour. Particular attention was given to the preparation of new bases, designed both to stabilise the statues structurally and to reduce the risk of seismic damage, a concern that reflects the wider preoccupation of Italian heritage authorities in the 1990s with the vulnerability of collections housed in historic buildings.

The movement and installation of the Ludovisi Collection coincided with similar efforts for other collections housed at the MNR. Notably, the project documentation includes references to the Egyptian Collection and the Late Antique Collection. Although these collections differed in material composition and historical provenance, the challenges associated with their transport and installation were still the same as those faced by the Ludovisi Collection. The invoices for these collections also list costs related to packaging, transport, and installation, demonstrating the comprehensive nature of the museum's reorganization efforts during this period.[551]

The invoice concludes with a summary of the labor costs associated with the project, itemized under the section ‘manual labor for work carried out economically’. This section details the wages paid to workers, including both skilled and unskilled labor, for tasks such as handling the sculptures, assisting with the conservation processes, and overseeing the reinstallation of the collection. Interestingly, the document reflects a broader trend within cultural heritage institutions,

551 Ibid.

specifically in the 1990s, to manage costs through the use of internal labor, as opposed to outsourcing all work to external contractors. This economic efficiency, achieved through the direct employment of qualified museum staff, is an important aspect of the project's overall financial strategy.

Administrative Reorganization and the Implementation of Structural Reforms: The 1993 Questionnaire

The movement of objects wasn't the only pressing issue regarding transportation, but the relocation of the administrative offices was also a necessary step in ensuring that the Soprintendenza could continue to meet its mandate of protecting and promoting Rome's archaeological patrimony, while creating the new sites of MNR. One of the central aspects of this restructuring was the relocation of the offices from their long-standing headquarters at Piazza Santa Maria Nova and Piazza delle Finanze to the new locations at Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps. This transition was a crucial moment in the operations of the Soprintendenza, as it aimed to address long-standing inadequacies in space, infrastructure, and accessibility, not only for visitors, but for personnel as well.

As detailed in the correspondence from La Regina, dated January 5, 1993, the former offices had become insufficient to meet the growing demands of the institution, both in terms of staff and their evolving responsibilities. The physical space at the old locations was increasingly inadequate, straining the Soprintendenza's ability to carry out its work efficiently. The relocation to Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps sought to rectify these issues, providing larger, more accessible spaces that could accommodate both the staff and the public more effectively. These new offices were strategically located to enhance the institution's public outreach and administrative functions, which had been compromised by the limitations of the previous buildings. The official report clearly points out the inadequacies of the former headquarters, stating: "Le attuali sedi sono carenti sia dal punto

di vista strutturale che di spazio in rapporto ai compiti della Soprintendenza ed al numero del personale."[552]

This period of transition, however, was not without its challenges. The move itself created a temporary disruption in the daily operations of the museum staff. Staff were forced to adjust to new working environments while dealing with the logistical challenges of transferring materials and reorganizing workflows. Additionally, the relocation exposed a bigger issue within the institution: a chronic shortage of personnel. The Soprintendenza was already understaffed, and the move exacerbated this problem, with roles in the administration and the custodianship of monuments and archaeological sites being stretched even further. As stated in the questionnaire: "Carenza di personale nei ruoli intermedi, carenza di personale di custodia per i monumenti ed aree archeologiche."[553]

The lack of qualified personnel to fill critical roles became an ongoing issue during this period. In the absence of adequate staffing through regular public hiring processes, the *Soprintendenza* often had to assign employees to roles for which they were underqualified, a temporary measure that further complicated the institution's ability to function smoothly. As noted in the report, "Diverse qualifiche, in mancanza di concorsi, sono ricoperte da personale di qualifica inferiore non sempre adeguato."[554] This highlights a broader trend in the Italian public administration of the time, where resource shortages were often managed through short-term fixes rather than long-term structural solutions. [555]

Attached to the correspondence from La Regina to the *Prefettura di Roma, Comitato Metropolitano* on 5 January 1993 was a *questionario* following a meeting held on December 18, 1992. In this meeting, the need to evaluate and address structural and organizational challenges

552 La Regina, Adriano. Trasmissione questionario. 5 Jan. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 61, p. 4.
553 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Corrispondenza al Prefettura di Roma, Comitato Metropolitano: Trasmissione questionario. 5 Jan.1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 61, fasc 2. See Appendix 18.
554 La Regina, Adriano. Trasmissione questionario. 5 Jan. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 61, p.8.
555 See e.g., Cavatorto,La Spina 2020; Bassanini 2010.

during the office relocations was discussed. The document, described as a *questionario*, was an attempt to quantify and qualify the impacts of the transition and to document the current state of the Soprintendenza's operations as it prepared to move from its historic locations at Piazza Santa Maria Nova and Piazza delle Finanze to new offices at Palazzo Massimo (Piazza dei Cinquecento) and Palazzo Altemps (Via Sant'Apollinare).

The *questionario* is an official record of the temporary disruptions caused by the restructuring, noting that the data collected were influenced by the relocation process, as noted by La Regina in his cover letter: "I dati riportati sono influenzati negativamente dal momento transitorio dovuto alla ristrutturazione dell'ufficio con il passaggio dei dipendenti dalle sedi attuali... alle nuove sedi."[556] This indicates that the results of the questionnaire were seen within the context of a temporary, albeit critical, phase of change for the institution. [557]

The document is divided into several sections that systematically address the issues of infrastructure, personnel, and technology. The *Dati Strutturali* section discusses the institution's former and new headquarters, evaluating their adequacy in terms of accessibility, space, and functionality. It is clear from the questionnaire that the old offices, while functional to a certain extent, were no longer sufficient for the needs of a growing institution tasked with the stewardship of Rome's vast archaeological heritage. As noted, *"Le attuali sedi sono carenti sia dal punto di vista strutturale che di spazio"*, reflecting the severe limitations that necessitated the move.

Addressing the personnel issues, the *Personale* section provides critical data on staffing levels, qualifications, and internal mobility. It reveals that while 550 positions were outlined in the institution's staffing plans, only 56% were actually filled at the time, indicating a substantial shortfall. The questionnaire notes: "*Carenza di personale nei ruoli intermedi...diverse qualifiche sono ricoperte da personale di qualifica inferiore*

556 Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Corrispondenza al Prefettura di Roma, Comitato Metropolitano: Trasmissione questionario. 5 Jan.1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 61.

557 Notably, the questionnaire was issued during the period in which Legge Ronchey was undergoing conversion from decree-law to formal legislation.

non sempre adeguato," [558]indicating that roles requiring specific expertise were often filled by staff without the necessary qualifications, further straining the institution's operations. This reliance on under qualified staff was identified as a major issue, particularly in the administration of archaeological sites and monuments.

In the section on *Informatizzazione*, it outlines the institution's struggles with inadequate technological resources. It details that the Soprintendenza had only a minimal centralized system and around ten personal computers at its disposal, and that the technological systems required substantial upgrading. This was a significant hurdle, as the move to new offices presented an opportunity to modernize administrative functions, yet the available technology lagged behind what was necessary for efficient operation.

The questionnaire outlines general issues related to staff motivation and absenteeism, which were moderate concerns at the time. The responses show that motivation was marked as only adequate, with absenteeism having a moderate impact on administrative efficiency. To address these issues, the document identifies potential improvements, including requests for additional staff from the Ministry: *"Richieste al superiore ministero di adeguamento degli organici nelle qualifiche carenti."*[559] This request signifies the institution's dependence on higher authorities for addressing structural deficiencies.

This document not only captures the immediate logistical and operational challenges posed by the office relocation, but also reflects the deeper institutional issues that the museum and Soprintendenza struggled with at this time. The relocation to Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps was seen as a necessary step toward improving the institution's capacity, yet the document reveals that the move alone could not resolve underlying problems related to staffing shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated technology.

558 La Regina, Adriano. Trasmissione questionario. 5 Jan. 1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 61, p. 5.
559 Ibid. p. 6.

Restoration Challenges and Preservation Strategies: The Ludovisi Collection

One of the critical documents that reinforces the continued preservation efforts at Palazzo Altemps is a letter dated September 28, 2001, from Adriano La Regina, Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma, to Dr. De Angelis.[560] This document shows the challenges involved in the restoration and maintenance of both the Ludovisi Collection and the architectural structures within the Palazzo. The letter illustrates the delicate balance between preserving historical artifacts and maintaining the environmental and structural integrity of the building itself.

In his letter, La Regina addresses the dilemma of reconciling the architectural integrity of historical museum buildings with the stringent environmental requirements of modern conservation. This tension is repeated in recent analyses of Italian museum settings, where adaptive reuse often exposes collections to fluctuating humidity, airborne pollutants, and structural constraints unsuited to climate control systems.[561] Such concerns are not unique to MNR but are part of a broader challenge in Italy's heritage management strategies.[562]

The document also emphasizes the importance of recording and documenting architectural elements within Palazzo Altemps. La Regina mentions the Torre Ludovisi, indicating that part of the restoration involves ensuring that all significant historical structures are properly cataloged. He also inquired about the status of unresolved issues related to the "Nuovo Ludovisi-Brachetti," suggesting that certain elements of the Ludovisi Collection or its associated structures still required attention at the time. His inquiry demonstrates the ongoing and evolving nature of the restoration process at Palazzo Altemps, where multiple layers of historical significance, architectural complexity, and artifact preservation intersect.

560 Adriano La Regina, "Lettera a Dr. De Angelis riguardante il restauro della Collezione Ludovisi e elementi architettonici di Palazzo Altemps," Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 28 settembre 2001, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.
561 Chiaia 2025.
562 See e.g.,Warke, Mishra 2025.

This is an important testament to the efforts required to maintain Palazzo Altemps as a site of cultural heritage, illustrating both the logistical complexities of restoring a historic structure and the forward-thinking necessity of documenting its architectural and museological context in detail. As Giorgio Resta notes, the control over cultural assets increasingly extends beyond physical conservation to include the management of their image and symbolic value — a reflection of the broader juridical and institutional frameworks that shape heritage access and interpretation today.[563]

The Opening of a New Chapter

The opening of Palazzo Altemps in December 1997 marked a significant moment in the evolution of the MNR, reinforcing its position as a multi-site institution dedicated to presenting Rome's classical heritage within historically resonant settings. The event was widely covered by the Italian press, with *La Repubblica* documenting the public reception, visitor numbers, and operational details in an article published on December 28, 1997.[564] The report not only recorded the museum's early success but also framed it within broader cultural and institutional developments in Italy during the late 20th century. According to *La Repubblica*, the museum's inauguration attended by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and Minister of Culture Walter Veltroni,[565]demonstrating the project's significance as a cultural

563 Resta 2023, pp. 73–83.

564 "L'ALTEMPS APERTO FINO A TARDI." La Repubblica, 28 Dec. 1997, p. 7.

565 In an interview published by AIACNews 1, 2005, Adriano La Regina credits Veltroni with supporting him and aiding in the creation of the new MNR sites:

(Interviewer) Q: Could you give a rating to a local or national administration that you worked with—whether particularly good or bad?

(La Regina) Since I worked with many people and maintained good relationships, ranking them would feel inappropriate. But I would like to mention people to whom I owe a lot and who supported the work I promoted. First and foremost: Walter Veltroni. I got to know him both as Minister and later as Mayor of Rome. He stood by me even in difficult moments, even when relations between the city and the Ministry were strained. I believe that he, regardless of political alignment, always supported cultural initiatives—so I remain grateful to him for that support. When Veltroni became Minister, I had recently finished dealing with the previous Mayor of Rome, with whom I had been in conflict. In contrast, Veltroni's positions—at least at the time—seemed to align with my own, especially regarding the use of public funds for culture and heritage, and not just for other political purposes.

Later, during his time as Mayor, Veltroni maintained that same support, especially concerning museum-related initiatives. Thanks to his efforts, we were able to open new museums and reopen others, including Palazzo Massimo,

milestone and also a state-backed initiative to expand public access to Italy's archaeological patrimony.

The article explains that Palazzo Altemps immediately attracted significant public interest, welcoming approximately 10,000 visitors in its first ten days.[566] This substantial turnout suggests a strong public enthusiasm for archaeological collections, as well as the effectiveness of institutional strategies for integrating newly restored historic sites into Rome's museum network. The collections on display; the Altemps, Boncompagni, Ludovisi, Jandolo, and del Drago collections, alongside a significant Egyptian collection were presented within the palazzo's opulent interiors, allowing visitors to experience antiquity within an immersive historical setting.

One of the key factors contributing to the museum's immediate popularity, was its extended evening hours during the holiday season, which allowed visitors to visit the museum until 10 PM. [567] allowing both residents and tourists to take advantage of late-night access to the museum. This decision reflected broader cultural policy trends in the late 20th century, which sought to broaden access to Italy's state museums through more flexible opening hours and targeted admission policies. The article also shows the museum's commitment to accessibility, noting that "*il biglietto costa 10.000 lire, ma è gratuito per i minorenni e per gli ultra sessantenni*", reinforcing a governmental push toward more inclusive museum experiences.

Beyond attendance figures and accessibility, the newspaper also documented an innovative staffing model at Palazzo Altemps, which combined volunteer participation with social employment programs. Volunteers from organizations such as Legambiente and Auser, alongside individuals recruited through state-supported employment initiatives, played a key role in visitor services and custodial duties. It notes that a significant portion of the personnel was drawn from "*cassintegrati*," referring to workers receiving financial assistance due to

Palazzo Altemps, Crypta Balbi, and the Museo del Palatino. I remain very attached to that museum system and to the entire reorganization of the Museo Nazionale Romano. La Regina 2009, pp. 50–51.
566 "L'ALTEMPS APERTO FINO A TARDI." La Repubblica 1997, p. 7.
567 Ibid.

unemployment, who were temporarily engaged in public service roles .[568] This approach reflected a broader trend in Italian museum management during the 1990s, where partnerships with civic organizations were increasingly used to supplement state resources and enhance public engagement in cultural heritage institutions.[569]

The establishment of Palazzo Altemps as the third branch of the museum, alongside Terme Diocleziano and Palazzo Massimo, signified a strategic institutional effort to decentralize and recontextualize Rome's archaeological collections. By situating antiquities within a historically significant urban palazzo, the museum provided a distinct alternative to traditional display settings in large-scale archaeological sites or neoclassical museum halls. The overwhelmingly positive reception documented in the La Repubblica article reinforced Palazzo Altemps' status as a major addition to Rome's museum landscape, exemplifying the successful intersection of historic preservation, archaeological research, and expanded public access within contemporary Italian museum policy.

Date	Event	Relation
1568	Cardinal Marco Sittico Altemps acquires the palace; Martino Longhi begins renovations (courtyard, roof gallery/tower-belvedere)	Ownership change & architectural transformation
1901	Italian State acquires much of Ludovisi collection; exhibits at Museo delle Terme cloister	Precursor location before transfer to Altemps
1932	Paribeni guidebook	Historiographic context for

568 Ibid.

569 See: Querci 2022; Thompson 2007.

	highlighting importance of the Ludovisi Collection	collection displayed at Altemps
1982	State acquires Palazzo Altemps; entrusted to Archaeological Service of Rome	Institutional acquisition
24 Jul 1982	Corriere della Sera (P. Lanzara) on plans to exhibit Ludovisi at the Quirinale; broader MNR strategy	Public discourse & institutional planning
12 Jun 1987	Memo on tenant 'La Maiella' obstructing façade restorations; non-compliant kitchen	Operational/tenancy obstacle
21 May 1987	La Regina memo proposing revised exhibition layout; integrate historical views (e.g., Piranesi)	Curatorial planning within Altemps
23 Mar 1987	Soprintendenza to Ministry: propose reorganization of part of Ludovisi Collection at Altemps; adjust layouts	Curatorial planning & design adjustments
6 Oct 1987	La Regina memo on placement, structural load analyses, environmental controls	Technical planning (structural/environmental)
19 Jan 1989	Memo on urgent stabilization; need to shore unsafe structures; access	Structural safety & access constraints

	blocked by occupied areas	
18 Dec 1992	Meeting leading to 1993 questionnaire on restructuring and relocations	Administrative transition context
Apr 9, 1992	La Regina: use as commercial activity incompatible with museum function; recommend non-renewal for La Maiella	Policy decision on tenancy
Nov 1992	Eviction notice for La Maiella; need to free spaces for museum use	Tenancy resolution enabling works
5 Jan 1993	Questionnaire summarizing staffing/infrastructure deficits during moves to Palazzo Massimo & Palazzo Altemps	Administrative reorganization
9 May 1994	Public ceremony with Mayor and Minister Ronchey for opening of Ludovisi display at Altemps	Public inauguration event (collection display)
17–18 Dec 1996	Letters arranging transport to MNR/Altemps; Via S. Apollinare road closure on 18 Dec	Collection transfer logistics
28 Dec 1997	La Repubblica report: 10,000+ visitors in first ten	Early operation & public reception

	days; extended holiday hours; inclusive ticketing	
Dec 1997	Opening of Palazzo Altemps as MNR site	Museum inauguration
28 Sep 2001	La Regina letter: environmental controls (windows ajar), documentation of Torre Ludovisi, pending 'Nuovo Ludovisi-Brachetti' matters	Ongoing preservation & documentation

To clarify the sequence of events traced in this section, Table X presents the main dates and decisions that marked the conversion of Palazzo Altemps into a museum site, from acquisition through to the inauguration and early public reception.

3.5 Crypta Balbi

The excavation which in many respects most transformed the face of archeology in Rome during the 1980s took place in the courtyard of an abandoned nunnery, not far from the Victor Emmanuel Monument. Initiated in 1981, the excavation provided the basis for a reconstruction hypothesis of the Crypta Balbi [570], an ancient theater complex commissioned in the late first century B.C. by a close associate of Augustus. Initially, the excavation aimed to address topographical questions, specifically to locate the remains of the Crypta Balbi, a long-buried and little-understood entertainment complex from antiquity. [571]

The Crypta Balbi, originally part of the theatre complex built by Lucius Cornelius Balbus in 13 BCE, offers a unique case study of Rome's urban and architectural evolution. Although modest in size compared to other Roman theatres, with a capacity of approximately 7,000 and a diameter of about 100 meters, its significance lies in its extensive

570 Manacorda 2001, p. 24.
571 Dyson 2019,p.247.

cultural stratification. Over centuries, the site transitioned through various uses, including the establishment of the Church of Sancta Maria Dominae Rosae, the hospice of St. Ignazio Loyola, and several private constructions.[572]

Its location in historic center was in a state of complete abandonment following the emptying of its area, a consequence of demolitions during the late sixteenth century. The area never saw a serious reconstruction project, leaving the buildings that once stood there stripped of their inhabitants and rendered uninhabitable for any residential use.[573]

The identification of the *Teatro di Balbo* was established in the 1960s by Guglielmo Gatti[574], who associated the structures built in *opus reticulatum* beneath the Palazzo Mattei-Paganica with the remains of the cavea. These remains had previously been misattributed to the Circus Flaminius. To the east of the theatre, there existed a quadripartite portico known as the *Crypta Balbi*, as evidenced by a fragment of the *Forma Urbis*, which explicitly names the *Theatrum Balbi*. This discovery not only recontextualizes the spatial organization of this area of ancient Rome but also contributes to a more detailed understanding of the urban development during the Augustan period.[575]

A crucial component of this research was the examination of fragments of the *Forma Urbis Romae* (the Severan Marble Plan of Rome), which offered essential topographical insights. Gatti's presentation on July 1, 1960, at Palazzo Braschi, was especially influential, providing strong evidence for the Crypta Balbi's true location. His findings, subsequently corroborated by further investigations and reports, established that the Crypta Balbi was situated behind the Church of S. Caterina de' Funari, correcting earlier misattributions of the site.

Further excavations in 1961, conducted by the Superintendency of Antiquities of Rome, provided additional archaeological support for Gatti's conclusions. Although these excavations were later interrupted

572 Fioriti 2022, p. 2.
573 Manacorda 2001, p.11.
574 Gatti 1979, p. 237.
575 Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana 1999, p. 73.

due to funding limitations, they succeeded in uncovering new structural elements that reinforced the established location of the Crypta Balbi.

This research not only clarified the location of the Crypta Balbi but also set the stage for further re-examination of related topographical issues in Rome.

The more recent history of the Crypta Balbi reflects a significant shift in Rome's approach to archaeological preservation, beginning in the 1980s. After decades of neglect, the area was brought under formal protection through the enactment of a special law for the conservation of Rome's archaeological heritage (Legge n. 92 del 23 marzo 1981). As stressed throughout this research, this legislation marked a turning point, enabling the reclamation of the site and initiating comprehensive stratigraphic research. In 1983, the state acquired the property, setting the stage for a meticulous campaign of urban archaeology.[576]

These excavations uncovered the complex layers of Rome's history preserved within the Crypta Balbi, illustrating the city's continuous growth atop its ancient ruins. The research not only provided insights into the site's transformation over centuries but also highlighted the broader dynamics of urban development in Rome. The Crypta Balbi became a focal point for understanding how the city's ancient fabric adapted to new social, cultural, and architectural needs through successive eras.[577]

The inception of the Crypta Balbi represents a significant case study in urban archaeology, offering a lens into Rome's evolution over two millennia. As discussed in Marco Ricci's analysis, this site exemplifies the interplay between monumental public spaces and private usage, revealing the complex transformations of the city's historical landscape. Initially constructed as part of the monumentalization of the Campus Martius during the Augustan age, the Crypta was an annex to the Theater of Balbus, inaugurated in 13 BCE. It consisted of a portico that framed public spaces and served both civic and ceremonial functions,

576 Vendittelli 2012, pp. 27-28.
577 Ibid.

connecting the theater to a broader urban network of religious and social landmarks. [578]

The archaeological investigations of the Crypta Balbi reveal its importance not only as an architectural structure but also as a dynamic urban space. Over centuries, it evolved in response to political, social, and environmental shifts. The site endured fires, reconstructions, and adaptive reuse, particularly following the Late Antique period, when much of the monumental core was repurposed. Excavations highlight the layers of continuity and transformation, with evidence of medieval ecclesiastical use and later private developments.[579]

Navigating Legal and Administrative Hurdles in Establishing the Crypta Balbi Museum

Crypta Balbi was the last 'polo' of Museo Nazionale Romano to be added and in many ways is unique from the rest, not only because it focuses on, or that it's a unique archeological site itself, but also because it is the first time since (insert info on archeologists - mussolini etc..) that scientific archaeological methods were used.[580]

The monumental complex of Crypta Balbi appears to be the only example of a museum that is able to tell the story of living in Rome from ancient times until today. This is not a conventional "museum", but is an entire urban complex of buildings dated back from the 1st to the 21st century. It is an *unicum,* more similar to an historical book than a museum, as we usually know it.[581]

Due to the administrative instabilities that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, the block remains one of the few Roman complexes where comprehensive research involving both the stratigraphies of the ground and the elevations is feasible. Owing to its topographical location in the historic center, this complex also represents one of the few researchable sites where a continuity of life

578 Ricci 2000,pp. 30-31.
579 Ibid.
580 Manacorda 2001.
581 Fioriti 2022, p.2.

from the Augustan age to the present day can be observed without substantial interruptions. For various reasons, only minimal parts of the area have undergone the extensive Renaissance, Baroque, and modern transformations seen in much of the city. These changes elsewhere have often obscured, disrupted, or rendered illegible the traces of historical sedimentation. Here, however, the structures both complete and clarify the phenomena found in archaeological deposits, presenting a clear picture of continuous dualism between public and private regarding the use of these areas.[582]

In 2006, Adriano La Regina wrote "In the last few years, museums have become more and more connected with their geographical areas, and in particular - as a consequence of a much wider diffusion of local institutes - with smaller districts." [583] This claim can be applied to the new museological concept of Crypta Balbi (museum/ archeological sites) as it demonstrates how a museum can embody the trend of becoming more connected to its geographical area through site-specific exhibitions, by anchoring itself in the very ground it interprets, the museum offers a model for how institutions can enhance their educational impact and societal relevance by deeply integrating with their immediate environments.

The property at Via dei Polacchi 20, located near the Crypta Balbi, serves as a case study of the administrative and legal challenges associated with managing cultural heritage within an urban context. During the early 1990s, this site became the center of a complex dispute involving unauthorized occupation, significant structural instability, and overlapping administrative responsibilities. The property's proximity to major archaeological remains and its inclusion in broader urban redevelopment plans further underscored the need for careful coordination among cultural and governmental authorities.

The situation first emerged in March 1991 through a report from the Ministero dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali, which identified severe

582 Ricci 2000, p. 30; my translation.
583 La Regina 2006, p. 10.

structural deterioration and illegal occupation of the property. The report, sent to the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma on March 6, 1991, described the property as "inabitabile privo ogni servizio,"[584] highlighting issues such as failing roof beams, collapsing windows, and a lack of basic utilities. It emphasized the urgency of securing the site due to its adjacency to an important archaeological area and the potential risk to artifacts within the premises.

Adriano La Regina further detailed the precarious state of the property in a letter dated March 14, 1991, addressed to the Questura Centrale di Roma, the Comando dei VV.FF. di Roma, and other relevant offices. In the letter, La Regina described the structural deficiencies, noting, "Le deficienze strutturali non solo mettono a rischio gli occupanti, ma compromettono anche l'integrità dei materiali archeologici conservati al suo interno."[585] He called for immediate measures to seal the building and secure its archaeological contents from potential damage or theft.

Despite the urgency conveyed in these communications, the administrative process was hampered by overlapping responsibilities and unclear jurisdictional authority. On April 22, 1991, the Ufficio Registro Demanio sent a formal request to the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma for assistance in reclaiming the property. The letter specifically referenced the need to address the "occupazione abusiva" by individuals identified in earlier reports. However, the property's complex legal status and ongoing unauthorized use created significant delays in implementing protective measures.[586]

Further correspondence illustrates the bureaucratic challenges involved in resolving the situation. A letter from the Intendenza di Finanza, dated November 17, 1992, addressed to the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, acknowledged the formal transfer of the

584 Ministero dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali. "Segnalo tue cortese attenzione per opportuno intervento che appartamento sito in Roma via dei Polacchi 20…." 6 Mar. 1991, Prot. n. 2753. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26.

585 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to Questura Centrale di Roma, Comando dei VV.FF. di Roma, and Ministero delle Finanze. 14 Mar. 1991, Prot. n. 3713. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26.

586 Ufficio Registro Demanio. Letter to Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. 22 Apr. 1991, Prot. n. 224/IV. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26.

property but reiterated the need for coordinated action. The document stressed the structural risks and recommended immediate measures to ensure public safety while preserving the property's cultural significance.[587] Similarly, a January 14, 1993, letter from the Ufficio Registro Demanio proposed creating a secure passageway through the property and described the need for specialized contractors to address both structural and security concerns.[588]

The property at Via dei Polacchi 20 became emblematic of the struggle to balance structural safety, prevent unauthorized use, and protect cultural and archaeological assets.Ultimately, this case was the need for clearer jurisdictional authority and streamlined decision-making in the management of heritage sites. As evidenced in the letters exchanged between agencies, addressing such challenges requires not only technical expertise but also efficient coordination among stakeholders.

In 1993, measures were implemented to address the preservation and accessibility of the area surrounding Crypta Balbi. These included structural restoration efforts for deteriorated buildings under the administration's ownership and steps to enhance pedestrian access, particularly near Piazza di Santa Caterina. The removal of visual obstructions, such as advertising boards along Via Caetani, further demonstrated a commitment to safeguarding the historical and aesthetic integrity of this culturally significant urban environment.[589]

Crypta Balbi demonstrates the overlapping uses of public and private spaces, providing an archaeological narrative of Rome's enduring urban fabric. As Ricci notes, the stratigraphic complexity of the site illustrates the "continuo dualismo tra pubblico e privato"[590] (continuous dualism between public and private), a recurring theme in the city's historical evolution. This dualism persisted through the medieval and

587 Intendenza di Finanza. Letter to Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. 17 Nov. 1992, Prot. n. 29973/92/IA. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26.
588 Ufficio Registro Demanio. Letter to Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. 14 Jan. 1993, Prot. n. 14/IV. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 136, Fasc. 17-26.
589 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al Presidente della 1ª Circoscrizione e al Direttore dell'Ufficio Tecnico 1ª Circ. 20 Apr. 1993, Prot. n. 3421/93. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 126, Fasc. 80.
590 Ibid, p. 30.

Renaissance periods, where religious and civic roles intersected with increasingly fragmented private ownership.

The historical narrative of the Crypta Balbi is a new way for Rome to be visited and understood.[591] It demonstrates the continuity and evolution of this urban block within the context of Rome's social and architectural transformations. Following the medieval and Renaissance periods, the area saw only minor structural adjustments in subsequent centuries, reflecting a remarkable degree of stability. These modifications included limited expansions of the convent of Santa Maria and its surrounding gardens, as well as alterations to facades and other architectural elements. Despite these interventions, the block maintained its overall alignment and cohesion, defined by enduring landmarks such as the Mattei and Caetani palaces.[592]

The restrained nature of these developments reflects the broader patterns of Rome's urban landscape, where stability and gradual change coexist. The Crypta Balbi's stratigraphic complexity is an example of this, revealing a continuous interplay between public and private spaces.[593] This architectural and spatial framework positions the Crypta Balbi as a critical site for examining Rome's capacity to integrate historical conservation within its evolving cityscape.

The Musealization of Crypta Balbi

It is worth noting that the opening of the Crypta Balbi museum[594] coincided with the celebrations of the Great Jubilee in Rome, a context that will be explored further in a subsequent chapter.

The efforts at the Crypta Balbi represent a critical chapter in the narrative of Rome's modern approach to archaeological restoration and museology. These projects are emblematic of a broader shift that sought to redefine the relationship between archaeological research, urban renewal, and public engagement. The restoration processes not only

591 Manacorda 2001, p.11.
592 Ibid, p. 32.
593 Manacorda 2008, pp. 227–228.
594 In some publications, it is also referred to as Museo di Roma Medioevo. See ibid., credits page.

unearthed artifacts and architectural remnants but also emphasized the importance of integrating advanced methodologies and interdisciplinary collaborations.

Unlike other branches of the museum, which primarily function as repositories for classical sculpture and antiquities, the Crypta Balbi was conceived as a site-specific museum that presents the stratigraphic transformation of an urban space over time. As Manacorda observed, the project "partiva […] dal rifiuto d'ogni gerarchia d'indagine, l'interazione fra i sistemi di fonti, [e] la narrazione contestuale più che tipologica," embodying a deliberate rejection of object-centered museography in favor of a contextual and processual reading of the city's material history.[595] This aligns with broader shifts in museological practice that prioritize in-situ preservation and the interpretation of historical continuity, rather than the isolated display of objects. The museological development of Crypta Balbi was informed by a desire to present the site's layered history in a way that not only highlighted its archaeological significance but also engaged contemporary audiences with its evolving functions over time.

The museum's concept was shaped by the decision to adopt a "museo narrativo" approach, which emphasized thematic storytelling over a strictly chronological presentation of artifacts. This approach allowed curators to highlight the evolving uses of the site, moving from its initial role as part of the theatre complex of Balbus to its later transformations as a medieval dumping ground and artisan workshop. As Franco Ceschi notes, the museum's design aimed to create "un progetto di allestimento per un museo narrativo", offering visitors an immersive experience that connects them to the site's diverse historical functions.[596]

A dedicated visual apparatus, produced in collaboration with external studios, translated the excavation's layered fabric into legible spatial narratives through calibrated 3-D reconstructions and cut-away

595 Manacorda 2008, p. 228.
596 Ceschi 2013, p. 22.

views.[597] One of the most significant decisions was the integration of the archaeological findings into a broader urban narrative, linking Crypta Balbi to the larger development of Rome over the centuries. This integration involved presenting artifacts not merely as isolated objects but as part of the evolving urban landscape. According to Lucia Saguì, the museum provides an opportunity to explore "una stratificazione bimillenaria eccezionalmente complessa e ricca," allowing visitors to grasp the site's continuity and transformations over time.[598] The challenge lay in balancing the need to preserve fragile structures, such as the remnants of the exedra, while also making them accessible to the public through thoughtful exhibition design.

The exedra itself is a focal point in the museum, illustrating how the space was continuously repurposed from its original use in the Augustan period to later serving as a latrine and, eventually, a dumping site. The display strategies surrounding the exedra include a carefully arranged selection of materials, such as ceramics, coins, and organic remains, which provide insights into both economic and daily life in Rome. The exhibition uses large display cases to evoke the sense of space within the exedra while categorizing materials by their geographic origins, such as African, Eastern Mediterranean, and local Italian imports. This design choice allows visitors to appreciate the complexity of trade and craftsmanship that characterized the site's later phases.[599]

Despite these successes, the museum has faced significant challenges in representing the site's full chronological scope. Notably, the medieval phase, particularly the balnea complex, remains underrepresented in the current exhibition due to space limitations. As Laura Venditteli notes, while the bath complex represents "un vero gioiello dell'archeologia medievale," its physical constraints have made it difficult to incorporate into the primary museum itinerary.[600] Future expansions of the museum are expected to address these gaps, ensuring

597 See Appendix 20 Studio Inklink and the Visual Narrative of Crypta Balbi for the commission, methods, 3-D reconstructions, cut-away visualizations, and interpretive aims.
598 Saguì 2013, p.14.
599 Ibid pp.14-21.
600 Venditteli 2013, p. 20.

a more comprehensive representation of the site's diverse uses over time.

In addition to physical constraints, the conservation of delicate structures such as the lime kiln and the collapsed vaults of the exedra posed significant logistical challenges. The restoration work required structural interventions, including the insertion of steel tie-rods and the reconstruction of connecting floors and vaults, while preserving the historic masonry and the legibility of the building's stratigraphy.[601] The museum's curatorial and technical teams adopted innovative solutions to balance accessibility with conservation, employing reversible reinforcements and new circulation routes that allow visitors to experience the site without compromising its structural integrity.[602] The interpretive design further integrates these preserved remains into the visitor experience through didactic installations, reconstructed sections, and full-height showcases that follow the curvature of the exedra wall, offering both a visual and contextual framework for understanding the site's transformation.[603]

Rather than isolating the site within the museum's walls, efforts have been made to connect it to nearby archaeological sites and urban developments. This approach helps to illustrate the evolving relationship between the site and the surrounding city. As Saguì states, "l'inserimento del museo nel contesto urbano permette di comprendere la continuità e le trasformazioni della città nel tempo," emphasizing the broader significance of the Crypta Balbi within the historical trajectory of Rome.[604]

The restoration and museological reconfigurations were also shaped by legislative and economic changes in the late 20th century, particularly in the context of preparations for the Jubilee of 2000. Recognizing the limitations of state funding for large-scale conservation efforts, reforms introduced in 1998 facilitated greater private sector involvement in cultural heritage initiatives. This legislative shift encouraged a model in

601 Conforto 2000,pp. 35–36; Bianchini, Russo 2000, pp. 42–44.
602 Ceschi 2000, pp. 37–41; Bianchini, Russo 2000 p. 44.
603 Ceschi 2000, pp. 40-41.
604 Saguì 2013, p.18.

which public and private entities collaborated in both the preservation and promotion of archaeological sites. The restoration of Crypta Balbi was part of a broader effort that included the Imperial Fora, with multiple stakeholders engaged in different aspects of conservation, research, and dissemination. Among them, the Cooperativa Edil Atellana and the Cooperativa Archeologia played a role not only in the execution of restoration work but also in the production of a research publication documenting the site's stratigraphic history.[605] This reflects an increasing emphasis on scholarly dissemination as an integral component of conservation projects, reinforcing the role of archaeological museums as research institutions.

The museializzation of Crypta Balbi represents a departure from traditional exhibition models centered on individual artifacts. Instead, it emphasizes the material and spatial transformations of the site, from its origins as part of the *Porticus Minucia* in antiquity to its function as a medieval workshop and later urban adaptations. This interpretative approach positions Crypta Balbi within a museological framework that foregrounds historical process and continuity, rather than viewing the site as a static monument. Such an approach aligns with international trends in archaeological site museums, where excavation itself is presented as an object of interpretation.[606] This interpretative strategy resists the traditional museological tendency to present archaeological remains as static monuments. Instead, it aligns with contemporary museum theory that emphasizes the constructed and processual nature of display and interpretation.[607]

The involvement of private enterprises in the Crypta Balbi project warrants closer attention. As Fabrizio Ghilardi observes, traditionally, the relationship between the cultural sector and the business world has been marked by mutual skepticism, with the former often viewing commercial interests as incompatible with heritage preservation, and the latter regarding cultural investments as lacking strategic value. As Ghilardi notes, the late 1990s witnessed a paradigm shift in Italy's

605 Baiani, Ghilardi 2000.
606 See e.g.,Barbanera 2008, pp. 165–182; Paardekooper 2012; Zan 2000, pp. 373–409.
607 Pearce 1994.

approach to public-private partnerships in the cultural sphere, facilitated by legislative reforms and growing corporate awareness of the social value of cultural investment.[608]

The restoration and musealization of the Crypta Balbi site exemplifies this evolving dynamic. As part of a broader initiative aimed at the recovery and public accessibility of Rome's archaeological heritage, the project benefited from the involvement of private enterprises, specifically the Cooperativa Edil Atellana of Caserta and the Cooperativa Archeologia of Florence[609]. These companies, having secured public contracts for excavation and restoration work through competitive tendering, went beyond their contractual obligations by independently financing the publication of a comprehensive report on the restoration process.[610] This initiative provided an invaluable record of the work carried out and ensured greater public engagement with the site's historical and archaeological significance.

The contribution of private entities to the project demonstrates their emerging role as long-term stakeholders in cultural heritage preservation. By investing in the dissemination of research findings and restoration outcomes, these companies not only enhanced the visibility of their corporate social responsibility initiatives but also contributed to a broader shift in cultural policy. Their involvement aligns with the Italian government's legislative efforts, particularly the 1998 reform, which sought to incentivize private contributions through fiscal benefits and collaborative frameworks.[611]

The publication funded by the private sector played a crucial role in fostering public awareness and education, aligning with contemporary

608 Ghilardi 2000, p. 152.

609 Founded in 1981, Cooperativa Archeologia is an Italian cooperative specializing in archaeological research, restoration, and cultural heritage management. Over the years, it has contributed to significant heritage conservation projects across Italy, including high-profile restorations such as the bronze replica of Michelangelo's David and the equestrian statue of Cosimo I in Florence. The cooperative collaborates with both public institutions and private sponsors to promote the sustainable management of cultural assets. See e.g., Editorial Staff. "Restoration of Sculpture in Piazzale Michelangelo and Piazza della Signoria." The Florentine, 16 July 2021, https://www.theflorentine.net/2021/07/16/sculpture-piazzale-michelangelo-piazza-della-signoria-restoration/. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.
Cooperativa Archeologia. "La Nostra Storia." https://www.archeologia.it/la-nostra-storia/. Accessed 21 Jan. 2025.

610Ghilardi 2000, p. 153.

611 Ibid, p. 152.

notions of "heritage pedagogy," in which visitors transition from passive observers to active participants with a deeper understanding of their cultural identity and heritage.[612] By contextualizing the restoration within a broader narrative of belonging and responsibility, the initiative effectively bridges the gap between historical preservation and contemporary social engagement.

The involvement of international institutions, among them the *Institution Européenne Roma Antiqua*, formed part of a broader network of collaborations that characterized the Crypta Balbi project. Rather than functioning sponsors or external observers, such bodies contributed to the exchange of expertise and lent the initiative a distinctly transnational inflection, reinforcing its position within wider debates on archaeological practice and museum formation. Ghilardi[613] emphasizes the significance of this international cooperation in fostering a sustainable model of public-private collaboration that can serve as a reference for future cultural initiatives. This represents a shift from a purely state-driven approach to a more integrated model of cultural governance, where businesses recognize their social responsibility and actively contribute to the sustainability and accessibility of cultural assets.

It's evident that the museum is an important case study in the evolution of museological practices and the focus on using new technology in exhibitions.[614] As Serena Baiani and Massimiliano Ghilardi explain in their publication *Crypta Balbi- Fori Imperiali - Archeologia urbana a Roma e interventi di restauro nell'anno del Grande Giubileo*, the museum was designed as a "modello" for the future, incorporating advanced technologies such as virtual reconstructions and computerized systems to enhance visitor experiences and academic research.[615] This approach allowed the site to tell a story that extended beyond its archaeological value, connecting its ancient history to the modern urban landscape. By showcasing artifacts from its excavations alongside materials from other Roman collections, the museum created

612 Ibid, p. 153.
613 Ibid.
614 Marazzi 2000, pp. 57–60.
615 Baiani, Ghilardi 2000, p. 3.

a narrative that highlighted the dynamic transformation of the city over centuries.[616]

Franco Ceschi, in his chapter "Note sul progetto di allestimento," discusses the challenges of transforming the site into a museum, emphasizing the delicate equilibrium between maintaining its archaeological integrity and constructing a narrative that is both coherent and accessible to contemporary audiences. Central to the project was the understanding that this was not only an exhibition of artifacts but a systematic effort to narrate the site's history through its spatial and temporal layers. As Ceschi observes;

Un importante progetto scientifico, che ha coinvolto tutte le diverse competenze necessarie, ha costituito il fondamento del progetto di allestimento che si è sviluppato ed è venuto man mano a delinearsi nei suoi contenuti, percorsi narrativi e soluzioni espositive, nell'ambito di un fertile rapporto di scambio.[617]

This multidisciplinary approach ensured that the musealization process integrated diverse areas of expertise, allowing the site to serve as both a space for scholarly research and a public institution dedicated to engaging visitors.

A key feature of the project was its chronological presentation of materials, which aimed to guide visitors through the historical stratigraphy of the site. This structured approach provided a clear framework for interpreting the layers of history that characterize the

616 Comparable museological approaches can be observed in several other urban archaeological site museums that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The Musée de Cluny – Musée National du Moyen Âge in Paris (opened in 1843, restructured extensively in the late 20th century) incorporates the remains of Roman baths into a medieval museum context, foregrounding spatial continuity and architectural layering. The Stoa of Attalos Museum in Athens, reopened in 1957 by the American School of Classical Studies, presents excavated material from the Athenian Agora within a reconstructed ancient structure, offering a didactic reading of civic space through archaeological display. In Rome, the Domus Romane at Palazzo Valentini (opened to the public in 2010) employs digital reconstructions and lighting technologies to visualize the remains of Roman houses beneath a Renaissance palazzo, echoing Crypta Balbi's emphasis on urban stratigraphy. Similarly, the London Mithraeum Bloomberg SPACE (opened 2017) integrates the archaeological remains of a Roman temple with immersive projection and sound, recreating the subterranean context in which it was discovered. Together, these projects reflect a shared curatorial strategy that emphasizes the interpretive potential of in-situ remains, technological mediation, and the layering of urban time within the contemporary museum experience. See: Leniaud 2006; Camp 2001; La Rocca, 2010; Sheppard 2017.
617 Ceschi 2000, p. 38.

Crypta Balbi, demonstrating its transformation across centuries. Ceschi notes the importance of narrative clarity in the museum's design:

In entrambi le sezioni del museo l'ordinamento scientifico prevede sequenze cronologiche molto rigorose secondo le quali sono disposti i materiali archeologici e la didattica che li accompagna. Ai fini del progetto espositivo tale ordinamento impone l'adozione di un percorso di visita rigorosamente delineato che non crei nel visitatore lacune di certezza, pena il disorientamento o salti logici nella narrazione. [618]

The chronological organization draws attention to the museum's commitment to historical accuracy, and also ensured that visitors could follow the site's complex narrative without confusion or interpretative gaps.

Another critical element of the musealization of Crypta Balbi was the integration of educational and interactive components, intended to narrow the distance between archaeological research and public engagement. The exhibition sought to embed visitors within the historical and scientific dimensions of the site, combining established didactic strategies with more experimental museological practices. As Ceschi observed, the objects displayed were "non selezionati per criteri estetici, ma [rivestono] straordinaria importanza testimonianza storica e sono stati inseriti in un percorso narrativo che li attraversa in tutta la loro scientifica evidenza."[619] This curatorial logic which prioritized historical testimony over aesthetic value, shaped the entire exhibition, from the selection of individual objects to the design of the visitor pathway.

To gain a deeper understanding of the museological approach adopted at the Crypta Balbi museum, it is essential to consider Daniele Manacorda's reflection on the interplay between space and time, which aims to immerse visitors in the site's complex historical stratification. Manacorda explains how the curatorial choices foreground the relationship between the physical dimensions of the archaeological remains and their evolving cultural significance. Rather than

618 Ibid, p. 39.
619 Ibid.

presenting a linear historical narrative, the museum offers an interpretative experience that invites visitors to actively reconstruct the past through their own perception of spatial and temporal layers.[620]

A central objective of Manacorda and his team's museological strategy was to encourage visitors to engage with the site in a manner that mirrors the investigative nature of archaeology itself. As he notes, "Il visitatore del museo potrà ricreare con la sua fantasia la targa stradale che riterrà più idonea. Sarebbe questo un segno che il museo ha raggiunto uno dei suoi obiettivi, e cioè quello di calare i suoi frequentatori in una dimensione dove spazio e tempo giocano ciascuno un proprio ruolo, ma sono al tempo stesso intimamente legati l'uno all'altro." [621] This perspective positions the visitor as an active participant in the interpretative process, challenging them to consider the relationship between historical memory and spatial experience within the museum setting.

This participatory approach also had practical implications, affecting how the museum's confined spaces were used and how visitors were guided through them. The physical constraints of the Crypta Balbi site further shape Manacorda's museological vision. He notes the challenge of working within a relatively confined area, stating that "L'indagine esposta nel museo ha investito in fondo assai limitata nelle sue dimensioni: qualche centinaia di metri al massimo in lunghezza e larghezza, qualche metro, qualche decina di metri sottosuolo e indagini negli elevati delle case e dei monumenti superstiti."[622] This recognition of spatial limitations necessitated a curatorial approach that emphasizes the vertical and horizontal stratigraphy of the site, allowing for a nuanced representation of its diachronic development.

Manacorda's approach also considers the site's identity as a constant element,[623] while positioning the passage of time as the variable that introduces cultural and environmental transformations. He explains, "L'identità di luogo è la costante, lo scorrere del tempo è la variabile,

620Manacorda 2001.
621 Manacorda 2001, p. 13.
622 Ibid.
623 See e.g., Rössler 2006, pp. 333–353; Tzortzi 2015.

che porta con sé gli elementi culturali e naturali che hanno via via cambiato il volto e la funzione dei luoghi e conferito loro un senso storico."[624] This explains the evolving nature of Crypta Balbi, and how successive interventions and adaptations have contributed to its layered historical narrative.

The restoration of Crypta Balbi, therefore, serves as a study in the adaptation of archaeological museums to changing economic and legislative contexts. It reflects an evolving role for the museum, wherein conservation is understood not as a discrete process but as part of an ongoing dialogue between research, public interpretation, and institutional management. The site's museological development highlights the increasing integration of interdisciplinary research, conservation practice, and public-private collaboration, positioning it as a model for future archaeological site museums.[625]

Contemporary Challenges in Preserving Crypta Balbi

The Crypta Balbi continues to be a critical site for archaeological and scientific inquiry, showcasing its enduring significance as both a historical artifact and a living laboratory for innovative research. As Fioriti emphasizes, the ongoing excavations and monitoring campaigns underscore the necessity of safeguarding such a "unique archaeological site" while adapting to the challenges of a modern urban environment.[626] This dual focus on conservation and study is emblematic of the site's significance, reflecting its potential to yield new findings while preserving its historical integrity.

The 2022 monitoring campaign at Crypta Balbi incorporated advanced methodologies to assess the site's structural stability and environmental conditions. These included thermographic imaging, vibration analysis, and microclimatic monitoring. According to the study, thermographic images captured using a Flir T440 infrared camera provided essential data on the material composition and

624 Manacorda 2001, p. 13.
625 Baiani, Ghilardi 2000, pp. 152-153.
626 Fioriti 2022, p. 2.

degradation patterns of the site. Similarly, seismographs and velocimeters monitored vibrations caused by nearby tramways, demonstrating the risk posed by modern urban infrastructure. As the authors note, these technologies enabled "non-contact investigations," which were essential for minimizing the risk of damage to the monument's fragile elements.[627]

The study also demonstrates the innovative use of motion magnification technology, which amplifies movements that are imperceptible to the naked eye. This method proved instrumental in identifying subtle structural instabilities, offering a "microscopic view" of the site's response to external pressures.[628] Such techniques show how modern science can contribute to a deeper understanding of ancient sites while mitigating the risks posed by invasive methods. The authors argue that the data collected through these methodologies not only ensure the preservation of the Crypta Balbi but also provide a framework for the application of similar techniques in other heritage contexts.

Pollution, a persistent threat, connects the site's current issues with broader concerns about archaeological preservation in Rome. As mentioned earlier, these challenges were championed by figures like Adriano La Regina and Antonio Cederna, whose advocacy led to the 1981 special law enabling the state to acquire and protect sites like the Crypta Balbi. While this legislation marked a significant step forward, the threats they identified (i.e. pollution and urban pressures) continue to haunt the site today.

Recent studies highlight how air pollution and vibrations from nearby infrastructure, such as tramways, jeopardize the integrity of the site. As Fioriti notes, these environmental factors create "conditions that could potentially harm this unique archaeological site," necessitating sophisticated monitoring and intervention strategies.[629] The enduring relevance of these issues exposes the ongoing tension between heritage preservation and urban modernization, demonstrating that the lessons

627 Ibid, p. 3.
628 Ibid, p.5.
629Ibid, p.2.

from the past remain critical in shaping contemporary conservation efforts. By serving as both a subject of research and a living example of these challenges, the Crypta Balbi continues to contribute to broader discussions on the stewardship of archaeological heritage. Fioriti asserts that Crypta Balbi "continues to provide valuable lessons in the maintenance of cultural heritage within an ever-changing urban landscape".[630]

Crypta Balbi bridges the gap between past and present. Its ongoing study exemplifies the dynamic relationship between history and modernity, showcasing how heritage sites can simultaneously preserve their historical narratives and adapt to contemporary challenges. As such, the Crypta Balbi can be used as a critical model for the preservation and study of archaeological sites in urban environments, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to cultural heritage management.

Conclusion

The reconfiguration of the MNR after 1981 marks a paradigmatic shift in how Rome's archaeological heritage was curated, interpreted, and presented to the public. Far from being a simple decentralization of collections, the transformation into a polycentric museum system reflected an evolving institutional philosophy, one that prioritized thematic clarity, architectural specificity, and proximity to the urban narratives of Rome itself.

Through the strategic rehabilitation of four historically and symbolically charged venues; Palazzo Altemps, Palazzo Massimo, the Terme di Diocleziano, and Crypta Balbi, the MNR redefined its identity not merely as a repository of antiquities but as an active agent in shaping Rome's heritage discourse. These spaces were not neutral containers but integral elements of the exhibition experience, mediating between the city's stratified past and contemporary expectations of accessibility, interdisciplinarity, and museological transparency.

630Ibid, p.6.

This spatial reorganization was deeply intertwined with broader reforms in cultural heritage governance during the 1980s and 1990s. Enabled by targeted legislation and steered by the vision of figures like Adriano La Regina, the museum embraced a model that blurred the line between archaeological site and museum display. Nowhere was this more evident than in the creation of Crypta Balbi, which exemplified a new museological approach: urban archaeology as narrative, excavation as interpretation, and the visitor's movement through space as a form of engagement with Rome's diachronic identity.

Crucially, these transformations were not only technical or administrative but conceptual. They entailed a move away from encyclopedic accumulation toward narrative coherence; from static grandeur to lived, locational meaning. The museum became inseparable from the city, inviting its public to inhabit the strata of history, not just to observe, but to traverse, question, and remember.

The following chapter will further explore this dynamic by turning to the museum's external relationships: its role in temporary exhibitions, its strategies for loans and international partnerships, and the institutional networks that supported (or complicated) its new museological mission. In doing so, it will continue to trace how the MNR, as both space and structure, engaged with the changing landscapes of politics, preservation, and public memory at the turn of the millennium.

CHAPTER IV. Object Mobility and Cultural Diplomacy

In the 1980s and 1990s, MNR found itself in a paradox of presence and absence. Its galleries were closed, succumbing to a drawn-out program of restoration and institutional reconfiguration that would delay the openings of Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps for years. However, its collections did not remain hidden, they were sent abroad, featured in international exhibitions.

This strategy is a well-established practice in the museum world. Major institutions under renovation commonly loan out key objects to maintain visibility, sustain public engagement, and generate revenue. For instance, during recent Louvre renovations, even the Mona Lisa was temporarily relocated to the Galerie Médicis within the museum to accommodate essential restoration works.[631] In a similar situation, Naples's Museo di Capodimonte, closed for renovations, lent seventy works to the Louvre, affirming that such strategic mobility is an internationally recognized solution when a museum is unavailable.[632]

Building on the previous chapter's architectural focus, this section shifts attention to the 'objects in motion' themselves. It asks: what guided decisions on outbound loans (what to send, to which venues, under what terms) and what do these movements reveal about MNR's institutional identity, its alignment with ministerial priorities, and its place within Italy's national heritage system?

Mobility was never merely administrative. Each loan was embedded in a framework of conservation ethics, insurance protocols, and environmental safeguards that both enabled and constrained exhibition practice.[633] At the same time, the circulation of objects operated as a form of cultural diplomacy: a means for museums to assert presence, sustain visibility, and perform stewardship even when their own

631 See, e.g., Musée du Louvre 2019a; Musée du Louvre 2019b.
632 Dagen 2023.
633 Taylor, Boersma 2018, pp. 257–261.

galleries remained closed.[634] These dynamics were evident across Italy; the *Musei Reali* in Turin, for instance, adopted regulations restricting the duration of loans and requiring systematic pre-loan conservation reviews.

Through case studies of both successful and cancelled loans, the attempted Discobolo Lancellotti (inv.no. 126371) export in 1987 and the full-scale participation in Montréal's *Roma: 1000 anni di civiltà* in 1992, this chapter explores how visibility, preservation, and administrative authority were negotiated. In doing so, it positions the MNR not just as a guardian of antiquity but as an active agent in Italy's heritage diplomacy, foreshadowing the institutional spectacle and infrastructure expansion that culminated in the Jubilee of 2000.

The circulation and loan of each object carried a symbolic charge (this is a general feature of museum practice) presenting the lender abroad as custodian and mediator of heritage and aligning, in Nye's terms, with soft power.[635] What is distinctive in MNR case is how that symbolism was produced within Rome's late twentieth-century conditions: a multi-site museum closed for prolonged works; embedded in the *Soprintendenza* chain of authorisations (pre-autonomy); operating under the 1939 legal ceiling and a stringent conservation regime that could veto high-profile requests (as with the *Discobolo*, 1987); and supplying a disproportionate share of major diplomatic exhibitions (e.g., Montréal, 1992). In this configuration, travel often substituted for access at home and doubled as an assertion of institutional competence: a single statue in transit could stand for the museum and for Rome, while refusal to move could be equally performative.

4.1 Art on the Move: The MNR in Transit

634 For Italian rules and practice governing outbound loans (including during temporary closures or building works), see the current national framework and operational circulars alongside museum-level regulations: the Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio (art. 48), MiBACT's operational circular on loans for exhibitions, and sample regulations from major state museums (Musei Reali, Museo delle Civiltà). Although these documents postdate the 1980s–1990s cases discussed here, they codify procedures and standards that had already taken shape in practice during that earlier period. See Italy 2004, art. 48; MiBACT 2019; ICOM Italia 2020; Musei Reali di Torino 2023; Museo delle Civiltà 2024.
635 Nye 1990.

In museum studies, circulation is not a single practice but two intertwined registers.[636] Internally, objects move within the institution's orbit, between excavation sectors, depots, laboratories, and galleries, through processes of documentation, conservation, reclassification, and redisplay. These transfers are governed by preventive conservation and curatorial planning and, in the period considered, often occurred within the same administrative body. Externally, objects circulate through outbound loans, diplomatic exhibitions, and, at times, restitutions, movements that require inter-institutional negotiation, ministerial authorization, insurance, couriers, and environmental guarantees.[637] Both registers are routinely framed in positive terms (access, visibility, collaboration) but each raises distinct questions about ownership, representation, conservation risk, and authority.[638] In what follows, I consider internal circulation first, then turn to outbound movement, to trace how the two together shaped the MNR's institutional life in the 1980s and 1990s.

The MNR's participation in this system offers insight into how object circulation functioned as part of Italy's cultural heritage strategy in the late twentieth century. Although the museum's internal reorganization (addressed in the previous chapter) focused on site expansion and renovation, its external collaborations reveal another dimension of institutional transformation. Loan requests, even for short-term exhibitions, required approval at multiple levels, from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali (MBCA; later MiBAC), and often involved partnerships with foreign institutions, restoration centers, and diplomatic channels.[639]

The same regime of controls applied not only to outbound mobility but also to acquisitions. In 1983, a fragmentary marble head offered by Aldo Viola entered the collection only after a sequence of statements, police archive checks, and formal price and condition reviews. The case is minor in scale but emblematic in tone. Viola described the piece (a

636 Heumann 2022, pp. 257–278.
637 Museums Association 2007.
638 Appadurai 1986; Clifford 1997; Geismar 2015, pp.71-85.
639 See Bennett 1995; Macdonald 2008, pp. 47–65.

bearded male head with a decorated headdress) as found during the clearing of an apartment on Via del Boschetto, and the Soprintendenza required that every link in its custody be documented. The Carabinieri's Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Artistico confirmed, through photographic archives and witness depositions, that the sculpture was neither stolen nor under investigation, tracing its passage from the deceased owner, Maria Vecchioni, to the seller.[640] What emerges from this ordinary transaction is a small but telling performance of bureaucratic diligence, where acquisition itself became an act of verification, and legitimacy was secured as much through paperwork as through possession.[641]

This research documents that by the late 1980s, MNR underwent significant infrastructural and curatorial reorganization, shaped not by high-profile exhibitions or international diplomacy, but by bureaucratic reconfigurations and internal spatial pressures. One aspect was the dismantling of the Aula della Minerva, formerly used as a planetarium, whose repurposing into exhibition space reveals the transformative operations happening within the institutional body of the museum.

An official letter from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, dated 29 September 1987, records the authorization for this change. The project was "part of the general restructuring and re-planning program provided for under the special law for the protection and enhancement of Rome's archaeological heritage" (Legge 92/81).[642] While this language echoed national legislative frameworks, the everyday reality involved more practical concerns: moving equipment, finding storage, and coordinating between ministries, universities, and public offices.

640 Carabinieri Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Artistico to Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 6 September 1983, No.19573/2: "L'oggetto in questione apparteneva alla signora VECCHIONI Maria, vedova GIZZI, già residente in via del Boschetto n. 114, deceduta lo scorso marzo. Il signor Panno Giuseppe, residente nello stesso stabile, lo rinveniva nell'atto di sgombrare l'appartamento, su richiesta della nipote della Vecchioni, signora DE LAURENTIS Maria Grazia in FIORINI, residente in via Brunate n. 11, la quale autorizzava il Panno a trattenerlo e successivamente questi lo cedeva al Viola Aldo."Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma. Busta 84, fasc.2.

641 For a fuller analysis, see Appendix 24.

642 "Il relativo progetto, che rientra nel programma generale di ristrutturazione e di ampliamento previsto nell'ambito della legge speciale per la tutela e la valorizzazione del patrimonio Archeologico di Roma (legge n°92/81)..." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma 1987, Busta 137, Prot. 12779.

La Regina's correspondence with the University of Rome's Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences exemplifies the hands-on nature of this shift. Once the dismantling of the planetarium's equipment was near completion, La Regina instructed the university to "communicate the address of the storage facility to which the crates should be delivered." Otherwise, he warned, "the crates will be housed in suitable spaces of the Soprintendenza, and any further transportation costs will be charged to the Faculty."[643] What emerges is a layered picture of institutional negotiation, where state and academic bodies juggled logistical responsibilities.

These internal movements were mirrored by changes within the collection itself. Between 1991 and 1994, a series of marble sculptures were transferred from the MNR's storerooms to the newly reconfigured Antiquarium of the Palatine.[644] Delivery reports trace the passage of heads of emperors, deities, and anonymous figures, objects that had long remained in reserve but were reanimated through their relocation.[645] At the time, both museums were administered under the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, which allowed for such internal redistributions of material across sites. Only later, with the MNR's transition to autonomous status, would these transfers become administratively distinct, requiring formal inter-institutional agreements rather than internal directives.

This internal redistribution complicates the dominant focus in museum studies on objects in motion across borders or into exhibitions. It reveals instead a subtler choreography of circulation: one where institutional identity is not only shaped by what is loaned or repatriated, but also by what is moved, reclassified, or exhibited anew within the same national system. The MNR's transformation in this period was thus not only curatorial or architectural, but also archival,

643 "Invitasi codesta Facoltà far conoscere indirizzo magazzino ove trasportare relative casse… ogni altra spesa di ulteriore spostamento sarà a carico della Facoltà." Fonogramma, Prot. 15941, Busta 137, 20 Nov. 1987.
644 "In data odierna 1.3.1993 si procede alla consegna delle seguenti teste marmoree conservate fino ad oggi presso il Museo Nazionale Romano, per l'allestimento dell'antiquario del Palatino." Verbale di consegna, 1 Mar. 1993.
645 See: multiple Verbali di consegna, 1991–1994, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, including Prot. No. 533 (15 Jan. 1993), Prot. No. 6258 (7 Apr. 1993), and Prot. No. 26134 (25 Oct. 1994), among others.

reshaping its public face through the repositioning of its hidden reserves.[646]

Turning from internal recirculation within the Soprintendenza to outward mobility across borders, the Discobolo Lancellotti case shows where conservation diagnostics could overrule diplomatic ambition. While the museum's original late 19th-century mission had been to centralize Rome's antiquities into a unified national framework, logistical limitations, spatial constraints, and political pressures often led to the distribution of key objects across deposits, restoration workshops, and even other museums, both in and outside of Rome. The case of the *satyr bust in bigio morato* (inv. no. 8578),[647] attributed to the Ludovisi collection and transferred from the MNR to Palazzo Venezia in 1920, exemplifies this tendency. It was not until the 1990s, with the expansion into Palazzo Altemps, that such pieces were formally reclaimed and re-integrated into the MNR's institutional orbit. This movement can be read not only as an exercise in logistical coordination, but also as a symbolic reassertion of curatorial authority and institutional unity, aligning with broader reforms aimed at redefining the museum's identity and mission under the polo museale system. The strategic recirculation and redisplay of formerly dispersed pieces like the Ludovisi busts speaks directly to the recentralization of heritage authority and the renewed emphasis on Rome as both archaeological center and museological hub.

Beyond these internal reallocations, circulation also operated across institutional and national boundaries, under a more formal legal and diplomatic regime. First we must analyze the legal and bureaucratic structures governing outbound object movement during this period, paying attention to the ongoing relevance of *Legge 1 giugno 1939, n.*

646 For a discussion of the internal circulation, classification, and shifting meanings of museum objects, see e.g., Alberti 2005, pp. 559–571; Murphy 2018.

647 The satyr bust in bigio morato, now housed at Palazzo Altemps, is recorded under inv. no. 8578 as "frammento di statua in marmo bigio, troncato sotto il petto ed agli omeri". It was originally part of the Ludovisi Collection and valued in 1902 at 1500 lire. Alongside it, a bust of the emperor Gallienus (inv. no. 8633) was also recorded, with a valuation of 3000 lire. Both pieces were among a group of sculptures transferred from MNR to Palazzo Venezia in 1920 for display. Their movement reflects broader institutional practices of object dispersal in the early 20th century and the later effort to reclaim and consolidate key works within the reorganized structure of the MNR. See: Friggeri, and Candilio 1993, pp. 179-180.

1089[648], which remained the principal legislation regulating cultural property[649] and show how they can be used as examples of how object mobility functioned as a form of cultural diplomacy. Rather than passive hurdles, these structures constituted a system of institutional rationality that governed the politics of display.[650]

The circulation of archaeological objects from the MNR during the 1980s and 1990s was governed by a dense administrative infrastructure.[651] Far from being a purely curatorial decision, each loan or exhibition involved a complex negotiation between legal restrictions, conservation protocols, institutional hierarchies, and logistical planning. While high-profile outbound loans often carried symbolic value (serving diplomatic, cultural, or ideological ends) the mechanisms that enabled them were grounded in the routine practices of state bureaucracy. This reflects what Tony Bennett has described as the "administrative rationality" of modern cultural institutions, in which museums operate not just as spaces of interpretation, but as technocratic apparatuses of state governance.[652] Similar to Sharon Macdonald's discussion of "heritage regimes," these practices can be read as expressions of bureaucratized stewardship, where legal and institutional procedures are central to producing legitimacy.[653]

The public stakes of this administrative field surfaced clearly in the debate that followed. A telling pre-Jubilee flare-up made the stakes of object mobility unmistakable. In a La Stampa article in March 1982, Federico Zeri condemned the plan to remove the Ludovisi marbles

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648 Legge 1 giugno 1939, n. 1089, titled "Tutela delle cose d'interesse artistico o storico", established the legal foundation for state control over cultural property in Italy. Passed under the Fascist regime, the law granted the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione authority over all movable and immovable objects deemed to have artistic, historical, or archaeological value, regardless of ownership. It required official authorization for any movement, restoration, or loan of such works, a system that remained in force through the 1980s and 1990s. For the original text, see Legge 1089/1939; Gazzetta Ufficiale 1939. For analysis of the law's long-term legacy, see Cecchini 2004; Chechi 2014, esp. pp. 44–47.

649See Legge 1089/1939, Gazzetta Ufficiale 1939. See also Coccolo 2004.

650 See Thompson 2000, pp.4-6, where Thompson discusses the increasing professionalization of museum administrative practices, emphasizing improved documentation standards and logistical procedures for managing archaeological collections, issues similarly faced by MNR during this institutional transformation.

651 Salvatore Settis critiques how Italy's MiBAC was structurally weak and politically sidelined, undermining its capacity for meaningful stewardship and transforming heritage governance into a symbolic or economically-driven venture. See Settis 2002, pp. 36–38.

652 Bennett 1995, pp. 90–120.

653 Macdonald 2012, pp. 255–272.

from MNR to the Quirinale, reading the move as a retrograde reversal of the modern museum's hard-won separation from political power. Rather than the historic passage from courtly collections into public museums, Zeri saw a symbolic re-absorption of patrimony into a presidential palace, an operation he cast as the "dismembering" of a national museum and the creation of an art appendage to power.[654] What the article crystallizes is less a curatorial dispute than a legitimacy script: transfers of canonical objects were publicly legible as tests of institutional autonomy and of who gets to narrate Rome's past. The rhetoric forged there, museum vs. palace, public custody vs. representative display, prefigures the later Jubilee choreography of loans, re-installations, and exhibition branding, where object movement functioned simultaneously as conservation action, urban diplomacy, and political signaling.

The picture that emerges from these bureaucratic negotiations and internal reallocations is one of a museum in motion even when its galleries remained closed. While the halls of Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps awaited their inaugurations, the MNR's collections circulated outward, entering temporary exhibitions and international partnerships. Although the museum's public visibility was reduced, its activity was not suspended: research, conservation, and administrative work continued, for *valorizzazione* was only one element of its broader institutional mission.[655] This is typical of museums undergoing renovation, allowing the institution to remain symbolically present on both national and international stages despite its partial inaccessibility at home. What might appear as routine loan activity was in fact deeply consequential: each movement of objects projected an image of the museum, of Rome, and of Italy itself. It is here that the logic of cultural diplomacy becomes visible. To understand the MNR's outward circulation in these years, we must situate it within the larger framework of soft power, where antiquities travelled not only as

654 Zeri 1982.

655 Under Italian heritage law, valorizzazione refers to the enhancement and public promotion of cultural property as one of the museum's core functions, alongside tutela (protection) and conservazione (conservation). See Decreto legislativo 22 January 2004, n. 42, Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio, art. 6.

scholarly objects but as emissaries of national prestige and cultural influence.

4.2 Cultural Heritage as Soft Power

This section proceeds in three steps. First, I outline soft power as it relates to culture in general; second, I sketch Italy's instruments in the 1980s–1990s (loans, international agreements, restitutions); finally, turn to MNR cases that give these dynamics concrete form.

MNR's international circulation of archaeological items during this period can be productively situated within the framework of soft power, a term first articulated by Joseph Nye to describe the ability of a state to achieve its goals not through coercion or economic inducement, but through attraction and cultural influence.[656] Nye introduced the concept of "soft power" to describe a nation's ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. He emphasized that "soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others"[657] through appeal and attraction, contrasting it with hard power, which relies on coercion and payment. As Nye puts it, soft power rests on the capacity to "shape the preferences of others" by projecting values and culture in ways that appear consensual rather than imposed.[658] In this light, museum loans and archaeological exhibitions abroad become more than acts of cultural generosity, they are instruments in a broader diplomatic toolkit through which Italy positioned itself as a steward of classical antiquity and a cultural leader within Europe and the Mediterranean.

MNR's outbound loans during this period, such as the *Torso di Pentesilea* to Basel (1988) and the attempted shipment of the *Discobolo Lancellotti* to Tokyo (1987), can be read not simply as curatorial exchanges but as expressions of what Natalia Grincheva has termed "museum diplomacy."[659] This dynamic echoes Casini's observation that

656 Nye 2004.
657 Ibid, p. 5.
658 Ibid.
659 Grincheva 2020.

cultural property is increasingly used as an instrument of international relations, where its circulation and protection are negotiated across multiple legal and political frameworks.[660] In this light, MNR's outbound loans were simultaneously curatorial gestures and tools of statecraft. According to Grincheva, museums increasingly function as agents of transnational public relations, using exhibitions, partnerships, and object mobility to extend state soft power beyond traditional diplomatic venues. Italy's participation in international exhibitions, its role in UNESCO's heritage agenda, and its network of Istituti Italiani di Cultura all form part of this broader strategy.[661] The MNR's active role in these years exemplifies how archaeological heritage was mobilized, symbolically, materially, and diplomatically as a vehicle for international visibility and influence.

Within this framework, museums and archaeological collections are not just custodians of national patrimony but are also symbolic assets projecting cultural prestige, historical continuity, and curatorial sophistication on the global stage. Cultural theorist Timothy W. Luke argues that heritage objects function as "media for international cultural policy,"[662] through which the state stages performances of civilizational identity. Italy's archaeological wealth, long associated with the grandeur of the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, and classical aesthetics, has consistently played a role in shaping international perceptions of Italian modernity. Loaned antiquities can act as emissaries in a cultural diplomacy that blurs the lines between exhibition and statecraft.[663] Read this way, cultural display appears both as symbolic offer and as an instrument of policy.

Soft power, as Nye classically formulated it, rests on persuasion through attraction rather than coercion. Recent scholarship has sought to refine this notion, emphasizing culture's dual status as intangible yet

660 Casini 2021, p.14.

661 See Fofi 2012, pp. 53–66.

662 Luke 2002, p. 103.

663 In Museum Diplomacy, Grincheva argues that major museums operate as agents of soft power in transnational cultural relations, framing exhibitions and loans as public diplomacy tools that serve both institutional prestige and state interests. She emphasizes that "international museum activities have evolved as highly institutionalized and professionally managed public relations campaigns directed toward foreign publics".
See Grincheva 2020, p. 11.

materially consequential. As Carbó-Catalan and Roig-Sanz remind us, "when examining the idea of culture, we find ourselves in the domain of the immaterial, the intangible, and the imaginary, but culture has material, tangible, and real effects."[664] In the case of the MNR, this observation acquires a literal dimension: its cultural transactions dealt with concrete items (marble, bronze, mosaic) whose movement activated infrastructures of conservation, transport, and insurance that were anything but abstract.

Equally, the deployment of antiquities abroad did more than showcase aesthetic value. Cultural actions, that Carbó-Catalan and Roig-Sanz argue, "have the capacity to consolidate, legitimise, and consecrate a given collectivity, not only as a cultural actor, but also as a political one, through foreign action."[665] The MNR's loans to Basel, Tokyo, and Montréal can thus be read as curatorial gestures respectively, the loan of the *Torso di Pentesilea* to the Antikenmuseum Basel (1988), the planned but withdrawn *Discobolo Lancellotti* for the exhibition *Space in European Art* at the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo (1987), and the museum's participation in Montréal's *Roma: 1000 anni di civiltà* (1992) and as deliberate acts of cultural legitimation in which the Italian state positioned itself as a custodian of classical civilisation and a political agent on the international stage.

Yet even these gestures of cultural diplomacy, presented as harmless, were marked by hierarchy and debate. As François Chaubet has noted, the very realisation of cultural hegemony "rests also, in part, on a form of symbolic and material violence; and the policy of cultural diffusion adopted formerly by European cultural diplomacy was part of this policy of hegemony."[666] For Italy in the 1980s and 1990s, the staging of antiquities abroad was caught up in this longer European tradition, one in which cultural display functioned as an instrument of prestige but also as a mechanism of influence over international publics. Set against this theoretical frame, Italy's late twentieth-century practice relied on a recognizable toolkit.

664 Carbó-Catalan and Roig-Sanz 2022, p.8.
665 Ibid.
666 Chaubet 2022, p.36.

The mobilization of cultural heritage as soft power must also be understood in relation to postwar international cultural policy frameworks, particularly UNESCO conventions and bilateral agreements.[667] Italy's engagement in high-profile exhibitions abroad[668], including Expo 1988 in Brisbane and collaborations with major institutions in Japan, Germany, and the United States, reflected not only curatorial aims but also a desire to reaffirm Italy's position within the postwar European cultural hierarchy.[669] Loans became instruments of symbolic capital[670], reinforcing narratives of stewardship, antiquity, and cultural legitimacy.[671]

Set against this architecture of promotion sits a contrary pressure: control and return. At the same time, this instrumentalization of heritage often occurred alongside calls for repatriation and restitution[672], highlighting a central tension in soft power deployment: the desire to use heritage as a diplomatic resource while retaining strict control over its circulation.[673] The logic of prestige and influence coexisted with the bureaucratic and conservationist apparatuses discussed in previous sections, revealing the multi-layered nature of heritage governance in this period.

While Nye defines soft power as a nation's ability to influence others "through attraction rather than coercion," this influence is neither ideologically neutral nor structurally simple.[674] Scholars such as

667 UNESCO emphasizes that lending museum pieces is a form of cultural diplomacy "to build a shared understanding of the past," reinforcing the role of heritage as soft power, see: UNESCO 2022.
668 Major examples include The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 26 Feb–12 Jun 1983; Art Institute of Chicago, 21 Jul–16 Oct 1983; M. H. de Young Museum, San Francisco, 19 Nov 1983–19 Feb 1984), Masterpieces from the Vatican (National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, 21 Mar–21 May 1989), Rediscovering Pompeii (IBM Gallery of Science & Art, New York, 12 Jul–15 Sep 1990; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 11 Nov 1990–17 Feb 1991), and Roma: 1000 anni di civiltà (Montréal, Palais de la Civilisation, 7 May -12 Oct 1992). These high-visibility loans exemplify how Italy mobilized archaeological and artistic heritage abroad as symbolic capital and instruments of cultural diplomacy.
669 Arndt 2005, p. 5.
670 Pierre Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as the prestige and recognition that stem from other forms of capital, yet operate as independent sources of social power anchored in shared cultural norms, see: Bourdieu 1990, pp. 112–120.
671 Cf. Settis 2002, pp.34-35, where Settis shows that even foreign looting, such as Napoleonic transfers to the Louvre, was legitimized as cultural triumph, highlighting how heritage mobility has long served symbolic and political capital.
672 See e.g., Morgantina 1988, when Italian authorities began investigations into the Getty's purchase of the so-called "Morgantina Goddess"; Victorious Youth 1989, marking Italy's first formal demand for the return of the bronze later known as the "Getty Athlete.
673 Chechi 2014, p. 49.
674 Nye 2004, p. 5.

Grincheva have emphasized how soft power functions not merely as benign persuasion but as a carefully orchestrated strategy of transnational public relations, designed to manage international image and institutional credibility.[675] The distinction between soft power as cultural ideology and soft power as bureaucratic strategy is particularly relevant to Italy's system of heritage governance in the late twentieth century. During this period, the *Istituti Italiani di Cultura* significantly operating under the authority of the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri* rather than the cultural administration, played a key role in projecting Italy's cultural presence abroad. Their placement within the diplomatic, rather than strictly cultural, hierarchy makes clear that cultural programming functioned as a tool of foreign policy, promoting Italy's image as a global steward of cultural patrimony.[676]

In parallel, Italy's leading role in international heritage diplomacy was reinforced through its participation in multilateral agreements such as the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.[677] These frameworks not only codified Italy's commitment to international standards but also lent legitimacy to its outbound loans, repatriation gestures, and exhibition diplomacy, activities that gained increasing institutional and political significance in the 1980s and 1990s. Together, these mechanisms reveal how cultural heritage became an essential lever of Italian soft power, not only as an ethical stance but as a calculated policy instrument.

At times, however, the deployment of cultural heritage as soft power extended beyond the framework of temporary loans and curated

675 Grincheva 2020,pp.15-16.

676 Rossi 2019, pp.392-405.

677 UNESCO. Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention 1954. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/protection-cultural-property-armed-conflict-1954

UNESCO. Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/illicit-import-export-cultural-property-1970 (Accessed

exhibitions. The 1982 restitution of the *Dea di Butrinto*[678] to Albania, though orchestrated at the interministerial level, nonetheless concerned MNR, since the head had long been part of its collection. Its removal was not the outcome of curatorial negotiation but a political gesture in the sphere of Cold War diplomacy. In this instance, the MNR's role was effectively reduced to that of custodian, asked to relinquish an object under state directive. The case makes it clear how the museum could be implicated in acts of cultural diplomacy that bypassed its authority, revealing the limits of institutional agency when national heritage was mobilized for broader geopolitical purposes.[679] If the Butrinto case points to the limits of museological agency, the subsequent examples, the attempted loan of the Discobolo Lancellotti and the international circulation of the Pugilatore, shift the perspective. Here, one of the museum's tasks is to become a participant in negotiating the movement of antiquities, navigating the overlapping demands of conservation, diplomacy, and institutional self-representation. If the archival record maps the institutional choreography of soft power, the public record reads differently. In the press, the same procedures appeared not as diplomacy but as delay, as illustrated, for instance, by the coverage of postponed inaugurations and museum reopenings in articles such as *Aspettando il '94* (mentioned below), turning bureaucratic labor into a civic story about promises, timelines, and fatigue.

Public Narratives of Mobility and Bureaucracy

If the archive plots an administrative choreography, the press translated it into a civic story about access: not simply "works in progress," but the blocked or postponed circulation of objects and the deferred reopening of galleries that made loans, returns, and reinstallations uncertain. While internal records detail legal vetting, diagnostics, couriers, and insurance schedules, mainstream coverage compressed these into a language of delay and expectation. A 1992 *Corriere della Sera* article, "Aspettando il '94," offered a snapshot of this reframing, treating restoration calendars as a public timetable for when objects and spaces would finally move back into view:

678 Former MNR inventory no. 124679.

679 For a detailed account of the restitution of the Dea di Butrinto and its implications for MNR, see Appendix 23.

Palazzo Massimo, da cui dipende la sistemazione del nuovo Museo Nazionale Romano, sarà in completa attività solo il prossimo anno. Questo permetterà di liberare le Terme di Diocleziano e procedere a ritmo serrato con il loro restauro-riordino.[680]

Read this way, "lavori in corso" was not just a construction sign; it was a mobility story. The piece captured the oscillation between institutional optimism and fatigue: promises of imminent movement "a ritmo serrato" against a civic memory of slippage. In this, museum work appears less as scholarly labour and more as urban logistics, i.e. sequencing transfers, reopening routes, and re-establishing access. This dual mood of hope and frustration is familiar from museum studies: as Pastore notes, contemporary museology often identifies museums not only as sites of heritage and preservation, but also as civic symbols whose delays or stalled promises feed public disillusionment.[681] Similarly, surveys of public attitudes toward museums show that while people deeply value museums' potential, they are quick to notice when institutional modernization lags behind public expectation.[682]

In public discourse, museum loans and renovations were less about conservation ethics or bureaucratic diligence, and more about narratives of national progress or failure.[683] These conflicting perceptions demonstrate the challenges faced by institutions like MNR during a time of heightened public scrutiny and evolving expectations.[684]

This media framing contrasts sharply with the procedural rigor of the archival documents and act as a counterpoint. In public discourse, museum loans and renovations were less about conservation ethics or bureaucratic diligence, and more about narratives of national progress or failure, echoing Hooper-Greenhill's argument that museums often become symbolic mirrors of state competence during periods of institutional reform or crisis. [685]

680 Corriere della Sera 1992, p. 39.
681 Pastore 2020.
682 Museums Association 2013, p. 10.
683 Hallin and Mancini 2004.
684 OECD 2017, pp.17–18.
685 Hooper-Greenhill 1992, pp. 4–9.

Appearing shortly after the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali launched a two-month initiative of guided visits to active construction sites, the article maps the city's cultural institutions through the lens of expectation and delay, capturing the complex rhythm of restoration in the capital. The piece situates the Terme Diocleziano within a larger "mappa di cantieri e restauri ora attivi in città," highlighting the interdependence between the major branches of MNR. In practical terms, such sequencing affected loan calendars, courier availability, and insurance windows, with outbound requests and inbound restitutions repeatedly rescheduled to follow construction milestones. This points to a phased logic of spatial and curatorial redistribution, emblematic of a museological model in which logistics, space, and collections were interconnected.

The article's emphasis on the target date of 1994, when the Terme, Palazzo Altemps, and Galleria Borghese were all expected to be completed, signals both the forward momentum and the fragility of this phase. Projects were often positioned as imminent and transformative, however their realization remained speculative. The framing of work proceeding "a ritmo serrato" simultaneously conveys urgency, suggesting that the institutional will existed, but was in constant negotiation with technical delays, funding constraints, and bureaucratic inertia. This is clear in the commentary on Palazzo Poli, where: "nonostante i 36 miliardi del finanziamento Pio," the project remained stalled, an all too familiar motif in Rome's heritage sector.

This reflects how mainstream media shaped public understanding of cultural heritage as both a civic aspiration and a site of systemic dysfunction.[686] The tone oscillates between optimism ("speranze") and a weary familiarity with "lavori in corso,"[687] a phrase that in the Roman context often implies stagnation more than progress.[688] Rather than critically interrogating the structural conditions that produced these delays (such as the rigidity of ministerial hierarchies or the chronic

686 e.g. Maniou 2021, p. 341.

687 Rech 2022, pp. 551–574.

688 See: D'Albergo and De Leo's analysis of Rome's "capitale debole," describing the city's prolonged infrastructural and institutional delays as symptomatic of deeper governance fatigue. Though the phrase lavori in corso isn't used verbatim, the context supports its implied meaning in Roman discourse. D'Albergo, De Leo 2018, pp. 96-98.

underfunding of heritage institutions[689]) the article adopts a neutral (or even a resigned) voice. This absence is telling: while the piece documents the surface-level symptoms of Italy's heritage management crisis, it stops short of addressing the political and institutional roots. In doing so, it mirrors a broader tendency in the Italian media landscape at the time to report on cultural infrastructure as a logistical or urban development issue, rather than a deeply political and institutional one.What drops out of this framing is precisely the circulation regime (condition checks, climate specifications, transport slots) through which "delay" translated into the (non-)movement of objects.

These perceptions align with what Lorenzo Casini has described as the entanglement of heritage with multiple layers of public interest: "the interests at stake in cultural property span from conservation to access, from education to circulation, from identity to development."[690] Media narratives of stalled projects and endless restorations thus condensed these wider tensions, presenting museum bureaucracy not only as inefficiency but as a visible arena where cultural policy, identity, and governance collided.

For MNR, especially Terme Diocleziano, this captures a moment of suspension: between the promises tied to *Roma Capitale* funding and the reality of inherited delays and infrastructural fatigue. Its value lies not only in its factual reportage, but in the way it reflects how heritage was being narrated to the public through a mixture of administrative optimism, cautious realism, and an unspoken acknowledgment of systemic inertia. It is both a primary source and a cultural barometer, illustrating how restoration efforts were perceived, mediated, and ultimately remembered.

These cases illustrate how the movement (or non-movement) of archaeological objects from the MNR was shaped by a system that was neither purely curatorial nor entirely political. At every level, object mobility was mediated by legal codes, technical vetting, conservation risk, insurance valuation, and public perception. Bureaucracy, in this

689 E.g. Marzano 2018, p. 206–220.
690 Casini 2021, p.13.

context, did not only obstruct circulation; it structured and legitimized it.

When object mobility served diplomatic or institutional aims, it was also routed through the slow, paper-heavy processes of ministerial culture. And when those processes failed (or succeeded only partially) they left behind traces of another kind: documents, approvals, invoices, cancellations. These are what is left behind as proof of Italy's heritage governance system, and they are essential to understanding how MNR operated within a national framework of cultural protection and display. Set against these public narratives, the files that follow: Basel, Discobolo, the Pugilatore, show what the headlines compress: how decisions were made, unmade, and justified on paper.

4.3 Mobilizing Heritage: Case Studies, The Basel Loan, Discobolo Lancellotti and the Pugliatore

The following table condenses a deliberately heterogeneous set of object movements, attempted transfers, and exhibitions that shaped the MNR's trajectory between the early 1980s and the Jubilee of 2000. Far from being a simple list of loans, it brings together events of different nature and scale; diplomatic gestures, internal reallocations, cancelled projects, and media episodes, revealing how the museum's collections were mobilized within distinct but intersecting institutional frameworks.

These show the extent to which object circulation operated as both a practical and symbolic instrument of institutional life. The repatriation of the abovementioned *Dea di Butrinto* in 1982, for instance, bypassed the museum's authority entirely, functioning as a state-level political gesture. By contrast, the cancelled loan of the *Discobolo Lancellotti* to Tokyo in 1987 shows how conservation diagnostics could outweigh diplomatic ambitions. Some movements (such as the reinstallation of the *Bambina di Grottarossa* in 1993[691]) were less spectacular but no less significant, reflecting a growing emphasis on preventive conservation and technical stewardship. Others, like the loan of the *Pugilatore in*

691 See Appendix 25.

riposo to the United States in 1995, demonstrated how antiquities could be deployed as instruments of cultural diplomacy, carrying Italy's prestige abroad.

The table below makes visible the temporal rhythm of these operations. Periods of intense outward activity, such as the mid-1990s, were interspersed with moments of internal consolidation, culminating in the reopening of Palazzo Massimo in 1997 and the coordinated preparations for the Jubilee Year in 2000. Taken as a whole, the record shows that object mobility was not ancillary to the MNR's development but constitutive of its institutional identity in this period. The table concludes with two institutional milestones (1997 and 2000) that, while not individual object movements, mark the culmination of decades of circulation and reorganization:

Year	**Object / Case**	**Action / Destination**	**Institutional Actors**	**Outcome / Significance**
1982	*Dea di Butrinto*	Repatriated to Albania	Ministero degli Affari Esteri; Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma	Political gesture; bypassed museum governance; repatriation
1984	Meta Sudans fragments	Internal relocation from Forum to Palatine depot	Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma	Internal circulation; example of hidden logistical networks

1987	*Discobolo Lancellotti*, Tarsie di Giunio Basso	Planned for Tokyo exhibition (*Lo spazio nell'arte europea*)	Ministero Beni Culturali; ENEA; Carabinieri NTPA; Tartaglia S.r.l.	Loan cancelled due to conservation risk
1988	*Torso di Pentesilea*	Loan extended to Antikenmuseum Basel	Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma	Legal constraint: 6-month loan limit under Legge 1089/1939
1992	Corriere della Sera coverage	Report on delays in Palazzo Massimo reopening	Media; MNR; Ministero	Highlighted public pressure and bureaucratic inertia
1993	*La Bambina di Grottarossa*	Reinstalled at Terme di Diocleziano	Museo Nazionale Romano; Istituto Centrale per il Restauro	Preventive conservation, special climate-controlled case
1995	*Pugilatore in riposo* (Boxer at Rest)	Loan to U.S. exhibitions (e.g., MMA, Getty)	Polo Museale Romano; Ministero Affari Esteri	Major case of cultural diplomacy and Italian soft power

1997	Palazzo Massimo reopens	Culmination of internal object transfers and redisplay	MNR; ICR; Soprintendenza	Consolidation of decades of object circulation; new curatorial ethos privileging fragment and transparency
2000	Jubilee Year preparations	Coordination of four MNR branches; final phase of reorganization	Ministero Beni Culturali; Comune di Roma	Institutional culmination of previous mobility cycles; symbolic reintegration of dispersed collections

On 10 December 1997, only days before Palazzo Altemps's official opening, Prime Minister Romano Prodi and Minister Walter Veltroni ordered the return of the bronze *Busto di Marco Aurelio* (long displayed in Palazzo Chigi) to its original context within the Ludovisi collection.[692] The newspaper framed the gesture as part of a new governmental policy to restore artworks displaced in state offices to their museum institutions. Symbolically, the act completed the reassembly of the Ludovisi sculptures and underscored Palazzo Altemps's identity as the MNR's new seat of the history of collecting. Coming just as the museum prepared to reopen on 16 December, the repatriation from the seat of government to the museum exemplified how cultural policy, museological renewal, and national representation converged on the eve of the Jubilee.

Legal Boundaries and Ministerial Authority: The Basel Loan

692 "Altemps, Prodi ridà un busto," La Repubblica, 10 December 1997.

An illustrative example of the bureaucratic mechanisms governing outbound loans from MNR is found in a letter dated 2 March 1988 from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma to Professor E. Berger of the Antikenmuseum Basel.[693] The letter responds to a request for the extension of a temporary loan of the *Torso di Pentesilea* (inv. no. 108363), originally authorized for exhibition in Basel between May and November of that year. While the Soprintendenza indicates its favorable opinion regarding the extension, it also reaffirms that the legal limit for international loans is six months, as established under the still-active Legge 1089/1939[694] and cannot be exceeded. The text reflects the dual role of the Soprintendenza as both a mediator in the international circulation of heritage and an enforcer of national legislation.

The loan is instructive less for its logistical peculiarities than for its embodiment of the established, still-valid protocols that govern the international circulation of Italian cultural property. The correspondence between the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and their Swiss counterparts methodically rehearses a now-familiar litany of requirements: recalibration of the insurance value, the appointment of a courier to oversee all transit and installation phases, and most critically, the strict six-month legal ceiling on outbound loans. These elements, though procedurally routine, mark the texture of institutional life for Italian museums navigating a complex network of national and international regulation.

If anything distinguishes this case, it is not the presence of insurance or accompaniment, these are unremarkable features, inscribed in both national law and international museum practice[695] but rather the tightly bounded legal framework within which the exchange unfolds. The letter's invocation of a non-negotiable six-month maximum "il prestito non potrà superare il limite di sei mesi stabilito per legge" offers a

693 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al Prof. Dr. E. Berger relativa al prestito del Torso di Pentesilea al Antikenmuseum Basel. 2 Mar. 1988. Busta 137, fasc. 34, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.
694 Legge 1089/1939, enacted on 1 June 1939, is the foundational Italian law "for the protection of things of artistic or historical interest," establishing state authority over movable and immovable cultural property and serving as the cornerstone of modern Italian heritage law. Its core principles continue in the current Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio (D.Lgs. 42/2004). See e.g., Fiorentini 2013, pp.112-115.
695 Prott, 2009; Macdonald 2006, pp. 197–200.

particularly clear instance of how Italian heritage legislation actively shapes, and at times constrains, even the most amicable and administratively competent international relationships.[696]The tone of the correspondence, requesting "urgent" confirmation from while reaffirming the legal perimeter is characteristic of the bureaucratic protocols through which such transactions are enacted, an interaction that is at once institutional and, potentially, diplomatic.

At the same time, the Basel loan can be seen as a microcosm of a wider reality: museum-to-museum cooperation across national boundaries invariably triggers multi-level negotiations, involving curators, registrars, heritage authorities, and even diplomatic actors. As Leanne Hoogwaerts notes, museums play a role in national soft power, "acting as 'national expressions of identity'" and requiring institutional and governmental coordination to realize international exchanges.[697] In this sense, the Basel case may be viewed as exemplary, not for its exceptionality, but for the clarity with which it foregrounds the everyday inter-institutional labor and legal architecture that underpin the temporary movement of objects across borders.

The Discobolo Lancellotti and the Institutional Limits of Object Circulation

How key archaeological collections have moved and changed over time (especially those originating from private 19th-century assemblages such as the Collezione Ludovisi) reflect a longer history of institutional decentralization that the MNR would only begin to reverse in the late 20th century..

The attempted loan of the Discobolo Lancellotti to Tokyo for the exhibition *Lo spazio nell'arte europea* in 1987 offers a case study into the internal mechanisms of heritage governance in Italy. While successful loans often highlight museums as visible actors in cultural diplomacy, it is the bureaucratic choreography underlying these exchanges (particularly when they fail) that best reveals the institutional,

696 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al Prof. Dr. E. Berger relativa al prestito del Torso di Pentesilea al Antikenmuseum Basel. 2 Mar. 1988. Busta 137, fasc. 34, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.
697 Hoogwaerts 2016, p. 315.

administrative, and material constraints of object mobility. While much scholarly attention has been given to spectacular outbound loans as expressions of cultural diplomacy, the internal workings of these operations, particularly when they falter, reveal a less visible, though no less significant, dimension of heritage governance.

The episode begins with a directive issued on 7 February 1987[698] by the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, requesting the "urgente restituzione Discobolo Lancellotti e tarsie Giunio Basso" from the Comune di Firenze to MNR. These works had been loaned for the exhibition *L'opera ritrovata*, but were now being recalled in preparation for their possible inclusion in the upcoming international exhibition in Tokyo, *Lo spazio nell'arte europea*. As noted in the ministerial fonogramma, "Urgenza restituzione opere suddette... è motivata da prestito medesime... per mostra organizzata presso Museo di Tokio."

A series of ministerial and inter-institutional correspondence followed. On 14 February,[699] the Ufficio Centrale communicated that on 17 February, functionaries from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma would arrive at Palazzo Vecchio to retrieve the works, and requested the cooperation of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici in Florence and the Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Artistico of the Carabinieri. The coordination was formalized in a letter from La Regina to the Mayor of Florence,[700] appointing three officials: Maria Teresa Polito, Maria Rita Di Mino, and Antonio Currò to oversee the handover. It is unclear from the surviving documents whether the works had remained in Florence beyond the scheduled closure of *L'opera ritrovata* or whether the recall was prompted by a change in ministerial planning following the Tokyo loan request. In either case, the episode reflects the fluid timelines typical of inter-soprintendenza coordination, where

698 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Fonogramma Prot. n. 671/IV H, 7 febbraio 1987.

699 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Fonogramma Prot. n. 1339/IV, 14 febbraio 1987.

700 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, lettera di Adriano La Regina al Sindaco del Comune di Firenze sull'incarico per la restituzione del Discobolo e delle Tarsie, 16 febbraio 1987.
At the time, the Mayor of Florence was Massimo Bogianckino, a prominent figure in cultural administration and former superintendent of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.

administrative and logistical contingencies frequently extended the life of temporary exhibitions.

The event began with a ministerial directive dated 7 February 1987, urgently recalling the Discobolo and the Tarsie di Giunio Basso from Florence back to Rome.[701] These objects, previously loaned for the exhibition *L'opera ritrovata*, were to be included in the Tokyo show. The bureaucratic specificity of the operation is revealing: the transaction involved the Soprintendenze of Rome and Florence, the Carabinieri's Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Artistico, and local authorities. Transport arrangements were meticulously documented down to the identification of the logistics firm[702], the truck's license plate (FI – F89679), and the driver's name (Massimo Mugnai).[703] Even diagnostic agencies such as ENEA became involved, conducting gamma-ray testing to verify the structural integrity of the sculpture. This attention to detail shows how domestic transfers, let alone international loans, activated a full security apparatus that encoded museum objects within discourses of risk and protection.

Despite this considerable effort, the Tokyo loan ultimately collapsed due to conservation concerns.[704] Diagnostic results from ENEA revealed internal structural lesions and corrosion of metal pins within the statue, leading Director General Sisinni to withdraw authorization for the loan.[705] In this episode, the role of diagnostic analysis was decisive: the scientific examination of material stability carried institutional weight, determining policy outcomes and shaping the boundaries of what could safely circulate. Such outcomes illustrate how, increasingly, the professional care and material condition of objects (rather than diplomatic or curatorial ambition alone) dictated their mobility, a reflection of what scholars like Haidy Geismar have

701Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Fonogramma Prot. n. 671/IV H, 7 febbraio 1987.

702 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Fonogramma Prot. n. 731/VII B1, 18 febbraio 1987.

703 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Fonogramma del Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Prot. n. 731/VII B1, 18 febbraio 1987.

704 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Fonogramma Prot. n. 1312, 18 marzo 1987.

705 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, Fonogramma di Francesco Sisinni: "Milano – Fiera padiglione Ministero Beni Culturali," Prot. n. 1320/87, 18 marzo 1987.

described as the "material turn" in heritage management, wherein technical diagnostics outweigh symbolic aspirations.[706]As Lorenzo Casini has observed, "cultural heritage has become a crucial battlefield of sovereignty and globalization."[707] The cancelled loan of the *Discobolo* thus functioned not only as a conservation decision but also as a moment in which the Italian administration of cultural heritage reaffirmed its authority over the circulation of antiquities, even in the face of diplomatic pressure.

The bureaucratic life of the Discobolo Lancellotti did not end with the cancellation. Instead, the aborted loan left a dense administrative trace, as shown by subsequent correspondences with Bruno Tartaglia S.r.l. over outstanding transport costs.[708] These documents reveal quiet tensions and retrospective negotiations around financial accountability, highlighting that even cancelled loans produced real administrative and economic consequences for state institutions.

Within the broader institutional history of MNR, whose collections had been historically decentralized due to spatial constraints and logistical realities, as exemplified by transfers such as that of the Ludovisi satyr bust to Palazzo Venezia, it was only in the 1990s, under the polo museale system, that the museum strategically reclaimed dispersed pieces, reaffirming curatorial authority and institutional coherence. This case demonstrates how the circulation of iconic antiquities blurred the line between cultural and political representation. As one scholar notes, "National pride is overwhelmingly present in cultural contests […] cultural representation can quickly become a form of political representation."[709]

Ultimately, this case reminds us that the significance of museum object mobility extends far beyond successful loans. Even unsuccessful movements generate tangible costs and bureaucratic residues, embody institutional aspirations, and reflect shifting paradigms in conservation governance and curatorial authority. As such, the Discobolo

706 Geismar 2015, pp. 71–85.
707 Casini 2021, p.10.
708 See Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32.
709 Carbó-Catalan and Roig-Sanz 2022,p. 9.

Lancellotti's attempted journey provides a nuanced counterpoint to successful diplomatic loans, exposing the infrastructural, epistemic, and administrative conditions that both enable and constrain the circulation of cultural heritage.

The exhibition that the statue was withheld from, The Council of Europe exhibition *Lo spazio nell'arte europea* (*Space in European Art*), held at the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo from March to June 1987, was conceived as a grand meditation on representation, perception, and the construction of space in the European visual tradition. Ernst H. Gombrich's introductory essay in the exhibition catalog framed the project with characteristic breadth, tracing debates on optics and illusion from antiquity to the Renaissance, and situating European art within a lineage of experiment and reflection on how space is perceived and rendered.[710] Yet for Italy, and particularly for MNR, the stakes of participation were as much material as they were intellectual. The loans requested from Rome, drawn from the collections of MNR included some of the museum's most emblematic antiquities: the abovementioned Discobolo Lancellotti, the crouching *Aphrodite*, the celebrated *Mosaic of Fishes* from the Esquiline, and several funerary relief fragments.[711] Their presence in the catalogue symbolically anchored the exhibition's chronological sweep in classical antiquity, positioning Roman collections at the foundation of the European canon.

Archival correspondence, however, complicates the picture. While the catalogue confidently lists the *Discobolo Lancellotti* among the intended loans, documents from the Soprintendenza and the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali reveal that the statue's inclusion was contested from the outset.[712] In the official catalog, there is no mention that the statuewas not exhibited. Conservation assessments noted corrosion of the iron pins inserted during nineteenth-century restorations, and La Regina himself warned of the risks of transoceanic transport. Despite the object's prominence in the printed catalogue, the loan was

710 Gombrich 1987, pp. 25-28.

711 Space in European Art, List of Works, cat. nos. 5, 7, 18–19, pp. 73, 75, 87–89.

712Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, lettera alla Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma: "Trasferimento Discobolo di Mirone e Tarsie," 28 aprile 1987.

ultimately refused. In Tokyo, therefore, the *Discobolo* was paradoxically both present and absent: reproduced in the catalogue as a promised masterpiece, but withheld in Rome on conservation grounds.

This illuminates the unstable terrain of museum diplomacy in the late 1980s. Even when works did not travel, the negotiations surrounding their potential movement generated meaning: they mobilised expertise, consumed administrative resources, and revealed the competing priorities of curators, conservators, and political authorities. The absence of the *Discobolo* was not a failure of diplomacy so much as a demonstration of the limits of symbolic exchange when weighed against the responsibilities of conservation. The very act of refusing the loan reaffirmed the MNR's role as custodian of works whose value was not only aesthetic but institutional and national.

However, other pieces did travel. The crouching *Aphrodite*, a marble of the second century CE, arrived safely in Tokyo, as did the *Mosaic of Fishes* from the Esquiline, long regarded as one of the MNR's most vivid examples of Roman illusionism, alongside funerary relief fragments illustrating ritual and civic life.[713] Their inclusion spoke directly to the exhibition's theme of spatial representation: the mosaic, with its shimmering arrangement of marine species, offered a Roman precedent for the play of depth and surface that Gombrich identified as central to European pictorial tradition.

For MNR, the Tokyo exhibition took place at a delicate moment. In 1987, only the Terme di Diocleziano complex was open to the public; Palazzo Massimo remained under interminable restoration, and the museum's identity as a multi-site institution was still unresolved. To loan key works abroad in this period was therefore a double gesture: an assertion of ancient Rome's continued centrality to the European canon, and a tacit acknowledgment that many of its most prized holdings were not yet visible at home. The paradox is telling. Even in absence (or perhaps especially in absence) the MNR's objects played a part in shaping international perceptions of Italian heritage.

713 Space in European Art, cat. nos. 7, 18, 19, pp. 75, 87-89.

The same statue was soon under consideration for a different context: a domestic exhibition in Rome related to the World Athletics Championships. A ministerial minuta dated 18 May 1987[714] proposed the Discobolo for the exhibition *Lo sport nell'antica Grecia*, but even in this case, the decision was deferred to further technical evaluations. The document notes that due to the precarious condition of the statue's support pins, "la decisione sia da subordinare ai risultati di un esame delle analisi gammagrafiche effettuate dall'E.N.E.A." This demonstrates how conservation, as much as diplomacy, determined the mobility of the object.

In addition, the inclusion of local law enforcement; the Questura di Roma and Carabinieri N.T.P.A. in logistical notices about the transport truck and driver underscores the securitization of object movement.[715] Even a domestic transfer activated a national security framework that encoded museum objects within the language of protection and risk.

Placed against later episodes, such as the Montreal exhibition *Roma: 1000 anni di civiltà* (1992), where the MNR contributed over half the displayed works, the Tokyo case highlights a different logic of mobility. In Tokyo, a handful of iconic pieces symbolically framed the entire narrative of European space; in Montreal, an avalanche of loans reflected a more practical strategy of filling new galleries abroad while the MNR's own spaces in Rome were still in flux. Both episodes reveal how the circulation of objects intersected with the museum's reorganisation in the decades before the Jubilee of 2000, and how loans functioned less as neutral transfers than as arenas of negotiation where conservation, diplomacy, and institutional identity converged.The available documentation does not register a political backlash to the refusal; if objections existed, they did not translate into formal acts or sustained public controversy, and the case remained within the technical remit of conservation authorities.

Il Pugilatore - From Rome to Brisbane

714 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Minuta di Adriano La Regina: Mostra "Lo sport nell'antica Grecia," Prot. n. 2586, 18 maggio 1987.

715 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 32, Fonogramma del Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali: identificazione camion Tartaglia e sicurezza trasporto, Prot. n. 1875, 18 febbraio 1987.

Even before it traveled to international exhibitions, the *Pugilatore in riposo* (inv. no. 129570) was already being positioned as a high-profile ambassador of Italian antiquity within national settings. A 1987 exhibition titled *Lo Sport nell'antichità* at the Fiera di Milano featured the statue as its central draw, following a detailed request submitted by the Assessorato alla Cultura of the Comune di Milano to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali.[716] The response from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, dated 6 May 1987, outlined the conditions for the loan: full insurance coverage, technical transport oversight, and the requirement that the statue be accompanied at all stages by authorized personnel.[717] This correspondence reveals the already-formalized procedures for safeguarding the *Pugilatore* during travel, marking it as a work of national importance subject to close surveillance. Even in the context of a domestic fair, the statue was treated as a diplomatically sensitive object, foreshadowing its later use in global exhibitions.

Among the outbound loans of this period, few were as emblematic as the inclusion of the bronze *Pugilatore in riposo* (inv. no. 1055) in the Italian Pavilion at Expo '88 in Brisbane. A letter from the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, dated 9 October 1987, directed the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma to carry out all necessary conservation checks and logistical preparations for the statue's imminent international departure.[718]

The documents associated with this loan, including the formal request from the Commissariato Generale del Governo, photographic documentation, and valuation reports, highlight both the administrative complexity and symbolic stakes of the operation. The statue was insured for 4.2 billion lire[719]an amount that signals its prominence in the cultural strategy surrounding the Expo.

716 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, lettera del Comune di Milano, Assessorato alla Cultura, al Ministero per i Beni Culturali, 17 aprile 1987.
717 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, lettera della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma al Comune di Milano, 6 maggio 1987.
718 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, lettera del Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali alla Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 9 ottobre 1987.
719Documenti relativi al prestito del Pugilatore per Expo '88, ibid.

The selection of *Il Pugilatore* was not coincidental. As a well-preserved Hellenistic bronze with a compelling affective and athletic form, the statue embodied a powerful visual narrative of classical heritage adapted to modern exhibition diplomacy. Its involvement in Brisbane was part of what scholars have described as prestige diplomacy, the strategic use of cultural assets to project soft power and national image abroad.[720] Wang's analysis of museum diplomacy, describes these exhibitions as "soft power performances of national cultural identity," where the international mobility of heritage objects is tightly linked to geopolitical messaging and institutional visibility.[721] The *Pugilatore*, in this sense, was not only an ambassador of antiquity, but an agent of curated national presence on the global stage.

This shows the shifting logic of museum governance during this period, where outbound loans increasingly required coordination between curators, conservators, transport specialists, and governmental bodies. While the statue's structural condition facilitated its eligibility for international travel, its selection was equally conditioned by its symbolic legibility and non-controversial provenance, a crucial factor in securing approval within the evolving landscape of cultural diplomacy.

In 1987, the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma approved the loan of the *Pugilatore* for the exhibition *Lo sport nell'antica Grecia*, organized by the Comune di Roma as part of the cultural programming accompanying the World Athletics Championships. The exhibition, hosted at the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitoline Hill, positioned Rome's ancient past as a symbolic backdrop for a contemporary international event. In a letter dated 18 May 1987, Soprintendente Adriano La Regina affirmed the Soprintendenza's willingness to participate, stating the office was "disponibile al prestito del 'pugilatore' in bronzo inv. 1055 del quale è ormai ultimato il restauro". The letter also considered the inclusion of a replica of the *Discobolo di Mirone* from Castel Porziano (inv. 56039), while advising against the loan of the *Discobolo Lancellotti*.[722]

720 Gienow-Hecht 2010, pp. 13–29.
721 Wang 2019, pp. 611–624.
722 Ibid.

The letter notes that the office would "procedere a richiedere, previo parere dell'I.C.R., l'autorizzazione ministeriale per il prestito delle opere suddette," revealing the multi-step bureaucratic pathway even for short-term loans.[723]

In the same period, the statue was also loaned for exhibition at the Fiera di Milano, in the padiglione del Ministero per i Beni Culturali. A phonogram dated 18 March 1987 from the Ufficio Centrale Beni A.A.A.A. e S. (Divisione VII) authorized the loan of the *Pugilatore*, "inteso che saranno adottate tutte le cautele inclusa la polizza assicurativa da chiodo a chiodo" a clear reference to full insurance coverage during transport and display.[724] In a follow-up dated 20 March 1987, the Soprintendente Aggiunto Maria Rita Di Mino sent two color photographs of the statue to the fair organizers, requesting they cite the author of the images as "Foto De Masi".[725] These materials demonstrate the standardization of visual documentation and the formalized nature of inter-institutional collaboration.

By 1988, the *Pugilatore* had become a central object of Italian cultural diplomacy abroad. In preparation for its inclusion in Expo Brisbane 1988, a telegram dated 16 September 1988 from the Ministero per i Beni Culturali to the Ministero degli Affari Esteri confirmed the statue's immediate departure for Brisbane and required that it be accompanied by a Soprintendenza official "per ovvi motivi precauzionali".[726] This requirement, while presented as precautionary, also reflects the symbolic role the statue played in affirming institutional and national stewardship over cultural patrimony.

The insurance valuation reinforces this: a telegram dated 27 March 1987 from the Soprintendenza stated the statue would be insured for seven billion lire ("L. 7.000.000.000") for the duration of its transport and

723 Ibid.

724 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, Fonogramma di Francesco Sisinni: "Milano – Fiera padiglione Ministero Beni Culturali," Prot. n. 1320/87, 18 marzo 1987.

725 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, lettera di Maria Rita Di Mino a Dott. Franco Amato (Fiera Milano), Prot. n. 3329/87, 20 marzo 1987.

726 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, Telegramma di Sante Serangeli al Commissario Generale Expo Brisbane, Prot. n. 4692/88, 16 settembre 1988.

exhibition.[727] This figure works as a material marker of the object's cultural and political value.

These documents show how the movement of the *Pugilatore* from Rome to Milan to Brisbane was a symbolic operation negotiated through bureaucratic channels and cultural diplomacy, in which MNR and the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma functioned as both custodians of antiquity and agents of national image-making. The statue's journey reflects the broader dynamics of political connection in heritage circulation that characterized the Italian cultural administration in the final decades of the twentieth century.

While the case of the *Pugilatore* illustrates the high-profile use of museum objects in international cultural diplomacy, many other examples from the same period demonstrate how decisions around loans were often driven not by politics, but by technical assessments and conservation ethics. A notable case is provided by a document dated 5 novembre 1987, issued by the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro (I.C.R.), concerning the feasibility of transporting several works from the Museo Nazionale Romano to Belgio for an exhibition titled *Lavorazione del marmo nell'antica Grecia*. The document offers a rare window into the concrete mechanisms of exhibition planning, particularly the tension between institutional willingness to collaborate and the physical limits of fragile ancient materials.

Responding to a request from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, the I.C.R. confirmed the trasportabilità of seven objects following an in-person inspection: "Si comunica che funzionari di questo ufficio hanno condotto il sopralluogo richiesto con fonogramma n° 14177 del 27/X/87." The response is methodical, providing a list of pieces deemed suitable for travel. Among those approved were:

1. Testa di atleta, inv. n. 1245;
2. Testa femminile, inv. n. 1194;
3. Rilievo di terracotta dalla Via Cassia, s. n.

727 Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, b. 137, fasc. 35, Telegramma della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma: assicurazione statua "Il Pugilatore," Prot. n. 3685/87, 27 marzo 1987.

4. Rilievo marmoreo da Terracina, s. n.
5. Testa di principe Seleucide, inv. n. 1248
6. Torso femminile con peplos, s. n.;
7. Torso femminile, inv. n. 3067

The objectivity of the language reflects the I.C.R.'s technical role, and the fact that approval for transport was never assumed, even for small or relatively well-known pieces. Crucially, the letter goes on to state a parere negativo regarding the transport of one particular object:

"Si esprime invece parere negativo al trasporto della testa di marmo raff. 'Persiano', inv. n. 603, in quanto le attuali condizioni del pezzo, con integrazioni in cattivo stato, non ne rendono consigliabile il trasferimento, tanto meno in tempi brevi."

This statement is heavy with institutional language: "integrazioni in cattivo stato" indicates that previous restoration work was either poorly executed or had deteriorated, while the phrase "tanto meno in tempi brevi" hints at a recurring problem in the late 1980s; tight deadlines for exhibitions that often left conservators with little margin to safely prepare fragile materials.

Among the objects approved for transport to the 1987 exhibition, several are listed in the official Istituto Centrale per il Restauro document without any formal inventory number. Specifically, the *Rilievo di terracotta dalla Via Cassia*, the *Rilievo marmoreo da Terracina*, and the *Torso femminile con peplos* are all designated with "s.n." (*senza numero*), indicating that they had not yet been assigned an official catalogue number by MNR. While this detail might seem procedural, it is quite telling, it points to a broader issue of how materials were being processed, tracked, and classified during this period.

The fact that three out of the seven objects deemed suitable for international transport were not formally inventoried reflects a recurring challenge in Italian museums in the 1980s: the gap between archaeological recovery and museum administration. The fact that these works could nonetheless be evaluated, approved, and dispatched

for international exhibition suggests a certain flexibility (or perhaps necessity?) within institutional workflows.[728]

However, this flexibility raises important questions: Without an inventory number, how were these objects tracked through the loan process? How were they described in international loan agreements or insured for travel? What mechanisms were in place to ensure that their provenance and movements were properly recorded, especially once they left state custody? The use of descriptive labels rather than catalogue numbers in official correspondence suggests a reliance on internal knowledge, familiarity, and perhaps even a degree of informality in managing the movement of certain objects, particularly those not yet destined for public display.

It's worth emphasizing that this was not an isolated case. The surge in archaeological activity following the implementation of the *Legge 92/1981* meant that museums like the MNR were receiving a high volume of new material, often without the resources or infrastructure to process it immediately.[729] The backlog this created is evident in these documents. Objects were being conserved, handled, and even circulated before they were fully integrated into the museum's registri di inventario.[730]

This administrative lag must also be read in light of national cataloguing frameworks. During the 1980s, the *Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione* (ICCD) was still refining and standardizing the *schede OA* (*Opere d'Arte*) and *RA* (*Reperti Archeologici*) systems for the systematic recording of heritage objects.[731] Yet implementation across regional *Soprintendenze* was uneven, and the delay in adopting these centralised standards often left newly excavated or recently

728 E.g., Ladkin 2004, pp. 17–30. Ladkin explains how collections management policies must balance administrative rigor with practical flexibility, allowing museums to fulfill exhibition and loan obligations even amid logistical challenges.

729 Neil Brodie states: "Museums frequently acquired large quantities of artifacts from rescue excavations, often without the means to immediately process or exhibit them," leading to long-term backlogs and undocumented material, see Brodie 2005, pp. 143–153.

730 Roberts 2004, pp. 31–50. Roberts addresses common inventory backlogs and documentation challenges faced by museums, emphasizing issues arising when objects circulate or are exhibited prior to formal registration or inventory completion.

731 Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (ICCD), "Normativa per la compilazione delle schede di catalogo OA ed RA," Ministero della Cultura, accessed October 2025, https://iccd.cultura.gov.it/getFile.php?id=157.

acquired materials outside formal inventory systems. The persistence of "s.n." objects within circulation therefore reveals not administrative neglect, but the structural lag between archaeological recovery, cataloguing, and musealization characteristic of this transitional phase in Italian heritage administration.

From a museological perspective, this reveals something significant: that the status of an object as "museum-worthy"[732] was not necessarily dependent on its formal classification. Mobility and visibility could precede institutional formalization.[733]

In this context, the "s.n." designation does not signal negligence, but it exposes the practical limits of administrative systems during a period of rapid institutional change. It also points to a hierarchy within museum documentation where certain objects, despite being selected for exhibition, remained on the margins of the museum's bureaucratic structure.[734] Their movement, in a sense, outpaced their musealization.

Unlike the *Pugilatore*, which traveled under full ministerial approval and was insured for seven billion lire, this shows that not all loans were feasible, and not all artworks could be mobilized to serve diplomatic or cultural agendas. The voice of the conservator, here that of Prof. Umberto Baldini[735], serves as a measured contrast to institutional

732 The designation of an object as "museum-worthy" should be read as a status conferred through symbolic, disciplinary, and institutional processes. Classic museological theory frames this as the passage of an object into the realm of the semiophore, a shift from utility to representation (Pomian 1990, 30–31, pp. 44–47). Within the museum, "worthiness" is further codified through regimes of classification and exhibitionary order (Bennett 1995, pp. 59–61; Pearce 1992, pp. 24–28). More recent scholarship conceptualizes this as museality, the evaluative and practical criteria by which professionals determine whether an object belongs in a museum (Thiemeyer 2015, pp.396–411; Vilkuna 2016). In this sense, "museum-worthy" marks not a neutral description but an institutional judgment negotiated through expertise, display, and value attribution.

733 See Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands 2014, pp. 4–7. This document underlines how museum practices sometimes allow objects to be managed informally based on internal valuation and knowledge, prior to formal inventory or registration. Page 5 states: "Valuing involves making reasoned, verifiable statements about the value of an object or collection in response to specific institutional needs, often even before formal registration or inventory completion."

734 Gray, Clive and McCall argue that museums, as bureaucratic organizations, reflect internal power dynamics and institutional hierarchies, which shape not only research processes but also how collections are managed and prioritized, see: Gray, Clive, McCall 2018, p. 124.

735 Umberto Baldini (1921–2006) was the director of the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro (ICR) in Rome from 1983 to 1987. He was a prominent Italian art historian and conservator, renowned for his contributions to art restoration and conservation. Prior to his tenure at the ICR, Baldini served as the director of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, where he played a pivotal role in the restoration efforts following the 1966 Florence flood. See e.g., Ciatti, Martusciello 2013.

enthusiasm. His signature at the end of the document reminds us of technical offices like the I.C.R. were given real authority to make sure museum objects weren't put at risk just to be seen.

Museologically, this document is a reminder that mobility is contingent: the ability of objects to circulate internationally depended not only on bureaucratic permission, but also on condition reports, structural integrity, and the growing role of diagnostic analyses that assessed the internal stability of materials. Scientific imaging, radiography, and laboratory testing increasingly determined whether an object could travel at all, transforming conservation from a backstage practice into a decisive administrative instrument. It is an example of how the logistics of conservation intersected with curatorial intent, and how the MNR's participation in international exhibitions during the 1980s was embedded within a tightly managed, and at times limiting, institutional framework.

4.4 Movement as Meaning: What Mobility Tells Us about *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* and MNR Abroad

In October 1992, the exhibition *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* opened at the Palais de la Civilisation in Montréal, marking one of the most comprehensively coordinated international heritage exhibitions organized by the Italian state in the postwar period.[736]Conceived to coincide with Montréal's 350th anniversary, the exhibition brought together over 220 archaeological objects from seven major Italian institutions, including MNR and the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.[737]Framed as a celebration of Roman antiquity and Western civilizational origins, the exhibition was less a conventional museum

736 This characterization is supported by the exhibition's extraordinary scale and institutional reach. Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà involved the direct coordination of seven major Italian museums and archaeological superintendencies, including MNR and the Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, alongside multiple ministerial bodies such as the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali and the Ministero degli Affari Esteri. The catalogue credits (pp. 6–7) list more than fifty individuals and institutions involved in the organization, transportation, conservation, and scientific preparation of over 220 archaeological objects. Political prefaces from Giulio Andreotti, Francesco Sisinni, and Canadian and Québécois leaders further prove the diplomatic significance of the exhibition as an important gesture in Italian heritage diplomacy.

737 Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà 1992.

loan than a carefully orchestrated act of transnational diplomacy. Officially sponsored by the *Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali* and the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri*, and supported by a wide network of Canadian partners, *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* exemplifies how classical heritage was mobilized to advance Italy's international cultural profile during the early 1990s.

Out of the 201 objects displayed, 116 came from the MNR alone, a remarkable share when one recalls that, in Rome, the museum was still in the midst of its long restructuring. With only the Terme di Diocleziano open, and with Palazzo Massimo years away from completion, many of the works destined for Montreal were effectively in limbo, withdrawn from storage, dispatched across the Atlantic, and then returned to await their eventual installation in the new galleries. This made the museum not only the principal lender but effectively the backbone of the exhibition.

The exhibition narrative was structured around emblematic themes of imperial power, myth, and religious syncretism, with a focus on the visual language of sculpture: gods, emperors, and allegories of Rome's political and moral order.[738] In public speeches and the exhibition catalogue, Italian officials consistently cast the initiative as both a *missione culturale* and a gesture of amity toward Canada, emphasizing shared civilizational values and mutual respect.[739] Notably, the language used by figures such as Giulio Andreotti, Francesco Sisinni, and Ivo Butini reveals how the display of antiquity abroad could serve dual functions: reinforcing national prestige while cultivating international goodwill. Carbó-Catalan and Roig-Sanz state that "Soft power is indeed used as a partial synonym of prestige, but with an emphasis on its political effects. Each historical period deploys different resources to exert soft power: the means of the Other by providing a sense of confidence, attraction, and prestige."[740] More than a temporary show, *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* emerged as a paradigmatic case of state-driven museological diplomacy at the close of the Cold War.

738 Ibid, pp. 8–10.
739 Ibid.
740 Carbó-Catalan, Roig-Sanz 2022,p.8.

The catalogue, edited by Adriano La Regina, makes clear how deliberately the exhibition was cast as a diplomatic event. The first page announces its presentation "under the distinguished patronage of" the President of the Italian Republic, Francesco Cossiga, and the Governor-General of Canada, Ramon John Hnatyshyn. What follows is a sequence of dedications by political leaders and cultural administrators that reads like a roster of transatlantic partnerships: Brian Mulroney and Giulio Andreotti alongside Robert Bourassa and Jean Doré; ambassadors, ministers, and municipal officials, each lending institutional authority to the project. The breadth of involvement was equally reflected in the loans themselves, drawn not only from the MNR but also from the Antiquarium of the Roman Forum, the Capitoline Museums, the Museo Archeologico of Florence, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Naples, the Museo della Civiltà Romana, and the Museo Nazionale Etrusco of Villa Giulia. What emerged, then, was not the voice of a single institution but the orchestration of a national heritage, projected abroad through a distinctly international frame.

Logistically, *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* represented a significant feat of interministerial and international coordination. The process involved meticulous conservation work, detailed transport documentation, and formal authorizations for each object, echoing the procedural rigor typical of outbound loans from the MNR during the 1980s and 1990s. As was standard, Italian couriers and officials accompanied the works "da chiodo a chiodo." The "da chiodo a chiodo" formula, insuring a work from the moment it leaves its original location until its return, is enshrined in Italian loan regulations, as seen in the *Regolamento per la concessione dei prestiti* of the Museo delle Civiltà.[741] What distinguished Montréal was the scale and concentration of loans (with the MNR as principal lender), the interministerial framing of the project, and the maintenance of curatorial control on site, with Italian experts overseeing installation and interpretation. In this sense, the exhibition did not only export material heritage; it exported institutional authority and a curatorial vision.

741 Museo delle Civiltà 2024, pp.8-9.

At a time when Italy was recalibrating its cultural diplomacy strategy in the post-Cold War order, this exhibition functioned as a public affirmation of Italy's role as a custodian of European antiquity.[742] The use of state-funded cultural initiatives to build bilateral ties with Canada, outside of the traditional European diplomatic landscape, signaled a broader turn toward globalized heritage diplomacy, in which exhibitions became instruments for reasserting national soft power in a multipolar world.[743]

As a case, Montreal illustrates the ways in which the MNR was already functioning beyond its walls, even before its reorganization had been completed at home. The exhibition took four years to prepare, reflecting the slow rhythms of both bureaucratic negotiation and museological planning, but it also prefigured the shape of the museum to come. Many of the objects that traveled to Canada would later anchor the displays at Palazzo Massimo, so that the Montreal show can be read retrospectively as both a provisional unveiling and a rehearsal. It demonstrated how external circulation of objects could serve internal ends, keeping collections visible during a period when the museum's public face was otherwise diminished.

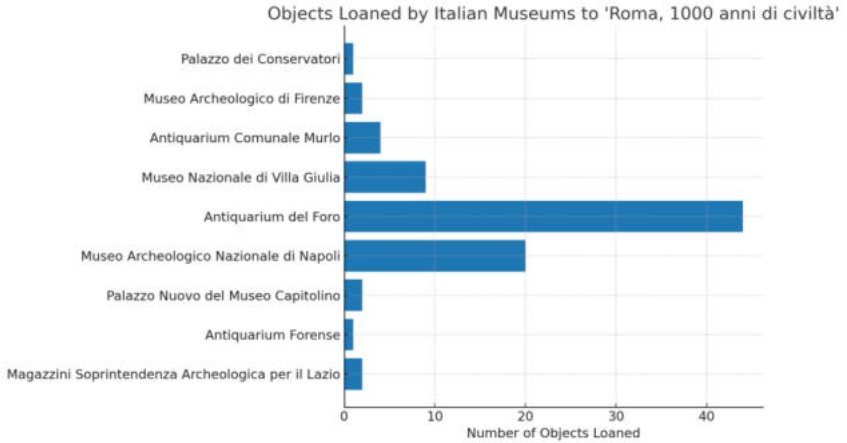
In this light, *Roma. 1000 anni di civiltà* was less a digression than a test case. It demonstrated how the MNR, even in the unsettled years of its restructuring, could act simultaneously as a custodian of archaeological heritage and as an agent of cultural diplomacy. The language of the catalogue (i.e. diplomatic prefaces, institutional acknowledgments, political endorsements) insinuates that the exhibition was conceived as a gesture of friendship between Italy and Canada, yet its practical consequences were equally significant for the museum's internal trajectory. By carrying Rome's antiquities abroad, the museum reinforced its authority within Italy, securing visibility and legitimacy at a moment when much of its collection remained inaccessible in

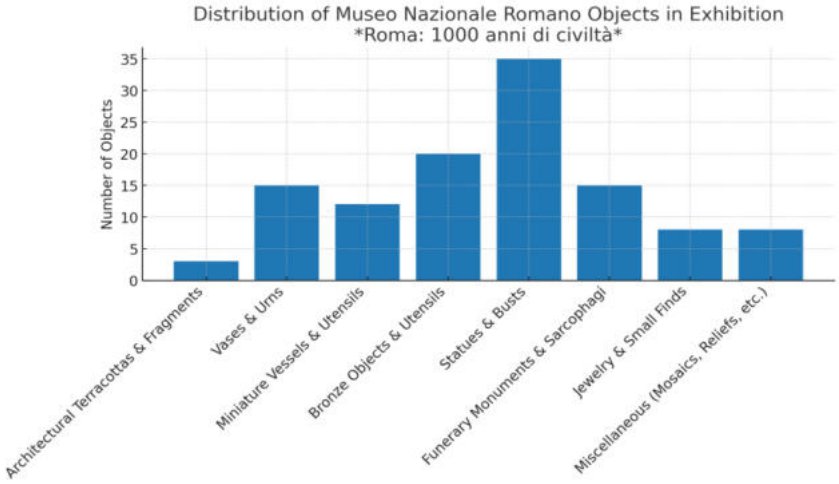
742 For a discussion of how national museums use exhibitions and objects to assert cultural authority and diplomatic identity, see Wang, who argues that museums often serve as public tokens in cultural diplomacy, forging national memory and projecting cultural identity on the international stage. Wang notes that "national museums and their collections are often embedded in colonial histories and are commonly used to forge collective memory, cultural identity and nationalism." See Wang 2018, pp. 1, 3.

743 On Italy's use of exhibitions as diplomatic strategy in this period, see Grincheva 2020, pp. 48–49; Nye 2004, pp. 11–14.

Rome itself. What appeared to be an outward projection thus also sustained the museum's inward transformation, bridging the years between the Legge n. 92 del 23 marzo 1981 and the eventual inauguration of its renewed sites in the late 1990s.

The scale of MNR's involvement in *Roma. 1000 anni di civiltà* was significant. Other contributors, while significant, played a supporting role. Taken together, these loans created a composite portrait of Rome's antiquity, pieced together from collections of different origins and institutional traditions. The following table illustrates the numerical distribution of objects across the lending institutions other than MNR.





As the above table explains, the distribution of the 116 objects loaned from MNR reveals both the breadth and the weight of the institution's contribution. The most substantial group consisted of statues and busts, a corpus of more than thirty works boasting the museum's role as custodian of Rome's sculptural heritage. Funerary monuments and sarcophagi followed closely, together with a significant selection of vases and urns. Smaller but still notable groups included miniature vessels, bronze utensils, and jewelry, while architectural fragments and mosaics represented the more fragmentary yet essential testimonies of Roman material culture. This distribution makes clear that the MNR's holdings provided not only numerical strength but also the thematic backbone of the exhibition, ensuring that the narrative of "a thousand years of civilization" rested firmly on the museum's collections, even as pieces from other Italian institutions offered complementary (or other) perspectives.

Contemporary Canadian press coverage further illustrates the extent to which *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* was perceived as an ambitious curatorial enterprise and a cultural spectacle tied to civic pride and international prestige. The following media provides critical insight into the logistical scale, diplomatic visibility, and symbolic freight of

the exhibition. In *The Globe and Mail*, journalist Ellin Bessner reported that the exhibition's infrastructure costs, including security and insurance, were projected at a staggering $4.5 million CAD, exposing the state-level coordination behind the loan. "The show is insured for more than $350 million and has taken three years to plan," she wrote, quoting Italian Consul General Ivo Butini, who emphasized that *Roma* would be "the most important show of Roman antiquities ever seen in North America."[744]

Other articles from *The Globe and Mail* reinforced the show's position as a centrepiece of Montréal's 350th anniversary celebrations. A May 1992 piece contextualized the exhibition among the city's official heritage initiatives, characterizing it as one of several "birthday bashes" that sought to connect local civic identity with broader civilizational narratives.[745] In this framing, ancient Rome was not simply a European past being imported into a North American context, but a symbolic mirror through which Montréal could represent its own historic and multicultural aspirations.

Tracing the exhibition's longer arc, a 1986 article titled *Montreal Casts Net for Roman Artifacts* revealed that the origins of the project stretched back more than six years.[746] At that time, local cultural organizers were already in discussion with Italian authorities to secure a major exhibition of classical antiquities, with hopes that the project would coincide with the upcoming tricentennial. This early coverage reveals the exhibition as the result of sustained diplomatic and institutional effort, and not merely an opportunistic display arranged for a special event.

More detailed commentary appeared in *The Gazette*, Montréal's leading English-language newspaper. In a Sunday feature from March 1992, Ed Bentley emphasized the financial arrangements between Canadian sponsors and Italian institutions, noting that profits from exhibition

744 Bessner 1992, p. C4. The Globe and Mail is a major Canadian daily newspaper based in Toronto, known for its national reach and influence in shaping public opinion, especially among English-speaking Canadians. Founded in 1844, it is widely regarded as Canada's newspaper of record.
745 The Globe and Mail 1992, p. C1.
746 The Globe and Mail 1986, p. D9.

merchandising would return to Italy.[747] "They're not chickenfeed," Bentley quipped, as he detailed how catalogue revenues and souvenir sales were expected to generate substantial income, income that would flow primarily back to Rome.[748] This attention to the economics of cultural diplomacy added another dimension to the press narrative, pointing to the exhibition as a complex transaction in which aesthetic prestige, institutional branding, and financial benefit were intimately connected.

In a July 1992 article for *The Financial Post*, Celina Bell's feature *Montreal Toasts Rome* reviewed the exhibition itself, offering a detailed curatorial account of the objects on display.[749] Bell emphasized the show's division into thematic areas (i.e. gods, emperors, military power, and civic life) highlighting both its educational ambition and its narrative coherence. She praised the museum-quality standards of installation, singling out a fourth-century funerary relief of a young girl and a multi-breasted statue of Artemis as standout pieces. While Bell noted that some reconstructions were less successful (such as the replica of a Roman marketplace) her account overall described *Roma* as a rare opportunity to engage with antiquity at a scale not previously seen in Canada.[750]

Read together, these five articles demonstrate that *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* was interpreted in Canada as much more than a temporary museum exhibition. It was presented as a carefully staged act of transatlantic collaboration, combining heritage diplomacy, civic branding, and educational ambition. MNR, along with the other participating institutions, played an essential role not only in lending material, but in projecting a broader vision of Italian cultural identity abroad. For the Canadian audience, the exhibition provided a lens through which to reflect on Montréal's own place within global cultural circuits, and the press responses suggest that this message was both received and reciprocated.

747 Bentley 1992, p. D8.
748 Ibid.
749 Bell 1992, p. S16.
750 Ibid.

Moving objects was now about sharing cultural heritage and demonstrating relevance, asserting stewardship, and negotiating visibility on a diplomatic stage. As H. Perry Chapman, Frits Scholten, and Joanna Woodall note, exhibitions are never neutral spaces. Even those designed to appear apolitical carry deep political weight, especially when they operate across cultural and national lines.[751] In this sense, the museum's outbound loans functioned as both cultural offerings and strategic performances that showcases Italy's archaeological legacy while positioning the MNR within broader international networks of heritage and influence.

From the high-level coordination of *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* to the complex negotiations surrounding domestic transfers, the MNR's object mobility mirrored the evolving priorities of the Italian state: modernizing the cultural sector, projecting heritage as soft power, and asserting Italy's custodianship over antiquity. These efforts were key instruments through which policy was enacted. As Sharon Macdonald has noted, the museum is a key site where "nations narrate themselves," and in the case of the MNR, loans became a medium for narrating Italy's archaeological and institutional primacy.[752]

Object movement also required the museum to assert curatorial authority across space. Even when works left Rome, Italian officials often retained interpretive control, overseeing installation and exhibition design abroad. This exported not just material heritage, but a vision of institutional professionalism rooted in preservation, classical expertise, and national representation. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has observed, heritage becomes most visible when it is staged whether in situ, in the gallery, or across borders and staging is always selective, ideological, and deeply contextual.[753]

Absence and Presence: Excavation, Restoration, and Display in 1990s Rome

751 Chapman, Perry, Scholten, Woodall 2015, pp. 6–21.
752 Macdonald 2013, pp. 1–5, 14–16, 25.
753 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, pp. 367–380.

In the 1990s MNR's identity was shaped in parallel by two different processes: the outward circulation of its collections through loans and exhibitions abroad, and the local practices of excavation, restoration, and display that redefined how Rome's archaeological past was presented at home. Excavations exposed the fragility of urban contexts, while at the same time museum restorations sought to stabilize antiquities within new narratives of continuity. Exhibitions such as Antiche Stanze emphasized absence and loss, using fragments and voids to evoke the costs of urban transformation, whereas the reopening of Palazzo Massimo highlighted presence, coherence, and display as strategies of renewal. An example of how absence and presence became central categories through which the MNR and its partners mediated between preservation, urban change, and public expectation.

The 1997 exhibition *Antiche Stanze: Un quartiere di Roma imperiale nella zona di Termini*, was hosted at the Terme di Diocleziano and it stepped directly into contemporary discussions about the influence of archaeology on Rome's evolving sense of self. It placed the remnants of a lost imperial neighborhood inside the museum, the exhibition called attention to a longstanding and still unresolved tension in the city's cultural priorities: how to balance the demands of archaeological preservation with the pressures of urban growth. This dilemma has been especially obvious in the Termini area ever since the nineteenth century, and the exhibition invited both specialists and the general public to reflect on what is at stake when a city must choose between or combine safeguarding its past and making way for its future.

The materials on display originated from a site that had been discovered, destroyed, and rediscovered in successive waves since the mid-1800s, each time in response to infrastructural demands rather than any intentional program of archaeological investigation. The first uncovering in 1862, during the construction of the original Termini station, revealed a dense urban fabric from the Imperial period, yet little effort was made to protect these remains.[754] In a city where antiquities were often obstacles rather than assets to modern

754 Barbera, Paris 1996, introduzione.

development, such losses were commonplace. By the time Anton Luigi Pietrangrande led the 1947–49 excavations, Rome was undergoing another phase of rapid transformation, this time in the wake of postwar reconstruction. His approach represented a departure from the clearance-driven methods of the nineteenth century; rather than prioritizing the excavation of individual objects for museum collection, he insisted on systematic documentation of the site's architecture, urban layout, and stratigraphy.[755]

While the curators of *Antiche Stanze* presented Pietrangrande's work as a triumph of modern archaeological sensibilities, it would be misleading to suggest that this moment represented a clean break with previous attitudes toward Rome's buried past. The 1947–49 excavations, though more rigorous in their recording methods, still resulted in significant destruction, dictated by the logics of urban planning rather than historical inquiry. The material displayed in the exhibition was itself a fragment of a fragment of what could be salvaged from an excavation conducted under extreme pressures of time and competing priorities. In this sense, *Antiche Stanze* was as much an exhibition about absence as it was about presence and it invited visitors to consider not only what had been recovered but also what had been lost in the process.

This was not just an exhibition about a Roman neighborhood but an argument about how such sites should be understood in the present. The choice to reconstruct the architectural and social context of the Termini quarter, rather than simply exhibiting its most aesthetically impressive remains, reflected a growing commitment to urban archaeology as a discipline that could challenge earlier, object-centric museum models. However, this shift also raises critical questions: To what extent did the exhibition's museological framing compensate for the fact that the original site itself no longer existed? Was this an act of recovery or an act of historical reconstruction that, in its own way, masked the reality of loss?

755 Idem.

These concerns were particularly pressing in 1990s Rome, where archaeology and urban planning were once again in tension, this time in the context of Jubilee 2000 preparations. The decade had already been shaped by the fallout from the Tangentopoli corruption scandal,[756] which exposed deep dysfunctions in Italy's political and economic structures.[757] In response to these crises, cultural heritage was increasingly deployed as a stabilizing force, a way of reaffirming historical continuity in a moment of national uncertainty. Yet this renewed attention to the past often coexisted uneasily with the pragmatic demands of urban development. As the city prepared for an anticipated influx of millions of pilgrims and tourists, investment in infrastructure and museum renovations increased dramatically, with large-scale projects reshaping both the historic center and peripheral areas.[758]

Against this backdrop, *Antiche Stanze* was an exhibition with a dual function: on the one hand, it celebrated the achievements of archaeological preservation, presenting the Termini excavations as part of a longer trajectory toward responsible cultural stewardship. On the other hand, it implicitly raised unresolved questions about the ongoing erasure of the past in Rome's modern expansion. It did not explicitly draw parallels between the loss of the Termini neighborhood and the threats faced by other sites in the 1990s, yet its very existence, an attempt to salvage meaning from destruction, suggests that such connections were unavoidable.

It is also notable that the exhibition was staged at a moment when the governance of Italy's museums was under debate. The late 1990s saw increased calls for greater autonomy, efficiency, and public engagement in museum administration, laying the groundwork for the Franceschini reforms of the 2010s.[759] The exhibition's emphasis on reconstructing an ancient neighborhood as a lived space, rather than simply displaying excavated objects, aligned with these shifting priorities, emphasizing

756 On the topic of corruption scandals, political crisis, and the reshaping of Italian society in the 1990s, see e.g., Ginsborg 2003, esp. pp. 210–248; Crainz 2012, pp. 129–175.
757 Barbera, Paris 1996, p.12.
758 Ibid, p. 15.
759 Ibid, p.17, see also: Alfano, Baraldi, Cantabene 2023, pp. 97–131; Politecnico di Milano 2020.

interpretation and accessibility over the traditional model of academic curation.[760]

In the end, the exhibition went beyond simply recounting history; it offered a pointed reflection on how vulnerable Rome's archaeological heritage remains in a city where the pull of the present often collides with the weight of the past. Visitors were prompted to notice not only what was on display, but also what was absent; remnants lost through time, redevelopment, or changing cultural priorities. This aligns with recent discussions of "absence heritage," where, as Vereb and deVries put it, "the concept of heritage of absence… comes to bear on any situation where the narrative, observations and or interpretation of the tangible and intangible elements of a culture are accidentally or intentionally removed or altered."[761] Where Pietrangrande's efforts in the 1940s could be seen as a landmark in the documentation and preservation of Rome's ancient fabric, the 1997 exhibition left visitors with a more troubling dilemma: Was careful documentation enough? Or did it merely soften the blow of acknowledging that the city's past continued to be rewritten, sometimes more by what was allowed to vanish than by what was preserved? This aligns with the recent scholarly turn toward "absence heritage," which recognizes that what is missing from public narratives, whether through erasure, loss, or deliberate removal, it can shape collective memory just as powerfully as what is present.[762]

If the exhibition at Termini invited reflection on the meanings of absence, the subsequent practices at Palazzo Massimo show how absence and presence are actively negotiated within museum display. The internal circulation of objects within the MNR's institutional orbit (including transfers between storage, restoration facilities, and new exhibition venues) not only determined what visitors encountered, but also influenced how these objects were interpreted. The contrasting

760 Bonini Baraldi, Di Mascio, and Ferri note that in Italian museums, "space consistently emerged as a constraint to, and an enabler of, de facto autonomy," since "inherited spatial features are perceived as limits to the decision-making autonomy of the new entities… which involve an increased attention to the visitor experience."
See Bonini Baraldi, Di Mascio, Ferri 2023.
761 Vereb, deVries 2024.
762 Ibid.

display solutions for the bronze inscription of L. Cornelius Pusio and the Ludovisi satyr bust exemplify the evolving philosophies of restoration that governed such mobilities.

The restoration choices for the inaugural displays at Palazzo Massimo reflect a notable shift in institutional attitudes toward authenticity, fragmentariness, and historical legibility. One of the clearest expressions of this ethos can be found in the treatment of the bronze inscription of *L. Cornelius Pusio*,[763] a fragmentary, but epigraphically rich piece that entered the MNR by the end of the nineteenth century. Rather than subject the plaque to modern reintegration or speculative reconstruction, conservators opted to emphasize its material and historical discontinuities. As reported in the *Bollettino di Archeologia*, when the plaque was reexamined for the new displays, it was found detached from its original cornice, which had been stored separately, labeled "proveniente da Luni".[764] The plaque itself had previously been affixed with metal staples and plaster with restoration methods that by the late 1970s, had come to be seen as intrusive and inappropriate. During its preparation for exhibition, however, these earlier efforts were undone, and the surviving fragments were mounted instead "in un sottile strato di resina epossidica appoggiato su una lastra di plexiglas"[765], an approach that preserved the object's fragmentary integrity without obscuring its damage.

In sharp contrast, a much earlier intervention on the *satyr bust in bigio morato*, originally from the Collezione Ludovisi and now displayed at Palazzo Altemps offers insight of a now-superseded restoration logic. Rediscovered in the early twentieth century and heavily damaged, the bust was restored to recreate missing limbs and features, likely during the seventeenth century by artists in the circle of Bernini or Algardi. As

763 From Bollettino di Archeologia, nn. 23–24 (1993), the following inventory numbers are noted: the bronze inscription of L. Cornelius Pusio is registered as inv. no. 48134, and its associated bronze cornice as inv. no. 48135, both entered into MNR's collection on 26 May 1900, with the annotation "provenienza: Via Nazionale, dono del sig. Eliseo Borghi" (p. 168). The satyr bust in bigio morato, attributed to the Ludovisi Collection and now at Palazzo Altemps, is listed as inv. no. 8578, described as "frammento di statua in marmo bigio, troncato sotto il petto ed agli omeri" and appraised in 1902 at 1500 lire (p. 179). A related piece, the bust of Gallienus, is inv. no. 8633, valued at 3000 lire. These works were among a group of sculptures transferred from MNR to Palazzo Venezia in 1920 for public display.
764 Friggeri, Candilio 1993, p. 165.
765 Ibid.

Daniela Candilio notes, the bust shows signs of "una visione laterale"[766] and its "superficie del volto è stata evidentemente ribassata in occasione della rielavorazione del pezzo"[767], indicating an aesthetic integration of missing elements rather than their absence. The contrast between these two restoration philosophies, one privileging historical stratigraphy and the other privileging visual completeness, illustrates a critical museological inflection point. By the 1990s, at Palazzo Massimo, fragments weren't hidden away or treated as shortcomings. Instead, the museum's displays used these broken or incomplete objects to tell the story of each artifact's unique journey by showing their age, their losses, and even the choices made by earlier restorers. This approach reflected modern conservation principles and also a conscious move away from the more heavy-handed restorations that were common in museums a century ago.[768]

The physical relocation of objects within MNR was only part of a larger rethinking of institutional identity. Equally important were the evolving philosophies that shaped how these objects were presented to the public, particularly in the new exhibition spaces at Palazzo Massimo and Palazzo Altemps.

This redevelopment of the museum was marked by a curatorial philosophy that emphasized critical engagement with archival and epigraphic documentation in reconstructing the biographies of objects. Rather than treat display as a neutral act of aesthetic arrangement, curators at these two sites increasingly sought to make archaeological context and historical provenance visible to the visitor, even when objects were fragmentary or disconnected from their original settings. This is exemplified by the above-mentioned reinstallation of the bronze inscription of L. Cornelius Pusio and its matching decorative cornice (inv. no. 48135) at Palazzo Massimo. The two elements, acquired together in 1900 but later separated in storage, were reunited through detailed archival cross-referencing that drew on old photographs, museum inventories, and epigraphic readings. The reconstructed

766 Ibid, p.180.
767 Ibid.
768 Viñas 2005, pp. 91–99.

installation was guided by early documentation that described the inscription as "incassata in una bella e ricca cornice," and restored the object as a "gemma nella sua montatura,"[769] choosing to preserve its incomplete surface rather than re-integrate the missing elements.

At Palazzo Altemps, a similar attention to documentation informed the presentation of the satyr bust in *bigio morato* (inv. no. 8578) from the Ludovisi Collection. Though long separated from its original collection and heavily restored (likely in the seventeenth century), curators turned to 1902 valuation records, 1920 deposit lists, and nineteenth-century catalogues to reconstruct its trajectory. Rather than obscure the object's restoration history, the museum emphasized its layered biography, displaying it as a document of both antiquity and early modern collecting. As Candilio observed, the bust's facial surface had been "evidentemente ribassata in occasione della rielavorazione del pezzo,"[770] a detail that reveals how seventeenth-century interventions sought aesthetic completeness over archaeological authenticity. These cases reflect a display philosophy deeply rooted in archival and material transparency, where museum presentation serves not to erase the complexities of object history but to expose them. As Alexandra Bounia notes, "Notions like social inclusion, public accountability, and transparency, are central in museum research, and should be included in all codes of ethics as well."[771]

While high-profile exhibitions and public loans shaped the external image of MNR, equally important were the internal and often invisible processes through which objects circulated between excavation sites, depots, and eventual exhibition spaces. These flows were less mediated by media, but deeply embedded in institutional routines that offer a parallel history of heritage in motion.

A handwritten memo dated 24 November 1984[772] (see figure below) provides insight into the day-to-day logistics of fragment management within Rome's archaeological infrastructure. Addressed to Dr. Jacopi

769Friggeri, Candilio 1993,pp. 165-166.

770 Ibid, p.180.

771 Bounia 2014, p.2.

772Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, b. 98, fasc. 27, minuta manoscritta senza titolo riguardante il trasferimento di frammenti architettonici dalla Meta Sudans al recinto palatino, 24 novembre 1984.

and originating from the Forum sector of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, the document lists eleven architectural fragments transferred from the excavation site of the Meta Sudans to the northeastern corner of the Palatine enclosure. The materials include architraves, column drums, capitals, and cornice blocks in Lunense marble, travertine, and granite, each tagged with a coded classification (e.g., “MS 341/746 n. 45”) but without any direct reference to eventual museum assignment. While the note does not mention MNR, the types of objects listed and their movement across archaeological zones administered by the Soprintendenza place them firmly within the same logistical system that supplied material to the MNR’s various branches in this period.

Dottor FORTINI
ARCHIVIO

3511/R

ALL'ATTENZIONE DELLA
GENT.MA DOTT.SSA I. IACOPI.

IL GIORNO 23-11-1934 SONO STATI TRASPORTATI, DAL CANTIERE DELLA META SUDANS ALL'ANGOLO NORD-ORIENTALE DEL RECINTO PALATINO, I SEGUENTI FRAMMENTI:

1) FRAMMENTO DI ARCHITRAVE IN MARMO LUNENSE, COD. O('84), n°1;
2) " D'ANGOLO DI ARCHITRAVE IN MARMO LUNENSE, COD. O('84) n°2;
3) " DI CAPITELLO CORINZIO SBOZZATO IN MARMO LUNENSE, COD. O('84) n°3;
4) " DI COLONNA IN MARMO CARESTIO, COD. O('84) n°4;
5) " DI CAPITELLO SBOZZATO IN MARMO LUNENSE, COD. O('84) n°5;
6) " DI BLOCCO D'ANGOLO DI CORNICE IN TRAVERTINO, COD. MS84I1476, n°45;
7) " DI BLOCCO DI CORNICE IN TRAVERTINO, COD. MS84I1476 n°46;
8) " DI ARCHITRAVE IN TRAVERTINO, COD. MS84I1476 n°48;
9) " DI ARCHITRAVE IN TRAVERTINO, COD. MS84I1476 n°43;
10) ROCCHIO DI COLONNA IN MARMO CARISTIO, COD. MS84I1313;
11) FRAMMENTO DI COLONNA IN GRANITO EGIZIO, COD. MS83I1107.

DISTINTI SALUTI

ROMA, 24/11/1934

Dott.ssa [illegible]

This connection is substantiated by later documentation: an architectural fragment from the Meta Sudans site, now held at the Terme Diocleziano, is recorded under inventory number 574361.[773] Its presence in the collection confirms that fragments moving through this internal network did enter formal museum holdings. At the time, the MNR was integrated within the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma; the fluidity among excavation areas, depots, and museum spaces was therefore routine administrative practice rather than an exception. What it illustrates is the functional overlap of those domains and the difficulty of distinguishing temporary storage, intended display, and long-term custody within a single bureaucratic body. In this context, a simple record like the 1984 transfer list takes on curatorial significance, capturing how a standard procedure structured the circulation of fragments in a moment of transition.

The MNR's activities during this transitional moment constituted a form of "heritage choreography,"[774] where loans, exhibitions, restorations, and administrative practices together asserted institutional credibility and positioned the museum within a wider diplomatic and cultural network. However, this choreography would soon shift direction. As Rome prepared for the Jubilee of 2000, the emphasis moved from outward mobility to inward concentration. What had travelled across countries would now be situated within the city. The next chapter tracks the turn from itinerant objects into anchored spaces by examining how the MNR emerged as a central player in the Jubilee's reimagining of Rome's urban and museological landscape.

Not all forms of institutional self-representation, however, relied on the movement of objects. In 1999 the *Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato* issued a commemorative silver coin marking the 110th anniversary of the MNR. Unlike the international exhibitions that had carried antiquities abroad, the coin condensed the museum's identity into a

773 See: Colantoni 2016, pp. 477–479; Panella 1996.

774 See e.g., Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's essay "Theorizing Heritage," argues that heritage is not simply preserved but actively "staged" through exhibition, display, and performance. Her analysis shows that the movement, arrangement, and contextualization of objects, what could be called "heritage choreography" are always selective acts shaped by institutional, cultural, and political agendas. See Ibid, pp. 370-371.

fixed emblem. Its dual iconography; *Italia*, drawn from a Social War denarius on the obverse, and the celebrated Ares Ludovisi on the reverse, juxtaposed republican origins with classical canon, projecting plurality and imperial continuity. Less a curatorial initiative than a state-sanctioned symbol, it demonstrates how, by the end of the decade, the MNR's image could be mobilised even in immobile form, in silver rather than through transit across borders.[775]

Conclusion

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, MNR underwent a gradual yet significant repositioning within Italy's cultural apparatus. No longer functioning solely as a guardian of in situ antiquities, it increasingly acted as an institution that could mobilize objects, narratives, and expertise across national and international boundaries. This chapter has traced that shift through a series of case studies (some successful, others not so much) that illuminate how object mobility became a proxy for deeper institutional changes. Whether in the form of contested loans, strategic diplomatic exhibitions, or failed transfers, the circulation of antiquities offers insight into MNR's evolving self-conception during a time of political, administrative, and museological transformation.

Mobility in this context was neither neutral nor incidental. It was deliberate, strategic, and often symbolically charged. The movement of objects was frequently accompanied by negotiations over curatorial authority, conservation standards, and diplomatic optics, revealing the extent to which outbound loans could function as instruments of institutional legitimation. The museum's expanding international profile, which was most visibly demonstrated in the *Roma: 1000 Anni di Civiltà* exhibition in Montréal, reflected broader ambitions within the Italian state to reposition its cultural heritage sector within global circuits of influence and exchange.

At stake in these mobilities was more than institutional visibility. As the case studies have shown, the MNR's loans also intersected with the

775 See Appendix 26 Commemorating the Museum: The 110th Anniversary Coin and Institutional Self-Representation

state's use of cultural heritage as a form of soft power, where exhibitions abroad functioned simultaneously as curatorial projects and as instruments of persuasion and prestige. In this way, the movement of antiquities became part of Italy's wider repertoire of cultural diplomacy, extending the museum's significance beyond the confines of Rome.

At the same time, the tensions exposed by unrealized projects, such as the attempted transfer of the *Discobolo Lancellotti*, underscore the constraints that persisted: legal issues, competing institutional jurisdictions, and the structural limitations of Italy's centralised heritage governance.

Ultimately, this chapter has argued that mobility, far from being a logistical detail, served as a key mode through which the MNR articulated relevance, authority, and connection with wider institutional and diplomatic networks. At the same time, the museum did not act with full autonomy in the 1980s and 1990s: decisions over loans, restitutions, and circulation were mediated, often decisively by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and the Ministry. The MNR's agency was therefore conditional and delegated, exercised within a vertically organised administrative field rather than outside it. Read this way, the movement of archaeological objects reveals shifts not only in the museum's self-presentation, but also in how ministerial heritage governance operationalised conservation, diplomacy, and risk across its branches.

Successful (and unsuccessful) loans reflected overlapping agendas: the enforcement of legal and conservation norms, the performance of state competence, and the negotiation of curatorial power. In this light, object mobility emerges as a form of institutional storytelling, one that reflects how museums define themselves not just through what they display, but through what they move, where, and under what terms.

As Rome prepared for the Jubilee Year of 2000, the focus would shift from the circulation of objects to the monumentalisation of museum space. The next chapter will look at how the MNR's expansion across multiple sites, its renewed architecture, and its deeper integration with

Rome itself brought about a major shift. Over the course of several decades, what was once a little-visited antiquities collection, gradually became a central part of both Rome's public life and its cultural identity.

CHAPTER V. Museums and the Millennium: The Museo Nazionale Romano's Institutional Transformation During the Jubilee

The Jubilee of 2000, formally known as the Grande Giubileo del 2000, must be understood not merely as a religious commemoration, but as a paradigmatic example of the cultural mega-event in late 20th-century Italy. While clearly rooted in ecclesiastical tradition, the Grande Giubileo increasingly functioned as a multi-scalar event: part ritualized temporal cycle, part urban development initiative, and part instrument of cultural soft power. Within this framework, the event catalyzed a complex alignment of spiritual, municipal, and national priorities, producing a constellation of interventions in heritage infrastructure, museum programming, and governance models.

Mega-events such as the Jubilee occupy a liminal space between spectacle and system. As Guala and Violante[776] have observed, the Jubilee in Rome activated extraordinary legal, financial, and planning mechanisms, many of which bypassed conventional democratic or administrative procedures. This dynamic positioned the event as a symbolic reset and a strategic tool of urban transformation. In this sense, the Jubilee served to legitimate infrastructural interventions and reassert Rome's global image, while simultaneously reshaping the roles and expectations of its cultural institutions.

For museums, the Jubilee represented both opportunity and pressure. As Di Vita and Wilson suggest, mega-events often produce temporary cultural intensifications that may not result in long-term institutional benefit unless effectively managed.[777] The Jubilee's legacy in the museum sector, therefore, is as much about the transformation of institutional identity as it is about the infrastructural and narrative strategies deployed to meet its demands.

776 Guala 2006, p.2; Violante, Annunziata 2011.
777 Di Vita, Wilson 2020, pp. 1–23.

This research takes on particular resonance as it coincides with the lead-up to the 2025 Jubilee. The Jubilee year brings a unique set of challenges and opportunities, including an influx of tourists, heightened global media attention, large-scale events, and the possibility of securing funding for improvements while addressing logistical issues throughout the city.

Reflecting on the Jubilee of 2000 provides a valuable lens through which to examine how Rome, and particularly its cultural institutions, responded to the demands of a holy year. While Rome and the world have undergone profound changes over the past 25 years, drawing direct comparisons between 2000 and 2025 would require in-depth exploration of numerous variables, including political, social, and economic factors. Nevertheless, the Jubilee of 2000 remains a critical point of reference for understanding the intersection of cultural heritage management, urban planning, and international visibility.

The primary aim of this research is to address a notable gap in the scholarship concerning the Jubilee of 2000 and its impact on cultural heritage institutions in Rome. By analyzing how the MNR and other key institutions approached this milestone year, this thesis seeks to uncover the strategies and improvements that were implemented to preserve and enhance Rome's cultural legacy. Furthermore, it will consider how these efforts may have established a framework for future advancements in heritage preservation and institutional development, setting the stage for Rome's preparation for subsequent Jubilees, including that of 2025.

The year 2000 represented not only a religious milestone for the Catholic Church but also a critical turning point in Rome's cultural, political, and urban landscape. As the city prepared, heritage institutions faced unprecedented pressure to modernize, expand, and perform a vision of Italian identity that was simultaneously rooted in antiquity and responsive to the challenges of globalization. Within this context, the MNR emerged as a key site where the aspirations and contradictions of Jubilee cultural policy became visible. Between high-profile exhibitions, extensive restorations, and renewed public investment, the museum became both a participant in and a symbol of

Rome's attempt to narrate its own continuity at the dawn of a new millennium.[778] This chapter examines how the Jubilee transformed the MNR's institutional role, explores the tensions between conservation and development, and analyzes how exhibitions such as *Italia dei Sanniti* and *Roma. Romolo, Remo e la fondazione della città* articulated competing visions of historical memory and national identity.

5.1 The Museo Nazionale Romano at the Millennium

The Museo Nazionale Romano entered the closing years of the twentieth century in a state of both consolidation and transition. By 1999, three of its four principal sites; Palazzo Massimo, Palazzo Altemps, and the Terme di Diocleziano, had either been inaugurated or substantially restored, while preparations for the opening of the Crypta Balbi were well advanced. These developments represented the material outcome of almost two decades of investment and negotiation and coincided with the extraordinary pressures and opportunities created by the Jubilee of 2000. The MNR thus stood as a complex institutional organism: at once a repository of antiquities, a multi-site experiment in museology, and a testing ground for the evolving relationship between tutela and valorizzazione.[779]

To begin with the museum itself rather than the event that framed it is to foreground the institutional realities that shaped the Jubilee moment. The completion of Palazzo Massimo in 1998 represented a decisive step in redefining the museum's profile. Originally conceived in the early 1980s, the project had been delayed by expropriation disputes and protracted restoration works, but its opening allowed for the transfer of major sculptural works that had long languished in storage or in temporary locations. Among the highlights were the *Lancellotti Discobolus*, the *Portonaccio Sarcophagus*, and the frescoes from the Villa of Livia, which were reinstalled in purpose-built galleries with modern conservation environments. (source) The museographic plan

778 See e.g., Bennett; Duncan; Anderson, ch. 10; Crane; Huyssen; Smith; Macdonald; Karp & Lavine.
779 See. e.g., La Regina 2005; La Regina, 2011.

emphasized clarity of chronology and typology, but also atmosphere: reconstructed Roman domestic interiors, such as the triclinium of Livia's villa at Prima Porta, offered visitors an immersive experience that aligned with late twentieth-century approaches to display.(source) In architectural and curatorial terms, Palazzo Massimo embodied a new standard of archaeological museology in Italy, one that balanced the scientific demands of conservation and cataloguing with the experiential and communicative needs of a mass public.

If Palazzo Massimo projected a vision of archaeology as science and spectacle, Palazzo Altemps, inaugurated in 1997, offered a different narrative, centered on the history of collecting. Installed within the Renaissance residence of Cardinal Marco Sittico Altemps, the museum presented masterpieces from aristocratic Roman collections, including the Ludovisi Throne, the Ares Ludovisi, and the *Galata suicida*.(source) The curatorial strategy emphasized the historical trajectories of these collections, situating them within the cultural politics of the Roman nobility from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. In this sense, Altemps was less about presenting antiquities as timeless art and more about narrating their afterlives as objects of prestige, exchange, and erudition. (source) By foregrounding collecting histories, Palazzo Altemps aligned the MNR with broader trends in museology that sought to historicize the museum itself, positioning it as a site where the social life of antiquities could be interrogated alongside their formal qualities.

The Terme di Diocleziano remained the most complex site of the MNR, both in scale and in museological ambition. Jubilee funding facilitated the restoration of monumental spaces such as the Chiostro di Michelangelo and the Grandi Aule, while also enabling the creation of new permanent sections. The Epigraphic Museum, long conceived but never realized on such a scale, was reorganized into a comprehensive exhibition on the birth and diffusion of the Latin language, displaying some 300 inscriptions out of a collection of over 10,000 pieces. (source) Alongside it, a new Protostoria section was developed, narrating the cultures of Latium from the Bronze and Iron Ages. These initiatives broadened the museum's chronological scope, moving beyond the

imperial narrative toward the longue durée of Italic and linguistic history. At the same time, the Terme embodied the paradoxes of the Jubilee: presented as a symbol of renewal, the complex was also a construction site throughout much of 1999, its provisional arrangements a reminder of the fragile balance between conservation, accessibility, and security. (source)

Finally Crypta Balbi, was inaugurated in 2000 as an experiment in "museo cantiere." Built around the remains of a Roman theatre complex and its medieval and post-medieval reuse, the museum presented excavation itself as a form of narration. Visitors could move from in-situ remains to stratigraphic displays and contextualized finds, tracing the longue durée of urban life from antiquity through the modern city.[780] This museographic approach marked a significant departure from the object-based displays of the other sites, foregrounding processes of transformation, reuse, and urban archaeology. In doing so, the Crypta Balbi resonated with contemporary theoretical debates that framed museums not only as repositories of heritage but also as laboratories of historical knowledge production.[9]

The museum's new multi-site structure, positioned it as a cohesive, interconnected entity, capable of narrating Rome's history across multiple venues. This structure was strategically framed as a model for other Italian museums undergoing similar decentralization and consolidation efforts under the influence of Legislative Decree 368/1998, which emphasized the autonomy of cultural institutions while encouraging regional networks. The MNR thus became a showcase for both the strengths and contradictions of Italian cultural governance: ambitious in scope, innovative in museography, but also vulnerable to the instabilities of public administration, funding, and security.

The Jubilee amplified these dynamics, providing resources and visibility that otherwise would have remained uncertain. Yet the trajectory of the MNR in the 1990s cannot be reduced to a mere

780 Manacorda 2001.

function of Jubilee allocations. Rather, the museum's development reveals the layered intersection of national and municipal priorities, legislative reforms, and curatorial strategies.It constituted a site where the tensions of Italian cultural policy were materially inscribed, while also resonating with international debates on the museum as civic space, cultural infrastructure, and instrument of urban transformation.[781] It was precisely in this context that the first major Jubilee exhibition at the Terme di Diocleziano *Italia dei Sanniti* would both exemplify and destabilize the promises of renewal.

5.2 The Materialization of Plans

A direct link between these administrative decisions and the actual museum interventions can be seen in photographic evidence from the Terme Diocleziano, where restoration and redevelopment efforts were explicitly labeled as part of the Jubilee interventions. The sign in the photograph taken at the site lists key personnel involved, including Massimo De Vico Fallani (architect), Alessandro Licciardello (assistant), and Francesco Buzi (collaborator), operating under the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and financed through the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri.[782]

This physical manifestation of the deliberazione No. 179 demonstrates how municipal governance decisions from the early 1990s were translated into actual museum and heritage site renovations by the late 1990s. The restoration efforts at the Terme Diocl. complex were an outcome of nearly a decade of urban and heritage policy planning.

However, even as new galleries and interpretive frameworks were introduced to reposition the museum's identity, these efforts unfolded within an institutional context characterized by ongoing instability, a vulnerability that would come into focus on the eve of the Jubilee's first major archaeological exhibition.

781 Bennett 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Macdonald 2013.

782 Licciardello, Alessandro. Photograph of Informational Sign Displayed at Terme di Diocleziano Detailing Intervention Personnel and Construction Involvement. 28 Oct. 1999. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 98.

Case Study - Fragile Foundations: Italia dei Sanniti and the Crisis of Museum Security

The exhibition *Italia dei Sanniti*, inaugurated on 14 January 2000 at the Terme Diocleziano, was a cornerstone of the Jubilee year's cultural programming. Housed in the newly restructured Protostoria section, it formed part of a broader institutional strategy to expand the museum's permanent offerings beyond classical Rome, showcasing instead the complexity and diversity of Italic cultures. Organized in collaboration with numerous southern and central Soprintendenze, the exhibition challenged long-standing stereotypes by repositioning the Samnites not as Rome's barbarian adversaries but as agents of a sophisticated and autonomous ethno-cultural trajectory. As the introductory panel proclaimed, the exhibition sought to offer "una presentazione visiva di tale tradizione storico-grafica ed illustrare attraverso l'esposizione dei reperti archeologici questa realtà nel suo insieme, proponendo nuovi interrogativi e sollecitando nuove risposte a vecchi quesiti."[783]

Curated by Leila Nista and designed by architect Gianni Bulian, *Italia dei Sanniti* took a regional and protohistoric perspective, integrating material from Lazio, Campania, and Molise to explore early Italic settlement patterns, linguistic development, funerary customs, and migratory myths such as the *ver sacrum*. The exhibition's guiding argument (that the ethnogenesis of the Samnites was not a residual category imposed by Rome, but a dynamic and self-defining process) was showcased through material from Campomarino (Molise, Province of Campobasso), Bisaccia (Campania, Province of Avellino), Montesarchio (Campania, Province of Benevento), and and the necropolis of Osteria dell'Osa (Lazio, Metropolitan City of Rome). Through this way, the museum acted as a venue for Roman imperial narratives and also as a critical platform for provincial histories and archaeological scholarship.

Yet the exhibition's opening was overshadowed, almost literally, by an institutional failure that exposed the fragility underlying Jubilee-era ambitions. In the early hours of 13 January 2000, the day before the

783 Italia dei Sanniti 2000, p. 9.

inauguration, a theft occurred in the very gallery hosting the Protostoria section. Four protohistoric vases (two *oinochoai*, one *kylix*, and a *calice a bucchero*) were stolen from a display case associated with the tomb 62 assemblage from the Osteria dell'Osa necropolis. The thieves gained access with apparent ease: "una vetrina di cristallo blindato in pezzi, quattro vasi del settimo secolo avanti Cristo scomparsi in barba ai monitor e alla vigilanza notturna."[784]

The symbolic damage far exceeded the financial value of the stolen objects. As *La Repubblica* noted, "furto da dilettanti, almeno dal punto di vista del valore venale del bottino: un milione, due al massimo. Ma il colpo all'immagine, già traballante, della gestione del patrimonio artistico capitolino è durissimo."[785] In the days prior, another high-profile theft had occurred at the Pinacoteca Capitolina, making the MNR incident appear not just isolated, but symptomatic of broader dysfunction. The timing was especially damaging: the museum was still a construction site set to open to the public in April. As Minister Giovanna Melandri[786] was scheduled to inaugurate *Italia dei Sanniti*, workers were coming and going with wheelbarrows and pipes while the gates remained closed.

The irony could not have been greater. At the precise moment when the Terme Diocleziano was being presented as a revitalized and secure cultural space restored with over 20 billion lire in Jubilee and Roma Capitale funds, the museum's vulnerability was exposed. What should have been a celebration of institutional renewal and archaeological rethinking became, briefly, a crisis in public trust. This episode problematizes the narrative of the Jubilee as an unmitigated success in museum reform. While exhibitions like *Italia dei Sanniti* embodied the scholarly and educational ambitions of the MNR, the theft showed the

784 Lugli 2000, p. 7, section Roma.

785 Ibid.

786 Giovanna Melandri (b. 1962) served as Ministro per i Beni e le Attività Culturali from 1998 to 2001 under the governments of Massimo D'Alema and Giuliano Amato. A member of the Partito Democratico della Sinistra and later the Democratici di Sinistra, she played a pivotal role in advancing cultural policy and heritage management, particularly during the lead-up to the 2000 Jubilee. During her tenure, she promoted public investment in cultural infrastructure, facilitated tax incentives for cultural patronage, and was instrumental in the establishment of the MAXXI Museum and also signed an agreement with the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana to enhance access to ecclesiastical archives and libraries. See: Melandri 2006.

persistent structural weaknesses in security, staffing, and institutional coherence.

It also exposed a tension at the heart of Jubilee cultural policy: the desire to project Rome as a global heritage capital, equipped with state-of-the-art museum infrastructure, clashed with the realities of underfunded oversight and legacy systems. The theft did not negate the intellectual integrity of the exhibition, but it reframed its staging, reminding the public and policymakers that even the most carefully curated historical narratives are vulnerable to the politics, logistics, and fragilities of the present. These ongoing vulnerabilities have positioned such sites as potential targets for theft, exposing the disconnect between policy frameworks and practical realities on the ground.

The political significance of the *Italia dei Sanniti* exhibition was stressed by the direct involvement of Giovanna Melandri, then Ministro per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, who attended its inauguration on 14 January 2000. [787]

Her presence at the inauguration reflected a deliberate political strategy: to frame the Jubilee as not only a religious or touristic phenomenon, but as a major occasion for modernizing and re-legitimizing Italy's cultural infrastructure. In her official reflections on the Jubilee program, Melandri emphasized that "il Giubileo deve essere un'occasione per investire non solo nella conservazione, ma nella creazione di una cultura contemporanea della gestione e della fruizione dei beni culturali."[788]

Italia dei Sanniti fit within this framework by presenting a scholarly, archaeological narrative that moved beyond the traditional triumphalism of Rome, offering visitors a more nuanced and regional vision of Italy's ancient past. Melandri's endorsement of the exhibition demonstrated her commitment to promoting cultural pluralism, as well as her belief that archaeological museums needed to play a more active

787 Melandri 1999, p. 8.
788 Ibid, p. 11.

role in "costruire la memoria pubblica di una nazione moderna ed europea."[789]

At the same time, Melandri's appearance at the museum had an immediate political necessity. The theft that occurred the night before the exhibition's opening risked damaging the image of the Jubilee as a showcase of Italian competence in cultural management. Her participation at the event thus served a dual function: celebrating the completion of key museological projects while visibly reasserting governmental oversight and commitment amidst unexpected challenges.

Against the backdrop of Jubilee preparations, Melandri's actions illustrate how the political stakes of museum modernization were inseparable from national image-making strategies at the turn of the millennium. Her vision of cultural policy by combining decentralization, technological innovation, and internationalization, shaped not only the MNR's transformations but also the ways in which these transformations were framed for both domestic and global audiences.

While the financial value of the stolen artifacts: four seventh-century BCE vases from the Necropolis of Osteria dell'Osa, was relatively low, the symbolic damage to the museum's reputation was significant. The artifacts had already been reconstructed from fragments, making them difficult to resell on the black market, further underscoring the opportunistic nature of the theft. This raises an important question about the motive behind the robbery: Was it an inside job? Was it an attempt to test the museum's security? These are the types of questions that, while speculative, are critical in understanding the vulnerability of museum collections beyond their market value.

The timing of the theft is particularly significant. MNR was in the middle of a major institutional restructuring. Terme Diocleziano, where the theft occurred, was still a construction site, with ongoing renovations and preparations for reopening sections to the public. This unstable environment, where museum security was compromised by

789 Ibid,p. 16.

open access points and construction traffic, created ideal conditions for opportunistic theft.

This incident highlights a larger issue in Italian museum policy during this period: the expansion of museum spaces was not necessarily accompanied by a proportional increase in staffing, funding, or security infrastructure. While the MNR was physically growing, its administrative and logistical capacity to safeguard collections remained precarious.

More examples of media scrutiny appeared, *Corriere della Sera* also published two articles the days following the incident, on 13 January the title read *Al Nazionale, chiuso per ristrutturazione, rubati da una vetrina reperti per 1 milione di lire Museo Romano, self-service Asportati vasi antichi ma di scarso valore: allarme bloccato?*[790] And the following day another pointed article that scrutinized the incident, suggesting the possibility of insider involvement in the security breach. The report emphasized the deliberate tampering with the museum's alarm system and underscored the suspicious timing of the theft, occurring just as the *Italia dei Sanniti* exhibition was being inaugurated by the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Giovanna Melandri.[791]

The immediate response to the theft included an emergency meeting involving key cultural administrators, including: Adriano La Regina (Soprintendente Archeologico di Roma), Eugenio La Rocca (Soprintendente Comunale), Claudio Strinati (Soprintendente Artistico e Storico) and Gianni Borgna (Rome's Cultural Assessor). [792]

Their proposed solution to expand video surveillance is emblematic of a technocratic approach to museum security that, while necessary, does not fully address the broader institutional weaknesses at play. This meeting was framed as a "vertice 'già programmato' sulla sicurezza dei musei capitolini," implying that it was meant to address security issues broadly, rather than being an immediate response to the theft. Yet, the irony is evident—despite video surveillance being a key issue under

790 "Al Nazionale, chiuso per ristrutturazione, rubati da una vetrina reperti per 1 milione di lire: Museo Romano, self-service Asportati vasi antichi ma di scarso valore: allarme bloccato?" Corriere della Sera, 13 Jan. 2000.
791 "Vasi Sparai, manomesso l'allarme." Corriere della Sera, 14 Jan. 2000.
792 Lugli,2000, p. 7.

discussion, the museum's security cameras had failed to prevent the crime in the first place: *"Come quelli che si sono lasciati scappare i ladri sotto il naso la notte scorsa."*[793]

From the perspective of museum studies, this event serves as a case study in the challenges of balancing institutional growth with collection security.[794]The late 1990s and early 2000s marked a period in which museological discourse increasingly emphasized public engagement, accessibility, and experiential learning. However, the practical realities of safeguarding collections did not always align with these ambitions, particularly in a country like Italy, where state funding for museums was often inconsistent.[795]

This theft also speaks to the role of media in shaping public attitudes toward museums. *La Repubblica*'s portrayal of the event reinforced a narrative of failure, where museum staff were depicted as absent, uncooperative, or incompetent. *"Introvabile la direttrice,*[796] *latitanti i funzionari, ostili e sfuggenti, fino al punto di mentire apertamente ai giornalisti, i custodi."*[797] While this may be an exaggeration, it raises an important point: the way museum crises are reported can have a direct impact on public trust and institutional legitimacy and can further erode confidence in cultural institutions.[798]

This case shows a fundamental tension in contemporary museum practice: the challenge of balancing the imperative to expand and modernize with the need to secure and preserve collections. The MNR's trajectory illustrates that institutional growth is not solely about acquiring new exhibition spaces but also about reinforcing foundational structures; security, staffing, and conservation, in tandem. The theft was not an isolated incident; it was a manifestation of broader systemic challenges confronting Italian museums at the turn of the

793 Ibid.

794 Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Culturale, ICOM, and Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo. Crime Prevention and Security Management in Museums. Edited by Adelaide Maresca Compagna, De Luca Editore d'Arte, 2015, pp. 15–102.

795 Lindqvist 2012, pp. 1–15.

796 Marina Magnani Cianetti was holding the role of director at the time, see appendix Museo Nazionale Romano List of Directors.

797 Lugli 2000, p. 7.

798 See e.g., Gieryn 1998; Takenaka 2014.

century. It exposed vulnerabilities inherent in museum expansion without adequate security measures, revealed gaps in administrative accountability, and underscored the influential role of media narratives in shaping public perceptions of institutional competence. Ultimately, the incident acts as a cautionary reminder that expansion without infrastructural stability can inadvertently compromise the very collections museums are intended to protect.

5.3 Restructuring the Museum: The Jubilee as Catalyst

An important legislative measure facilitating these endeavors was Legge n. 651 del 23 dicembre 1996 titled "Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 23 ottobre 1996, n. 551, recante misure urgenti per il Grande Giubileo del 2000".[799] This law converted and amended the earlier decree-law, establishing a legal framework for the implementation of necessary interventions in anticipation of the Jubilee. The legislation authorized the allocation of substantial financial resources and outlined procedures for expediting public works, particularly those aimed at improving infrastructure and restoring cultural sites.[800]

Among these initiatives, the Terme Diocleziano emerged as a focal point of transformation. On February first 1998, La Repubblica announced the complex would be closed for eleven months, the reason: preparation work for the Jubilee. It went on to say that the Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma has announced the news, specifying that the period planned for the work runs from today to December 31, 1998. Despite the closure, the Superintendency also specifies that the entrance ticket will remain in force and will give access to the Museum in Pal. Massimo, via largo Peretti 1, to the Octagonal Hall (formerly the Planetarium) in via Romita, and to the Sant' Isidoro Hall, in via Parigi.[801]

799 Italia. Parlamento. Legge 23 dicembre 1996, n. 651: Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 23 ottobre 1996, n. 551, recante misure urgenti per il Grande Giubileo del 2000. Gazzetta Ufficiale, 23 Dec. 1996, n. 300.
800 Bronzini 2019, pp. 7–9
801 "Terme Diocleziano chiuse per un anno." La Repubblica, 1 Feb. 1998, p. 2.

According to a report published in *La Repubblica* from January 2000, approximately twenty billion lire were invested into the Terme Diocl. site to restore and reorganize a wide range of historic spaces.[802] Works included the rehabilitation of the entrance garden facing Piazza dei Cinquecento, the restoration of the Chiostro di Michelangelo and the Cloister Ludovisi, and the adaptation of the Grandi Aule, the former antiquarium, and the Olearie (Renaissance spaces once used for olive oil storage) into new museum functions. These interventions were not cosmetic; they were conceived as part of a broader strategy to integrate the Terme into a modernized, multi-sited national museum system that could meet the expectations of a new millennium.[803]

More significantly, the Jubilee funds enabled the creation of entirely new permanent sections within the museum. Central among these was the *Sezione Epigrafica*, an ambitious installation dedicated to the birth and diffusion of the Latin language. Drawing from the museum's collection of over 10,000 inscriptions, curators selected approximately 300 exemplary pieces to narrate Rome's linguistic, social, and cultural formation. The new section was strategically organized around the historic core of the Chiostro Ludovisi and the ancient Sala dei Capolavori but expanded across multiple levels according to a modern museographic plan designed by architect Gianni Bulian.[804]

In parallel, a new *Sezione di Protostoria* was developed on the raised ground floor of the Chiostro, illustrating the evolution of Lazio culture from the late Bronze Age through the early Iron Age (11th–7th centuries BCE). This focus on protohistoric material, relatively rare in Rome's museum offerings[805], signaled a deliberate effort to situate Rome's mythical origins within broader regional and anthropological contexts. By anchoring the museum's narrative not solely in the grandeur of the imperial past but in the deeper, more complex processes of linguistic and cultural development, the MNR aligned

802 "Roma. Il luogo: un museo cantiere della storia antica." La Repubblica, 14 Jan. 2000, p. 6, section Roma.
803 Bustard 2000,pp.10–14. Bustard emphasizes the necessity of structural planning and preventive conservation in museum settings, providing relevant comparative insights for understanding the infrastructural upgrades at MNR for the Jubilee.
804 "Roma. Il luogo: un museo cantiere della storia antica." La Repubblica, 14 Jan. 2000, p. 6, section Roma.
805 See: De Santis, Bietti Sestieri 2000.

itself with contemporary archaeological scholarship while also responding to the heritage politics of the Jubilee.

The Terme Diocl.thus became a "museo cantiere della storia antica," a living construction site for the ongoing re-articulation of Rome's ancient identity.[806] Inaugurations were timed to coincide with the height of Jubilee activities in mid-2000, allowing the reimagined spaces to serve as celebrations of Roman antiquity and as testaments to the city's commitment to cultural renewal.

In this way, the museum's renovation reflected a larger dynamic at work during the Jubilee: the simultaneous projection of historical continuity and institutional modernization. The material fabric of Rome, with its monuments, museums, and public spaces, was reshaped to meet the demands of a globalized, heritage-driven economy. Within this context, the Terme Diocleziano complex stood as both a participant in and a symbol of the city's negotiation between past and future at the turn of the millennium.

As part of the extensive preparations for the Jubilee, MNR carried out a series of major restoration and conservation projects, particularly at the Terme Diocleziano and was funded in part by Jubilee resources, these interventions aimed to safeguard and rehabilitate historic spaces while adapting them for modern public use in accordance with contemporary safety and accessibility standards. The restoration work at the museum reflected broader efforts across Rome to reconcile the preservation of its monumental heritage with the practical needs of a modern, functioning city. These projects not only facilitated public engagement with Rome's archaeological legacy but also ensured the structural integrity of significant historical sites at a moment when the city anticipated an unprecedented influx of visitors.[807]

This moment marked a turning point in Rome's urban and archaeological landscape, acting as a driving force for large-scale interventions that extended beyond individual museum sites to

806 "Roma. Il luogo: un museo cantiere della storia antica." La Repubblica, 14 Jan. 2000, p. 6, section Roma.
807 Odegaard 2000, pp. 38–40. Odegaard's discussion of current museum conservation trends provides a comparative framework for the MNR's conservation strategies, particularly the integration of historical preservation with contemporary display practices during the Jubilee preparations.

encompass public infrastructure, archaeological conservation, and urban renewal projects. This national initiative sought to reinforce Rome's status as a global cultural capital while accommodating the practical and logistical challenges posed by an event of such scale. The restoration work at the MNR was part of this larger strategy, reflecting an increasing recognition of cultural heritage as both an economic asset and a central element of urban identity. As the volume *Archeologia urbana a Roma e interventi di restauro nell'anno del Grande Giubileo* documents, this period saw an intensified collaboration between state institutions and private firms, particularly cooperative enterprises specializing in heritage restoration. These firms, many of which emerged from the fields of archaeology, architecture, and conservation, played a crucial role in developing innovative methodologies to balance historical preservation with the evolving demands of museum display and urban planning.[808]

The approaching Jubilee was a further defining moment in the trajectory of Rome's museum and archaeological infrastructure, particularly within the framework of Legge 15 dicembre 1990, n. 396. For MNR, this translated into a series of restoration and reorganization projects that were designed to enhance the institution's physical spaces, improve visitor experience, and integrate the museum more fully into the city's urban renewal efforts.[809]

The law itself explicitly framed these interventions as part of a broader national interest, stating that its objective was to "perseguire il pieno assolvimento da parte della Città di Roma del ruolo di Capitale della Repubblica".[810] The MNR, with its dispersed network of sites, was among the primary beneficiaries of this state-backed urban and museological transformation.

Beyond the museum itself, the Jubilee projects demonstrated a broader shift in Italian heritage policy toward integrating conservation with

808 Baiani, Ghilardi. Introduction by Francesco Rutelli, Sindaco di Roma, 2000.

809 On Cederna's role, see Cederna 1956; 1965; 199; 2001); "Una Roma capitale eterna immobile e immobiliare," La Repubblica, 16 Feb. 1991; "Roma 2000: la 'trincea' ambientalista," La Repubblica, 29 Mar. 1991; Ferrarotti 1991, pp. 144–145; Regione Lazio, L.R. 66/1988 (establishing the Parco Regionale dell'Appia Antica).

810 Comune di Roma. Deliberazione No. 179, 8-9 Giugno 1991, Estratto dal Verbale delle Deliberazioni del Consiglio Comunale. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6, p.2.

contemporary urban life. The efforts particularly at the Terme Diocl., exemplify this approach: alongside essential structural reinforcements, the site underwent significant transformations, including the creation of new exhibition spaces and improved visitor pathways. An example is the installation of walkways has redefined the spatial organization of the epigraph collection, now structured across three levels. This arrangement guides visitors through a chronological progression, showcasing the evolution of inscriptions from the archaic period to the extensive production of the imperial era.[811] These interventions reflect an increasing awareness of the need to make archaeological heritage both accessible and sustainable in the long term. The details of these projects are extensively documented in *Archeologia e giubileo. Gli interventi a Roma e nel Lazio nel piano nazionale per il giubileo 2000*[812] by F. Filippi, which offers a comprehensive account of the initiatives undertaken as part of the national Jubilee plan.

Among the most critical interventions was the redevelopment of the *Olearie*, located in the western wing of the Terme. Originally repurposed in the late 16th century under Pope Gregory XIII for the Jubilee of 1575, these spaces served as oil warehouses (*granai gregoriani*). Over the centuries, they became vital to Rome's trade network for olive oil, with successive popes like Urban VIII and Benedict XIV further developing the site. By the late 20th century, however, the *Olearie* had fallen into disrepair, necessitating a comprehensive restoration by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.[813]

The restoration, which was undertaken in preparation for the 2000 Jubilee, sought to preserve the historical and architectural integrity of the *Olearie* while adapting them for modern museum functions. The project involved conserving original materials and carefully restoring vaulted spaces and subterranean chambers, ensuring that these spaces could once again serve the public, both as exhibition areas and as part of the museum's broader educational mission. The restored *Olearie*

811 La Regina 2011, p.83.
812 Filippi 2001.
813 Ibid, p. 34.

exemplified the dual goals of the Jubilee restoration projects: to protect and celebrate Rome's historical monuments while integrating them into the museum's evolving narrative.[814]

A similar approach was taken with the *Aula Ottagona*, a key part of the thermal complex that had been largely neglected until the late 20th century. Originally designed with an octagonal floor plan and crowned by a large dome, the *Aula* reflected the architectural sophistication of Roman imperial baths. However, water infiltration and structural decay had severely compromised the building's integrity.[815] In the lead-up to the Jubilee, restorers worked meticulously to remove corroded materials, reinforce the dome with steel bars, and apply protective lead sheets to preserve the building's iconic cornice.[816]

Beyond the structural repairs, the restoration team focused on cleaning the surfaces and conserving decorative elements like the 'intonaco', which had suffered from centuries of exposure. By securing the building's stability and restoring its aesthetic beauty, the *Aula Ottagona* was reintegrated into the museum's exhibition spaces, enhancing the public's ability to engage with this significant piece of Rome's architectural heritage. As noted by Giuseppe D'Offizi and Roberto Pagliardi, this restoration was part of a broader effort across Rome and Lazio to revitalize ancient structures in preparation for the Jubilee, with a strong focus on both conservation and modern functionality.[817] For example, they specify: "The installation of a lighting system, carefully integrated into the architectural framework, further emphasized the spatial proportions of the Aula, allowing visitors to appreciate the monumental scale of the room and its refined geometric composition."[818]

Additionally, the intervention included the installation of interpretive panels to provide historical and architectural context for the visitors, explaining the original function of the space as a calidarium and its subsequent transformations over time.

814 Ibid.
815 Candilio 1995, pp. 193–202.
816 Filippi 2001, p.36.
817 Ibid.
818 Ibid.

Another significant focus of the Jubilee preparations was the restoration of the Grandi Aule of the Terme Diocleziano. These expansive spaces, covering approximately 2,500 square meters, are a testament to Roman engineering and architectural ingenuity. The restoration provided access to around 1,000 square meters of previously uncovered space, offering a rare opportunity to engage with the grandeur of Roman imperial architecture. As Magnani Cianetti and Pagliardi observed, "The imposing structure offers an important testimony of Roman architectural conception, even though what survives today is only a small part of what must have been the grandeur of Diocletian's Baths".[819]

The restoration of the *Grandi Aule* also focused on the external structures, which had suffered significant degradation due to years of exposure to the elements. Conservation efforts included careful cleaning and restoration aimed at both recovering the original state of these structures and protecting them from further damage. The external garden areas were also transformed, with ancient objects (such as sarcophagi, jars, and architectural elements) being displayed in flowerbeds and walkways, creating an accessible and educational outdoor exhibition.[820]

The museological enhancements extended to the museum's internal galleries, where sepulchral monuments were reassembled and displayed. In Hall VI, funerary statues from the Tiberian and Flavian periods were restored as part of a broader effort to showcase one of the best-preserved and most artistically significant sepulchral complexes from the 1st century AD. The reconstruction of the *Tempietto di Torrenova*, a funerary temple, within Hall IV further emphasized the museum's dedication to presenting ancient Roman funerary art in a cohesive and educational format.[821]

Another section of the museum that was to be refurbished was the cloister of the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri. The cloister is widely attributed to Michelangelo because he was given the

819 Filippi 2001, p.21.
820 Ibid.
821 Ibid.

task of converting the frigidarium of the Terme Diocleziano into a church in 1561, however according to Aurigemma this is unfounded.[822] The complex which had undergone various alterations over the course of the centuries, was restored for the Jubilee of 2000, bringing it back to its original appearance and returning the plaster to its old color.[823] The restoration is an example of preserving a historic structure while adapting it for contemporary museological functions.[824]

The restoration focused on structural stabilization and surface cleaning, aiming to address the damage caused by moisture infiltration and inappropriate prior interventions. The restoration team prioritized archival research and material analysis, using laboratory tests to identify original pigments and application techniques, a process described as essential to achieving "un recupero di materiali originali".[825]

Museologically, the cloister was reimagined as a contemplative space that could also function as an exhibition area for ancient statuary. The strategy of integrating sculptures into the colonnades was intended to evoke the cloister's historical use while reinforcing its narrative as a bridge between antiquity and the Renaissance. *Archeologia e Giubileo: Gli interventi a Roma e nel Lazio nel piano nazionale per il Giubileo 2000* details the dual function of the space, describing it as both a "monumento architettonico" and a "spazio espositivo".[826]

This project exemplifies the complex interplay between conservation ethics and modern museum practice in Rome during the Jubilee preparations, balancing the imperatives of structural stabilization, historical accuracy, and visitor engagement within a single intervention.

Through these restoration and conservation efforts, the MNR integrated both the architectural legacy of the Roman Empire and its

822Aurigemma 1963, p.149; Schiavo 1949. For a concise update on Michelangelo's architectural practice, without entering the attribution debate, see recent syntheses and catalogues: Wallace 2019; Portoghesi 2009; Zöllner, Thoenes, Popper 2014, esp. pp. 320–343; Hall 2015.
823 La Regina 2005, pp. 102.
824 Filippi 2001, pp. 38–43.
825 Ibid,p.40.
826 Ibid, p.41.

vast collection into a cohesive visitor experience. The museum's extensive work in restoring the *Olearie*, *Aula Ottagona*, *Grandi Aule*, and sepulchral monuments was designed not only to preserve these spaces for future generations but also to make them more accessible and engaging for the public during the Jubilee. As extensively documented by Filippi, in *Archeologia e giubileo. Gli interventi a Roma e nel Lazio nel piano nazionale per il giubileo 2000*, these initiatives were part of a coordinated national effort to safeguard and enhance Italy's archaeological heritage in preparation for the Jubilee. This approach exemplified the museum's broader goal of bridging ancient history with contemporary cultural engagement, ensuring that MNR remained a focal point of Rome's cultural and architectural heritage during the 2000 Jubilee celebrations and for the forecasted influx of tourists to the city.

5.4 Crypta Balbi: Completing the Multi-Site Vision

This focus on urban stratification allowed the museum to present the area as a layered narrative, where the past was continuously being written over yet never fully erased. For the Jubilee, these findings were presented to the public in a way that connected ancient, medieval, and contemporary Rome, offering a coherent narrative that linked the city's transformation with broader historical trends.[827] Such an approach reflected a growing trend in archaeology and museology, which moved away from isolating artifacts by period, instead embedding them within a continuous narrative of urban evolution.[828]

The restoration of the Crypta Balbi and the surrounding structures not only enhanced MNR's physical infrastructure but also allowed it to present a richer, more integrated narrative of Rome's history. As mentioned, the year 2000 was a turning point in the reconfiguration of the MNR, as it completed the museum's transformation into a multi-site institution with the opening of Crypta Balbi in July 2000.[829] This

827 Cirsone 2012 p.7.
828 Bernard 2019, pp. 511–512.
829 Manacorda 2001, pp. 16–18.

strategic expansion, alongside the existing sites, was not only a logistical or architectural achievement but a deliberate effort to align Rome's archaeological heritage with contemporary museological practice. The museum's rooms, set up in the buildings between Via delle Botteghe Oscure and Via Michelangelo Caetani (particularly the "Barberini Dormitory" and the two adjacent medieval structures on Via delle Botteghe Oscure), further illustrate this multi-period approach.[830]

The archaeological excavations initiated in the 1980s and funded through Legge 92/81, revealed a deep stratification of Rome's historical layers, stretching from the Roman era to the 20th century. Under the supervision of Daniele Manacorda, these excavations were not only about recovering physical artifacts but were crucial in reconstructing the area's social and architectural history. The site's integration into the wider urban fabric, especially its transformation from Roman times through the medieval period and into modernity, became a core narrative of the museum's public engagement strategy.

The inclusion of Crypta Balbi as the fourth and final seat of the museum symbolized a shift toward a more comprehensive, diachronic representation of Rome's urban and social history. Rather than focusing solely on the grandeur of imperial Rome, the new site emphasized continuity and transformation across centuries, from the Roman era to the modern period when the church of Santa Caterina dei Funari[831] was built.[832] This approach aligns with contemporary museological frameworks that aim to present the city as a living, stratified narrative[833], positioning Crypta Balbi as a lens through which to

830 Vendittelli, Baiani, Ghilardi 2000, p. 25.

831 Santa Caterina dei Funari, both the convent and the church, played a pivotal role in the history of the area, and its restoration was central to the museum's Jubilee preparations. The convent's architectural and social importance during the medieval and early modern periods was woven into the museum's narrative, illustrating how religious institutions contributed to the shaping of Rome's urban fabric. The church itself, an essential component of the Augustinian monastery, was linked to the broader narrative of religious and civic life in Rome, helping visitors to understand the layered connections between sacred and secular spaces. The focus on the convent and church also highlighted the role of women, particularly the nuns of Santa Caterina, in shaping the city's social and religious landscape during the Middle Ages. This was a deliberate move by the museum to expand the historical narrative, giving voice to often overlooked actors in the city's development. See: Vendittelli 2018, p. 22.

832 La Regina 2011, p. 193.

833 For discussions of contemporary museological frameworks that conceptualize the city as a stratified, living narrative and emphasize museums as agents of public memory and cultural identity, see: Heersmink 2023, pp. 249–265; Sadowski 2021, pp. 209–240; Assmann, Meusburger, Heffernan, Wunder 2011, pp. 15–27; Wróblewska, 2019, pp. 2408–2416.

explore post-classical Rome, a focus not as prominently addressed in the other three sites.[834]

Inaugurated in time to be within the Jubilee year, Crypta Balbi also represented a broader institutional objective: to reassert the museum's status within the competitive landscape of Rome's museum system. As noted by Daniele Manacorda, the excavation was conceived not only as a means of stratigraphic documentation but also as a contribution "to the urban function of this area, upon which years of demolition and abandonment had taken their toll,"[835] demonstrating how archaeology "can actually touch off initiatives of positive value to urban renewal."[836]

From a museological perspective, the inclusion of Crypta Balbi also allowed the Museo Nazionale Romano to engage with narratives of everyday life, urban infrastructure, and post-classical transformation that were less visible in the other three sites. This was particularly relevant in the context of the Jubilee, a moment when Rome sought to present itself as both an ancient capital and a modern European city. By highlighting the site's layered stratigraphy, the museum effectively positioned Crypta Balbi as a lens through which visitors could trace Rome's historical evolution as a continuous, complex urban environment.

The narrative strategy employed at Crypta Balbi mimicked a broader museological trend in the 1990s and early 2000s: the increasing focus on contextualizing archaeological artifacts within their historical, social, and spatial frameworks. The exhibition design at Crypta Balbi, with its use of multimedia installations and spatial reconstructions, emphasized this approach, creating a visitor experience that moved beyond static displays to evoke the lived experiences of Rome's residents across centuries.[837]

Moreover, the opening of Crypta Balbi coincided with a renewed emphasis on accessibility and public engagement in Italian museums. The integration of multimedia displays, digital reconstructions, and

834 Pergola, Caruso 2021, p.103.
835 Manacorda 1990, p. 72.
836 Ibid.
837 Manacorda 2001, pp. 25-27.

interactive elements was a strategic response to evolving visitor expectations.[838] During the Jubilee, when Rome was receiving international visitors at unprecedented levels,[839]Crypta Balbi served as a case study in how archaeological narratives could be made accessible and engaging for diverse publics, from academic audiences to tourists.

The positioning of Crypta Balbi as the museum's final site within the multi-site structure allowed MNR to craft a more comprehensive and interconnected historical narrative. The strategic sequencing of the sites, from the classical grandeur of Palazzo Massimo to the protohistoric narratives of Crypta Balbi, effectively solidified the museum's goal to present Rome as a city in constant transformation, a living palimpsest of historical epochs.[840]

This focus on continuity and transformation is also evident in the museum's interpretive approach, which presents Crypta Balbi as a key gateway for understanding Rome's lesser-known post-classical periods.[841] By highlighting the urban and social developments of late antiquity and the medieval era, the site broadens the museum's narrative beyond its classical foundations.[842] In doing so, it strengthens the museum's role in presenting a long-term historical view of Rome, one that highlights the city's continuous evolution over centuries, a vision of the city shaped by sustained change over millennia. This approach challenges traditional, imperial-centric narratives by reaffirming the significance of historical periods often marginalized in dominant accounts of Roman history.

The opening of Crypta Balbi in 2000 can be understood not only as the establishment of a new museum venue but as the completion of a long-term institutional strategy to create a cohesive, multi-site museum that encapsulated Rome's diverse and stratified history, from antiquity to the contemporary era.

838 Pergola, Caruso 2021, p.105.
839 Bronzini, Mocetti, Mongardiniau 2020, pp. 810-832.
840 See e.g., Coarelli 2007, pp. 261-263; Manacorda 2003, pp. 22-25; Long 2020, p. 1538.
841 Kalas, van Dijk 2021, pp. 12–16.
842 Thunø 2021, pp. 178–180.

5.5 Funding and Planning Frameworks for the Jubilee

While the Jubilee of 2000 adhered formally to its liturgical origins, it operated as a secular enterprise in practice, mobilizing ministries, municipal agencies, and cultural institutions toward a shared but unevenly defined vision of national renewal. This dual function aligns with what Malusardi describes as the "pulsar effect," wherein major events serve as accelerators of urban transformation, concentrating financial resources and public attention on specific infrastructural and cultural projects. As they explain,

The pulsar effect is characterized by the sudden influx of financial resources, administrative focus, and public attention concentrated around a singular event. In the case of the Great Jubilee of 2000, Rome capitalized on its dual identity as a political and spiritual capital, using the event as a vehicle to reframe its urban image and to fund extensive infrastructural and cultural projects. The event thus functioned as both a catalyst for urban regeneration and a means of reasserting Rome's status as a global cultural center.[843]

Nowhere was this ambiguity more visible than in the heritage and museum sectors, where the pressures of symbolic representation collided with practical questions of infrastructure, access, and institutional visibility. In this context, MNR emerged as a beneficiary and also a testing ground for evolving state strategies. The Jubilee's expansive mandate (restoration, modernization, and rebranding) became a lens to examine the state of Italian museology at the turn of the millennium and the forms of governance that increasingly shaped its priorities.

In anticipation, the Italian national and local authorities enacted a series of laws and emergency decrees to support the wide-ranging cultural and infrastructural projects required to accommodate the expected influx of pilgrims and tourists. Among these was Legge n. 270 del 15 dicembre 1999, *Interventi per Roma Capitale in vista del Giubileo del 2000*, which authorized extraordinary public investments for the city of Rome and granted special executive powers to a newly established

843 Malusardi 2019, p.6.

Commissario Straordinario per il Giubileo. This figure was tasked with streamlining administrative procedures and overseeing the execution of key urban and heritage works[844]. Earlier that year, Legge n. 135 del 29 marzo 1999 provided a new national framework for tourism development that emphasized infrastructure and service upgrades in cultural destinations, aligning with broader Jubilee preparations[845]. These efforts were further supported by a sequence of Decreti del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri (1996–1999), which itemized and authorized specific Jubilee-related works, including restoration of historic monuments, transportation improvements, and the creation of thematic pilgrimage routes[846]. The legal foundation for Rome's exceptional administrative status had already been laid by Legge n. 396 del 15 dicembre 1990 which recognized the city's unique cultural and political role as *Roma Capitale* and provided the basis for future urban investment[847].

As Rome prepared for the 2000 Jubilee, concerns about infrastructure and crowd control became central to public discourse. Antonio Paolucci, writing in the newspaper *La Nazione*, evokes the tragic memory of the 1450 Jubilee, when "la folla che andava verso San Pietro scontrandosi con quella che da San Pietro usciva" caused such congestion on the bridge at Castel Sant'Angelo that the "spallette del ponte" collapsed, leading to a deadly disaster in which "centinaia di pellegrini [...] caddero nel Tevere annegandovi".[848]

This historical precedent is framed as a cautionary tale, with Paolucci emphasizing the potential dangers of failing to anticipate the sheer volume of visitors expected in 2000. He warns that the Jubilee could result in an "implosione," a catastrophic convergence of crowds that might prove "devastante come un'alluvione".[849] The use of the term

844 Legge 15 dicembre 1999, n. 270. Interventi per Roma Capitale in vista del Giubileo del 2000. Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, no. 296, 18 Dec. 1999.
845 Legge 29 marzo 1999, n. 135. Riforma della legislazione nazionale del turismo. Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, no. 92, 21 Apr. 1999.
846 Decreti del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri (1996–1999). Various acts concerning Jubilee 2000 planning and cultural infrastructure, published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana.
847 Legge 15 dicembre 1990, n. 396. Interventi per Roma Capitale. Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, no. 297, 20 Dec. 1990.
848 Paolucci 1996, p.39.
849 Ibid.

"alluvione" affirms both the scale of the anticipated influx and the city's vulnerability to infrastructural collapse, effectively positioning the Jubilee as a secular crisis as much as a spiritual event. Paolucci spoke authority: since 1988 he had overseen Florence's state museums and only a few years earlier (1995–1996) he had served as Italy's Minister for Cultural Heritage.

Paolucci's rhetoric shifts between urgency and fatalism as he draws a direct connection between past and present. He describes the 2000 Jubilee as an "overdose di traffico automobilistico" that would extend not only to Rome but also to other major Italian cities such as Florence and Naples, cities he identifies as already struggling to manage mass tourism and "flussi umani ingovernabili".[850] In this context, the Jubilee becomes a test of the city's logistical capabilities: "Gli ingorghi e il sovraffollamento saranno in ogni caso inevitabili"[851], he asserts the inevitability of the crisis if proactive measures are not taken.

Reflecting on these infrastructural concerns, Paolucci proposes specific interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of the Jubilee. He advocates for "una sopraelevata, o un sottopasso o un parcheggio scambiatore",[852] emphasizing that such projects should have ideally begun already last year, lest Rome risk further infrastructural failure under the weight of an unprecedented influx of pilgrims.

During the 1990s, specifically under the leadership of Francesco Rutelli as mayor of Rome (1993-2001) was a defining period in Rome's transition toward a neoliberal model of urban governance, characterized by an increasing reliance on public-private partnerships and strategic urban renewal initiatives. His administration, which oversaw key infrastructural and cultural projects in preparation for the Great Jubilee of 2000, operated within the broader shift in Italian and European urban policy that sought to balance state-led interventions with private investment. As d'Albergo and Moini argue, this period in Rome's governance saw a recalibration of power dynamics between municipal authorities and economic actors, with political leadership

850 Ibid.
851 Ibid.
852 Ibid.

navigating the competing pressures of financial austerity, heritage conservation, and large-scale development.[853] Rutelli's approach was marked by a combination of ambitious cultural investments, privatization of municipal services, and high-profile urban projects, reflects the hybridization of neoliberal policies that took root in Rome during the 1990s, where the state retained a significant role in urban planning but increasingly engaged private actors to fund and manage key initiatives. His administration's handling of Rome's cultural infrastructure in this period, particularly in relation to heritage sites and museum projects[854], highlights the broader ideological and financial negotiations shaping the city's urban landscape at the turn of the millennium. A legislative shift occurred with the introduction of Legge 81/1993, which established the direct election of mayors, reshaping local governance structures across Italian cities and granting municipal leaders greater autonomy in shaping urban policies.[855] This newfound political autonomy coincided with broader European trends, particularly the alignment with funding frameworks and major international events, such as the *Colombiadi*, the Olympic Games, and various Expositions, which often served as drivers for urban regeneration initiatives.

In this context, public-private partnerships emerged as a critical tool for cities seeking to assert greater independence in determining their developmental trajectories. These collaborations frequently reflected European Union objectives, emphasizing cohesion, sustainability, innovation, and in the case of Rome, spatial and functional polycentrism as key components of urban strategy.

Rome, in particular, experienced an intensification of these trends due to its enhanced status as "Capitale dello Stato", a designation that brought increased autonomy and financial resources.[856] This was

853 d'Albergo, Moini 2013.

854 Rutelli also took an interest in archaeology and its significance for The Great Jubilee year, see e.g., Ruiz 1997.

855 Semi 2017, pp. 395-401.

856 The redefinition of Rome's administrative status was formalized through a series of legislative reforms. The initial change began with the 2001 constitutional amendment, followed by Law 42/2009, which granted Rome increased autonomy in areas such as governance, funding, and legislative authority. The implementing decrees established the official designation of "Roma Capitale," restructuring the city's institutional framework, expanding its administrative functions, and strengthening the powers of the mayor.

formalized through the Roma Capitale program (1990), which provided dedicated funds aimed at fostering urban development and infrastructure improvements. These financial allocations were further bolstered by specific funding streams tied to the preparations for the Great Jubilee of 2000. These developments reflected a broader shift in Rome's approach to urban and cultural management, where economic pragmatism and institutional modernization increasingly intersected with heritage preservation efforts.[857]

Francesco Rutelli's tenure was deeply intertwined with the Great Jubilee of 2000. Appointed Special Commissioner for the Jubilee Works by the first Prodi government, Rutelli presided over a tightly controlled administrative apparatus, with Guido Bertolaso as Vice-Commissioner and Bishop Crescenzio Sepe overseeing Vatican coordination.[858] This coalition facilitated an ambitious rehabilitation of Rome's historic piazzas, particularly those surrounding key basilicas, reinforcing the city's dual identity as both secular capital and sacred pilgrimage site. Contemporary planning analyses credit the Jubilee with accelerating coordination and urban works[859] , while later economic evaluations find only modest short-term gains and limited long-run productivity effects, with employment shifting toward lower-productivity sectors.[860] Contemporary press coverage also reinforced a "success" narrative; for example, *La Repubblica*'s Marco Politi reported John Paul II's assessment; "Il Giubileo del 2000 è un grande successo" in an 3 April 2000 article.[861]

Beyond the Jubilee, Rutelli's administration pursued broader urban policy reforms, initiating a new regulatory plan while navigating Rome's evolving political and economic landscape.[862] His dual role as mayor and commissioner exemplifies the period's shifting governance

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See: e.g., Marks 2021, pp. 1–6.

857 Rome's urban and cultural transformations in the lead-up to the Jubilee 2000 were shaped by strategic investments under the "Roma Capitale" program and broader modernization efforts, reflecting a convergence of economic, infrastructural, and heritage concerns. See Malusardi 2004; Dyson 2019, pp. 259–286; Berdini 1999.

858 Insolera 2021, p. 336.

859 See e.g., Monardo, Bruno. "The Role of'Great Events' in the Urban Transformations of Rome." Isocarp.net.

860 See e.g., Bronzini, Mocetti, Mongardini 2019.

861 See Politi 2000, p. 22.

862 Ibid, p. 337.

strategies, where cultural policy became increasingly instrumentalized within a framework of neoliberal urban development.

In the introduction to *Crypta Balbi - Fori Imperiali - Archeologia urbana a Roma e interventi di restauro nell'anno del Grande Giubileo*, Rutelli reflects on the transformative impact of the Jubilee Year 2000. He points out the dual significance of the event, not only as a spiritual milestone but also as a catalyst for substantial improvements to Rome's infrastructure, public services, and cultural heritage. Rutelli articulates this vision, stating:

The Jubilee is an extraordinary event, and for Rome, it holds special significance for two main reasons: its spiritual value and the impetus it provided to improve institutional organization and the functioning of public services. Certainly, this Jubilee of the turn of the millennium will leave behind a different Rome, even more beautiful thanks to the extensive maintenance and restoration work carried out on the monumental heritage that our capital possesses. It also offered new archaeological excavation initiatives, whose discoveries have contributed to presenting the world with a cultural event of universal significance.[863]

A central aspect of these initiatives was the collaboration between public institutions, such as the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, and private enterprises. These partnerships were essential for addressing the dual challenge of protecting Rome's ancient sites and adapting them to contemporary urban contexts. The efforts extended beyond individual restorations to include comprehensive urban planning projects, reflecting the broader ambition to align the city's historical and modern dimensions, or as a new *Global City*.[864] Among the notable examples cited is the Crypta Balbi, which emerged as a paradigm for combining archaeological research with urban development. The project not only uncovered a rich historical narrative

863Baiani, Ghilardi, Rutelli 2000.
864 Marinaro, Thomassen 2014, pp. 21–58.

but also demonstrated how heritage sites could be reimagined as active parts of the city's identity.[865]

Public and Private Funding: A New Model for Museum Governance

Deliberazione n. 178 del 6 giugno 1991 recounts the necessity of integrating private investment into heritage projects, stating: "Le risorse pubbliche non riescono da sole a garantire l'attivazione delle opere… si possono ottenere attraverso sinergie fra pubblico e privato"[866] .

This marked a significant departure from previous state-funded conservation efforts, highlighting the extent to which museological infrastructure was becoming entangled with economic imperatives. The document further justifies private sector involvement by citing "la rilevanza economica delle iniziative", which, it argues, could ensure a return on investment while still maintaining public ownership of cultural assets.[867]

However, this shift was not without controversy. The same document explicitly acknowledges that private sector participation must not compromise the fairness of competitive bidding processes, stating: "Pur tenendo conto di tali disponibilità manifestate [dagli operatori privati], non possa essere riconosciuta alle suddette proposte alcun titolo di preferenza per la partecipazione alle gare."[868]

This displays the tension between economic pragmatism and the preservation of cultural integrity, a debate that was particularly pronounced in the context of Rome's rapid urban transformation in the

865 The integration of public and private efforts in heritage conservation projects, exemplified by the Crypta Balbi, underscores how urban archaeology can serve as a conduit between ancient and contemporary Rome. For a comprehensive overview of public-private partnerships in heritage conservation, see Macdonald, Cheong 2014. For insights into the Crypta Balbi as a model of archaeological integration into modern urban contexts, see Redazione. The Crypta Balbi, a journey into the everyday life of ancient Rome. Finestre sull'Arte, 28 Jan. 2023.
866 Gagliani Caputo, V., Segretario Generale Supplente. Deliberazione n. 178 del 6 giugno 1991: Legge 15 dicembre 1990, n. 396: Criteri per la realizzazione degli interventi previsti nel primo programma di Roma Capitale. Prot. Serv. Delib. n. 6521/91, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 6 June 1991. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6, p.1.
867 Ibid.
868 Ibid, p.3.

1990s.[869] The incorporation of private investments was seen as a necessary measure, yet there was also a clear institutional concern about maintaining public oversight and preventing conflicts of interest in the awarding of contracts.[870]

This deliberation was ultimately approved unanimously, confirming broad political support for the proposed strategy. The official voting record states:

L'On. le Presidente, non oltre sorgendo osservazioni, invita il consiglio a procedere, per alzata di mano, alla votazione della proposta di deliberazione nel surriportato testo definitivo. Procedutosi alla votazione nella forma come sopra indicata, l'On. le Presidente medesimo dichiara che la proposta risulta approvata all'unanimità con l'astensione dei Consiglieri Cerina, De Luca, De Petris, Del Fattore, Filippini, Nieri, Rutelli e Rutigliano. La presente deliberazione assume il n° 178.[871]

This unanimous approval, with only a handful of abstentions, suggests that the council regarded public-private collaboration as an unavoidable necessity, despite concerns about transparency. The inclusion of prominent political figures, such as Francesco Rutelli, in the list of abstentions may indicate hesitation or political positioning regarding the privatization of heritage funding.[872] This moment in Rome's heritage policy exemplifies the broader challenges of balancing economic interests with the safeguarding of public cultural assets.

The Role of the Consiglio Comunale di Roma in MNR's Preparations for 2000

869 Insolera 2021, pp. 332-346.

870Hanniball 2000, pp. 6–9. Hanniball examines museum administrative structures involving public-private collaborations, relevant to understanding similar governance strategies adopted by MNR during its preparations for the 2000 Jubilee.

871 Gagliani Caputo, V., Segretario Generale Supplente. Deliberazione n. 178 del 6 giugno 1991: Legge 15 dicembre 1990, n. 396: Criteri per la realizzazione degli interventi previsti nel primo programma di Roma Capitale. Prot. Serv. Delib. n. 6521/91, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 6 June 1991. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6, p.5.

872 "It was in fact during the period 1993 to 2008, under the left-wing leadership of two Mayors of Rome, first Francesco Rutelli and then Walter Veltroni, that the neoliberalism approach and a strong entrepreneurial style of government were particularly reflected in their strategies of urban planning and implemented tourism policies" see: Gemmiti 2019, p.196.

The restoration projects linked to the Jubilee of 2000 must be understood considering the context of Rome's infrastructural and urban development policies. The same legal framework that funded the museum's renewal also included large-scale interventions in the city's public spaces, as evidenced by Deliberazione n. 177 del 5 giugno 1991, which authorized extensive expropriations for urban redevelopment under Article 8 of Legge 396/1990.[873] The document explicitly outlines the connection between heritage conservation and urban modernization, stating: "La permanenza degli interventi di non diretta competenza dell'Amministrazione Comunale inseriti nel Programma resta subordinata alla verifica della loro compatibilità urbanistica."[874] The provision illustrates how archaeological preservation and urban planning were entangled within the same bureaucratic apparatus.

The project preparations for the Jubilee at the MNR were not merely a response to the anticipated influx of pilgrims and tourists but part of a longer-term strategy for integrating Rome's archaeological and museological heritage into its contemporary urban fabric. One of the most significant turning points in this process was the deliberazione No. 179, passed by the Consiglio Comunale di Roma on 8-9 giugno 1991. This document, adopted in a seduta pubblica at the Palazzo Senatorio, was central to shaping the financial and strategic direction of Rome's archaeological and museum infrastructure in the years leading up to the Jubilee.

This session, presided over by Franco Carraro,[875] formalized the adoption of the Programma degli interventi per Roma Capitale, which

873 Article 8 of Law 396/1990, enacted on December 15, 1990, outlines the procedures for the acquisition and subsequent disposition of areas designated for the Sistema Direzionale Orientale. It mandates that the Municipality of Rome formulate a multi-year program specifying zones subject to expropriation and establishes the criteria for ceding such properties to public or private entities. The law emphasizes the use of public auctions and stipulates that sale prices are to be based on acquisition costs and projected development expenses. See Italia. Legge 15 dicembre 1990, n. 396. Interventi per Roma Capitale della Repubblica. Normattiva.

874 Consiglio Comunale di Roma. Deliberazione n. 177 del 5 giugno 1991. Esproprio delle aree destinate alla attuazione dello S.D.O. Signed by Segretario Generale Supplente. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6.

875 In 1991, Franco Carraro, affiliated with Partito Socialista Italiano, held the office of Mayor of Rome. During his administration, he oversaw the municipal session that ratified the Programma degli interventi per Roma Capitale, a strategic framework for the distribution of funds allocated under Law 396/1990. The initiative emphasized the city's efforts to navigate the competing demands of urban redevelopment and archaeological preservation as Rome prepared for the Jubilee celebrations.

was the legislative framework through which funds, particularly those allocated under Legge 396/1990, would be distributed. The session's minutes reveal the city's leadership grappling with the dual pressures of urban modernization and heritage conservation, particularly in relation to the vast and complex set of archaeological sites under municipal and state supervision.

The meeting was attended by an extensive group of consiglieri, a testament to the significance of the discussions at hand.[876]

The minutes of the deliberation convey a sense of urgency and strategic foresight. The councillors were acutely aware that the Jubilee interventions could not be temporary but had to be integrated into a sustainable framework for Rome's urban and cultural future. The document explicitly warns that while the funds provided through Legge 396/1990 created unprecedented opportunities, there was a critical need to align them with the city's long-term urban and heritage planning strategies. It states: "La permanenza degli interventi di non diretta competenza dell'Amministrazione Comunale inseriti nel Programma resta subordinata alla verifica della loro compatibilità urbanistica da parte dell'Amministrazione Comunale."[877]

This passage explains how municipal authorities sought to ensure that these interventions were not just short-term infrastructural upgrades but part of an overarching urban conservation policy. The council also underscored the need to synchronize these projects with Rome's

876 The official record lists the presence of: Andreoli Inghilesi Teresa, Angelè Romano Edmondo, Antonucci Fausto, Baccini Mario, Bareti Edda, Battistuzzi Gian Paolo, Bernardo Corrado, Buontempo Teodoro, Calcagni Gianfranco, Carraro Franco, Casanatta Mauro, Cenci Roberto, Ciocchetti Luciano, Cioffarelli Francesco, Costi Robinio, Cutrufo Mauro, D'Alessandro Prisco Franca, D'Ambrosio Raffaele, Del Fattore Sandro, De Luca Athos, De Petris Loredana, Di Pietrantonio Luciano, Elissandini Maurizio, Fichera Daniele, Forcella Enzo, Francescone Tiziano, Garaci Enrico, Gerace Antonio Giuseppe, Turlaro Pierpaolo, Labelarte Gerardo, Mammoliti Anna Maria, Medi Iacovoni Maria Beatrice, Meloni Piero, Molinari Carmelo, Palombi Massimo, Pelonzi Carlo, Quadrana Alberto, Redavid Gianfranco, Rossetti Piero, Ruspoli Sforza, Rutelli Francesco, Rutigliano Oreste, Sodano Ugo, Spagnoli Arcangelo, Tocci Walter, Tortosa Oscar, Amato Filippo Antonio, Anderson Guido, Antonini Berardino, Azzaro Giovanni, Paolo, Bettini Goffredo Maria, Cedena Antonio, Ciancamerla Ettore, Collura Saverio, Coscia Maria, Filippini Rosa, Gionfrida Mario, Marino Bruno, Masini Renato, Mazzocchi Antonio, Montoforte Daniela, Montino Esterino, Morì Gabriele, Nicolini Renato, Nieri Luigi, Pompili Massimo, Proietti Enzo, Ravaigioli Marco, Ricciotti Paolo, Rossi-Doria Anna, Salvagni Piero
Comune di Roma, Deliberazione No.179, 8-9 giugno 1991, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6.
877 Comune di Roma, Deliberazione No.179, 8-9 giugno 1991, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6, p. 4.

metropolitan development plans, stating that: "Gli interventi dovranno essere armonizzati con le esigenze del territorio provinciale, in relazione alla prossima attuazione dell'area metropolitana."[878]

Financial sustainability was another key concern. The meeting records deliberations on public-private partnerships, which were increasingly seen as a necessary mechanism for managing large-scale heritage investments.[879] The document acknowledges that public resources alone were insufficient, stating: "Le risorse pubbliche non riescono da sole a garantire l'attivazione delle opere; la complessità della gestione richiede criteri di efficienza e managerialità che si possono ottenere attraverso sinergie fra pubblico e privato."[880]

The Consiglio Comunale di Roma's deliberazione No. 179 of June 1991 is a crucial case study in understanding how legislative, financial, and strategic governance shaped the cultural heritage landscape of Rome in the lead-up to the Jubilee. It was a moment when the city was forced to reconcile with the pressures of international tourism, religious pilgrimage, and its role as custodian of millennia of cultural heritage.

The meeting's records highlight a pragmatic approach to funding, governance, and urban planning, reflecting a deliberate effort to ensure that the museum interventions of the 1990s would have a sustained impact beyond the Jubilee. This strategy points to the increasing role of public-private partnerships in heritage management and the growing significance of municipal policy in shaping Rome's museum and archaeological frameworks at the end of the century.

878 Comune di Roma, Deliberazione No.179, 8-9 giugno 1991, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6, p. 4.

879 For example, the Herculaneum Conservation Project initiated in 2001 exemplifies a successful public-private partnership in cultural heritage conservation. The collaboration between the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei and the Packard Humanities Institute led to significant advancements in the preservation and management of the Herculaneum site. Similarly, the Chorus Association, established in Venice in 1997, represents a network of churches that collectively manage and promote their cultural heritage through private sponsorship and collaborative governance. Additionally, organizations like Save Venice Inc. have played a pivotal role in the restoration and preservation of Venice's cultural heritage between 1990-1997 through private funding and partnerships. See: Thompson 2007, pp. 120–134; Carlsmith 2022.

880 Ibid, p.3.

5.6 Institutional Tensions in the Shadow of the Jubilee: La Regina, Rutelli, and the Crisis of Tutela

As Rome entered the final years of the 1990s, preparations for the Great Jubilee of 2000 accelerated the pace of urban transformation. Infrastructure projects, cultural renovations, and expansive redevelopment schemes marked an ambitious attempt to redefine the city's image on the world stage. This momentum also exposed profound institutional tensions, particularly between the municipal administration under Rutelli and the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, led by La Regina. A revealing account of these frictions appeared in *La Repubblica* on 15 September 1998, capturing a contentious public exchange at the *Festa dell'Unità* involving La Regina, Deputy Mayor Walter Tocci, assessor Esterino Montino, and journalist-politician Furio Colombo. The article provides not only a direct glimpse into the political climate of the time, but also a lens through which to examine how archaeology and by extension, museums, were framed as obstacles or assets within a city in the midst of rebranding itself for the new millennium.

La Regina's intervention at the roundtable exemplifies the defensive posture adopted by the Soprintendenza in the face of sustained political pressure. He directly accused the Rutelli administration of seeking to delegitimize and dismantle the structures of archaeological tutela, stating that "c'è una forte insofferenza dell'amministrazione nei confronti della tutela archeologica" and characterizing the mayor's actions as part of a broader "campagna di aggressioni." He went further, claiming that "uno degli obiettivi del sindaco Rutelli [...] era quello di eliminare le strutture della tutela,"[881] and critiqued the symbolic manipulation of administrative language by pointing out that the city had misleadingly renamed one of its offices "soprintendenza," creating "molta confusione." These statements reflect a broader anxiety within MiBAC and its local arms about the erosion of their authority in a rapidly decentralizing political climate. They also point to the

881 Boccacci 1998, p. 5. Sezione: Roma.

struggle over naming and visibility where institutional titles themselves became part of the contest over cultural jurisdiction.

The article also reveals how the conflict was not only about legal or procedural authority, but also about public communication and transparency. Furio Colombo's closing intervention is particularly striking in this regard: "Roma è anche i romani, tre milioni di cittadini che vivono in un grande museo,"[882] reminiscent of Paolucci's idea of Italy that all of Italy is an open-air museum "Tutta l'Italia e' un museo a cielo aperto" or a "museo diffuso".[883]By likening the city to a museum inhabited by citizens, Colombo acknowledged the centrality of heritage to Rome's identity, but quickly shifted to emphasize the democratic obligations of cultural administration: "Non si può distruggere il passato, ma nemmeno ignorare i bisogni della gente, tra i quali il più importante è quello di essere informati tempestivamente e con chiarezza."[884] His call for open dialogue and accessible information frames the Soprintendenza not as a protector of heritage alone, but as a public institution accountable to the citizenry. His criticism of "le burocrazie [che] non si devono chiudere a riccio."[885] .

In this light, the article can be read as a microcosm of the challenges facing MNR on the eve of the Jubilee. Although not explicitly mentioned, the museum (particularly its then-new headquarters at Palazzo Massimo) was implicated in these tensions. As a high-profile project that straddled archaeological preservation, architectural restoration, and public display, it stood at the intersection of these competing discourses. The institutional fragility surrounding the Soprintendenza necessarily influenced the museum's position within the urban and political landscape. The debates captured in the article offer a stark reminder that museum work in this period was never just about objects or exhibitions, it was embedded in a volatile terrain of territorial disputes, urban ambitions, and ideological disagreements over the meaning and purpose of cultural heritage itself.

882Boccacci 1998, p. 5. Sezione: Roma.
883 Paolucci 1996, pp.14-15.
884 Ibid.
885 Ibid.

Amid the ongoing institutional power struggles, the contested public image of Francesco Rutelli became increasingly visible in the media as the Jubilee approached. An episode occurred during the televised broadcast *Serata Tg1*, aired on January 8, 2000, titled "Roma, Giubileo o caos?" The program, hosted by Lamberto Sposini, framed the Jubilee as a potential urban disaster, characterized by infrastructural chaos and logistical mismanagement.

Rutelli's insistence that Sposini had shown a shameful reality of the capital suggests a deeper concern with how media representations could undermine the mayor's broader strategic positioning of Rome as a cultural capital and successful host of a global (religious) event. Off-camera, he reportedly declared, "Questa puntata non è degna del servizio pubblico", reflecting the heightened sensitivity surrounding media portrayals in the lead-up to the Jubilee.[886]

This public confrontation not only amplified the existing tensions between municipal and institutional authorities but also highlighted the extent to which media became a contested space for asserting narrative control during the Jubilee. The rhetorical framing of Rome as either a renewed cultural hub or a city on the brink of chaos echoed the broader institutional conflicts (discussed later in this chapter) with the media serving as a visible stage upon which these tensions played out.

The timing of these conflicts is significant. Legislative Decrees 112/1998 and 368/1998 had just been passed,[887] furthering the decentralization of cultural heritage competences from the central state to regional and municipal entities. While the Soprintendenze remained under state control, the political atmosphere increasingly favored flexible, development-oriented interpretations of heritage policy. Within this context, La Regina's frustration is emblematic of a broader institutional fear: that archaeology was being reframed not as a public good or constitutional duty, but as an impediment to urban progress.[888]

886 Ibid.

887 Legislative Decree No. 112 of 1998 transferred various administrative functions, including certain aspects of cultural heritage management, from the central government to regional and local authorities, promoting decentralization in cultural policy. Subsequently, Legislative Decree No. 368 of 1998 established the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, consolidating responsibilities related to the protection and promotion of Italy's cultural heritage.

888 Crisci, Gon, Cicero 2018, pp. 297–310.

This view was reinforced by La Regina's rhetorical question: "Perché hanno voluto fare della povera archeologia il Nemico, l'Ostacolo? Per coprire ritardi loro?"[889] Here, archaeology is both the scapegoat and the casualty of a political agenda that prioritizes visibility and infrastructural achievement over cultural stewardship. His use of the phrase *"povera archeologia"* is particularly evocative, suggesting both the vulnerability of the discipline and its marginalization in urban policy debates.

In contrast, Walter Tocci sought to reframe the situation by offering a compromise that aligned archaeological research with urban planning. He proposed a major investment (30 to 40 billion lire) for new excavations and a mapping campaign of the Agro Romano, which would culminate in the creation of a *carta archeologica delle certezze*.[890] Tocci's well-known metaphor, "l'archeologia a Roma è come i pozzi di petrolio in Arabia,"[891] encapsulated a strategic shift in municipal rhetoric: archaeology as resource, as potential, as a foundation for a new urbanism.[892] Tocci's line reprises a 1980s policy metaphor of *giacimenti culturali* (cultural heritage as exploitable 'deposits') formalized in Italy's 1986 budget law creating a dedicated program to 'valorize' heritage via youth employment and cataloguing.[893] This was a notable departure from the preservationist discourse espoused by La Regina. Rather than viewing archaeology as a constraint, Tocci positioned it as a generator of value, albeit within a logic of capital and development. While this might be read as an attempt to bridge the ideological divide between preservation and modernization, it also risked subordinating archaeological knowledge to utilitarian, city-branding aims.[894]

The conflict between La Regina and Rutelli during the Jubilee planning period wasn't just a matter of personal differences or conflicting

889 Boccacci 1998, p. 5. Sezione: Roma.
890 Tocci 2020.
891 Boccacci 1998, p. 5. Sezione: Roma.
892 D'Eramo 2017, pp. 85–105.
893 Senato della Repubblica 1986.
894 Urban branding strategies in European cities around the turn of the millennium often positioned cultural heritage as a resource within broader economic frameworks. See Gómez, Fernández, Molina 2016, pp. 210–223; Moulaert, Rodríguez, Swyngedouw 2003.

priorities, it reflected deeper, systemic tensions within Italian cultural governance and, more broadly, within Italy's public administration during the 1990s. As Bertacchini[895] argues, the 1990s marked a decisive shift not only in the administration of cultural heritage in Italy but across municipal policy, with increasing moves toward decentralization, managerial autonomy, and public/private cooperation. La Regina's insistence on archaeological integrity and procedural rigor reflected the model of centralized, expert-led stewardship, whereas Rutelli's approach, framed around visibility, urban regeneration, and event-readiness, aligned with a new political logic of cultural delivery. In Deloche's terms, this amounted to a technocratic recalibration of the museum's role: from guardian of patrimony to operator within a performative economy of visibility and spectacle.[896] The conflict thus signaled not only institutional divergence, but competing visions for the future of Rome's museums in an era of event-driven urbanism.

These clashes over *tutela*, visibility, and media control were not confined to meeting rooms and television studios; they spilled directly into the galleries. In the summer of 2000, as Jubilee programming reached its apex, the MNR staged an exhibition that translated those governance debates into a public narrative about Rome's beginnings.

5.7 MNR Between Myth and Reform

With *Roma. Romolo, Remo e la fondazione della città* at the Terme di Diocleziano, the MNR turned the Jubilee spotlight into a curatorial argument connecting archaeology and civic myth to assert cultural authority at the very moment institutional reform was reshaping how that authority was exercised and as the city prepared for 2000, its cultural institutions were placed under unprecedented international scrutiny and pressure.[897] The MNR was at a pivotal moment in its institutional trajectory. Not only was it in the midst of major

895 Bertacchini, Santagata 2012, pp. 263–274
896 See: Deloche 2001.
897 Richards 2003, pp. 55–62.

renovations and expansions (particularly at Palazzo Massimo and Crypta Balbi) and it also took on an emblematic role in narrating the city's ancient origins through a major exhibition that exemplified the intersection of museological ambition, urban transformation, and political-cultural symbolism.

One of the central events marking the museum's contribution to the Jubilee year was the exhibition *Roma. Romolo, Remo e la fondazione della città*, held at the Terme Diocleziano from June to October 2000. Curated by Andrea Carandini[898] and Rosanna Cappelli, the exhibition sought to conjoin the mythical with the historical through a bold archaeological narrative of Rome's foundation. The Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, in partnership with MiBAC, Comune di Roma and the Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza", used this occasion to promote an assertive interpretation of cultural identity that emphasized Rome's ancient and divine lineage. In the words of Carandini, "Non solo celebriamo il 21 aprile, ma a poterne parlare in modo nuovo è oggi un archeologo," encapsulating both the exhibition's commemorative intent and its scholarly ambitions.[899]

The exhibition aimed to contextualize the mythic origins of Rome through a series of thematic sections focusing on Lavinium, Alba Longa, and Roma, tracing the genealogical and foundational narratives of Aeneas, Romulus, and Remus. Central to the exhibition was the articulation of Rome's mythic past as a framework for understanding the city's enduring monumental legacy in light of contemporary urban transformations.[900]

The exhibition's spatial design, illustrated in the floor plan[901], created a coherent narrative that allowed visitors to traverse the stages of Rome's legendary origins, from the wanderings of Aeneas to the foundation of Rome by Romulus and Remus. The structure of the exhibition reflected contemporary museological strategies aimed at integrating archaeological finds within a cohesive narrative framework, thereby

898 See e.g., Carandini 1997; McCaskie 2021, pp. 49–71; Wiseman 2001,pp. 182–193.
899 Carandini 2000,p. 9.
900 Cappelli, Carandini 2000, p.3.
901 Ibid, p.4.

reinforcing Rome's identity as a 'città eterna' during the Jubilee celebrations.



The exhibition exemplifies how, in 2000, museological programming leveraged historical narrative to align Rome's ancient heritage with its modern urban context, staging a dialogue between past and present that was as much about cultural reaffirmation as urban reconfiguration. Its interpretive frame pressed Rome's foundational myth through a handful of anchor objects that carried ritual, kingship, and civic identity: the *carrello rituale di Bisenzio* (read as Mars and Ops), the *specchio da Bolsena* with the wolf-twins; signs as much as things. Crucially, because the show was mounted under the aegis of state and municipal partners and addressed an overwhelmingly international public drawn by the Jubilee, it operated as cultural diplomacy in the narrow sense[902]: policy-enabled symbolic communication aimed at external audiences, using heritage to generate attraction and legitimacy (soft power[903] rather than decree). The choice to narrate origins (Rome's

902 See e.g., Ang, Isar & Mar 2015, pp. 365–381
903 See Nye 2004

claim to antiquity and continuity) within a contemporary scenography thus became a diplomatic language: reassuring foreigners about the city's competence and identity even as it repositioned the museum in a global circuit of meaning. By threading evocative objects through a tightly managed storyline, the MNR acted as a platform for projecting Rome's image[904] and how heritage mobilized to do reputational work in the Jubilee spotlight.

It is within this context that the MNR's curatorial choices must be understood. The *Roma* exhibition, while ostensibly about early Rome, as Sanniti, was tied to contemporary narratives of national identity and institutional legitimacy. T.P. Wiseman, in his critical review of the exhibition catalogue, echoes this point, noting that the event was as much "an exercise in cultural politics" as it was a scholarly endeavor.[905] The exhibition's narrative framework was centered on Romulus, divine kingship, and the fusion of myth and archaeology. It reflected a desire to anchor the Italian state's cultural authority in an ancient and continuous past. The selection and presentation of objects, including speculative reconstructions of religious rituals and the identification of mythic figures in ambiguous material remains, exhibited a vision of Rome's origins that was not only celebratory but also politically resonant.

What the Jubilee made especially visible was the way in which museum institutions like the MNR served as platforms for enacting the state's broader heritage strategies. The "museum" became a medium through which to articulate and legitimize transformations in heritage governance, tied to both decentralization and the rise of cultural tourism. The coordination between the museum's programming and urban redevelopment efforts, particularly in light of Rome's infrastructural preparations for the Jubilee, could be the beginning of the museum's role in what might be termed "civic mythmaking."[906]

904 See e.g., Lord & Blankenberg 2015.

905 Wiseman 2001, pp.182.

906 The notion of "civic mythmaking" draws on broader theories in cultural history and memory studies that analyze how modern communities, cities, and nations construct symbolic narratives to reinforce collective identity. See: Anderson1983; Nora 1984–1992.

The selection of Andrea Carandini as chief curator was itself profoundly meaningful. His work from the 1980s and 1990s had increasingly challenged the disciplinary boundaries between archaeology, history, and memory, advocating for an approach that read material remains as repositories of "living memory."[907] Carandini's interpretation of Rome's foundation was never a matter of simple empirical recovery; rather, it was a psychoanalytic and narrative construction, one that treated archaeological evidence as fragments of collective unconscious, embedded in ruins and landscapes. As Tom McCaskie has observed, Carandini's scholarship operated "at the intersection of material ruin and mythic construction," moving beyond stratigraphic excavation to a form of historical storytelling shaped by intuition, symbolic logic, and cultural desire.[908]

Carandini's curatorship of *Roma* thus represented a deliberate departure from traditional exhibition practice. Instead of presenting discrete artifacts as isolated objects of aesthetic or antiquarian interest, the exhibition arranged them into a complex historical tapestry, suggesting that even the most fragmentary relics could be woven into a coherent civic narrative. This approach aligned closely with the broader objectives of the Jubilee, which sought to reaffirm Rome's exceptionalism on both religious and secular fronts.

Institutionally, Carandini's appointment also mirrored deeper structural reforms underway within Italy's cultural governance. Following the aforementioned Legge Ronchey (1993) and the Legislative Decrees 112/1998 and 368/1998, there had been a systematic push toward administrative decentralization, the professionalization of museum management, and the valorization of scholarly leadership within heritage institutions.[909] Museums were no longer imagined as passive custodians of patrimony but as dynamic research centers, mediators of complex cultural narratives, and strategic agents of soft

907 Carandini 1997.

908 McCaskie 2021, pp. 49–71.

909 Legislative Decree No. 112 of 1998 (D.lgs. 112/1998), "Conferimento di funzioni e compiti amministrativi dello Stato alle regioni ed agli enti locali"; Legislative Decree No. 368 of 1998 (D.lgs. 368/1998), "Istituzione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali."

power.[910] By selecting Carandini, the MNR signaled its participation in this broader redefinition of the museum as a site of intellectual production, public engagement, and identity formation.

Yet the exhibition also exposed the fault lines of the new museology. In his review, T.P. Wiseman levelled three linked critiques: evidentiary slippage (hypotheses staged as facts in the gallery), historiographical circularity (Augustan myth retrojected onto fragmentary archaic strata), and political dramaturgy (a foundation story orchestrated to underwrite contemporary identity). He pointed to the elevation of figures like Picus and Faunus and to reconstructed rites from scant traces as emblematic of a slide from excavation to ideology, collapsing the ladder between what is known, inferred, and imagined. Supporters countered that a public museum must risk integrative narratives, but Wiseman's caution usefully marks the limits of Jubilee-era mythmaking.[911]

The MNR's activities were also embedded in a decade-long process of institutional reform and cultural-political reimagining. The function of the Jubilee was a culmination and a performative testing ground for new museological, scholarly, political and administrative paradigms that had been unfolding since the late 1980s.

5.8 Financial Planning, Institutional Prioritization, and the Challenges of Implementing Legge 396/90 for Museo Nazionale Romano

Amidst these broader ideological shifts, the financial management of Rome's cultural projects during the Jubilee period reveals the tangible constraints that shaped institutional priorities. The I Progetti per il I° Programma di Attuazione, signed by *Segretario Generale Supplente V. Gagliani Caputo* on July 29, 1991, marks a significant bureaucratic effort to manage the ambitious cultural and infrastructural projects

910 Museums have increasingly positioned themselves as cultural actors, engaging with contemporary narratives and broader societal objectives. See Zabalueva 2018, pp.231–247; Hoogwaerts 2016, pp. 276–288.
911 Wiseman 2001,p.182.

envisioned under Legge 396/90. This document reveals the financial constraints that shaped decision-making for the *Programma per Roma Capitale*. While the legislation set out an expansive vision for Rome's renewal in anticipation of the Jubilee, this financial memorandum makes clear that the resources available in the 1990-1991 biennium were insufficient to meet the full scope of proposed interventions. This funding gap necessitated a strategic reallocation of resources, compelling both municipal and ministerial authorities to establish hierarchies of priority and explore alternative financing models.[912]

At the heart of this document is the recognition that the financial burden of preparing Rome for the Jubilee could not be shouldered by public funds alone. The text explicitly calls for two key measures: first, the selection of priority interventions, and second, the integration of private capital through financial engineering strategies to attract investment into public works.

While such strategies reflect a pragmatic response to fiscal constraints, they also reveal underlying tensions within heritage governance at the time. Previous municipal deliberations had already raised concerns about safeguarding the transparency of public investment, particularly regarding the fairness of competitive bidding processes. Deliberazione n. 178 del 6 giugno 1991 had warned that, despite private sector interest in these projects, *"non possa essere riconosciuta alle suddette proposte alcun titolo di preferenza per la partecipazione alle gare"*[913]. The *I Progetti per il I° Programma di Attuazione*[914] does not directly address these concerns, nor does it provide a clear mechanism for balancing the imperative of private investment with the principles of public accountability. This ambiguity reflects a broader issue in cultural policy during this period—while the need for private sector involvement was increasingly

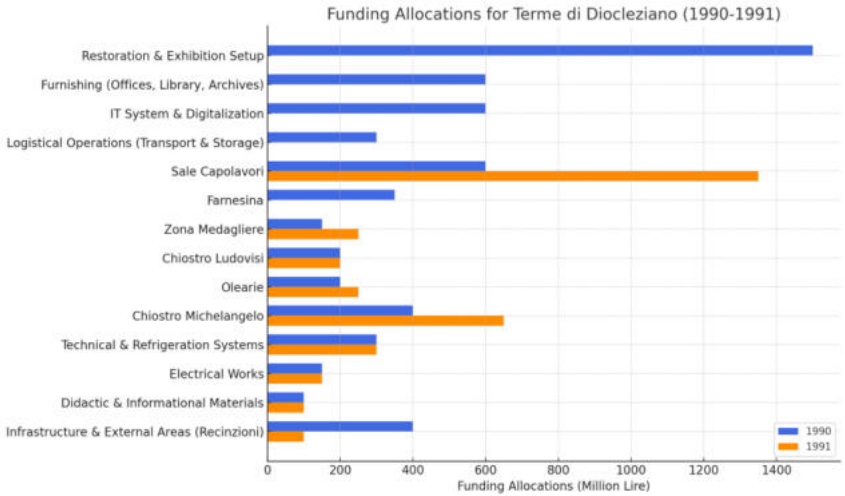
912 Gagliani Caputo, V., Segretario Generale Supplente. I Progetti per il I° Programma di Attuazione: Sostituisce il Punto 4.2.2 del Programma. 29 July 1991. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6.
913 Gagliani Caputo, V., Segretario Generale Supplente. Deliberazione n. 178 del 6 giugno 1991: Legge 15 dicembre 1990, n. 396: Criteri per la realizzazione degli interventi previsti nel primo programma di Roma Capitale. Prot. Serv. Delib. n. 6521/91, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 6 June 1991. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6, p.2.
914 Gagliani Caputo, V., Segretario Generale Supplente. I Progetti per il I° Programma di Attuazione: Sostituisce il Punto 4.2.2 del Programma. 29 July 1991. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 44, Fasc. 6.

acknowledged, institutional frameworks for managing such collaborations remained underdeveloped.

The financial allocations outlined in this document provide valuable insight into how the state prioritized restoration and infrastructural projects within MNR. The funding breakdown reveals a clear emphasis on the Terme Diocleziano, which received the most substantial investment across the two-year period, followed by Palazzo Altemps and Crypta Balbi. This hierarchy of investment shows the state's commitment to enhancing visitor accessibility and exhibition spaces, aligning with the broader museological strategy for the Jubilee.

Terme Diocleziano the largest and most architecturally complex site within the MNR, received a total of 5.5 billion lire in 1990 and 3.7 billion lire in 1991. The financial allocations highlight key areas of investment:

- Restoration, reassembly of materials, and exhibition installations – 1.5 billion lire
- Sale Capolavori – 600 million lire (1990); 1.35 billion lire (1991)
- Farnesina – 350 million lire (1990)
- Zona Medagliere – 150 million lire (1990); 250 million lire (1991)
- Chiostro Ludovisi – 200 million lire (1990); 200 million lire (1991)
- Chiostro Michelangelo – 400 million lire (1990); 650 million lire (1991)
- Technical & refrigeration systems – 300 million lire (1990); 300 million lire (1991)
- Electrical works – 150 million lire (1990); 150 million lire (1991)
- Didactic & informational materials – 100 million lire (1990); 100 million lire (1991)



The prominence of the Sale Capolavori and Chiostro Michelangelo in this financial plan suggests a concerted effort to enhance the visitor experience and improve exhibition spaces. The allocation signals a turn in Italian museology toward treating major archaeological sites as public heritage spaces geared to large-scale visitation, rather than primarily as research institutions.[915]

While substantial investments were still directed towards restoration and infrastructural improvements at established sites (i.e. Terme Diocleziano.), there was a clear reallocation of resources toward expansion, particularly with the transformation of Pal. Altemps and Crypta Balbi into new museum venues. This shift in priorities reflects a broader institutional and urban strategy aimed at reconfiguring Rome's archaeological and museological landscape within an expanded and more decentralized framework.

Notably, the 1990-1991 funding documents do not mention Pal. Massimo, which would later emerge as another key seat of MNR. The absence of any financial allocation for this site suggests that, at this stage, it had not yet been fully integrated into the museum's immediate

915 The ideological shift in Italian museology around the year 2000, emphasizing public engagement and tourism, is discussed in Ludovico Solima's study on visitor communication strategies in state museums, introduced by Giovanna Melandri. See Solima 2000, pp.17–33.

expansion plans. Instead, the focus was placed on Pal. Altemps and Crypta Balbi, indicating a clear hierarchy of urgency and feasibility in the museum's development strategy in connection to the legge 396/90.

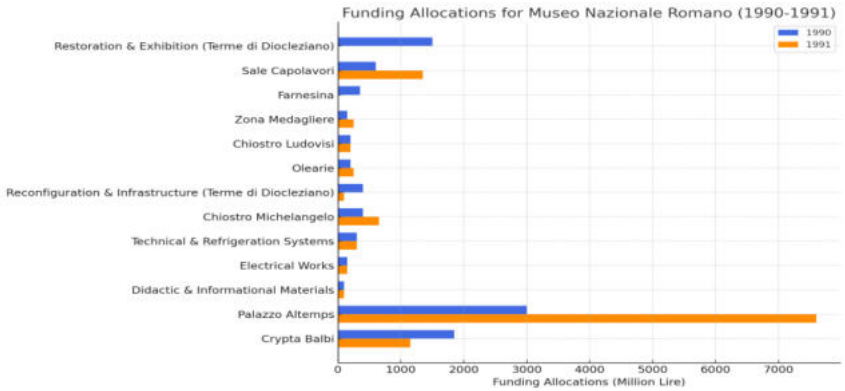
The restoration of Palazzo Altemps saw a significant increase in funding from 3 billion lire in 1990 to 7.6 billion lire in 1991. This dramatic 153% increase suggests a more defined role for the site within the overall museum network by the second year of funding. The decision to allocate such a large sum to Palazzo Altemps reflects a strategic effort to diversify the exhibition spaces of the MNR. Whereas the Terme Diocleziano. housed the museum's core archaeological collection, Pal. Altemps was envisioned as a space to showcase Renaissance-era sculptures and collections, broadening the chronological and cultural scope of the institution.

Crypta Balbi, an archaeological site that provides a unique diachronic perspective on Rome's transformation from antiquity to the medieval period, received:

- 1.85 billion lire in 1990
- 1.15 billion lire in 1991

The comparatively lower funding for this site may indicate that excavation and research phases were still ongoing at this stage, requiring a more gradual approach to restoration and exhibition planning. Unlike the Terme Diocl. and Pal.Altemps, which were largely architectural restorations, the Crypta Balbi project involved complex stratigraphic excavation and conservation,[916] which may have influenced the pacing of financial allocations.

916 See Fioriti 2022.



From an institutional standpoint, the MNR's involvement in the Jubilee was shaped by the wider legislative and administrative frameworks that had been developing throughout the 1990s. Notably, the aforementioned Legge Ronchey (Legge 4/1993) and Legislative Decrees 112/1998 and 368/1998 also redefined the relationship between the central administration and cultural institutions, emphasizing autonomy, management rationalization, and the formation of museum *poli museali*. These reforms directly affected MNR by formalizing the creation of a unified museum system under a single directorship, while still distributed across multiple historic venues.[917] The 2000 Jubilee offered an opportunity to showcase archaeological scholarship and to also enact and display these new managerial configurations.

Broader Implications for Rome's Cultural Policy

I Progetti per il I° Programma di Attuazione illustrates the broader bureaucratic and financial challenges of implementing *Legge 396/90*. The document confirms that by 1991 the scope of proposed interventions far exceeded available resources, necessitating a phased approach to funding and execution. While municipal deliberations such as Deliberazione n. 179 dell'8-9 giugno 1991 had already emphasized the need to integrate these interventions into a sustainable

917 For legislative context, see Legislative Decree No. 112 of 1998 (D.lgs. 112/1998), "Conferimento di funzioni e compiti amministrativi dello Stato alle regioni ed agli enti locali," and Legislative Decree No. 368 of 1998 (D.lgs. 368/1998), "Istituzione del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali."

urban development plan, this financial memorandum makes clear that funding limitations were a primary constraint.

This shows the extent to which financial planning shaped the museum's development strategy. The decision to invest heavily in Terme Diocleziano and Palazzo Altemps, while allocating more moderate sums to Crypta Balbi, suggests a calculated prioritization of sites that could be made visitor-ready within the Jubilee timeframe. At the same time, the reliance on private sector investment, though emphasized as a necessary strategy, remained vaguely defined, reflecting broader tensions in heritage governance at the time.[918]

A photograph taken at the Terme Diocleziano[919] provides visual confirmation of these interventions. The project sign, displayed on-site, outlines the financial and administrative structure of the work, explicitly linking it to the Jubilee preparations under the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. The sign indicates an overarching budget of 8.7 billion lire for the valorization and maintenance of archaeological parks and green areas, with 374 million lire specifically allocated to the MNR. The sign also lists key personnel, including architect Massimo De Vico Fallani, scientific director Alessandro Licciardello, and collaborator Francesco Buzi, this shows the interdisciplinary nature of the restoration project.

The interaction of infrastructure, salvage excavation, and display did not end with the Jubilee. It resurfaced explicitly in *Roma. Memorie dal Sottosuolo. Ritrovamenti archeologici 1980–2006* (MNR, 2006)[920], which reframed a quarter-century of urban discoveries through the lens of preventive archaeology and its museological translation.[921]

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918 During the preparations for the Jubilee 2000, the emphasis on public-private partnerships was framed as a necessary strategy, yet the specifics of these collaborations were often ambiguously defined, creating challenges in execution and financial planning. See Bronzini, Mocetti, Mongardini 2019.

919 See photos in Appendix 27.

920 Tomei 2006.

921 See Appendix 28 The "Sottosuolo" Exhibition, Preventive Archaeology, and the MNR, for an extended discussion of the exhibition's curatorial program and its implications for preventive archaeology.

5.9 Conclusion: Museums, Memory, and Urban Transformation

The Jubilee of 2000 represented a shift towards a moment in which the MNR assumed the physiognomy we have now known for the last 25 years. Positioned against a backdrop of heightened international visibility and substantial public investment, the MNR's development during this period illustrates how cultural heritage institutions were mobilized to project narratives of continuity amidst modernization.

Central to this transformation was the extensive program of restoration and exhibition reorganization undertaken across all four museum sites. These projects were part of a broader strategy to present the MNR as a unified, multi-site institution capable of narrating Rome's layered history from antiquity to the contemporary era. Financial backing through Jubilee-specific legislation, including Legge 651/1996 and Legge 270/1999, enabled the museum to carry out restoration work while expanding exhibition spaces and narrative scope.

However, the Jubilee's impact extended beyond physical restoration. The event also served as a catalyst for institutional rebranding, compelling the MNR to assert its relevance within a shifting cultural landscape characterized by decentralization, public-private partnerships, and urban regeneration. The Jubilee's dual emphasis on historical continuity and contemporary renewal positioned Rome as both a repository of ancient heritage and a modern European capital. The MNR's exhibition programming during the Jubilee reflects this duality. Exhibitions such as *Italia dei Sanniti* and *Roma. Romolo, Remo e la fondazione della città* moved between mythic origins and protohistoric narratives, expanding the museum's focus beyond the classical canon. By incorporating lesser-known cultural histories, the MNR positioned itself as a counterpoint to traditional, triumphalist narratives of Rome's imperial past.

The Jubilee also exposed vulnerabilities in governance and infrastructure. Legislative Decrees 112/1998 and 368/1998 facilitated the decentralization of cultural management, granting museums greater

autonomy but also requiring them to secure external funding and align with broader economic strategies. For the MNR, this created both opportunities and challenges. While the multi-site structure allowed the museum to showcase a wider range of collections, it also placed additional strain on its logistical and financial resources. The 2000 theft of vases from the Protostoria section exposed these tensions and drew public attention to security gaps and institutional fragmentation.

The political context further shaped the museum's institutional narrative. Under Mayor Rutelli, the municipal government framed cultural heritage as central to Rome's urban redevelopment strategy, positioning the city as a "global capital of culture." The museum became a focal point in this broader project, serving as both a participant in and a symbol of Rome's cultural renaissance. However, the theft at Terme Diocleziano revealed a divide between the museum's public narrative of modernization and the operational challenges it continued to face.

The MNR's experience during the Jubilee illustrates the complex dynamics of positioning a museum as both a site of historical memory and a participant in contemporary urban branding. While the museum successfully expanded its narrative scope and physical infrastructure, logistical and security challenges were the risks of rapid institutional growth without sufficient operational support. This gap between curatorial ambition and institutional capacity reflects broader tensions in Rome's cultural governance, as museums were expected to function as both custodians of heritage and cultural showcases without adequate investment in foundational infrastructure.

As Rome prepares for the 2025 Jubilee, the lessons of 2000 remain particularly relevant. The MNR's experience brings attention to the importance of aligning curatorial ambition with institutional capacity, securing sustainable funding, and integrating heritage strategies with broader urban planning initiatives. The 2000 Jubilee demonstrated that while mega-events can provide critical opportunities for institutional growth and renewal, they can also expose underlying structural

weaknesses that persist long after the event ends. The MNR's trajectory during this period thus serves as a reminder that institutional transformation must be matched by comprehensive support for infrastructure, security, and staffing to ensure lasting impact.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of MNR between 1981 and 2000 reflects a deeper story about how Italy's museum system negotiated the boundaries between heritage preservation, administrative reform, and cultural modernization. During these two decades, MNR became a microcosm of the Italian State's evolving approach to cultural governance: bound by legal tradition yet increasingly responsive to the demands of accessibility, public communication, and institutional autonomy. The museum's trajectory, beginning with the passage of Legge 92/1981 and culminating with the openings completed for the Great Jubilee year of 2000, reveals how the principles of *tutela* and *valorizzazione* were reinterpreted through the realities of bureaucratic practice, political ambition, and museological innovation.

Throughout this thesis, I have explored how the evolution of the MNR was neither linear nor inevitable. Rather, it emerged from sustained, often contentious negotiations among multiple stakeholders: ministry workers, politicians, architects, scholars, and the public. negotiations shaped by bureaucracy, financial constraints, shifting legal frameworks, and evolving museological ideas. As Bennett argues, museums must be understood not only as spaces of knowledge and display but as "cultural technologies" embedded within wider governmental rationalities.[922] The story of MNR from 1981 to 2000 reveals museums as dynamic institutions, responding to, and actively shaping, the political, social, and cultural shifts of their times.

Situated at the intersection of urban policy, legislative reform, museological innovation, and heritage governance, the MNR offers a unique vantage point from which to examine the broader dynamics of museum transformation in Italy and beyond. The museum emerges as a site of archaeological conservation and as a complex institutional actor responding to, and helping to shape, the shifting political and cultural landscapes of late twentieth-century Rome.[923]

922 Bennett 1995, pp. 23–28.
923 La Regina 1981, pp. 15–17.

Across these two decades, certain tensions recur with notable regularity in both the archival files and the public debate. One of the clearest concerns the museum's room for manoeuvre: how far it could act on its own, and how far it remained bound to decisions taken elsewhere. Time again, the question of who actually directed the institution, its technical staff, the municipality, or the Ministry, resurfaces as both a practical question and a point of principle. These shifting lines of authority shaped choices about personnel, budgets, and the way objects and collections were presented.

Another thread, growing more pronounced as the years progressed, concerns the museum's relationship with its public. While early initiatives in the 1980s reflect a general aspiration to make heritage more accessible, later documents and press commentary show mounting concern with how to engage an increasingly diverse audience without diluting the museum's scholarly mission.

Tied to both of these is the less visible but ever-present struggle to reconcile the bureaucratic processes with the need for adaptability in a rapidly changing capital city. The legal and administrative systems governing Rome's museums frequently appear institutionally heavy, especially when juxtaposed with the everyday realities of project management, construction setbacks, and shifting political priorities. Many of the key events detailed in this thesis; the acquisition of new sites, the reorganization of existing collections, the long delays before major openings, are shaped as much by these underlying systemic constraints as by curatorial vision or external expectations.

What is perhaps most revealing is how these threads intertwine, sometimes in tension, sometimes in unexpected alignment. The drive to broaden public access, for example, often collides with the limitations imposed by preservation mandates or funding cycles, while attempts at institutional reform (however well-intentioned) can stumble over entrenched habits and institutional memory.[924] These layered dynamics, more than any single policy or moment, define the MNR's

924 Montella 2003;Crainz 1996, pp. 372–375.

transformation during the final decades of the twentieth century and continue to inform the challenges it faces today.

The trajectory that led MNR from a centralized institution to a dispersed, multi-site network cannot be understood outside the context of the early 1980s, a period defined by a profound rethinking of heritage governance in Italy. The passage of the Legge speciale per Roma (Legge 92/1981) marked a decisive departure from both the postwar conservation model and the state's earlier ambitions of centralized monumental management[925]. This law, prompted by pressure to safeguard Rome's archaeological patrimony amid rapid urbanization and infrastructural expansion, provided exceptional funding and administrative authority and signaled a wider shift toward recognizing cultural heritage as a public good central to urban identity and development.[926]

This specific law provided the legal and financial foundation for the museum's transformation. It authorized the expropriation and restoration of Palazzo Massimo and defined the framework for the reorganization of Rome's archaeological collections under the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Yet the law's significance exceeded the administrative sphere: it symbolized the State's renewed commitment to Rome as an archaeological capital and to museums as dynamic agents of cultural policy. La Regina's vision of a "systemic" museum network reflected an early recognition that the traditional model of the single monumental museum could no longer sustain the scale and diversity of archaeological discovery in the late twentieth century. Within this framework, the MNR was conceived not as a single institution but as a coordinated organism, an early prototype of what would later be called a *polo museale*, establishing the Terme Diocleziano, Palazzo Massimo, Palazzo Altemps, and eventually the Crypta Balbi into an integrated structure.

Archival correspondence from the period reveals the complexity of this transition. In the months following the law's enactment, La Regina,

925 "Legge 1 marzo 1981, n. 92, Provvedimenti urgenti per Roma capitale." Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, no. 64, 6 March 1981, pp. 2034–2036.
926 Crainz 1996, pp. 372–375.

who had a dual role as both administrator and public intellectual, shaped the reform's practical outcomes. He frequently clashed with municipal officials over the definition of "valorization" and the boundaries of institutional autonomy.[927] Internal memoranda from the Soprintendenza highlight anxieties about bureaucratic overload, the reliability of political commitments, and the risks of dispersing authority across Rome's sprawling administrative apparatus.[928] At the same time, press coverage from the era (especially in La Repubblica and Corriere della Sera) expressed the public hopes for a more open, participatory approach to heritage, anticipating the participatory "new museology" that would gain momentum in subsequent decades.[929]

The implementation of Legge 92/81 was far from seamless. While the legislation endowed the MNR with resources previously unavailable, it also introduced a new level of administrative complexity. Local and national priorities sometimes diverged, particularly when plans for the expansion of museum space and above all the long-delayed acquisition and conversion of Palazzo Massimo, which encountered resistance from overlapping authorities.[930] The archival record documents months of negotiation over property expropriation, budget allocations, and restoration schedules, punctuated by moments of acute bureaucratic conflict.[931] In several instances, as internal notes make clear, curatorial

927 Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 61, fasc. 3–5, including: Protocollo d'intesa tra il Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali e il Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (27 May 1989); Commissione per la Riforma del Sistema Museale Nazionale. Gruppo di lavoro per i Musei e i Parchi Archeologici. Documento programmatico (21 Nov. 1990); Verbale n. 3 (10 July 1990); Verbale n. 4 (18 Sept. 1990).
928 For the internal correspondence, budget requests, and technical memoranda referenced here, see the series of documents signed/ issued by Adriano La Regina, preserved in the Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 60, Fasc. 5, including: Lettera al Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali: Richiesta fondi per le edizioni dei cataloghi del Museo Nazionale Romano (29 Oct. 1981); Relazione interna sull'edizione dei cataloghi delle collezioni del Museo Nazionale Romano (1981); De Luca Editore S.r.l., Preventivo per la pubblicazione "Pitture Museo Romano" (28 Apr. 1981); Lettera all'U.N.A.S.: Richiesta fondi per attività didattica 1981 (18 June 1981); Lettera al Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali: Richiesta fondi per rilievi e catalogazione, Programma di attuazione 1980/81 (28 Oct. 1981); Lettera al Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali: Richiesta fondi per mostre, Programma di attuazione 1980/81 (15 July 1981); and Lettera al Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali: Richiesta fondi per esecuzione rilievi (3 Nov. 1981).
929 "Roma: Museo e città, una sfida per il futuro." La Repubblica, 24 March 1981, p. 7.
930 Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2, "Corrispondenza sull'espropriazione e il restauro di Palazzo Massimo," 1982–1986.
931 Ibid.

and scholarly priorities were subordinated to the imperatives of political consensus or the constraints of legal process.[932]

From the outset, the museum's reorganization was shaped by the pressures of Rome's urban archaeology movement. The massive excavations associated with the city's infrastructural expansion (i.e. the *metropolitana*, the redevelopment around Termini station, and the works in the Esquilino area) produced an unprecedented influx of material. Archival correspondence documents the mounting crisis of storage and exhibition space and the growing awareness that the Terme Diocleziano could no longer accommodate the collections or reflect the scale of research underwayIn this context, the acquisition of Palazzo Massimo emerged as both a logistical necessity and a symbolic act.[933] Its restoration and conversion were understood as a chance to align museography with the contemporary principles of accessibility and scientific display outlined by scholars such as Massimo Montella, who argued that the Italian museum must "become an instrument of civic communication and shared responsibility". The struggle to reconcile the integrity of archaeological contexts with the demands of increased public visibility was not only a practical challenge but a conceptual dilemma, one that shaped debates over everything from gallery layouts to loan policies, and which would become even more pronounced in subsequent decades.[934]

Yet the restoration of Palazzo Massimo also revealed the systemic fragilities of the Italian cultural bureaucracy. The expropriation process, initiated in 1981 but not fully concluded until 1996, was slowed by inter-ministerial negotiations, valuation disputes, and the involvement of multiple agencies, including the Ministero del Tesoro, the Comune di Roma, and the Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archeologici.[935] Administrative correspondence from the 1980s shows

932 Ibid.

933 Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 91, fasc. 4, Documentazione relativa alla prelazione, acquisizione, catastazione e lavori di restauro del Palazzo Altemps, 1982–1987, incl. estratti catastali, decreti di prelazione (2 Aug. 1982; 28 Sept. 1983), corrispondenza tecnica e osservazioni ai progetti di restauro firmate da Adriano La Regina (1985–1987).

934 Montella 2003, pp.105–109.

935 Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, fasc. 1, documentazione su espropriazione e immissione in possesso degli immobili di Via Amendola e Via Massimo D'Azeglio, 4–11 October 1996.

La Regina repeatedly pressing for authorizations and lamenting the proliferation of decrees without corresponding funds.[936] The prolonged nature of these procedures shows a paradox: the same legal culture that guaranteed heritage protection also constrained institutional efficiency. Each bureaucratic decision (whether an expropriation decree or a budget authorization) translated museological vision into juridical form, producing a museum that literally grew through paperwork.

The archive has many accounts of this drawn-out process: typed and handwritten notes mentioning delays, legal documentation about property claims, and periodic flashes of optimism (usually whenever a budget was finally approved or a new restoration plan agreed upon).[937]

The reforms of the 1990s, notably the Legge Ronchey 1993 and the Legislative Decrees 112 and 368 of 1998, sought to introduce managerial flexibility and decentralization into the cultural sector. In principle, these reforms recognized museums as autonomous institutions within the public administration. In practice, autonomy remained limited. The MNR continued to operate under the authority of the Soprintendenza, with budgets, personnel, and strategic decisions still subject to ministerial approval. As scholars such as Barbati and Casini have observed, these reforms often "changed the language of cultural administration more than its operational structures."[938] Within this context, the MNR's autonomy was enacted less through statutory reform than through everyday negotiation, where innovation often emerges within rather than against legal constraint.

If the administrative framework remained stable, the physical and conceptual character of the museum changed profoundly. Each of the four sites embodied a distinct museological intention. Palazzo Massimo, with its clear sightlines and didactic layout, became the paradigm of archaeological modernity (a museum of form and

936 See the report signed by La Regina, "Interventi urgenti per la protezione e per la valorizzazione del patrimonio archeologico di Roma," 1 November 1980, in Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 60, fasc. 5, which details chronic underfunding and the mismatch between ministerial directives and available resources and quotes "La legge n° 671 ha comunque cessato di operare nel 1978, e da allora alle esigenze di intervento proprie della Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma si è dovuto far fronte in modo ancora meno adeguato con gli stanziamenti ordinari del Ministero."

937 Ibid.; see also Busta 87, fasc. 1, "Note interne e verbali di riunione sul progetto Palazzo Massimo," 1994–1996.

938 Barbati, Cammelli, Casini 2020.

sequence that guided visitors through Roman sculpture, wall painting, and numismatics). Palazzo Altemps, inaugurated in 1997 after decades of closure, reinterpreted the history of collecting, transforming the private narratives of aristocratic antiquarianism into a reflection on ownership, taste, and identity. The Terme Diocleziano, long a symbol of grand-scale display, was recast as a museum of epigraphy and protohistory, aligning with the national emphasis on documentation and education. Finally, the Crypta Balbi, opened in 2000 under the direction of Daniele Manacorda, presented the most experimental museographic model of all: an *archeologia della città*, in which excavation and exhibition were continuous processes. These four sites together realized a coherent but non-centralized vision, a *museo diffuso,* whose unity resided in its conceptual design rather than in a single architectural space.

This spatial and ideological reconfiguration mirrored the larger reorientation of Italy's cultural policy during the final decades of the century. The traditional emphasis on conservation was gradually joined, and sometimes challenged, by the discourse of accessibility and public participation. The MNR became a laboratory for this transition. Its 1987 collaboration with IBM, which introduced computer systems for cataloguing and data management, symbolized the first phase of digital modernization in Italian museums.[939] Though modest in scope, this initiative signaled an awareness that museological practice was entering a new technological and communicative age. Similarly, public debates over accessibility, such as the 1999 protest organized by the *Comitato Pro Handicap di Nettuno* and the *Federazione Italiana Sport Disabili*, revealed the growing social expectations attached to cultural institutions. As reported in *La Repubblica* on 21 September 1999, demonstrators denounced the barriers that prevented disabled visitors from entering Palazzo Massimo and demanded "museums equal for all." This episode demonstrated that modernization was no longer

939 See correspondence relating to the 1989–1990 IBM donation: Gustavo Vicentini to Adriano La Regina, 23 Nov. 1989; Adriano La Regina to Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 28 Nov. 1989; Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, autorizzazione, 23 Jan. 1990; Adriano La Regina to IBM Italia, 9 Feb. 1990. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, B. 84, f. 2.

measured solely by architecture or technology but by inclusivity and civic accountability.

Alongside these physical and digital initiatives, the MNR's programme of printed catalogues needs particular attention. From the early guides of the 1890s to the scholarly catalogues accompanying the reinstallation of individual sites in the 1990s, these publications constituted a sustained effort to document, interpret, and disseminate the museum's collections. Their scientific value was considerable: they established provenance, fixed attributions, and opened research questions for future generations. But they also served a broader institutional function, making the museum's holdings available to scholars and the interested public at moments when the physical spaces were under renovation or only partially open. In a period marked by prolonged closures and construction delays, the printed catalogue was often the only means through which the MNR's collections could be studied and appreciated.

The Great Jubilee of 2000 brought these themes to an apex. As both religious celebration and political enterprise, the Jubilee functioned as an extraordinary accelerator of public works. For the MNR, it provided the long-awaited resources to complete the Crypta Balbi, restore key sections of Terme Diocleziano, and enhance the museum's visibility within the cultural landscape of *Roma Capitale*. Yet archival documentation from 1997 to 2000 also reveals the strains of this accelerated modernization: short-term contracts, fragmented project oversight, and the pressure to meet ceremonial deadlines.[940] The Jubilee's exceptional funding structure, reliant on temporary budgets and emergency decrees offered a glimpse of what could be achieved through political will, but also what could not be sustained once the event concluded. The museum entered the 21st century with expanded infrastructure but without a stable administrative framework capable of maintaining it.

At the same time, the Jubilee marked the MNR's symbolic reintegration into the civic identity of Rome. Its four sites collectively narrated the

940 See the documents in Busta 87, fasc. 1, verbali e corrispondenza sui lavori MNR 1997–2000, incl. "lavori urgenti," richieste di personale a tempo determinato, ritardi procedurali e solleciti per il Giubileo.

city's material and cultural history, transforming the museum into an interpretive map of urban time. In doing so, the MNR anticipated contemporary notions of networked museography and contextual display. The museo diffuso model, though conceived as a response to the practical dispersion of collections across separate sites, also anticipated later discussions about museums as networked institutions, linked less by a single building than by shared narratives, coordinated governance, and a city-wide interpretive framework. In many respects, the MNR sat between two overlapping phases: the tail end of the large, centrally funded archaeological reforms that had defined the 1980s and 1990s, and the emerging landscape marked by tourism-driven visibility, global cultural exchange, and the early digital shift in how museums communicated. The museum asserted a role that went beyond conservation or display. It became an actor within Italy's network of cultural diplomacy, where the movement of objects, exhibitions, and expertise served to negotiate visibility and authority on the international stage.

As the chapter on loans and mobility suggests, the MNR also shaped its public role through the movement of objects. Loan requests, diplomatic negotiations, and exhibition partnerships became part of its everyday work, allowing the museum to assert its authority beyond its walls and to position itself within broader scholarly and cultural networks. These practices reveal how the MNR operated simultaneously as a local institution and as an interlocutor in the international circulation of antiquities.

The institutional dynamics behind this transformation reveal how Italy's system of cultural heritage management operated through negotiated continuity rather than rupture. The expropriations on Via Massimo D'Azeglio in 1996, carried out to expand Palazzo Massimo's annexes, exemplify this incremental approach. Administrative exchanges among the Ministry, the *Prefettura di Roma*, and law enforcement agencies show the slow but steady convergence of legal and technical instruments to serve museological ends.[941] Likewise, the acquisition of the *Torso Strohl-Fern* in the 1980s (under the provisions of

941 See Idem concerning the planning, coordination, and internal negotiations for the Palazzo Massimo project.

Legge 92/1981) demonstrated the museum's capacity to mobilize existing legislation creatively to secure works of public interest.[942] These episodes attest to a pattern repeated across the period: the MNR's ability to act within bureaucratic constraint without being entirely defined by it.

The methodological approach adopted in this research reveals the value of administrative archives as a lens for understanding museum history. Letters, technical reports, and internal memoranda reveal not only decision-making processes but the mentality of cultural governance itself. The MNR's story shows that the making of a museum is as much an administrative and legal process as it is an architectural or curatorial one. To follow the paper trail of its transformation is to witness how law, policy, and scholarship materialize in institutional form. This perspective connects museology to public administration and demonstrates that the modernization of museums in Italy cannot be separated from the structures of the State that sustain them.

More broadly, this research demonstrates the value of reading museum history through the combined lens of administrative archives and policy analysis. By following the paperwork (laws, decrees, internal notes, correspondence) it becomes possible to reconstruct how museological visions were translated into institutional reality. This approach makes the museum an administrative organism as much as a cultural one, and argues for the importance of integrating public-administration history into museum studies.

Beyond its historical boundaries, the MNR's evolution offers insight into ongoing debates about museum autonomy, accountability, and identity. The questions that emerged between 1981 and 2000 remain relevant: How can a state museum balance the responsibilities of *tutela* with the flexibility required for contemporary cultural management? What forms of autonomy; scientific, administrative, financial are

942 Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 84, fasc. 2, Documentazione relativa all'acquisizione del cosiddetto "Torso Strohl-Fern", incl. perizie tecniche, corrispondenza tra Adriano La Regina, Giuseppe Cellini, Saverio Cacciola, il Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, e il Nucleo Carabinieri Tutela Patrimonio Artistico; atti di vendita, dichiarazioni sostitutive, note di pagamento e inventariazione, 1983–1986.

compatible with public accountability? And how might Italy's recent reforms, particularly those enacted after 2014, fulfill the aspirations first articulated during the MNR's transformation? These issues continue to shape discussions within Italian museology and cultural policy, suggesting that the MNR's history is not a closed chapter but a reference point in a longer institutional dialogue. La Regina frames these questions in starker terms, asking whether museums exist primarily to generate revenue or to provide universal public access to cultural knowledge.[943] The growing emphasis on ticketing income and tourism-driven visibility, he argues, risks transforming cultural heritage from a public good into an economic asset, effectively excluding citizens who cannot afford entrance fees. The tension between tutela and valorizzazione, already evident during the MNR's transformation in the 1980s and 1990s, has intensified as neoliberal governance models position museums as revenue centres rather than as research institutions and civic resources. This is not merely an administrative question but a philosophical one about the fundamental purpose of state museums in democratic society.

By the turn of the millennium, MNR had become both achievement and ongoing experiment. Its architecture, governance, and collections embodied the enduring paradox of Italian museology: a system simultaneously protective and aspirational, juridically rigid yet intellectually flexible. To trace its evolution from 1981 to 2000 is to observe the slow emergence of a new institutional consciousness, one that redefined the museum not as a static guardian of antiquity but as an active participant in the cultural and civic life of Rome.

The lesson from this history is not one of rupture but of adaptation. In the Italian context, modernization has rarely meant dismantling inherited structures; it has meant reinterpreting them.[944] The MNR's story shows that reform proceeds through continuity, through the patient negotiation of law, policy, and vision. Its enduring vitality lies in this very process. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, MNR remained what it had always been: a living institution, both guardian

943 La Regina 2025, p. 48.
944 Carradore, Rech 2024, pp.1089, 1092, 1096–97.

and mirror of the culture that shaped it, a museum whose past continues to illuminate the evolving relationship between heritage, governance, and the public realm.

From today's perspective, the twenty-year arc from 1981 to 2000 reads as both achievement and warning. The MNR succeeded in reconstituting Rome's principal archaeological museum as a networked institution embodying interdisciplinary research, accessibility, and public service. But the same process exposed the chronic fragilities of Italy's cultural administration: dependence on exceptional laws, the volatility of project-based funding, and the absence of a steady framework for staffing and maintenance. Reform delivered spaces and visibility; it did not always deliver stability.

These fragilities have become more acute in recent years. Writing in 2025, Adriano La Regina, the soprintendente who oversaw much of the museum's transformation during the 1980s and 1990s, observed that recent interventions have systematically dismantled key achievements of the earlier period.[945] Crypta Balbi's pioneering urban archaeology displays were closed and removed, the Protostoria section at Terme di Diocleziano was demolished, and the entire four-site structure now faces reorganization under PNRR funding without a clear cultural vision. La Regina's critique highlights a pattern familiar from the Jubilee 2000 experience: the pursuit of rapid expenditure and ceremonial deadlines at the expense of sustained institutional planning. What was built through two decades of patient negotiation risks being undone by projects driven more by budgetary imperatives than by museological coherence.

Theoretically, the MNR's history situates Italy within what Macdonald calls *heritage regimes*, systems where the management of the past becomes a means of negotiating civic futures. The Italian variant privileges adaptation over rupture. Law, bureaucracy, and museography remain interdependent languages, each translating reform into continuity. Within this regime, the museum is not only the product but also the producer of state self-representation: it stabilizes

945 La Regina 2025, pp.44-46.

the narrative of modernization while absorbing the contradictions modernization generates.

The Jubilee also made clear how vulnerable museum planning can be when it depends on exceptional funding cycles. The works completed by 2000 benefited from speed and political visibility, yet the pace proved difficult to sustain once the event had passed. What came out was a familiar rhythm in Rome's cultural administration: rapid concentration of resources followed by the slower, return to ordinary procedures.

As the 2025 Jubilee comes to a close, these lessons regain immediacy. The files from 2000 remind us that cultural mega-events can catalyse investment but cannot substitute for structural reform. What endures are systems, not spectacles. The challenge ahead is to convert cyclical visibility into lasting institutional capacity, to ensure that curatorial ambition keeps pace with maintenance, and that governance sustains the infrastructures it celebrates. The history traced here suggests that Italy's museums modernize not by abandoning tradition but by reinterpreting it, patiently, through law, negotiation, and civic imagination. The MNR's trajectory from 1981 to 2000 remains, in that sense, a living document: a record of reform as endurance, and of heritage as the medium through which the State learns, again and again, to see itself.

Looking back, the Jubilee year symbolizes the culmination and a point of departure.[946] It brought long-standing tensions into sharper focus: between preservation and access, scholarship and publicity[947], autonomy and oversight.[948] It also marked the moment when the museum's place in Rome became something to be actively negotiated, both with the city and with an increasingly global audience.[949]

946 d'Albergo, Moini 2007, pp. 382–402.
947 Filippi 2000, pp.7–15.
948 Montella 2001, pp.303-326; Casini 2011,pp.1–3, 19–27; Bertacchini 2013 ,pp.267–284.
949 Manacorda 2001,pp. 7–13; Wiseman 2001,pp.235–236.

APPENDIX

Chapter I

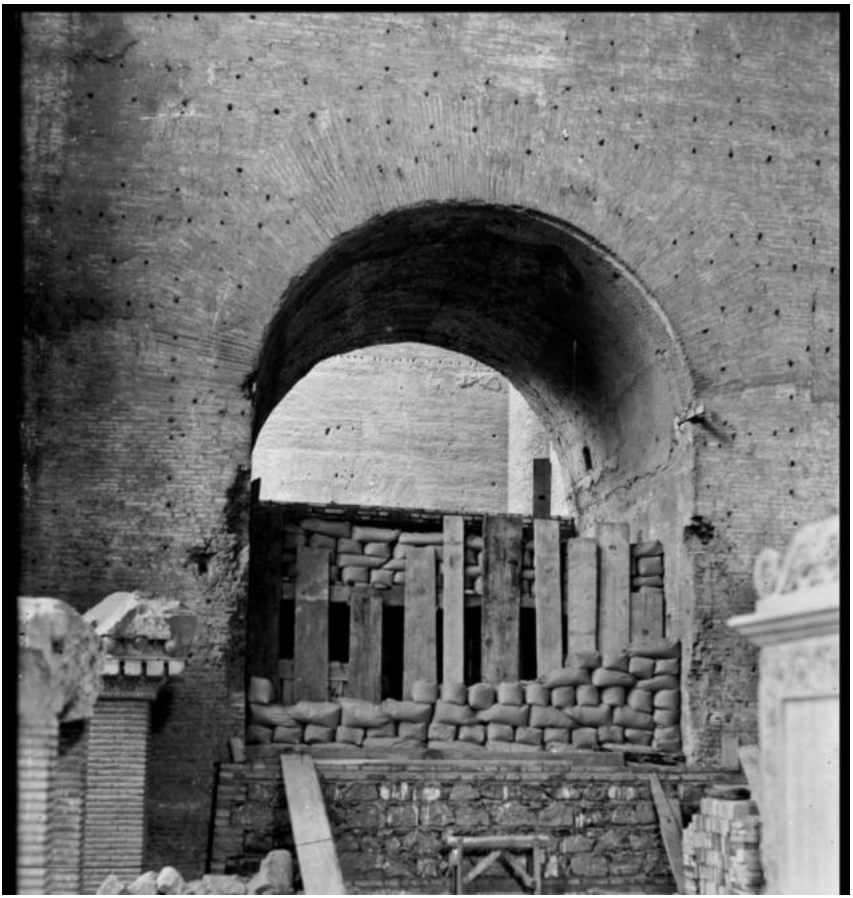
1. Museo Nazionale Romano. “Nel luglio 1944 il Museo Nazionale Romano restava un’istituzione inaccessibile ma, non per questo, abbandonata a sé stessa.” *Facebook*, 28 April, 2025.



2. Museo Nazionale Romano, Photo Archive.
Photograph dated 29 January 1943 showing a large hoist lowering a crate to be transferred along with others already prepared; published on Instagram on 2 December 2021.



3. Museo Nazionale Romano, photograph showing how the wide passage arches between the Grandi Aule were walled up to create tall protective compartments. Source: Museo Nazionale Romano, *Instagram post*, 25 April 2023.



4. Museo Nazionale Romano, "Un istante di vita del Chiostro di Michelangelo negli anni del dopoguerra." *Instagram post,* 9 June 2025.



5. Major Events in Italy and Europe (1970–2001) Influencing Cultural Policy and the Museo Nazionale Romano

Date/ Year	**Event**	**Significance for Cultural Policy and MNR**
16 November 1972	Adoption of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention	Established the international framework for the protection of cultural and natural heritage, influencing Italy's policy on conservation and heritage management.
1974 - 1975	Creation of *Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali* (Presidential Decree No. 657/1974; Legge n. 5 del 29 gennaio 1975)	Created Italy's first Ministry for Cultural Heritage, unifying duties from other ministries and shaping the framework in which the MNR operated.
1975	Publication of the final reports of *Commissione Franceschini*	Codified the notion of *bene culturale* as archaeological, artistic, and environmental heritage, forming the conceptual basis of modern Italian cultural policy.
8 August 1977	Legge n. 512/1977 regulating the alienation and export of cultural property	Strengthened state control over the export and sale of artworks and antiquities, directly affecting acquisition and loan

		policies of national museums.
2 October 1978	Ratification of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Illicit Export of Cultural Property (Law No. 873/1978)	Reinforced Italy's commitment to international cooperation in the protection of antiquities, providing legal backing to museum provenance practices.
23 November 1980	Irpinia earthquake and subsequent Legge 219/1981 for reconstruction	Exposed the vulnerability of Italy's heritage and led to state interventions in cultural restoration, influencing later emergency management policies.
26 April 1981	Legge n. 92/1981 (*Interventi urgenti per la tutela del patrimonio archeologico di Roma e Ostia Antica*)	Allocated extraordinary funding for archaeological excavations, expropriations, and museum projects in Rome and Ostia; directly supported activities of MNR during the 1980s.
8 August 1985	Legge n. 431/1985 (Legge Galasso) on landscape protection	Extended protection measures to landscapes and archaeological zones, environmental and cultural conservation.

17 February 1987	Signing of the Single European Act	Introduced cooperation on culture and heritage within the European Community.
1987	Launch of the *Progetto Finalizzato Beni Culturali* by the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR)	Promoted technological innovation in heritage documentation and research, anticipating digitisation efforts later implemented at the MNR.
9 November 1989	Fall of the Berlin Wall	A new phase of European cultural collaboration and exchange starts.
15 December 1990	*Legge Speciale per Roma* (Legge n. 396/1990, *Interventi per Roma, capitale della Repubblica*)	Recognised Rome's status as capital and established mechanisms for urban and cultural investment, including restoration and museum projects linked to the Jubilee 2000.
7 Febrary 1992	Maastricht Treaty	Introduced culture as an EU competence (Art. 128), providing new frameworks for heritage funding and cooperation involving Italian institutions.
14 January 1993	Legge n. 4/1993 (Legge Ronchey)	Allowed museum services to be managed by private operators, modernising administration and finance

		in state museums.
1996	Final expropriation and acquisition procedures for Palazzo Massimo	The completion of the new MNR headquarters and reorganisation of its collections.
15 March 1997	Legge n. 59/1997 (Legge Bassanini) and implementing decrees	Introduced administrative simplification and decentralisation, reshaping the relationship between central ministries and local offices.
31 March 1998	Legislative Decree n. 112/1998 (Conferimento di funzioni e compiti amministrativi dello Stato alle Regioni e agli Enti Locali)	Transferred selected state competences in culture to regional and local authorities, redefining governance structures for national museums.
20 October 1998	Legislative Decree n. 368/1998 establishing the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (MiBAC)	Reorganised the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali and created a unified institution responsible for cultural heritage
June 1999	Launch of the European Union *Culture 2000* Programme	Provided a funding for transnational cultural projects and museum cooperation across member states.

2000	The Great Jubilee	Led to extensive restoration and urban improvement works in Rome, increasing visibility and access to state museums.
18 October 2001	Constitutional Legge n. 3/2001 reforming Article 117 of the Constitution	Gave regions shared legislative powers in cultural matters, changing how the state and regions manage heritage.

Chapter II

6. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. *Lettera di trasmissione del decreto ministeriale per l'immissione tra i beni del Demanio della zona archeologica delle Terme di Diocleziano.* Rome, 1 Jan. 1987. *Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma*, b. 85, fasc. 5, stanza 4.

Ministerial Decree Recognising the Archaeological Zone of Via Parigi (adjacent to the Terme di Diocleziano) *(Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, n.d. [c. 1980s])*

This decree, issued by the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, extends legal protection under *Legge 1089/1939* to archaeological remains discovered beneath the pavement of Via Parigi, immediately west of the Terme di Diocleziano complex. The protected area, shown in red on the attached plan, borders the museum precinct and lies within the administrative jurisdiction of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. The text in the correspondence below recognises the remains as being of particular interest for their documentation of successive construction phases within a dense urban nucleus.

Although not referring explicitly to MNR, the decree reflects the same network of ministerial oversight and local archaeological management that governed the museum's operations during the 1980s. Together with the map, it illustrates how the perimeter of protected ground around the Terme Diocleziano expanded through the application of *Legge 1089/1939*, reaffirming the integration of urban archaeology into the museum's immediate environment.

MODULARIO UCBC - 151

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali

UFFICIO CENTRALE PER I BENI AMBIENTALI, ARCHITETTONICI, ARCHEOLOGICI, ARTISTICI E STORICI

IV Divisione

Prot. N.° 15 Allegati %

W F

Arch. Tomassetti
Arch. Giuliani

MOD. 1

Roma, MINISTERO DELLE FINANZE
DIREZIONE GENERALE DEL DEMANIO

Al ROMA

Risposta al Foglio del Div. Sez. N.°

OGGETTO: **ROMA - Terme di Diocleziano - Immissione tra i beni del Demanio.**

e, p.c. AL SOPRINTENDENTE PER I BENI ARCHEOLOGICI DI ROMA

Si trasmette, per gli ulteriori adempimenti, una copia conforme del provvedimento ministeriale in data con il quale l'immobile in oggetto, a norma dell'art. 822 C.C., viene sottoposto alle disposizioni della legge 1/6/1939, n. 1089, sulla tutela delle cose di interesse artistico o storico.

Altra copia dell'atto di cui trattasi viene inviata, per opportuna conoscenza, al Soprintendente in indirizzo.

IL DIRETTORE DELLA DIVISIONE

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA ROMA
14 GEN. 1987
PROT. 314
POSIZ. FASC.

/dm

MINUTA

Torrei Mandrin

02. MAR. 1988

19

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA
Di ROMA
PIAZZA DI S. MARIA NOVA, 53 - I 00186 ROMA
TEL. 6786325 - 6790333, TELEX 621407 SARMNR I

Prot. N° 868 Allegati

All Signor Prof. Dr.E.Berger
Antikenmuseum Basel und Samalung Ludwig
ST.Albangraben 5,
CH - 4051 BASEL

Risposta al Foglio del
Div. Sez. N°

OGGETTO: Basilea- Museo dell' Antichità - Prestito per esposizione temporanea, del Torso di Pentesilea del Museo Nazionale Romano (inv.n.108363).3 Maggio-3 Novembre 1988.

e.p.c.
Al Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali
Ufficio Centrale per i Beni A.A.A.A.S.
Div.VII
R O M A

In riferimento alla sua richiesta di proroga per il prestito in oggetto, si comunica che, per quanto di nostra competenza, abbiamo già inoltrato parere favorevole all'Ufficio Centrale del Ministero per l'autorizzazione.

Si informa che tuttavia il prestito non potrà superare il limite di sei mesi stabilito per legge, pertanto può essere concesso fino al termine massimo del 3 Novembre 1988.

Si ritiene comunque indispensabile aumentare il valore assicurativo dell'opera a £.200.000.000, in considerazione di una necessaria rivalutazione.

Inoltre si ritiene opportuno l'accompagnamento dell''opera da parte di un funzionario, per assistere a tutte le fasi relative all'arrivo, alle sistemazione e, successivamente, al ritorno della scultura.

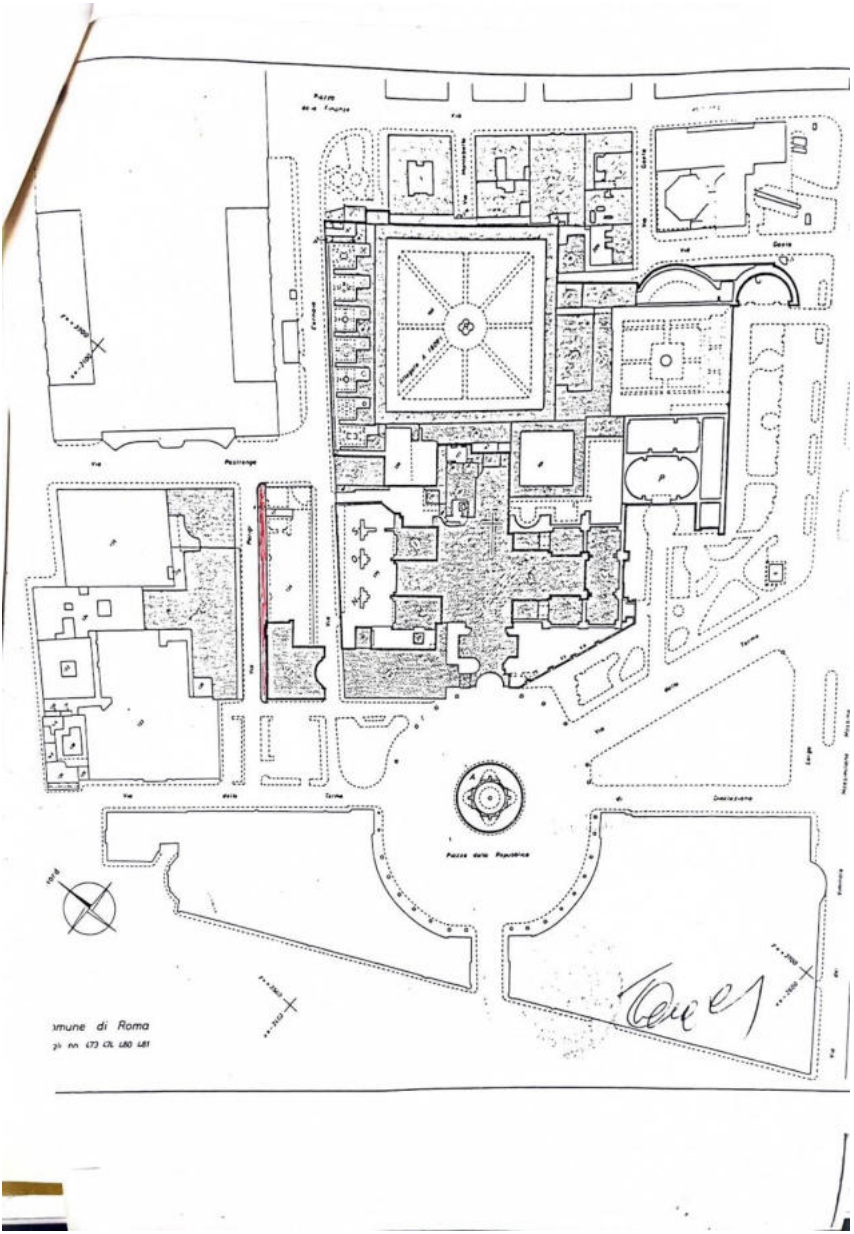
Si ringrazia dell'attenzione e si rimane in attesa di cortese ed urgente riscontro in relazione agli ultimi accordi da definire.

IL SOPRINTENDENTE
Adriano La Regina

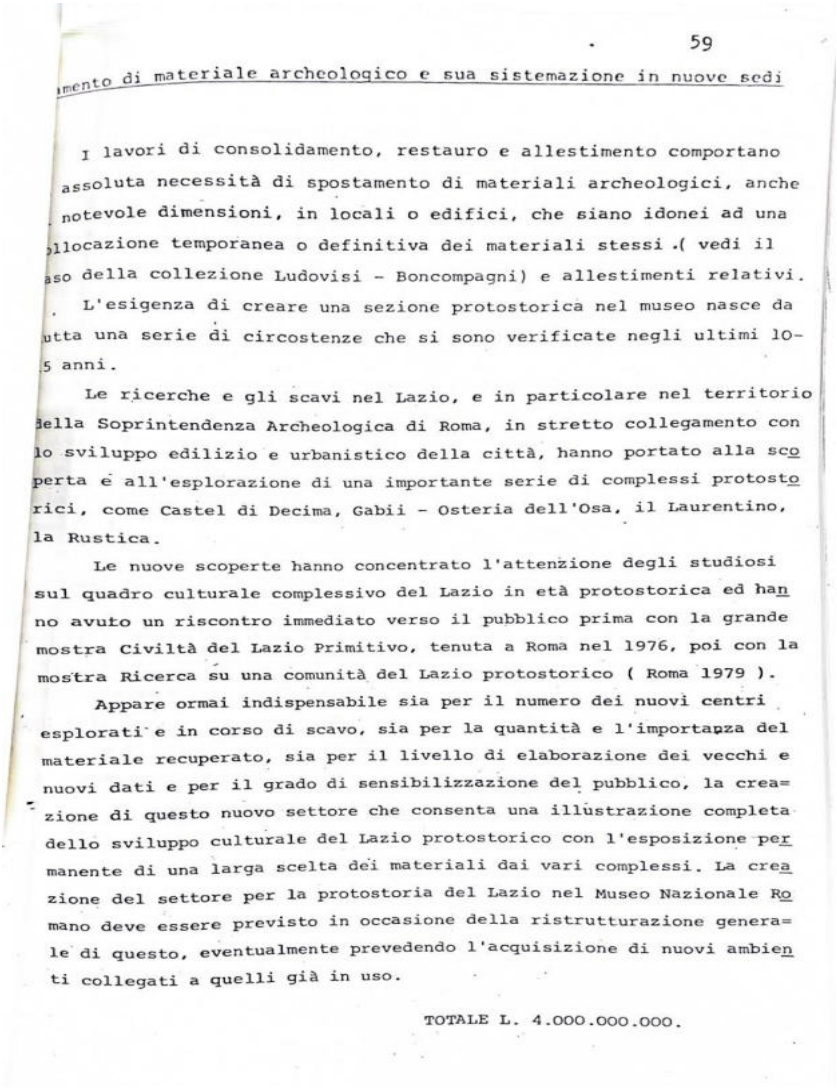
MRDM/DAC/af

MRDM DAC

3.7.1.1


Piazza della Repubblica
Comune di Roma

7. La Regina, Adriano. "Interventi Urgenti per la Protezione e per la Valorizzazione del Patrimonio Archeologico di Roma." November 1, 1980. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 60, fasc. 5, p. 59.



59

imento di materiale archeologico e sua sistemazione in nuove sedi

I lavori di consolidamento, restauro e allestimento comportano assoluta necessità di spostamento di materiali archeologici, anche notevole dimensioni, in locali o edifici, che siano idonei ad una ollocazione temporanea o definitiva dei materiali stessi .(vedi il aso della collezione Ludovisi - Boncompagni) e allestimenti relativi.

L'esigenza di creare una sezione protostorica nel museo nasce da utta una serie di circostenze che si sono verificate negli ultimi 10-5 anni.

Le ricerche e gli scavi nel Lazio, e in particolare nel territorio della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, in stretto collegamento con lo sviluppo edilizio e urbanistico della città, hanno portato alla scoperta e all'esplorazione di una importante serie di complessi protostorici, come Castel di Decima, Gabii - Osteria dell'Osa, il Laurentino, la Rustica.

Le nuove scoperte hanno concentrato l'attenzione degli studiosi sul quadro culturale complessivo del Lazio in età protostorica ed hanno avuto un riscontro immediato verso il pubblico prima con la grande mostra Civiltà del Lazio Primitivo, tenuta a Roma nel 1976, poi con la mostra Ricerca su una comunità del Lazio protostorico (Roma 1979).

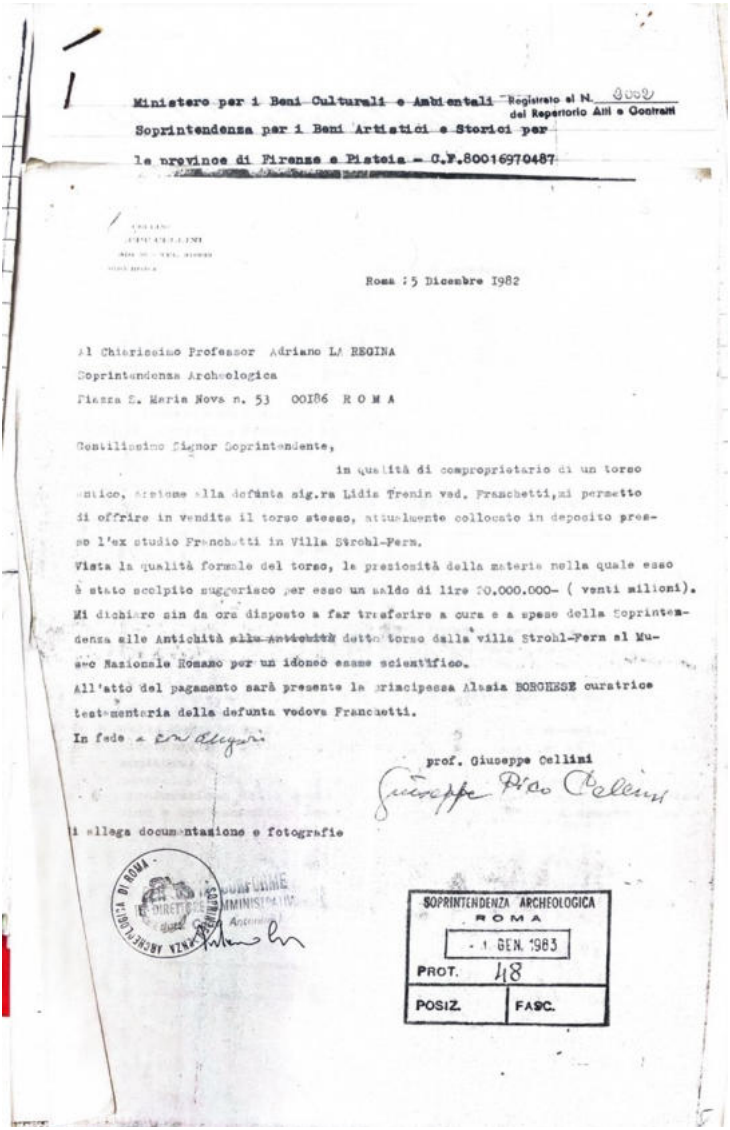
Appare ormai indispensabile sia per il numero dei nuovi centri esplorati e in corso di scavo, sia per la quantità e l'importanza del materiale recuperato, sia per il livello di elaborazione dei vecchi e nuovi dati e per il grado di sensibilizzazione del pubblico, la creazione di questo nuovo settore che consenta una illustrazione completa dello sviluppo culturale del Lazio protostorico con l'esposizione permanente di una larga scelta dei materiali dai vari complessi. La creazione del settore per la protostoria del Lazio nel Museo Nazionale Romano deve essere previsto in occasione della ristrutturazione generale di questo, eventualmente prevedendo l'acquisizione di nuovi ambienti collegati a quelli già in uso.

TOTALE L. 4.000.000.000.

8. Documents Relating to the Acquisition of the Torso “Strohl-Fern” (1982–1986)

The following documents, preserved in the Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma (Busta 84, fasc. 2), trace the administrative and legal steps that led to the State acquisition of the torso known as “Strohl-Fern,” later inventoried as MNR inv. 371281. They reflect the sequence of valuation, ministerial authorization, contractual formalization, and final payment.

Lettera di Giuseppe Pio Cellini ad Adriano La Regina, *5 Dec. 1982*, prot. 48 (1 Jan. 1983).



Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali — Registrato al N. 9009 del Repertorio Atti e Contratti

Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici per

le province di Firenze e Pistoia — C.F.80016970487

Roma : 5 Dicembre 1982

Al Chiarissimo Professor Adriano LA REGINA
Soprintendenza Archeologica
Piazza S. Maria Nova n. 53 00186 R O M A

Gentilissimo Signor Soprintendente,

in qualità di comproprietario di un torso antico, aggiunse alla defunta sig.ra Lidia Trenin ved. Franchetti, mi permetto di offrire in vendita il torso stesso, attualmente collocato in deposito presso l'ex studio Franchetti in Villa Strohl-Fern.

Vista la qualità formale del torso, la preziosità della materia nella quale esso è stato scolpito suggerisco per esso un saldo di lire 20.000.000- (venti milioni).

Mi dichiaro sin da ora disposto a far trasferire a cura e a spese della Soprintendenza alle Antichità ~~alle Antichità~~ detto torso dalla villa Strohl-Fern al Museo Nazionale Romano per un idoneo esame scientifico.

All'atto del pagamento sarà presente la principessa Alessia BORGHESE curatrice testamentaria della defunta vedova Franchetti.

In fede

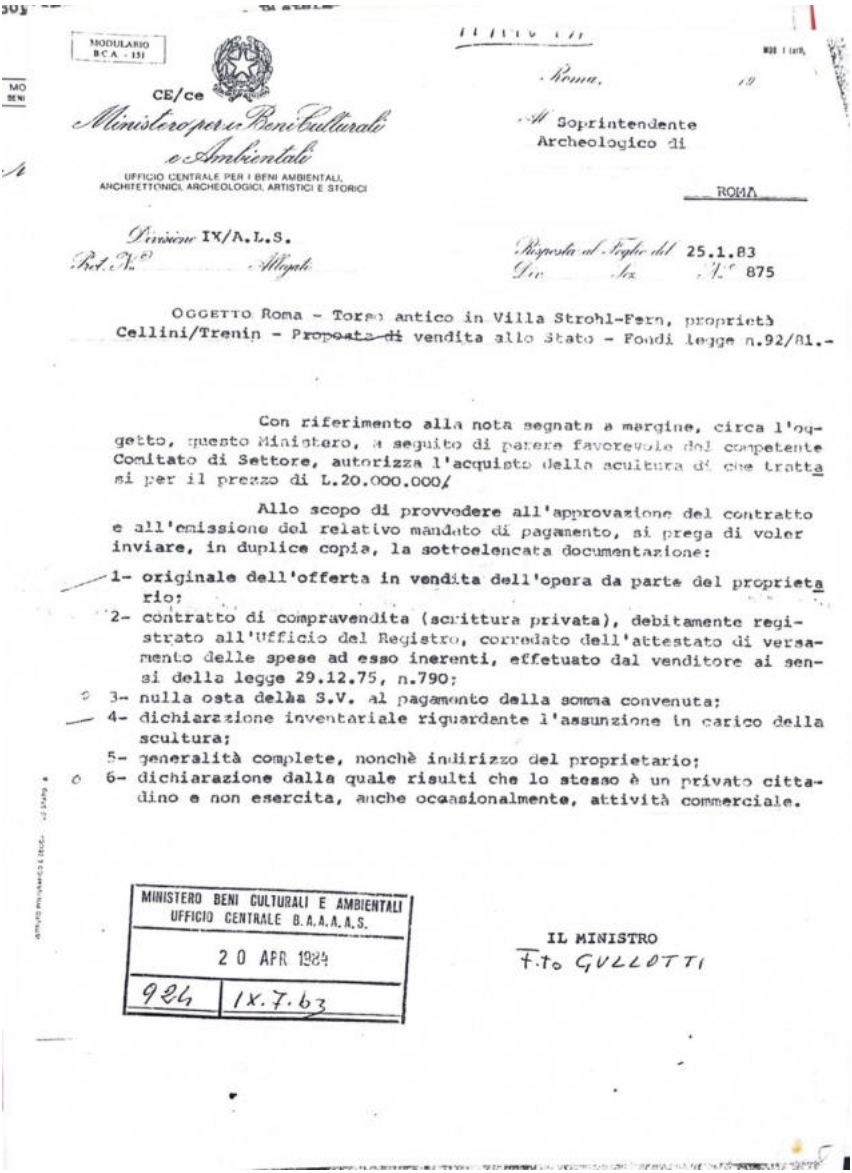
prof. Giuseppe Cellini

Giuseppe Pio Cellini

Si allega documentazione e fotografie

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA
ROMA
- 1 GEN. 1983
PROT. 48
POSIZ. FASC.

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali. Autorizzazione all'acquisto di un torso antico in Villa Strohl-Fern, proprietà Cellini/Trenin. Prot. 875, 20 Apr. 1984.



MODULARIO BCA - 151

CE/ce

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali

UFFICIO CENTRALE PER I BENI AMBIENTALI, ARCHITETTONICI, ARCHEOLOGICI, ARTISTICI E STORICI

Roma, 19

Al Soprintendente Archeologico di

ROMA

Divisione IX/A.L.S.

Prot. N.° Allegati

Risposta al Foglio del 25.1.83 Div. Sez. N.° 875

OGGETTO Roma - Torso antico in Villa Strohl-Fern, proprietà Cellini/Trenin - ~~Proposta di~~ vendita allo Stato - Fondi legge n.92/81.-

Con riferimento alla nota segnata a margine, circa l'oggetto, questo Ministero, a seguito di parere favorevole del competente Comitato di Settore, autorizza l'acquisto della scultura di che trattasi per il prezzo di L.20.000.000/

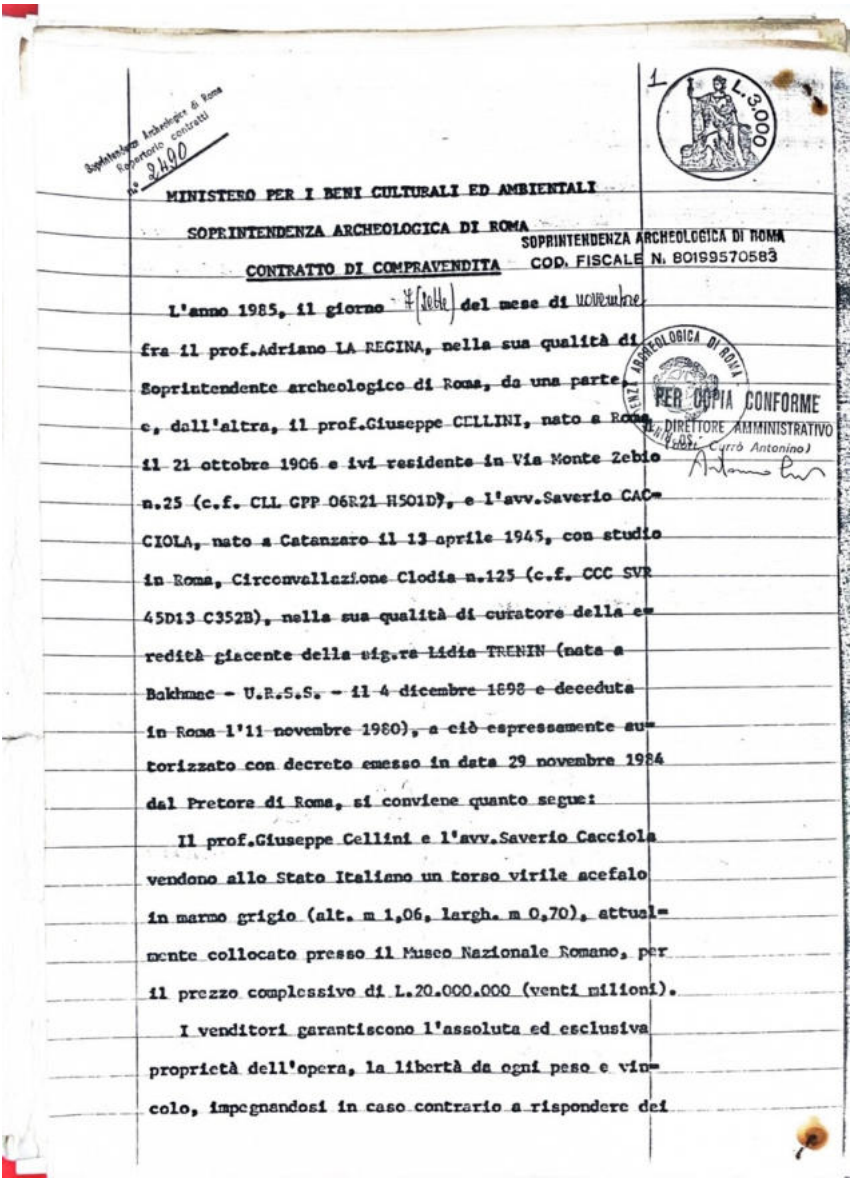
Allo scopo di provvedere all'approvazione del contratto e all'emissione del relativo mandato di pagamento, si prega di voler inviare, in duplice copia, la sottoelencata documentazione:

1- originale dell'offerta in vendita dell'opera da parte del proprietario;
2- contratto di compravendita (scrittura privata), debitamente registrato all'Ufficio del Registro, corredato dell'attestato di versamento delle spese ad esso inerenti, effetuato dal venditore ai sensi della legge 29.12.75, n.790;
3- nulla osta della S.V. al pagamento della somma convenuta;
4- dichiarazione inventariale riguardante l'assunzione in carico della scultura;
5- generalità complete, nonchè indirizzo del proprietario;
6- dichiarazione dalla quale risulti che lo stesso è un privato cittadino e non esercita, anche occasionalmente, attività commerciale.

MINISTERO BENI CULTURALI E AMBIENTALI
UFFICIO CENTRALE B.A.A.A.A.S.
20 APR 1984
924 IX.7.63

IL MINISTRO
F.to GULLOTTI

Contratto di compravendita per l'acquisto di un torso virile acefalo in marmo grigio (La Regina, Cellini, Cacciola), 20 Nov. 1985.



Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma
Repertorio contratti
n° 2490

1

L. 3.000

MINISTERO PER I BENI CULTURALI ED AMBIENTALI

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA
COD. FISCALE N. 80199570583

CONTRATTO DI COMPRAVENDITA

L'anno 1985, il giorno 4 (dieci) del mese di novembre fra il prof.Adriano LA REGINA, nella sua qualità di Soprintendente archeologico di Roma, da una parte, e, dall'altra, il prof.Giuseppe CELLINI, nato a Roma il 21 ottobre 1906 e ivi residente in Via Monte Zebio n.25 (c.f. CLL GPP 06R21 H501D), e l'avv.Saverio CACCIOLA, nato a Catanzaro il 13 aprile 1945, con studio in Roma, Circonvallazione Clodia n.125 (c.f. CCC SVR 45D13 C352B), nella sua qualità di curatore della eredità giacente della sig.ra Lidia TRENIN (nata a Bakhmac - U.R.S.S. - il 4 dicembre 1898 e deceduta in Roma l'11 novembre 1980), a ciò espressamente autorizzato con decreto emesso in data 29 novembre 1984 dal Pretore di Roma, si conviene quanto segue:

Il prof.Giuseppe Cellini e l'avv.Saverio Cacciola vendono allo Stato Italiano un torso virile acefalo in marmo grigio (alt. m 1,06, largh. m 0,70), attualmente collocato presso il Museo Nazionale Romano, per il prezzo complessivo di L.20.000.000 (venti milioni).

I venditori garantiscono l'assoluta ed esclusiva proprietà dell'opera, la libertà da ogni peso e vincolo, impegnandosi in caso contrario a rispondere dei

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA
PER COPIA CONFORME
IL DIRETTORE AMMINISTRATIVO
(dott. Carrà Antonino)

danni.

Il prof.Adriano La Regina, a ciò autorizzato con nota n.924 del 20 aprile 1984 dal Ministero Beni Culturali ed Ambientali, Ufficio Centrale Beni AAAA e S., Div.IX ALS, dichiara di acquistare per conto dello Stato Italiano la predetta opera.

Il presente contratto, mentre ha fin da questo momento valore impegnativo per gli alienanti, non sarà obbligatorio per l'Amministrazione dello Stato, se non dopo le prescritte approvazioni.

Il presente contratto, redatto in carta legale, verrà registrato.

Tutte le spese del presente atto, nessuna esclusa ed eccettuata, sono a carico della parte venditrice.

Fatto in quadruplice esemplare, letto e sottoscritto il giorno, mese ed anno di cui sopra.

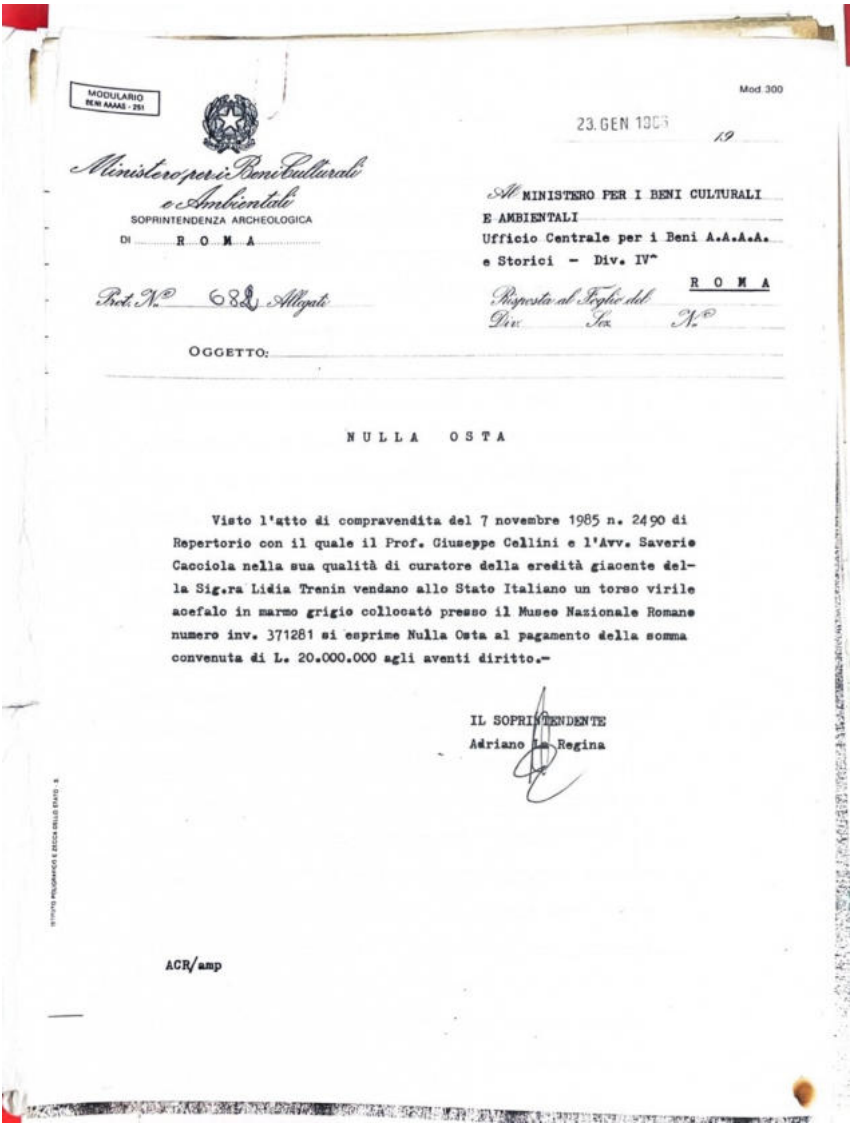
Il Soprintendente:

Gli alienanti:

PER COPIA CONFORME
IL DIRETTORE AMMINISTRATIVO

UFFICIO DEL REGISTRO ATTI PRIVATI ROMA
L'ORIGINALE DELLA SCRITTURA REGISTRATA
AL N. 52880/C
IL DIRETTORE
(Dr. Salvatore Salmari)
ADDI
(data del bollo a calendario)

Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. *Nulla osta al pagamento per il torso virile acefalo in marmo grigio, inv. 371281.* Prot. 628, 23 Jan. 1986.



MODULARIO
BENI AAAAS - 251

Mod. 300

23 GEN 1986

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali
SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA
DI ROMA

Prot. N.° 628 Allegati

Risposta al Foglio del
Div. Sez. N.°

Al MINISTERO PER I BENI CULTURALI
E AMBIENTALI
Ufficio Centrale per i Beni A.A.A.A.
e Storici - Div. IV°
ROMA

OGGETTO:

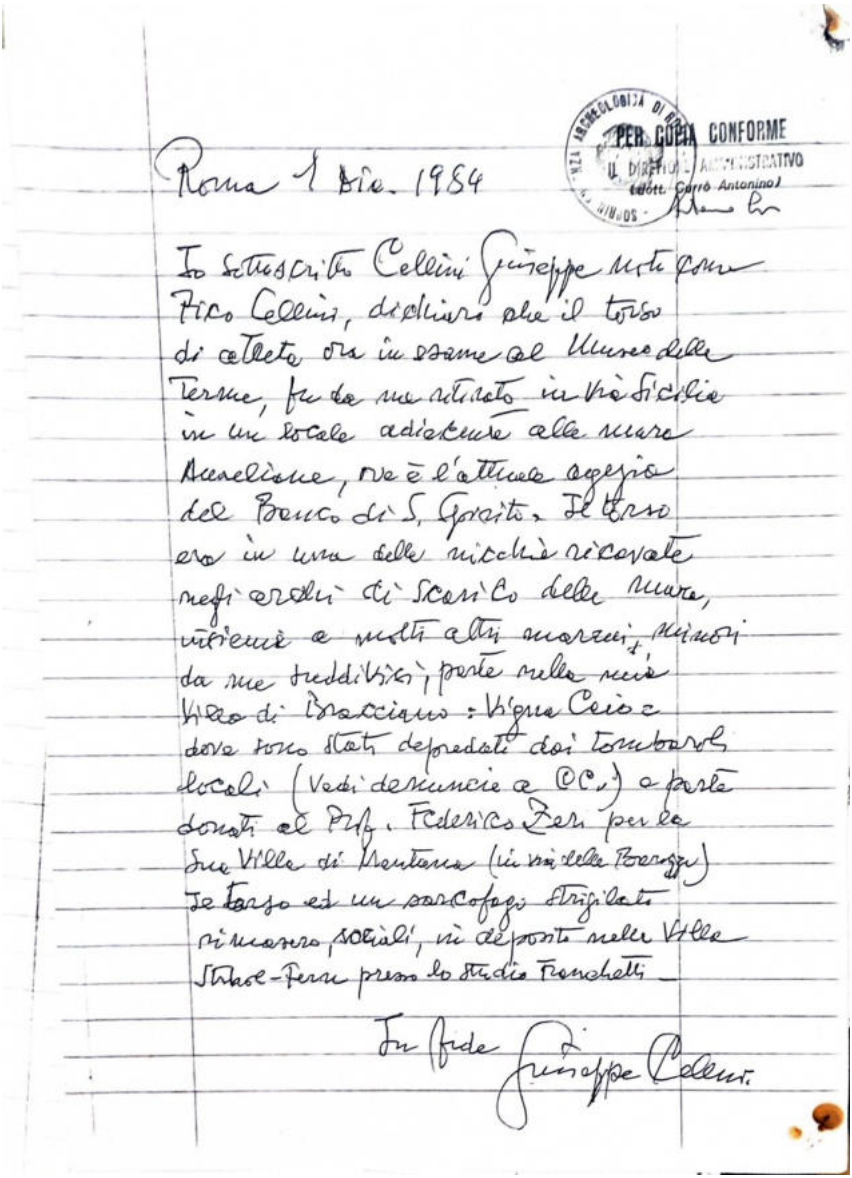
NULLA OSTA

Visto l'atto di compravendita del 7 novembre 1985 n. 2490 di Repertorio con il quale il Prof. Giuseppe Collini e l'Avv. Saverio Cacciola nella sua qualità di curatore della eredità giacente della Sig.ra Lidia Trenin vendano allo Stato Italiano un torso virile acefalo in marmo grigio collocato presso il Museo Nazionale Romano numero inv. 371281 si esprime Nulla Osta al pagamento della somma convenuta di L. 20.000.000 agli aventi diritto.-

IL SOPRINTENDENTE
Adriano La Regina

ACR/amp

Cellini, Giuseppe. Handwritten declaration concerning the provenance and storage of the Torso Strohl-Fern. 1 Dec. 1984.



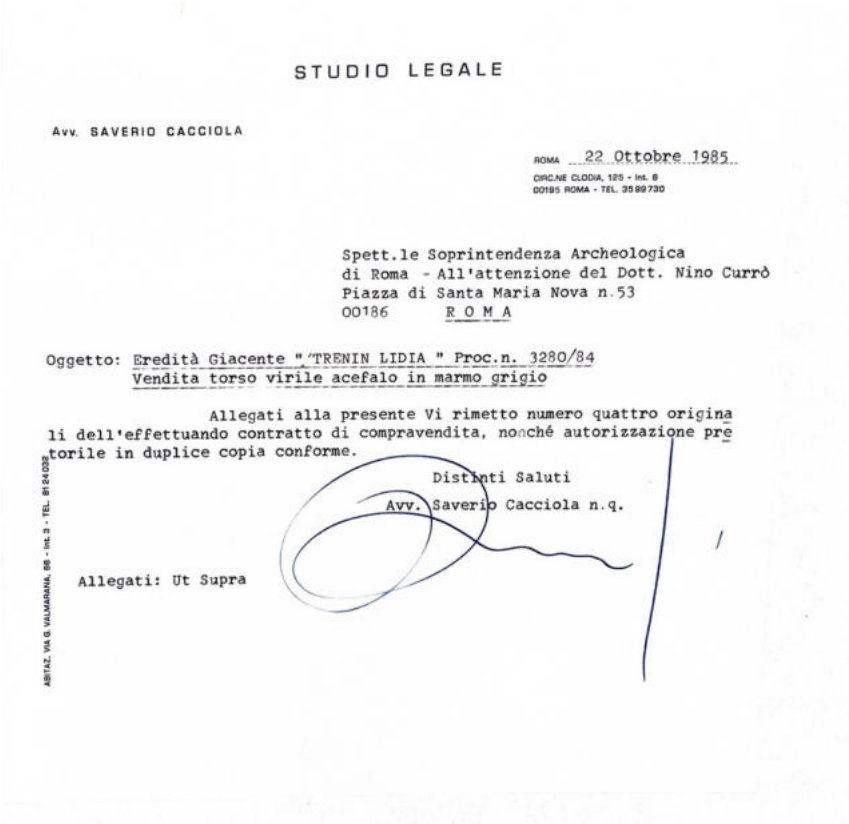
Roma 1 Dic. 1984

PER COPIA CONFORME
IL DIRETTORE AMMINISTRATIVO
(dott. Carlo Antonino)

Io sottoscritto Cellini Giuseppe noto come Pico Cellini, dichiaro che il torso di atleta ora in esame al Museo delle Terme, fu da me ritrovato in via Sicilia in un locale adiacente alle mura Aureliane, ove è l'attuale ingresso del Banco di S. Spirito. Il torso era in una delle nicchie ricavate nei fornici di scarico delle mura, unitamente a molti altri marmi, minori da me suddivisi, parte nella mia Villa di Bracciano: Vigna Cerio e dove sono stati depredati dai tombaroli locali (vedi denuncia a CC.) e parte donati al Prof. Federico Zeri per la sua Villa di Mentana (in via delle Borgate) Il torso ed un sarcofago strigilato rimasero sociali, in deposito nella Villa Strohl-Fern presso lo studio Franchetti.

In fede Giuseppe Cellini

Cacciola, Saverio. *Letter to the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma transmitting the contract of sale for the Torso Strohl-Fern*. 22 Oct. 1985.



STUDIO LEGALE

Avv. SAVERIO CACCIOLA

ROMA 22 Ottobre 1985

CIRC.NE CLODIA, 125 - Int. 6
00195 ROMA - TEL. 3589730

Spett.le Soprintendenza Archeologica
di Roma - All'attenzione del Dott. Nino Currò
Piazza di Santa Maria Nova n.53
00186 R O M A

Oggetto: Eredità Giacente "TRENIN LIDIA" Proc.n. 3280/84
Vendita torso virile acefalo in marmo grigio

Allegati alla presente Vi rimetto numero quattro originali dell'effettuando contratto di compravendita, nonché autorizzazione pretorile in duplice copia conforme.

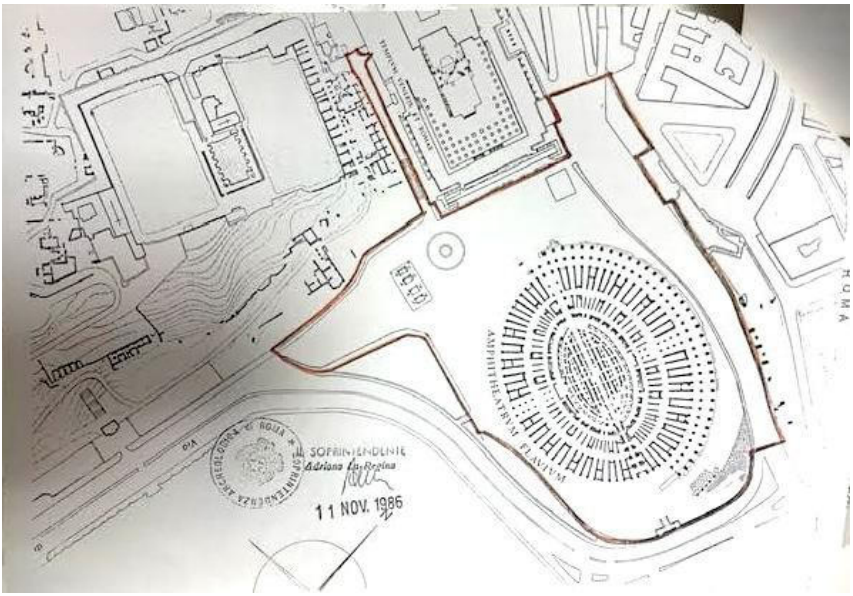
Distinti Saluti

Avv. Saverio Cacciola n.q.

Allegati: Ut Supra

ABITAZ. VIA G. VALMARANA, 66 - Int. 3 - TEL. 8124028

9. Adriano La Regina, "Oggetto: Roma – Colosseo, Arco di Costantino, via Sacra – tutela archeologica (legge 1.6.1939, n. 1089)." Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 11 Novembre 1986. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.

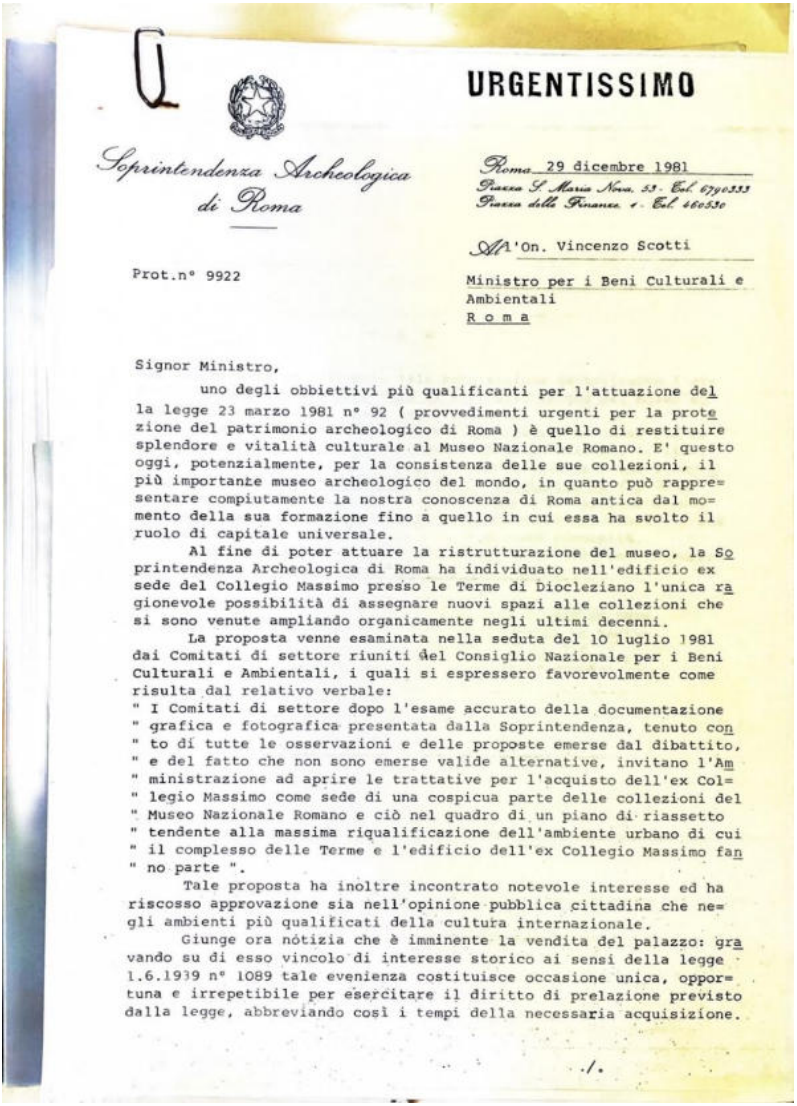


Chapter III

10. Dubourg, Matthew. *Views of the Remains of Ancient Buildings in Rome and Its Vicinity: With a Descriptive and Historical Account of Each Subject.* Plate 25, "The Baths of Dioclesian." London: Printed for J. Taylor, Architectural Library, Holborn, by J. Moyes, Greville Street, 1820. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.



11. La Regina, Adriano. *Lettera all'On. Vincenzo Scotti, Ministro per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali.* 29 dic. 1981. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, Prot. n. 9922. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma.



URGENTISSIMO

Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma

Roma 29 dicembre 1981
Piazza S. Maria Nova, 53 - Tel. 6790333
Piazza della Finanze, 1 - Tel. 460550

All'On. Vincenzo Scotti

Prot.n° 9922

Ministro per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali
R o m a

Signor Ministro,

uno degli obbiettivi più qualificanti per l'attuazione della legge 23 marzo 1981 n° 92 (provvedimenti urgenti per la protezione del patrimonio archeologico di Roma) è quello di restituire splendore e vitalità culturale al Museo Nazionale Romano. E' questo oggi, potenzialmente, per la consistenza delle sue collezioni, il più importante museo archeologico del mondo, in quanto può rappresentare compiutamente la nostra conoscenza di Roma antica dal momento della sua formazione fino a quello in cui essa ha svolto il ruolo di capitale universale.

Al fine di poter attuare la ristrutturazione del museo, la Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma ha individuato nell'edificio ex sede del Collegio Massimo presso le Terme di Diocleziano l'unica ragionevole possibilità di assegnare nuovi spazi alle collezioni che si sono venute ampliando organicamente negli ultimi decenni.

La proposta venne esaminata nella seduta del 10 luglio 1981 dai Comitati di settore riuniti del Consiglio Nazionale per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, i quali si espressero favorevolmente come risulta dal relativo verbale:

" I Comitati di settore dopo l'esame accurato della documentazione
" grafica e fotografica presentata dalla Soprintendenza, tenuto con
" to di tutte le osservazioni e delle proposte emerse dal dibattito,
" e del fatto che non sono emerse valide alternative, invitano l'Am
" ministrazione ad aprire le trattative per l'acquisto dell'ex Col=
" legio Massimo come sede di una cospicua parte delle collezioni del
" Museo Nazionale Romano e ciò nel quadro di un piano di riassetto
" tendente alla massima riqualificazione dell'ambiente urbano di cui
" il complesso delle Terme e l'edificio dell'ex Collegio Massimo fan
" no parte ".

Tale proposta ha inoltre incontrato notevole interesse ed ha riscosso approvazione sia nell'opinione pubblica cittadina che negli ambienti più qualificati della cultura internazionale.

Giunge ora notizia che è imminente la vendita del palazzo: gravando su di esso vincolo di interesse storico ai sensi della legge 1.6.1939 n° 1089 tale evenienza costituisce occasione unica, opportuna e irrepetibile per esercitare il diritto di prelazione previsto dalla legge, abbreviando così i tempi della necessaria acquisizione.

./.

...manze, 1 - Tel. 460530

Al _____

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= 2 =

Ove rapidamente perfezionata tale acquisizione garantirebbe l'attuazione completa del programma di ristrutturazione del Museo entro i termini previsti dalla legge n°92.

A tal fine occorre che nelle disponibilità di cassa per il 1982 il Capitolo 8012 venga incrementato di 30 miliardi di lire.

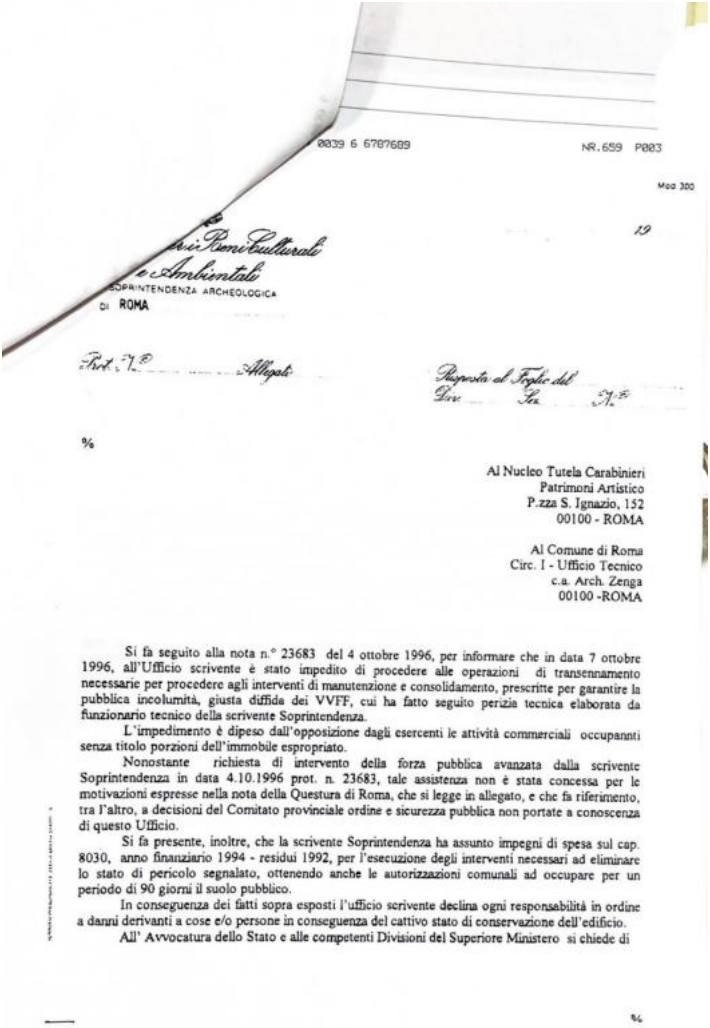
La prego, Signor Ministro, di voler considerare che l'importanza dell'obbiettivo che ci si propone giustifica la rilevanza dell'intervento. L'applicazione della legge n°92 richiede ancora una volta la diretta partecipazione del Ministro del Tesoro, a cui La prego di voler rappresentare questa urgente necessità.

Restando in attesa di conoscere ogni eventuale determinazione, formulo i migliori auguri per il nuovo anno.

IL SOPRINTENDENTE
Adriano La Regina

/cv

12. La Regina, Adriano. *Lettera al Nucleo Tutela Carabinieri e al Comune di Roma riguardante impedimenti alle operazioni di transennamento e alla procedura di esproprio*. 7–9 Oct. 1996. *Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma*, Busta 87, Fasc. 1, Rome.



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Beni Culturali e Ambientali
SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA
DI ROMA

Prot. N.° Allegati

Risposta al Foglio del N.°

%

Al Nucleo Tutela Carabinieri
Patrimoni Artistico
P.zza S. Ignazio, 152
00100 - ROMA

Al Comune di Roma
Circ. I - Ufficio Tecnico
c.a. Arch. Zenga
00100 -ROMA

Si fa seguito alla nota n.° 23683 del 4 ottobre 1996, per informare che in data 7 ottobre 1996, all'Ufficio scrivente è stato impedito di procedere alle operazioni di transennamento necessarie per procedere agli interventi di manutenzione e consolidamento, prescritte per garantire la pubblica incolumità, giusta diffida dei VVFF, cui ha fatto seguito perizia tecnica elaborata da funzionario tecnico della scrivente Soprintendenza.

L'impedimento è dipeso dall'opposizione dagli esercenti le attività commerciali occupanti senza titolo porzioni dell'immobile espropriato.

Nonostante richiesta di intervento della forza pubblica avanzata dalla scrivente Soprintendenza in data 4.10.1996 prot. n. 23683, tale assistenza non è stata concessa per le motivazioni espresse nella nota della Questura di Roma, che si legge in allegato, e che fa riferimento, tra l'altro, a decisioni del Comitato provinciale ordine e sicurezza pubblica non portate a conoscenza di questo Ufficio.

Si fa presente, inoltre, che la scrivente Soprintendenza ha assunto impegni di spesa sul cap. 8030, anno finanziario 1994 - residui 1992, per l'esecuzione degli interventi necessari ad eliminare lo stato di pericolo segnalato, ottenendo anche le autorizzazioni comunali ad occupare per un periodo di 90 giorni il suolo pubblico.

In conseguenza dei fatti sopra esposti l'ufficio scrivente declina ogni responsabilità in ordine a danni derivanti a cose e/o persone in conseguenza del cattivo stato di conservazione dell'edificio.

All' Avvocatura dello Stato e alle competenti Divisioni del Superiore Ministero si chiede di

%

Beni Ambientali
SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA
DI ROMA

Prot. N.° _____ Allegati _____

Risposta al Foglio del _____
Div. _____ Sez. _____ N.° _____

%

chiarire all'Ufficio scrivente e a tutti gli Enti interessati quanto richiesto dalla Questura di Roma circa la sussistenza delle condizioni necessarie per procedere alla completa acquisizione dell'immobile, confermando quanto comunicato per le vie brevi a questo Ufficio circa la piena efficacia ed esecutorietà del provvedimento di esproprio.

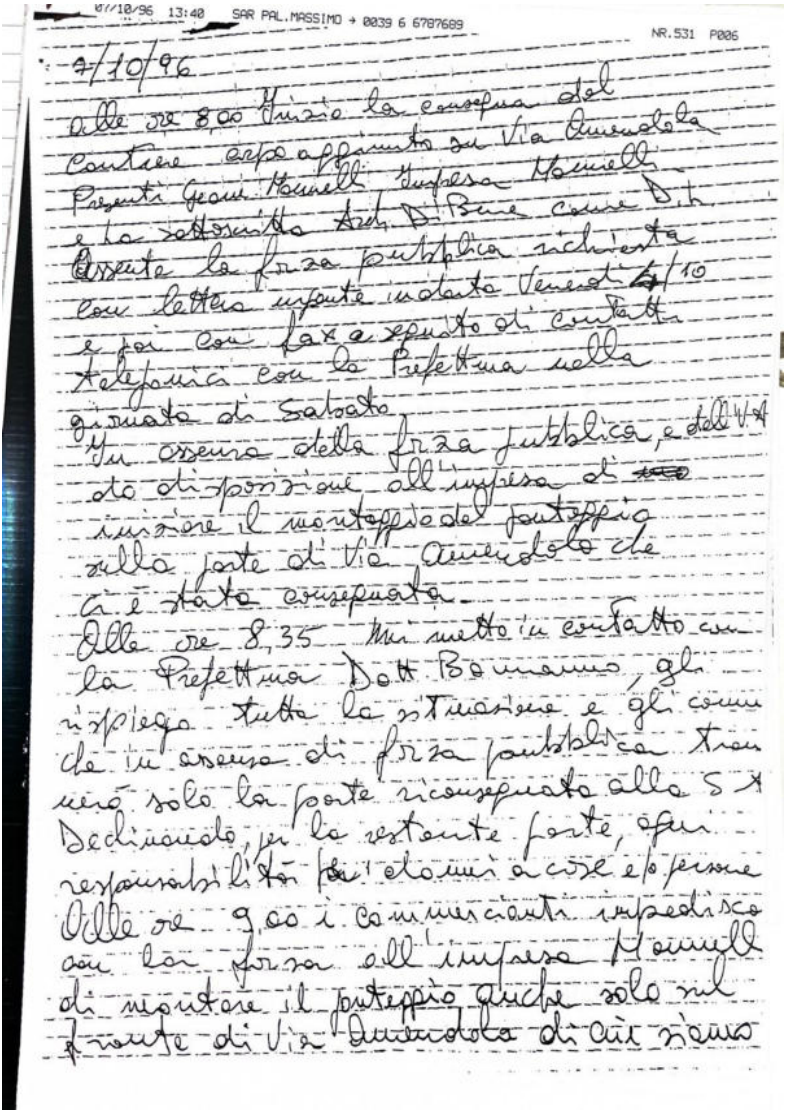
Si comunica la piena disponibilità della scrivente Soprintendenza a partecipare, unitamente a tutti gli Enti in indirizzo, ad un incontro operativo per definire in modo chiaro e definitivo tempi e modalità di esecuzione del provvedimento di esproprio.

Inoltre si fa presente che per le opere necessarie per restaurare l' edificio in oggetto sono state già stanziate, oltre alle somme sopra indicate in merito agli interventi di urgenza, , anche £ 4.500.000.000 sul cap. 8030 A.F. 94, residui '92 , fondi che lo scrivente Ufficio è attualmente impossibilitato ad utilizzare per le ragioni su esposte.

Il Soprintendente
Prof.Adriano La Regina

SBdC/AdB/RAM/cf

13. Di Bene, Arch. "Verbale di sopralluogo, 7 ottobre 1996." Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 87, Fasc. 1. Handwritten field report.


07/10/96 13:40 SAR PAL.MASSIMO → 0039 6 6787689 NR.531 P006

7/10/96

Alle ore 8,00 Inizio la consegna del Cantiere sopra appiantato su Via Quirinale. Presenti Geom. Mannelli Impresa Mannelli e la sottoscritta Arch. Di Bene come D.L. Assente la forza pubblica richiesta con lettera inviata Venerdì 4/10 e poi con fax e seguito di contatto telefonico con la Prefettura nella giornata di Sabato.

Un assenza della forza pubblica, e dell'V.d.d. di disposizione all'impresa di iniziare il montaggio del ponteggio sulla parte di via Quirinale che è stata consegnata.

Alle ore 8,35 mi metto in contatto con la Prefettura Dott Bonanno, gli spiego tutta la situazione e gli comunico che in assenza di forza pubblica non viene solo la parte consegnata alle 8 Declinando, per la restante parte, ogni responsabilità per eventuali cose e/o persone

Alle ore 9,00 il Comune non ha inviato nessuno con la forza all'impresa Mannelli di montare il ponteggio anche solo sul fronte di Via Quirinale di cui viene

07/10/96 13:41 SAR PAL.MASSIMO → 0039 6 6787689 NR.531 P007

entrati in possesso dichiarando di essere i proprietari dell'immobile e che secondo loro non vi sono pericoli di sorta.
Con il Dott. Quici tentiamo di parlare con i commercianti, spiegando la necessità di procedere in quel caso ad una tracciatura temporanea dell'area di pericolo. Spieghiamo che tale esigenza è stata prescritta dai VVFF.
I commercianti ribattiscono (con fare e maniere aggressive) che non vi è assolutamente pericolo, impedendo l'esecuzione delle opere, dietro minacce anche fisiche indirizzate ai funzionari ed operai dell'impresa.
Constatato che non vi è possibilità di procedere all'esecuzione delle opere senza resistenza e senza problemi di ordine pubblico ordino all'Ing. Vera di sospendere i lavori.
Alle ore 9,30 dopo aver ricevuto il FAX della Questura che ci segnala l'assistenza della F.P. contatto telefonicamente la Prefettura, il Dott. De Leo mi comunica che dovremmo discutere un incontro operativo con tutti gli Uffici interessati.

Con il Dott. Amici e la Dott. Battistelli
Loro concordiamo il testo che sarà
inviato alla firma della Dott. Bertolati.

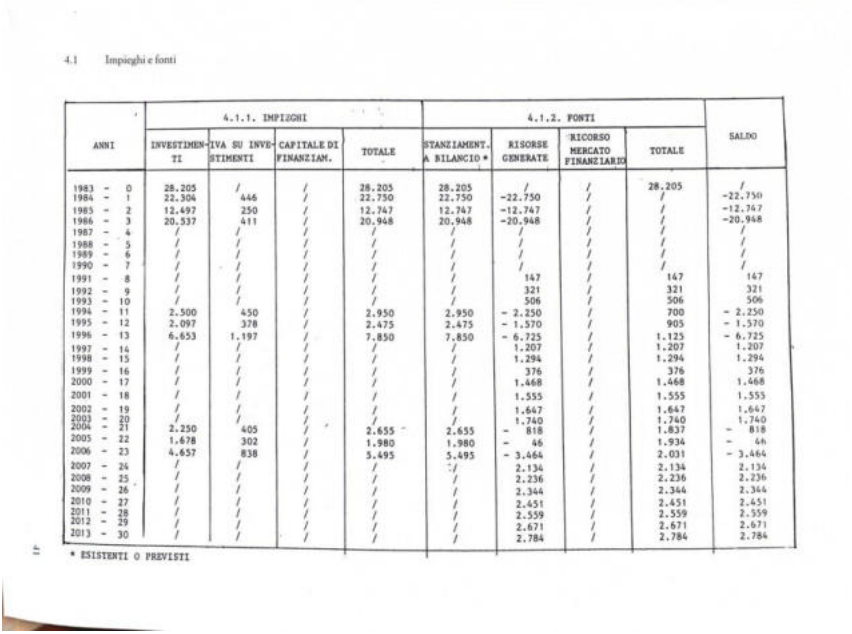
7/10/96 ore 13,00

Giulia Di Bene

Seguirà nota dattiloscritta

Distinti saluti

14. Nuove sedi del Museo Nazionale Romano, Piano Finanziario, 1983, p. 41-43.



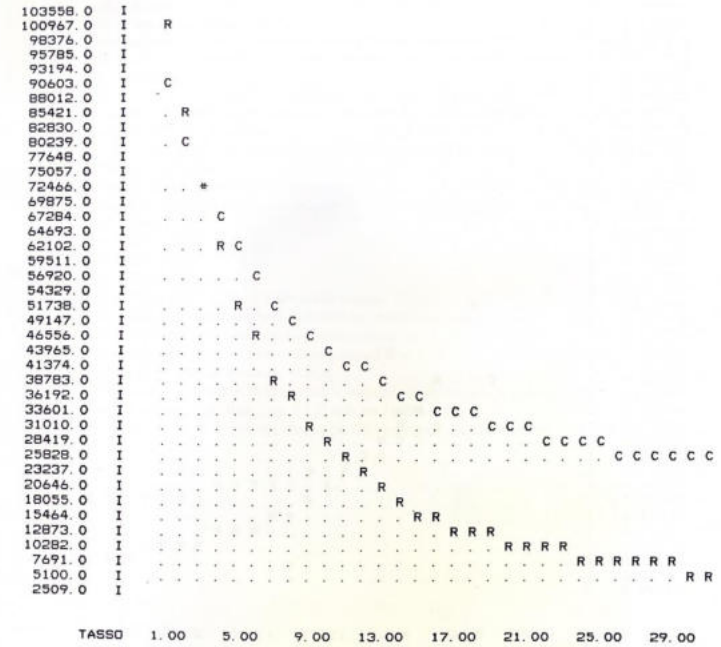
4.1 Impieghi e fonti

ANNI	4.1.1. IMPIEGHI				4.1.2. FONTI				SALDO
	INVESTIMENTI	IVA SU INVESTIMENTI	CAPITALE DI FINANZIAM.	TOTALE	STANZIAMENT. A BILANCIO *	RISORSE GENERATE	RICORSO MERCATO FINANZIARIO	TOTALE	
1983 - 0	28.205	/	/	28.205	28.205	/	/	28.205	/
1984 - 1	22.304	446	/	22.750	22.750	-22.750	/	/	-22.750
1985 - 2	12.497	250	/	12.747	12.747	-12.747	/	/	-12.747
1986 - 3	20.537	411	/	20.948	20.948	-20.948	/	/	-20.948
1987 - 4	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
1988 - 5	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
1989 - 6	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
1990 - 7	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
1991 - 8	/	/	/	/	/	147	/	147	147
1992 - 9	/	/	/	/	/	321	/	321	321
1993 - 10	/	/	/	/	/	506	/	506	506
1994 - 11	2.500	450	/	2.950	2.950	- 2.250	/	700	- 2.250
1995 - 12	2.097	378	/	2.475	2.475	- 1.570	/	905	- 1.570
1996 - 13	6.653	1.197	/	7.850	7.850	- 6.725	/	1.125	- 6.725
1997 - 14	/	/	/	/	/	1.207	/	1.207	1.207
1998 - 15	/	/	/	/	/	1.294	/	1.294	1.294
1999 - 16	/	/	/	/	/	376	/	376	376
2000 - 17	/	/	/	/	/	1.468	/	1.468	1.468
2001 - 18	/	/	/	/	/	1.555	/	1.555	1.555
2002 - 19	/	/	/	/	/	1.647	/	1.647	1.647
2003 - 20	/	/	/	/	/	1.740	/	1.740	1.740
2004 - 21	2.250	405	/	2.655	2.655	- 818	/	1.837	- 818
2005 - 22	1.678	302	/	1.980	1.980	- 46	/	1.934	- 46
2006 - 23	4.657	838	/	5.495	5.495	- 3.464	/	2.031	- 3.464
2007 - 24	/	/	/	/	/	2.134	/	2.134	2.134
2008 - 25	/	/	/	/	/	2.236	/	2.236	2.236
2009 - 26	/	/	/	/	/	2.344	/	2.344	2.344
2010 - 27	/	/	/	/	/	2.451	/	2.451	2.451
2011 - 28	/	/	/	/	/	2.559	/	2.559	2.559
2012 - 29	/	/	/	/	/	2.671	/	2.671	2.671
2013 - 30	/	/	/	/	/	2.784	/	2.784	2.784

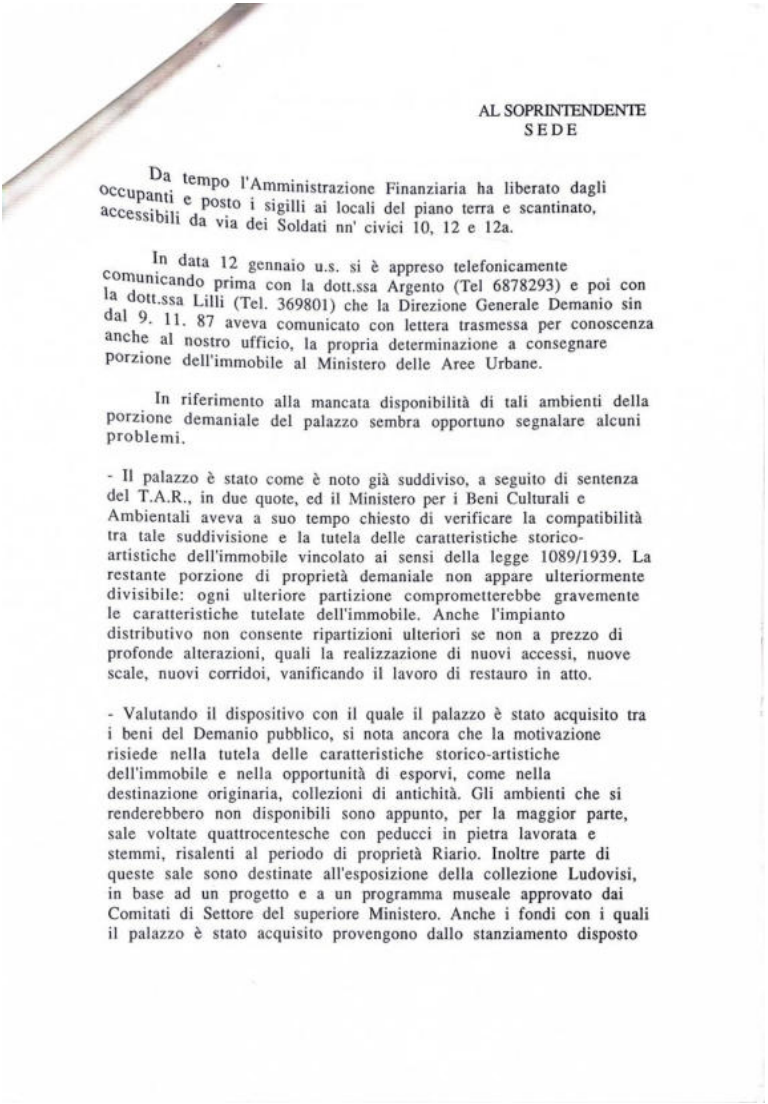
* ESISTENTI O PREVISTI

ANALISI COSTI. BENEFICI – F. I. O. 83: MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO. AN. FINANZIARIA

DIAGRAMMA DEGLI IMPORTI ATTUALIZZATI ALL'ANNO 1



15. Currò, Antonino, and Francesco Scoppola. “Progetto di Restauro e Sicurezza: Palazzo Altemps.” 19 January 1989. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 132, fasc. 11.



AL SOPRINTENDENTE
SEDE

Da tempo l'Amministrazione Finanziaria ha liberato dagli occupanti e posto i sigilli ai locali del piano terra e scantinato, accessibili da via dei Soldati nn' civici 10, 12 e 12a.

In data 12 gennaio u.s. si è appreso telefonicamente comunicando prima con la dott.ssa Argento (Tel 6878293) e poi con la dott.ssa Lilli (Tel. 369801) che la Direzione Generale Demanio sin dal 9. 11. 87 aveva comunicato con lettera trasmessa per conoscenza anche al nostro ufficio, la propria determinazione a consegnare porzione dell'immobile al Ministero delle Aree Urbane.

In riferimento alla mancata disponibilità di tali ambienti della porzione demaniale del palazzo sembra opportuno segnalare alcuni problemi.

- Il palazzo è stato come è noto già suddiviso, a seguito di sentenza del T.A.R., in due quote, ed il Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali aveva a suo tempo chiesto di verificare la compatibilità tra tale suddivisione e la tutela delle caratteristiche storico-artistiche dell'immobile vincolato ai sensi della legge 1089/1939. La restante porzione di proprietà demaniale non appare ulteriormente divisibile: ogni ulteriore partizione comprometterebbe gravemente le caratteristiche tutelate dell'immobile. Anche l'impianto distributivo non consente ripartizioni ulteriori se non a prezzo di profonde alterazioni, quali la realizzazione di nuovi accessi, nuove scale, nuovi corridoi, vanificando il lavoro di restauro in atto.

- Valutando il dispositivo con il quale il palazzo è stato acquisito tra i beni del Demanio pubblico, si nota ancora che la motivazione risiede nella tutela delle caratteristiche storico-artistiche dell'immobile e nella opportunità di esporvi, come nella destinazione originaria, collezioni di antichità. Gli ambienti che si renderebbero non disponibili sono appunto, per la maggior parte, sale voltate quattrocentesche con peducci in pietra lavorata e stemmi, risalenti al periodo di proprietà Riario. Inoltre parte di queste sale sono destinate all'esposizione della collezione Ludovisi, in base ad un progetto e a un programma museale approvato dai Comitati di Settore del superiore Ministero. Anche i fondi con i quali il palazzo è stato acquisito provengono dallo stanziamento disposto

la legge 92/81 e sono destinati alla tutela del patrimonio archeologico della città di Roma.

- A meno che non vi siano i motivi per un ricorso alla deroga, sotto il profilo della normativa urbanistica vigente non risulta possibile destinare la quota del palazzo di cui si tratta ad uffici. Inoltre nel corso dei lavori si è beneficiato di alcune agevolazioni fiscali legate al ripristino della originaria destinazione.

- Sotto il profilo della sicurezza, il progetto di restauro in corso di attuazione è stato sottoposto all'esame dei Vigili del Fuoco. E' stato in tal senso pattuito il ripristino dell'accessibilità di una rampa di una scala rinascimentale caduta in disuso al fine di consentire - in caso di emergenza - una soddisfacente evacuazione rapida dell'immobile anche in assenza della scala esterna (che per le caratteristiche storico artistiche già menzionate, non può in questo caso essere realizzata). Alcuni degli ambienti che non sono stati consegnati a questa Soprintendenza costituiscono proprio il percorso destinato all'evacuazione, oltre che - in condizioni ordinarie - all'accesso degli uffici indipendente dal settore aperto al pubblico e destinato a museo.

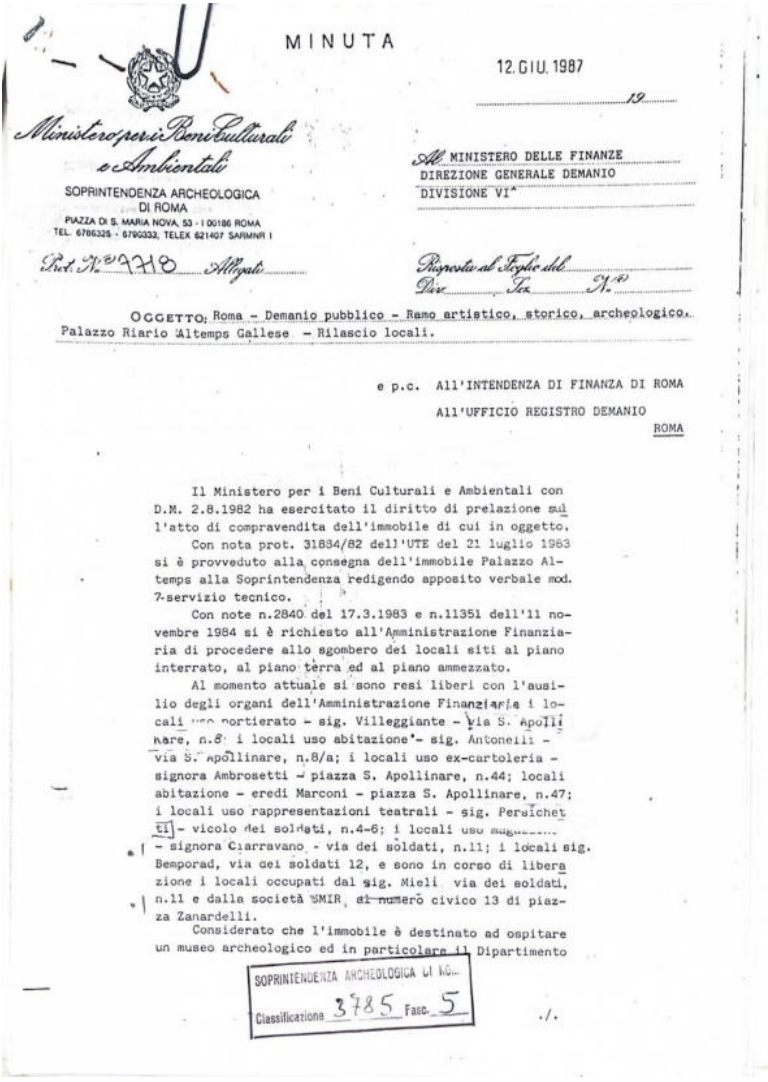
- Sotto il profilo delle opere di restauro avviate e del cantiere in atto si rilevano i rischi derivanti dall'indisponibilità di alcuni ambienti ai quali occorrerebbe con urgenza accedere per effettuare il consolidamento e la bonifica delle volte, delle strutture murarie e delle fondazioni. Dagli ambienti in consegna a questa Soprintendenza, al piano superiore degli ambienti in parola, procedendo dall'alto allo svuotamento dei rinfianchi delle volte si sono registrate lesioni originate da dissesti dell'ordine di alcuni centimetri. Non è assolutamente possibile procedere oltre al successivo consolidamento, in parte già finanziato e approvato, senza puntellare dal basso (cioè dagli ambienti non ancora consegnati) le strutture pericolanti.

Si allegano le planimetrie relative e lo schema di lettera da inviare agli uffici finanziari.

19 gennaio 1989

Dott. Antonino Currò Arch. Francesco Scoppola

16. La Regina, Adriano. "Minuta: Roma – Demanio pubblico – Ramo artistico, storico, archeologico. Palazzo Riario Altemps Gallese – Rilascio locali." 12 June 1987. *Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma*, busta 132, fasc. 11.



MINUTA

12. GIU. 1987

19

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA

PIAZZA DI S. MARIA NOVA, 53 - I 00186 ROMA
TEL. 6786325 - 6790333, TELEX 621407 SAMINR I

Prot. N. 9710 Allegato

All MINISTERO DELLE FINANZE
DIREZIONE GENERALE DEMANIO
DIVISIONE VI^

Risposta al Foglio del
Div. Sez. N.

OGGETTO: Roma - Demanio pubblico - Ramo artistico, storico, archeologico. Palazzo Riario Altemps Gallese - Rilascio locali.

e p.c. All'INTENDENZA DI FINANZA DI ROMA
All'UFFICIO REGISTRO DEMANIO
ROMA

Il Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali con D.M. 2.8.1982 ha esercitato il diritto di prelazione sul l'atto di compravendita dell'immobile di cui in oggetto.

Con nota prot. 31834/82 dell'UTE del 21 luglio 1983 si è provveduto alla consegna dell'immobile Palazzo Altemps alla Soprintendenza redigendo apposito verbale mod. 7-servizio tecnico.

Con note n.2840 del 17.3.1983 e n.11351 dell'11 novembre 1984 si è richiesto all'Amministrazione Finanziaria di procedere allo sgombero dei locali siti al piano interrato, al piano terra ed al piano ammezzato.

Al momento attuale si sono resi liberi con l'ausilio degli organi dell'Amministrazione Finanziaria i locali uso portierato - sig. Villeggiante - via S. Apollinare, n.8; i locali uso abitazione - sig. Antonelli - via S. Apollinare, n.8/a; i locali uso ex-cartoleria - signora Ambrosetti - piazza S. Apollinare, n.44; locali abitazione - eredi Marconi - piazza S. Apollinare, n.47; i locali uso rappresentazioni teatrali - sig. Perulchetti - vicolo dei soldati, n.4-6; i locali uso magazzino - signora Ciarravano - via dei soldati, n.11; i locali sig. Bemporad, via dei soldati 12, e sono in corso di liberazione i locali occupati dal sig. Mieli via dei soldati, n.11 e dalla società SMIR, di numero civico 13 di piazza Zanardelli.

Considerato che l'immobile è destinato ad ospitare un museo archeologico ed in particolare il Dipartimento

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA
Classificazione 3785 Fasc. 5

./.

Beni Culturali
Ambientali

ENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA
DI ROMA
ZA DI S. MARIA NOVA, 53 - I 00186 ROMA
6786325 - 6790333; TELEX 621407 SARMNR I

Prot. N.

Allegati

19

Al

Risposta al Foglio del
Div. Sez. N.

OGGETTO:

della Storia del Collezionismo del Museo Nazionale Romano con la presenza delle collezioni statuarie Altemps - Ludovisi - del Drago nonchè la sezione dei ritratti post-antichi, si rende necessario continuare nell'opera di liberazione dei locali occupati da attività commerciali.

Si segnala in particolare la necessità di attuare lo sgombero dei locali siti al piano terreno, al piano interrato ed al piano ammezzato dello stabile avente accesso dal civico n.45 di piazza S. Apollinare occupati dal sig. Lempredi Dante (Ristorante La Maiella.

La presenza dell'esercizio commerciale impedisce la prosecuzione dei restauri della facciata in quanto rende impossibile operare dall'interno delle iniezioni di malta cementizia causa la presenza all'esterno della cortina di mattoni antica.

Si rende noto che attualmente la cucina del ristorante non è a norma ed affaccia con una finestra nel cortile del Palazzo e che l'area occupata dal ristorante si rende indispensabile per l'apertura al pubblico del museo per essere destinata ad accessi e servizi per i visitatori.

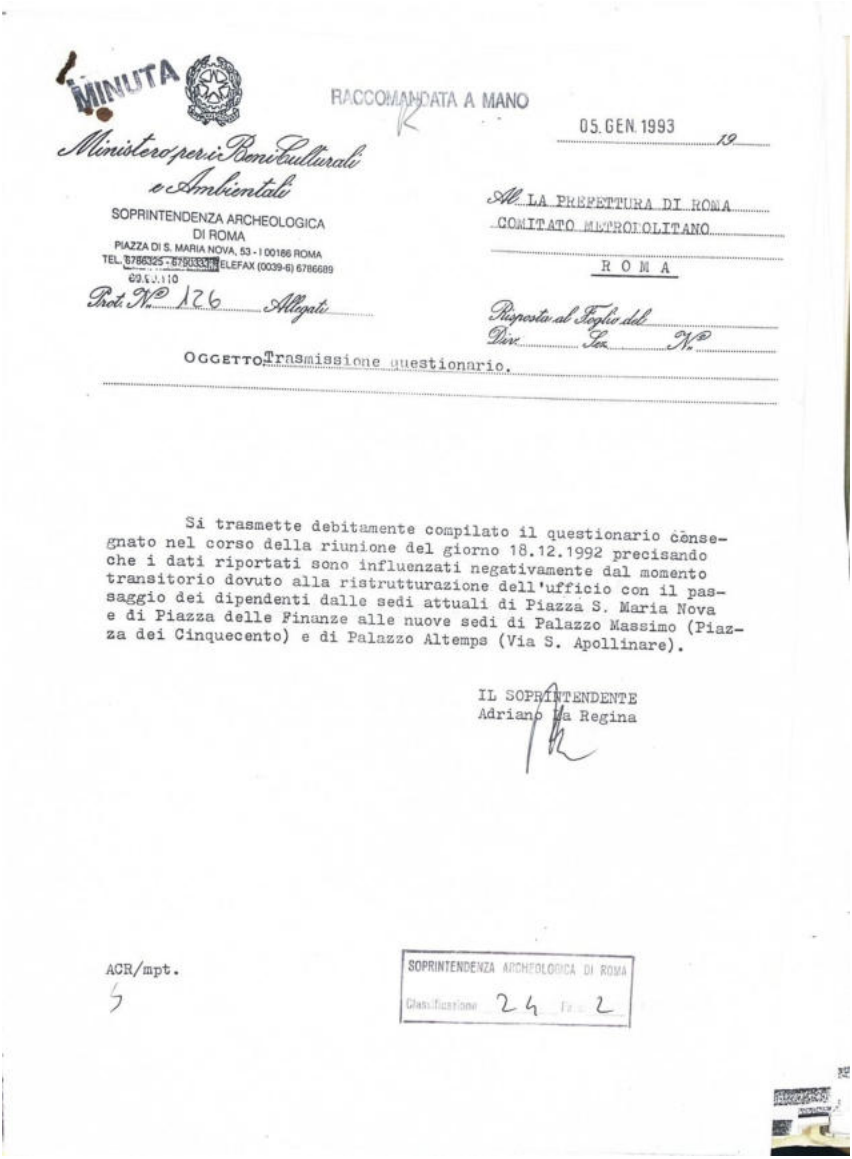
IL SOPRINTENDENTE
Adriano La Regina

ACR/FS/au

17. Photograph of “La Maiella” Restaurant, future museum entrance of Palazzo Altemps, Piazza S. Apollinare, 46, Rome. Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 85, fasc. 5.



18. Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. *Corrispondenza al Prefettura di Roma, Comitato Metropolitano: Trasmissione questionario.* 5 Jan.1993. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, Busta 61, fasc 2.



MINUTA

RACCOMANDATA A MANO

05. GEN. 1993 19

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA
DI ROMA
PIAZZA DI S. MARIA NOVA, 53 - I 00186 ROMA
TEL. 6786325 - 6791333 TELEFAX (0039-6) 6786689
03.1.1.10
Prot. N° 126 Allegati

All. LA PREFETTURA DI ROMA
COMITATO METROPOLITANO
ROMA

Risposta al Foglio del
Div. Sez. N°

OGGETTO: Trasmissione questionario.

Si trasmette debitamente compilato il questionario consegnato nel corso della riunione del giorno 18.12.1992 precisando che i dati riportati sono influenzati negativamente dal momento transitorio dovuto alla ristrutturazione dell'ufficio con il passaggio dei dipendenti dalle sedi attuali di Piazza S. Maria Nova e di Piazza delle Finanze alle nuove sedi di Palazzo Massimo (Piazza dei Cinquecento) e di Palazzo Altemps (Via S. Apollinare).

IL SOPRINTENDENTE
Adriano La Regina

ACR/mpt.
5

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA
Classificazione 24 Fasc. 2

NOTE METODOLOGICHE PER LA COMPILAZIONE
DEL QUESTIONARIO PROVINCIALE

- Premessa

Il presente questionario consta di tre sezioni contenenti indicatori di natura strutturale ed organizzativa che si ritiene possano consentire una valutazione dell'efficienza dei servizi resi alla cittadinanza su tutto il territorio provinciale.

Dati strutturali - Nella sezione vengono richieste notizie circa:
- dislocazione territoriale dell'Ente
- livello di accessibilità dell'utenza alle strutture che ospitano gli uffici
- adeguatezza delle strutture alle esigenze del personale in servizio e dell'utenza
- funzionalità delle strutture ai fini di un efficace svolgimento dell'attività lavorativa
- notizie circa il numero ed i tempi di apertura degli sportelli al pubblico

Personale - Nella sezione vengono richieste notizie di carattere quantitativo e qualitativo attinenti a:
- organico
- qualificazione e formazione del personale
- servizi a disposizione del personale
- assenteismo

Informatizzazione - Nella sezione vengono richieste notizie circa:
- personale addetto
- attrezzature installate
- utilità dell'informatizzazione ai fini dello snellimento delle procedure

In calce alle principali tematiche vengono richieste sintetiche note illustrative relative alle strategie ed interventi migliorativi intrapresi o allo studio.

A conclusione di ciascuna sezione è stato predisposto un apposito spazio per le considerazioni generali, che costituirà l'indispensabile ausilio per la lettura delle notizie contenute nel questionario e l'imprescindibile completamento del medesimo.

In esso potranno inoltre essere poste all'attenzione ulteriori tematiche attualmente non inserite nel modello di rilevazione.

Al fine di non appesantire il questionario con una serie di dati statistici, per altro rilevabili da altre fonti, sono state richieste principalmente delle valutazioni che, pur nella loro necessaria soggettività, dovranno essere ancorate a parametri quanto più possibile oggettivi.

La valutazione circa l'adeguatezza e l'efficienza degli indicatori pescelti dovrà essere effettuata individuando, nell'apposita tabella, la fascia qualitativa ritenuta più consona (es.: ottimo, adeguato ...)e, nell'ambito di questa, il valore numerico che consenta di meglio graduare il giudizio espresso.

Tale metodologia già sperimentata in altre ricerche permette di operare più agevoli confronti tra le valutazioni.

Avvertenze

Pag. 1 - Per Ente s'intende ogni ufficio decentrato delle Amministrazioni statali e degli Enti pubblici non territoriali avente competenza e responsabilità a livello provinciale o sovraordinato.
L'acquisizione dei dati concernenti gli uffici a competenza sovraprovinciale sarà promossa dalla Prefettura della provincia in cui gli uffici medesimi hanno la sede.
Ciascuno degli enti provinciali dovrà compilare un questionario nel quale verranno riportate globalmente le notizie relative non solo alla propria situazione, ma anche a quella degli uffici dipendenti di livello subprovinciale.
Gli enti a competenza regionale dovranno rappresentare la situazione relativa alle strutture delle quali si servono per esplicare le proprie attività istituzionali.

Pag. 4 - Per sportello si intende la struttura alla quale è previsto istituzionalmente ed in via ordinaria l'accesso del cittadino per la fruizione dei servizi resi dall'Ente. Nel caso in cui la struttura comprenda più punti di ricevimento essi vanno computati nel numero totale.

Pag. 9 - B) Alla voce inerente le attrezzature informatiche, in caso di risposta affermativa, indicare di quali attrezzature si dispone: sistemi centrali di elaborazione, mini-elaboratori, personal-computer, computer portatili, terminali.

GENERALITA': Denominazione dell'Ente:
SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA

SEDI ATTUALI : SEDE PRINCIPALE - P.zza di S. MARIA NOVA n. 53 (PALATINO - FORO ROMANO)
ALTRA SEDE - P.zza DELLE FINANZE n. 1 (MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO)

DATI STRUTTURALI

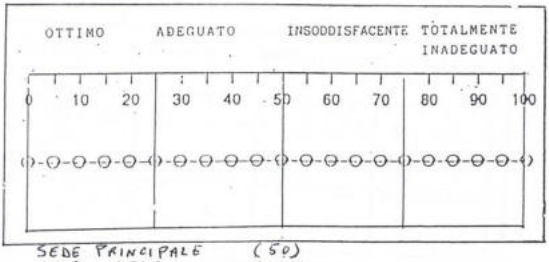
1 - Caratteristiche della struttura:

- L'Ente dispone di sedi distaccate ?
  SI ☒ n .. 1 NO ☐

- La dislocazione sul territorio delle sedi distaccate è ritenuta utile ai fini dell'efficienza dei servizi di competenza?
  SI ☒ NO ☐

2 - Accessibilità alla sede

A) Stato di accessibilità dell'utenza alle strutture (*)



SEDE PRINCIPALE (50)
ALTRA SEDE (10)

(*): Nell'esprime la valutazione si dovranno considerare vari parametri, quali distanza dell'ufficio dalle fermate dei mezzi pubblici, distanza dai parcheggi, disponibilità di posti auto riservati all'utenza.

B) Stato di accessibilità da parte dei portatori di handicap alle strutture (*)



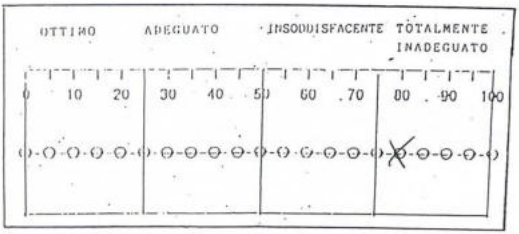
- Strategie ed interventi migliorativi
- È in corso il trasferimento degli uffici della sede del Palatino nella nuova sede di palazzo massimo vicino alla sede di P.zza delle Finanze
- È in corso di completamento una nuova sede a Palazzo Altemps (via S. Apollinare)

3 - Adeguatezza delle strutture in cui collocare momentaneamente gli uffici di P.zza delle Finanze attualmente non adeguate

A) Rapporto fra superficie (**) e personale:

mq/addetto INADEGUATO

B) Valutazione sull'adeguatezza della superficie destinata all'utenza nei luoghi di ricevimento al pubblico



(*): Nell'esprimere le valutazioni si dovranno considerare vari parametri quali la distanza dell'ufficio dalle fermate dei mezzi pubblici, distanza dai parcheggi, disponibilità di posti auto riservati, accessibilità a tutti i piani, servizi igienici appositamente attrezzati.

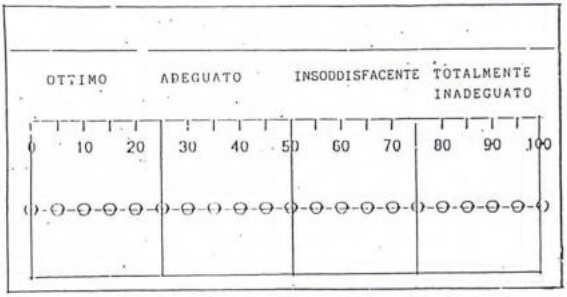
(**): Nel computo si dovrà tener conto esclusivamente dei locali ove è dislocato ed opera stabilmente il personale.

C) Rapporto tra superficie adibita ad archivi e superficie totale (*):
NON ESISTE ATTUALMENTE UN ARCHIVIO CON LE CARATTERISTICHE INDICATE NELLA DESCRIZIONE %

- Strategie ed interventi migliorativi:
SONO LEGATE AL TRASFERIMENTO DEGLI UFFICI NELLE NUOVE SEDI

4 - Funzionalità delle strutture

- Valutazione sullo stato di manutenzione e di funzionamento delle strutture (**)



- Strategie ed interventi migliorativi
SONO LEGATE AL TRASFERIMENTO DEGLI UFFICI NELLE NUOVE SEDI A PALAZZO MASSIMO E PALAZZO ALTEMPS

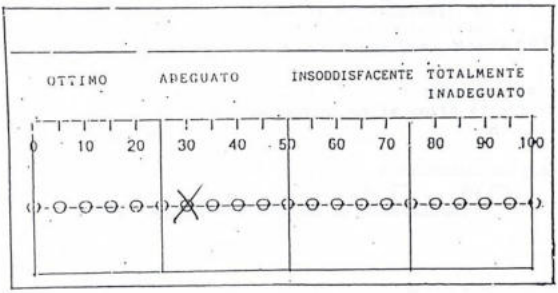
(*) Per archivio si deve intendere il locale ove non sia abitualmente dislocato il personale.
(**) Nell'esprimere la valutazione si dovrà tenere conto di vari elementi quali la salubrità degli uffici, disponibilità dei servizi igienici, arredo degli uffici, ascensori, numero di linee telefoniche, ecc.

5 - Numero totale di sportelli aperti al pubblico n. 2
- di cui informatizzati n. -
- di cui aperti nelle ore pomeridiane n. -

A) Tempi di apertura al pubblico

- numero totale di ore settimanali di apertura al pubblico degli sportelli n. 12
- di cui numero totale di ore settimanali di apertura nelle ore pomeridiane n. -

B) Valutazione dell'adeguatezza dei tempi di apertura al pubblico



- Strategie ed interventi migliorativi
SONO LEGATE AL TRASFERIMENTO NELLE NUOVE SEDI

- Considerazioni generali sugli aspetti strutturali esaminati.
LE ATTUALI SEDI SONO CARENTI SIA DAL PUNTO DI VISTA STRUTTURALE CHE DI SPAZIO IN RAPPORTO AI COMPITI DELLA SOPRINTENDENZA ED AL NUMERO DEL PERSONALE.

P E R S O N A L E

A) Consistenza dell'organico

1 - L'Amministrazione ha provveduto alla determinazione della pianta organica? SI ☒ NO ☐

In caso positivo indicare:
numero delle unità previste in organico n. 550
numero delle unità effettive n. 560

- La pianta organica esistente è ritenuta adeguata?
SI ☐ NO ☒

In caso negativo indicare le motivazioni:
CARENZA DI PERSONALE DEI RUOLI INTERMEDI
CARENZA DI PERSONALE DI CUSTODIA PER I MONUMENTI ED AREE ARCHEOLOGICHE

2 - Nel caso in cui la dotazione organica non sia stata determinata, indicare il numero delle unità effettive addette all'ufficio n. ....

- La dotazione organica effettiva è ritenuta adeguata? SI ☐ NO ☐
In caso negativo indicare le motivazioni:

3 - Di quali profili professionali attualmente non disponibili si avverte l'esigenza?
VEDI PUNTO 1

B) Vengono svolti corsi di formazione, qualificazione ed aggiornamento del personale? SI ☒ NO ☐

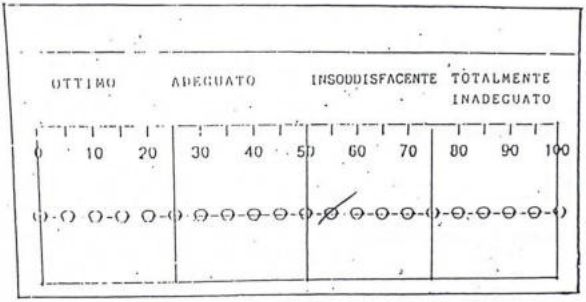
C) Si fa ricorso all'utilizzo di personale per compiti diversi da quelli propri della qualifica rivestita?
SI ☒ NO ☐

In caso affermativo in quale misura:
FREQUENTE ☒ OCCASIONALE ☐

D) Si fa ricorso all'utilizzo della mobilità interna ai fini di una maggiore efficienza dell'azione amministrativa?

SI ☒ NO ☐

E) Grado di motivazione del personale in relazione al lavoro svolto



- Strategie ed interventi migliorativi sui temi A), B), C), D), E)

RICHIESTE AL SUPERIORE MINISTERO DI ADEGUAMENTO DEGLI ORGANICI NELLE QUALIFICHE CARENTI.

F) Servizi per il personale

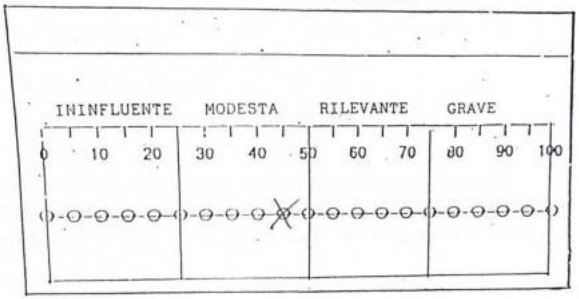
- Esistono servizi a disposizione del personale adiacenti o all'interno della struttura? (mense, asili nido, banche, uffici postali, ecc.)

SI ☐ NO ☒

- Di quali servizi non attualmente disponibili il personale avverte la mancanza:

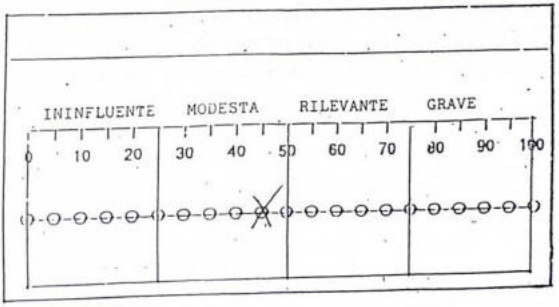
MENSE

G) In quale misura il fenomeno dell'assenteismo incide sull'efficienza dell'azione amministrativa?



H) Tempo impiegato dal personale per raggiungere il posto di lavoro: mediamente meno di 1/2 ora 1,0 %
tra 1/2 ora ed 1 ora 6,0 %
oltre 1 ora 3,0 %

I) Valutazione sul grado di conflittualità sindacale:



- Quali sono i principali motivi di conflittualità?

- ORGANIZZAZIONE DEL LAVORO
- MOBILITA'
- STRAORDINARI

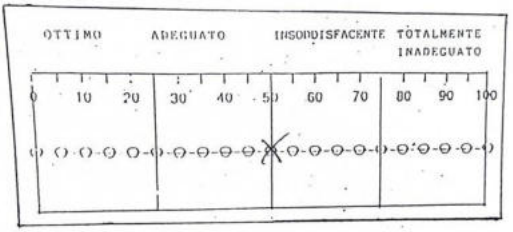
- Strategie ed interventi migliorativi intrapresi (*)
MIGLIORAMENTO DELLE CONDIZIONI DI LAVORO MEDIANTE LA SISTEMAZIONE NELLE NUOVE SEDI.

- Considerazioni generali sulle problematiche inerenti il personale
IL PERSONALE È CARENTE OLTRE CHE NUMERICAMENTE RISPETTO ALLE INCOMBENZE DELL'UFFICIO, ANCHE DAL PUNTO DI VISTA QUALITATIVO IN QUANDO DIVERSE QUALIFICHE, IN MANCANZA DI CONCORSI, SONO RICOPERTE DA PERSONALE DI QUALIFICA INFERIORE NON SEMPRE ADEGUATO.

(*): incentivazione, motivazione del personale, riduzione del fenomeno dell'assenteismo, pendolarismo.

I N F O R M A T I Z Z A Z I O N E

A) Rispondenza del personale informatico alle esigenze della Amministrazione



B) L'Ente dispone di attrezzature informatiche?

SI ☒ NO ☐

Se SI indicare quali:
SISTEMA CENTRALE COLLEGATO CON IL PROVVEDITORATO CON SEDE A PALMER.
ALTEMPS
2 MINI ELABORATORI
PERSONAL-COMPUTERS, UNA DECINA

C) Esistono ostacoli alla completa utilizzazione delle attrezzature informatiche?

SI ☒ NO ☐

Se SI indicare quali (*):
OLTRE CHE PER LE VOCI SOTTOINDICATE NEL QUESTIONARIO
ANCHE PER I PROBLEMI SU ESPOSTI RIGUARDANTI LE SEDI

D) Le attrezzature informatiche installate sono adeguate?

SI ☐ NO ☒

Se No indicare i motivi
E' DA COMPLETARE IL SISTEMA INFORMATICO RIGUARDANTE
L'UFFICIO AMMINISTRATIVO

(*) ☒ carenza di personale qualificato
☒ resistenza del personale all'utilizzo dei sistemi
☒ carenza dei programmi di software
- carenza di manutenzione hardware
- altro

E) Il personale in dotazione è sufficiente per il funzionamento delle attrezzature?

SI ☐ NO ☒

F) L'informatizzazione dei servizi ha favorito lo snellimento delle procedure amministrative?

SI ☒ NO ☐

- Strategie ed interventi migliorativi

IL POTENZIAMENTO DEI SISTEMI INFORMATICI È STRETTAMENTE COLLEGATO AL TRASFERIMENTO DEGLI UFFICI NELLE NUOVE SEDI.

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA

IL SOPRINTENDENTE

19. The Venus of Cyrene

Discovered in 1913 in Cyrene during the Italy-Turkey conflict, the statue was taken to Italy and exhibited at Museo Nazionale Romano. It was displayed in the Octagonal Hall of Terme di Diocleziano, alongside other significant works such as the Apollo Lyceus.

In the 1991 arrangement of the *Aula Ottagona*, the *Statua di Afrodite da Cirene* (Venus of Cyrene) was prominently displayed, emphasizing its historical and artistic significance. Discovered in the northeast corner of the *Piazzale d'Apollo* in Cyrene, (modern-day Libya), dates back to the late Hellenistic period, around the early to mid-1st century BCE and reflects the *anadyomene* type, with distinct variations.[950]

Situated along the periphery of the hall, the *Venus of Cyrene* allowed for close examination of its refined details, including a body tilt toward the supporting leg and the absence of shoulder-length hair, common in other representations of Aphrodite. Its dolphin support, draped with a fringed cloth, subtly alludes to Aphrodite's mythological association with the sea. This placement complemented the surrounding depictions of athletic and divine figures, enhancing the thematic contrast between mortal beauty and heroic masculinity.

The positioning within the Aula Ottagona exhibits the sculpture's stylistic nuances and contextual history, bridging Roman and broader Mediterranean cultural exchanges.

Two years before this 1991 catalog, the environment of skepticism and critical media coverage surrounding the statue was high. Before the Aula Ottagona placement, the statue was in museum storage and a Corriere della Sera article criticized the museum for withholding it from public view. The statue, displayed first in Hall III in the Terme Diocleziano, known as The Great Hall of Masterpieces,[951] in the same hall as the Discobolus Lancellotti (which was restituted to Italy in 1948 and became part of Museo Nazionale Romano's collection in 1953)[952],then moved into storage became a focal point in the debate over

950 Di Mino 1991, p.81.
951 Aurigemma 1963, p. 102.
952 Aurigemma1963, pp. 104-111.

the fate of cultural artifacts. The statue was not displayed in a gallery, but rather stored in the museum's warehouse, packaged in a manner that suggested impermanence and potential for relocation.

In 1989 Libya had sent a formal request for the statue's restitution. To the Italian public, it then became a point of contention when on 12 September 1989, Corriere della Sera printed the article (and posed the public question); "Dove verra' esposta la statua ritrovata a Cirene nel'13 e rivendicata da Gheddafi? Una sede adatta a Venere", which sheds light on this situation, while also reminding the public about the Butrint Goddess head: "L'altro invito degli ambientalisti è quello di «porre la Venere di Cirene in un luogo visibile al pubblico, perché l'attuale collocazione in una cassa dei magazzini può dare l'impressione di provvisorietà e di eventuale trasferimento»."[953]

We know from the 1991 Rotvnda Diocletiani catalog (aforementioned) that the statue was moved to the Aula Ottagona, however Museo Nazionale Romano would eventually go on to lose, as it was restituted back to Libya by 2008. [954] The repatriation in 2008 was a particularly complex case, involving nearly two decades of negotiations and legal disputes between the two countries. Since Libya's first formal request in 1989, it took nearly a decade before an official agreement was reached. A key moment was on 4 July 1998, when Italy and Libya signed a joint declaration in which Italy committed to returning all cultural objects removed during and after the Italian colonial period. This agreement later found legal reinforcement in Article 16.2 of the Treaty of Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation, signed in Benghazi on 30 August 2008,[955] which included provisions for broader reparations related to Italy's colonial occupation of Libya.

953 "Dove verrà esposta la statua ritrovata a Cirene nel '13 e rivendicata da Gheddafi? Una sede adatta a Venere." Corriere della Sera, 12 Sept. 1989, p. 34.

954 In accordance with the "Trattato di Amicizia, Partenariato e Cooperazione" signed in Benghazi on August 30, 2008, by then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Libyan leader Muammar El Gheddafi, and ratified by the Italian Parliament on December 23, 2008, the Venus of Cyrene was officially returned to Libya in a ceremony attended by both leaders. The return of the statue marked an important moment in Italian-Libyan relations, underlining the statue's symbolic, political, and archaeological significance. This event drew significant media attention in Italy.See Cevoli 2011, p.11-34.

955 The Treaty of Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation between the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Republic of Italy was signed on 30 August 2008 and entered into force on 2 March 2009. The treaty, which formalized bilateral relations and addressed historical grievances related to Italian colonial rule, was ratified in Italy through Law no. 7 of 6 February 2009 and published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, no. 40.

Progress toward the statue's restitution gained further momentum during the first meeting of the Committee for Italo-Libyan Partnership, held between 11 and 13 December 2000, where the Venus of Cyrene was officially designated for repatriation. Building on this commitment, on 1 August 2002, the Italian Ministry of Culture (MiC) issued a decree authorizing the removal of the statue from state ownership in preparation for its return to Libya. However, despite these formal steps, the actual restitution was delayed due to legal challenges in the Italian administrative courts.[956] It was not until 30 August 2008, a decade after the initial agreement and following extensive legal disputes, that the Venus of Cyrene was finally repatriated to Libya.

20. Studio Inklink and the Visual Narrative of Crypta Balbi

The musealization of the Crypta Balbi reflects not only the expertise of archaeologists and architects, but also the contributions of designers and technology studios, whose work introduced modern digital and interpretative elements into the museum space. This period coincided with a broader shift in museum practice during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when digital technologies and multimedia interpretation were increasingly embraced as tools to enhance accessibility, engagement, and storytelling.[957] These collaborations represent a broader trend in the development of contemporary archaeological museums, where the integration of technology and design plays a central role in shaping visitor experiences.

956 One of Italy's oldest cultural heritage advocacy organizations, Italia Nostra, challenged the restitution of the Venus of Cyrene in the Regional Administrative Tribunal (TAR) of Lazio, arguing that the statue was part of the inalienable cultural heritage of the state and could not be deaccessioned through a ministerial decree alone. The lawsuit asserted that such a transfer required parliamentary approval and that the statue's connection to Italy's Greco-Roman heritage outweighed any cultural or historical ties to Libya. Furthermore, Italia Nostra expressed concerns that the restitution could set a precedent, potentially leading to further claims and a long-term depletion of Italy's cultural patrimony. However, the Italian courts ultimately upheld the decree, both in first instance (TAR) and on appeal before the Council of State, rejecting the claim. The ruling dismissed the idea that cultural affiliation should be determined exclusively by modern national borders, emphasizing that Libya still possesses a significant Roman heritage and that Hellenistic art had profoundly influenced Islamic artistic traditions. The court also countered concerns about potential future claims by highlighting that Italy itself had suffered cultural losses during World War II, and that recognizing a broader duty to return unlawfully removed objects would, in principle, also benefit Italian claims for restitution, reinforcing a principle of international solidarity in cultural heritage protection.
See: Albano 2007; Visconti 2021, pp. 566–568.

957 See e.g., Hawkey 2004; Müller 2002, pp. 21–33; Reading 2003, pp. 67–85.

In this case, traditional architectural techniques were complemented by innovative approaches that utilized cutting-edge tools to visualize and interpret the complex stratigraphy of the site. Studio InkLink, a Florence-based firm, played a significant role in the musealization of the Crypta Balbi by creating reconstructions that bridge archaeological findings with accessible visual interpretations. As Richard Hodges explains in a 2006 issue of *Minerva* magazine, Studio InkLink's reconstructions are designed to "obtain the three-dimensional scope of a scene or structure" to enhance visitors' understanding of the site's spatial and architectural context.[958] This philosophy is particularly important for a site like the Crypta Balbi, where the layers of history are complex and interwoven, requiring careful visualization to effectively convey the continuity of Rome's urban development. Hodges goes on to explain why this specific studio was chosen:

Studio InkLink is very Italian. Its artistic treatment owes much to the contemporary world of Italian design. Its interpretations are a combination of proficient Italian archaeology and technology blended with a strident Italian sense of the visual. The end result is very different from the visually undemanding and, frequently bland, reconstructions employed by heritage managers of north European sites and museums.[959]

The studio's collaborative methodology, which integrated the expertise of historians, archaeologists, and artists, was essential in the transformation of the Crypta Balbi into a museum space. Hodges notes that their reconstructions include "the three-dimensional skeleton [which] provides the suite of the mass of a monument in its context and is an essential instrument for cut-away glimpses into buildings"[960]. Through these techniques, they provided an in-depth view of the porticus Minucia Frumentaria and other areas of the site, illustrating the evolution of its use from the Imperial Roman period through the Middle Ages. By capturing the shifting functions and meanings of these

958 Hodges 2006, p. 41.
959 Ibid.
960 Ibid.

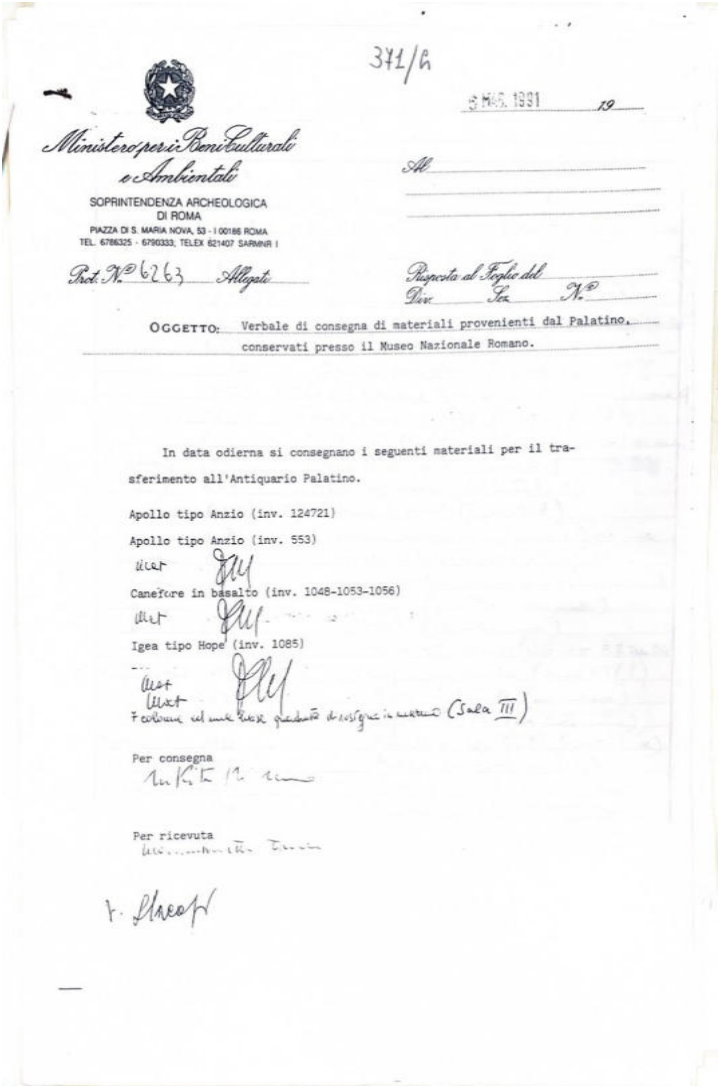
spaces, their work enabled visitors to appreciate the site's historical trajectory more fully.

The reconstructions were not limited to static representations. Their visualizations actively engaged visitors, providing a sense of scale and continuity that would otherwise be difficult to imagine. As Hodges explains, their work "brought a sense of place and scale that visitors would otherwise struggle to imagine"[961]. These visualizations complemented archaeological findings with detailed illustrations and plans, creating a comprehensive narrative that connected the physical remains of the site to broader historical themes.

The innovative approach taken by Studio InkLink connects the vital role of visual media in archaeological interpretation. Their contributions to the Crypta Balbi project demonstrate how reconstruction can transform complex and multi-layered archaeological sites into spaces of education and engagement.

961 Ibid.

21. Di Mino, Maria Rita. *Verbale di consegna*, 6 maggio 1991. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 136, fascicolo 22. Indirizzato a Maria Antonietta Tomei.



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6 MAG. 1991 19

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA
PIAZZA DI S. MARIA NOVA, 53 - I 00186 ROMA
TEL. 6786325 - 6790333, TELEX 621407 SARMNR I

Prot. N° 6263 Allegati

Al

Risposta al Foglio del
Div. Sez. N°

OGGETTO: Verbale di consegna di materiali provenienti dal Palatino, conservati presso il Museo Nazionale Romano.

In data odierna si consegnano i seguenti materiali per il trasferimento all'Antiquario Palatino.

Apollo tipo Anzio (inv. 124721)

Apollo tipo Anzio (inv. 553)

Canefore in basalto (inv. 1048-1053-1056)

Igea tipo Hope (inv. 1085)

Per consegna

Per ricevuta

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N.

	4182	Eros fanciull (latine) (I piano Lud.)
	4184	Testa di gioventù dalle Domus Aug. (I piano Lud)
	4187	Testa Barberini (I piano Lud.
38	Terme 616	Testa giulio-claudia (Ch. Lud. già inv.)
	52651	testa di guerriero elmato (I? Lud. da inv.)
	4346-4349	4 frammenti di fusi f. H.P. dalle cisterne arcaiche
	4354	Antefissa con testa di satiro

CASSE CHIOSTRO LUDOVISI =

X	53	(124721)	testa Apollo —
X	332	(553)	" " —
	41	(618)	" Nerone —
	3	(1119)	testa fanciulla —
X	60	(1085)	" di Igea —
	38	(616)	testa giulio-claudia velata —

da imballare in 5 minuti 2 antefissa + greco dispo Delledn —

ERME (-1° piano Lud.)

RESISTO. MOD. 202-22-R

Frontespizio in sospeso (per motivi di spazio)

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VERBALE DI CONSEGNA

In data odiena si riconsegnano al Palatino, per essere esposti nell'Antiquarium, i seguenti materiali provenienti dal Palatino e attualmente conservati nel Museo nazionale Romano:

inv. n. 56316	Testa di Efebo
" " 4182	Testina di Eros fanciullo
" " 1122	Doppia Erma
" " 4283	Testa di greco morente
" ' 614	Erma bifronte
" " 601	Erma bifronte
" ' 4187	Testa di Doriforo
" " 4184	Testa di giovinetto dalla Domus Augustana
" " 603	Testa di persiano morente
" " 56433	Testa di Afrodite tipo Sosandra
" " 4231	Testa di fanciullo di età gallienica

MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO
(Dott.ssa M. Rita di Mino)

PALATINO
(M.A. Tomei)

SOPRINT ARCH DI ROMA
27 MAG 1991
PROT. N. 7548

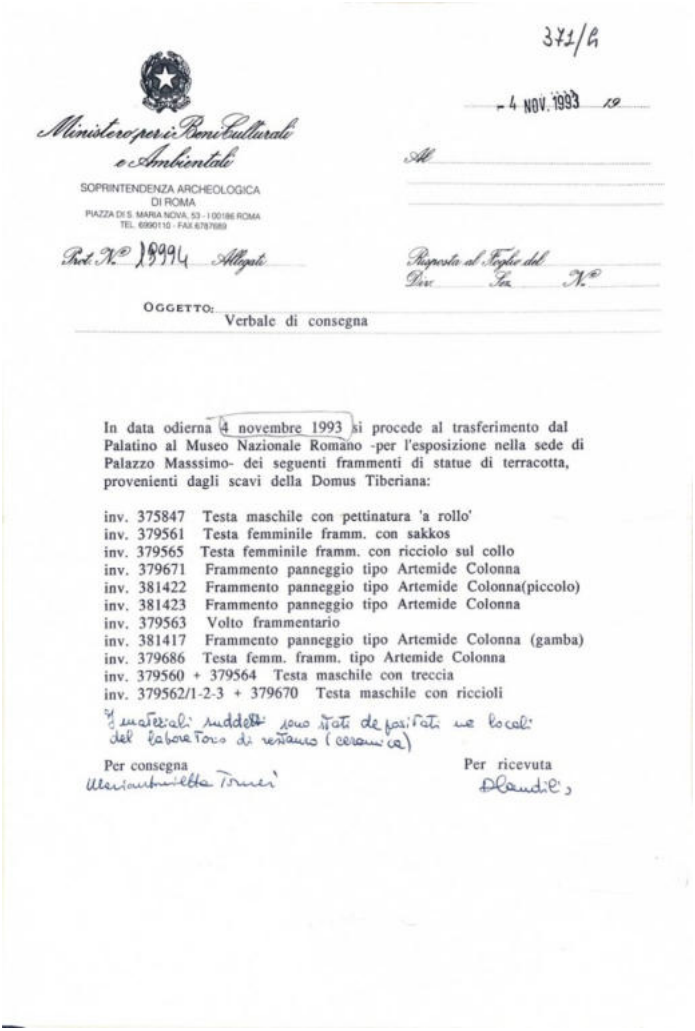
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Materiali del M.N.R. provenienti dal Palatino N.

	56133	Esquilino	(Galleria Ritratti)
	56316	Testa di efebo	(I piano Ludovisi)
5	cassa 124722	Musa seduta	(sala III) restauro - asportiamo
88 -	(cassa) 12697	Muse	(ora inaccessibile)
117	cassa 124696	Danzatrici	(" ")
=53	" " 124721	Apollo tipo Ausonio	(già inac. C.L.)
	4231	Testa ritratto	(Galleria ritratti) Effetti Ns. 336
	4283	giovane morente	(I piano Ludov.)
	4282	Testa di tipo dionisiaco	(magazz. scatt. C.7.2. III
	52563	Erma	(Hermes e Dionisio fanciullo) (ora inaccessibile)
	586	Torsetto femminile	(Chiostro - ala IV)
	138	Tipo Afrodite Landolina	(area x riserva) ora inac.
31	(cassa) 699	Satiro che si guarda le corna	(magazz. scatt. C.7.2. III)
332	(") 553	Apollo tipo Ausonio	(Palazzo Ludovisi)
	601-614 (2)	Erme e frammenti	(I piano Ludovisi)
	603	Persiano morente	(sala IV) ora inac.
6	cassa 12	Musa seduta	(sala III) asportiamo
87	cassa 51	Hera Borghese	(magazzino - ora inaccessibile)
19	" 607	Charis	(magazzino - ora inac.)
41	" 618	Nereide	(Palazzo Ludovisi)
	812	Torsetto virile nudo	(magazz. scatt. C.7.2. III C4
308	(cassa) 1048-1053-1056	Cariatidi in basalto	(sala IV) (?)
	1059	Efebo in basalto	(ora inaccessibile)
	1122	Testa di Erma	(ora inaccessibile)
3	cassa 1119	Fanciulla dello Stadio	(Palazzo Ludovisi)
	1115	Asclepio	(area XI - ora inac.)
60	cassa 1085	Igea tipo Hope	(Palazzo Ludovisi)
86	" " 1219	Antonino Pio	(illegibile)

"RESISTO" MOD. 202-22-R

22. Di Mino, Maria Rita. *Verbale di consegna*, 4 novembre 1993. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, busta 136, fascicolo 22. Indirizzato a Marina Sapelli Ragni.



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– 4 NOV. 1993 19

Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGICA DI ROMA
PIAZZA DI S. MARIA NOVA, 53 - I 00186 ROMA
TEL. 6990110 - FAX 6787989

Prot. N.° 19994 Allegati

Al

Risposta al Foglio del
Div. Sez. N.°

OGGETTO: Verbale di consegna

In data odierna 4 novembre 1993 si procede al trasferimento dal Palatino al Museo Nazionale Romano -per l'esposizione nella sede di Palazzo Masssimo- dei seguenti frammenti di statue di terracotta, provenienti dagli scavi della Domus Tiberiana:

inv. 375847 Testa maschile con pettinatura 'a rollo'
inv. 379561 Testa femminile framm. con sakkos
inv. 379565 Testa femminile framm. con ricciolo sul collo
inv. 379671 Frammento panneggio tipo Artemide Colonna
inv. 381422 Frammento panneggio tipo Artemide Colonna(piccolo)
inv. 381423 Frammento panneggio tipo Artemide Colonna
inv. 379563 Volto frammentario
inv. 381417 Frammento panneggio tipo Artemide Colonna (gamba)
inv. 379686 Testa femm. framm. tipo Artemide Colonna
inv. 379560 + 379564 Testa maschile con treccia
inv. 379562/1-2-3 + 379670 Testa maschile con riccioli

I materiali suddetti sono stati depositati nei locali del laboratorio di restauro (ceramica)

Per consegna
Mariantonietta Tinari

Per ricevuta
Claudia

Chapter IV

23. Repatriation as Political Gesture: The Case of the *Dea di Butrinto*

The *Dea di Butrinto*, or "Goddess of Butrint," is a marble head discovered in 1928 at the archaeological site of Butrint, Albania, by the Italian Archaeological Mission led by Luigi Maria Ugolini. Its excavation marked a defining moment in the Italian exploration of Albania's ancient past, an endeavor embedded in the fascist regime's broader project of cultural imperialism. The mission sought not only to uncover material traces of the Greco-Roman world, but to inscribe Italy's own historical legitimacy through archaeological stewardship beyond its borders.[962] After its discovery, the head was transferred to Italy under circumstances that have since been described as irregular; to defuse potential diplomatic tensions, the movement of the object was retroactively framed as a gift from King Zog I of Albania to Benito Mussolini.[963]The body of the statue remained in Albania.[964] The sculpture's return to Albania in 1982, and its current housing in the National Historical Museum in Tirana, and invoked in both scholarly and public commemorations of Butrint's cultural legacy (including state press coverage in 1990[965]). This stands as a powerful case of how archaeological objects have been entangled in twentieth-century narratives of nationalism[966], diplomacy, and cultural legitimacy.[967]

Unlike the more structured protocols surrounding international exhibitions or temporary loans, the movement of the *Dea di Butrinto* happened outside the formal mechanisms of museum governance. It

962 Gilkes 2002, pp. 4–12.
963 Ibid.
964 Aurigemma 1963, p.111.
965 Albanian cultural media at the end of the communist era also highlighted the Dea di Butrinto as a masterwork of national heritage. In a 1990 article celebrating the site of Butrint, the statue was referred to as a defining emblem of the site's significance. See Bardhyl Bejko, "Në qytetin antik të Butrintit," Zëri i Popullit, February 16, 1990, p. 3. Published by the Central Committee of the Albanian Party of Labor, Zëri i Popullit ("The Voice of the People") was the official newspaper of communist Albania. Articles in this period often reflected both state ideology and strategic efforts to promote Albania's archaeological and cultural assets for international and national legitimacy.
966 Albanian media at the time publicly affirmed the repatriation of the statue as a significant cultural and nationalist event. An April 1989 article in the Albanian Communist Party newspaper Zëri i Popullit references the Dea di Butrinto as housed in the National Historical Museum in Tirana, describing it as a copy of Praxiteles' original and emblematic of Albania's ancient artistic heritage. See Zëri i Popullit, 7 April 1989, no. 83, p. 3.
967 Buzi 2018, pp. 67–80.

was not a curatorial initiative, but rather a unilateral act of state diplomacy, shaped by Cold War geopolitics and enacted at the interministerial level.[968] It reveals a different mode of object circulation that bypassed museological discourse entirely in favor of strategic cultural gestures. Its repatriation in the early 1980s, though relatively quiet at the time, has since become emblematic of the complexities inherent in restitution processes, particularly when heritage is mobilized not through legal claims or institutional negotiations, but as an instrument of political exchange.[969]

While the act itself was carried out quietly at the time, its afterlife erupted years later. In September 1989, an article in *Il Tempo* accused Italian authorities of handing over the sculpture without documentation or due process, framing the transfer as a form of institutional malpractice. The Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, through Soprintendente Adriano La Regina, responded forcefully and publicly. In an official clarification dated 4 September 1989, La Regina emphasized that the transfer was not a curatorial decision but rather "un atto di Governo promosso dal Ministero degli Affari Esteri nel 1979, concordato con il Ministro per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, e realizzato secondo le determinazioni di detto Ministero."[970] He stated that the *Dea di Butrinto* had been delivered formally by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1982, not by the museum or the Soprintendenza, and pointed to two parliamentary inquiries, filed by On. Battistuzzi in 1983 and 1984 that had already addressed the matter.[971]

What emerges is a case that places the museum at the edge of its own collections. The Soprintendenza, while nominally responsible for the sculpture, was neither the initiator nor the executor of its movement. Instead, the action was conducted at the interministerial level, aligning with broader diplomatic objectives during a period when Albania remained politically isolated from both Western Europe and the Soviet

968 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al quotidiano Il Tempo riguardo alla restituzione della testa di Butrinto. 4 Sept. 1989. Busta 82, fasc. 2, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.
969 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al Corriere della Sera sul caso della scultura di Butrinto. Sept. 1989. Busta 82, fasc. 2, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.
970 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al quotidiano Il Tempo riguardo alla restituzione della testa di Butrinto. 4 Sept. 1989. Busta 82, fasc. 2, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.
971 Ibid.

Bloc. In this sense, the *Dea di Butrinto* repatriation constitutes a gesture of cultural diplomacy in the Cold War periphery, an instance in which heritage functioned not as a static national possession, but as a movable asset in international negotiation.[972]

Equally significant is the temporality of the controversy. The sculpture was returned in 1982, but media and institutional responses did not fully materialize until seven years later. This delay highlights the asynchronous relationship between political action, museum governance, and public discourse. In responding to press accusations, La Regina was not merely defending his institution; he was also reasserting the legal and diplomatic frameworks that authorized the transfer. In his response to *Il Tempo* and *Corriere della Sera*, the Soprintendente reaffirmed that "la consegna della scultura allo Stato albanese è stata effettuata formalmente, per il Governo italiano, dal Ministero degli Affari Esteri," shifting the burden of accountability to the state itself.[973]

The *Dea di Butrinto* statue complicates conventional understandings of restitution or repatriation, which typically frame returns as either legal redress or moral reparation tied to national identity.[974] It was not the result of a legal claim, a provenance investigation, or activist pressure. Rather, it was a preemptive political act undertaken not in response to institutional failure, but as a tool of soft diplomacy. For MNR, it works as a case study in the limits of curatorial agency under the authority of the state. For the broader museum system, it exemplifies how the movement of objects (even those no longer in the collection) can continue to activate institutional memory, media scrutiny, and administrative defense.

It's also important to note that the return of the *Dea di Butrinto* in 1982 did not go unnoticed in Italy's public discourse, even several years after

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972 See e.g., Winter 2015, pp. 997–1015. Winter explores how cultural heritage operates as a tool in international diplomacy, particularly in postcolonial and Cold War contexts, where heritage serves as a negotiable asset in diplomatic relations.

973 La Regina, Adriano. Lettera al Corriere della Sera sul caso della scultura di Butrinto. Sept. 1989. Busta 82, fasc. 2, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma.

974 See Merryman 1986, pp. 831–853. Merryman articulates the opposition between "cultural nationalism" and "cultural internationalism," which have come to dominate legal and ethical restitution.

the event. A 1989 article in *La Repubblica*, titled "Quella Venere Gheddafi se la sogna," used the Butrinto case to frame a broader debate about cultural property claims, particularly in response to Libya's demand for the restitution of the *Venere di Cirene*. The article juxtaposes the two cases, but only to firmly discredit the latter, both legally and morally, while reaffirming the former as justified. Libya's claim, journalist Clara Valenziano notes, "non ha nessuna consistenza" because the *Venere* was removed during colonial rule and prior to Libya's existence as a state.[975] By contrast, the restitution of the *testa della dea di Butrinto* is described as both scientifically and ethically necessary: "in Albania era stato commesso un vero atto vandalico: era stata decapitata una statua. Per farne omaggio a Mussolini, quella testa era stata separata dal suo tronco."[976] The article thus presents the *Butrinto* return not as part of a broader reparative logic, but as an exceptional case necessitated by the circumstances of its original removal.

This selective framing reveals how Italian restitution discourse in the late 20th century was shaped less by legal consistency than by symbolic and political considerations. This shows how the rejoining of the *testa* and *tronco* was a distancing gesture from the violence of the fascist period. At the same time, the article critiques the broader ecosystem of illicit circulation and international acquisitions, particularly in Germany, France, and even Eastern Europe. Museums in Berlin, Munich, and Copenhagen are named as institutions housing works that were removed from Italy under questionable conditions, including Etruscan vases from Vulci and terracottas from Cerveteri. The Berlin museum is highlighted for possessing a stolen Roman sarcophagus from Ostia, and for recently inaugurating a gallery of newly acquired Apulian ceramics, prompting the article's final rhetorical question: "È tutto legale, ma non è un'espropriazione anche questa?"[977]

That closing line captures a growing discomfort, even in mainstream Italian media, with the unequal dynamics of cultural property

975 Valenziano 1989, p. 6.
976 Ibid.
977 Ibid.

exchange.[978] It's also telling of unresolved tensions between formal legality and historical accountability.[979] While the *Dea di Butrinto* could be framed as a necessary act of restitution, other claims (especially those made by formerly colonized nations) were categorically dismissed. This reveals how decisions about repatriation are never just technical, they're deeply political choices that help shape broader stories about national identity, legitimacy, and who holds real authority.

24. The Acquisition of the Aldo Viola Marble Head (1983)

One of the more revealing episodes in the internal workings of MNR in the early 1980s concerns the acquisition of a fragmentary marble head later catalogued following a formal offer from Aldo Viola. The case is interesting less for the object itself than for what it shows about the museum's administrative practice at the time, including its methods of documentation, its growing attention to provenance, and the procedural tone through which it sought to define itself amid increasing public and institutional scrutiny over the lawful circulation of antiquities.

It begins with a letter addressed to the Museum's management, in which Aldo Viola describes himself as the possessor of a marble head, "depicting a bearded male figure, with a decorated headdress," which he offers for sale at the sum of three million lire. Aldo details the object's provenance in notably straightforward terms: the head had been delivered to her by one Panno Giuseppe, who discovered it "while cleaning the apartment in the building located at Via del Boschetto 114, owned by Mrs. Gizzi Vecchione." Aldo's narrative, with its emphasis on casual discovery and transparent transaction, is

978 See: Visconti 2021, especially the introduction and section on "colonial amnesia."

979 See: Clark 2022, pp. 175-194. Clark explains that because international law (especially the UNESCO 1970 Convention) only applies to objects removed after the Convention came into force, it "is not particularly helpful for making determinations about museum repatriation, particularly when it comes to objects like the Parthenon Marbles... exported in the first decade of the nineteenth century" (pp. 185–186). Clark states: "While the 1970 Convention is certainly a powerful symbol and tool to combat looting, theft, and illegal export, it does little to nothing to force or persuade museums to return cultural heritage objects that have been part of their historical collections." (p. 186) This illustrates the disconnect between what is "legal" and what might be "just" or historically accountable.

significant precisely because it marks a break from the era in which museums could acquire objects with little regard for documentation or ownership trail. In the aftermath of the 1970s, with the increasing internationalisation of the art market and the growing reach of heritage protection laws,[980] even a seemingly modest acquisition demanded elaborate institutional choreography.[981]

The Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma (La Regina) responded to Aldo's proposal with measured formality. After noting that the "statements of the current owner, Mr. Aldo Viola, seem to correspond to the truth," and that "the price requested, considering the current market trend at this time, is reasonable," the office recommended that the ministry proceed with acquisition. This recommendation, however, was not given lightly. Rather, the museum's bureaucracy set in motion a chain of verifications, including reference to photographic documentation and a request for an official provenance check by the Carabinieri's Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Artistico.[982]

The reply from the Carabinieri is particularly illustrative of this era's protocols and their underlying anxieties. Drawing on their photographic archives, they confirmed that the marble head in question was neither stolen nor listed as sought after. The investigation further reconstructed the object's chain of custody, noting that it had belonged to Maria Vecchioni (widow Gizzi), passed to her niece, and ultimately surfaced during a posthumous clearing of effects by Giuseppe Panno. Each party's account was obtained and corroborated. In the Carabinieri's words: "The object in question belonged to Mrs. VECCHIONI Maria, widow GIZZI, already resident in this via del Boschetto no. 114, deceased last March. Mr. Panno Giuseppe, resident in the same building, found it while cleaning the apartment, at the request of Mrs. DE LAURENTIS Maria Grazia in FIORINI, resident here at via Brunate no. 11, found the aforementioned sculpture, which,

980 Brodie, Doole, Watson 2000, pp. 9–12; Brodie 2005, pp. 531–551.

981 Viola, Aldo. Letter to Museo Nazionale Romano, undated letter, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma. Busta 84, fasc.2.

982 La Regina, Adriano. Letter to Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 17 May 1983, Prot. 4950, Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma. Busta 84, fasc.2.

with prior authorization from Mrs. DE LAURENTIS, he kept in his possession and subsequently sold it to VIOLA Aldo".[983]

That the museum and its superintendency insisted on such procedures, obtaining written statements from all parties, verifying provenance through police channels, and recording each step in formal correspondence reflects a wider transformation in Italian museological and legal culture during the time. In contrast to earlier periods, when archaeological finds could pass into public collections with only the thinnest documentary trace (i.e. post war), this acquisition reveals a deepening bureaucratic self-awareness, one attuned to the risks of illicit trade and the reputational stakes of museum acquisition. The concern was not only to secure the object, but to secure its legitimacy within a legal and ethical order increasingly defined by documentation, cross-checking, and institutional memory.

This case exposes the strain between the principle of heritage protection and the practical demands of building a collection. The care devoted to what might otherwise seem a routine acquisition shows how, by the 1980s, even ordinary museum work had become a display of administrative precision. The resulting file (comprising letters, declarations, and police verifications) offers a concise record of the procedural culture that defined collecting practices in late twentieth-century Italy.

25. The Temporary Removal of *La Bambina di Grottarossa*

An example of an object that required temporary removal from MNR's collection for conservation reasons is *La Bambina di Grottarossa* (the Girl from Grottarossa). The find was first extracted to allow for essential preservation work. On 5 February 1964, *the* Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma received a report from the Commissioner of

983 Carabinieri Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Artistico to Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 6 September 1983, No.19573/2: "L'oggetto in questione apparteneva alla signora VECCHIONI Maria, vedova GIZZI, già residente in via del Boschetto n. 114, deceduta lo scorso marzo. Il signor Panno Giuseppe, residente nello stesso stabile, lo rinveniva nell'atto di sgombrare l'appartamento, su richiesta della nipote della Vecchioni, signora DE LAURENTIS Maria Grazia in FIORINI, residente in via Brunate n. 11, la quale autorizzava il Panno a trattenerlo e successivamente questi lo cedeva al Viola Aldo."Archivi della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma. Busta 84, fasc.2.

Public Security concerning an unusual discovery along Via Cassia: a sarcophagus containing a mummified body.[984] Caprino, an archaeologist with the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, carried out an on-site inspection near the junction with Via di Grottarossa in the La Giustiniana area. Her report noted that recent excavation for a building foundation had disturbed the soil, revealing at a depth of about 0.92 metres what appeared to be the base of a substantial tomb, probably of brick and concrete construction. The structure had been damaged by mechanical digging, which also exposed a small niche within the concrete layer.

Enclosed within a cement sarcophagus, this niche held both the mummy and a funerary doll. After an initial assessment, the police transported the sarcophagus and its contents to the Forensic Medicine Institute for further study and preservation. The subsequent preservation and exhibition history of the *Bambina di Grottarossa* reflects a series of institutional decisions and conservation measures, exposing both the challenges and developments within the field of museum conservation. Following its discovery, the mummy was first examined at the Forensic Medicine Institute of the University of Rome La Sapienza, where preliminary cleaning and preparations were conducted. News of the discovery quickly spread, generating significant national and international interest.

In April, the mummy was exhibited at the Museo delle Terme, attracting large crowds. Soprintendente Anton Luigi Pietrangeli responded to the public interest by requesting precautionary measures, specifically "seventy meters of barriers, plus six meters of slanted barriers, to prevent the public from damaging the mummy, and for public safety," in response to the high volume of visitors.[985]

In 1970, to prevent further deterioration, the mummy was transferred back to the Forensic Medicine Institute, where it received conservation treatments, including the application of a resin layer to protect the surface. A few years later, it was relocated to the Institute of Anatomy and Pathology at La Sapienza, where Prof. Antonio Ascenzi led an

984 Caprino 1968, pp. 77–84.
985 Sapelli 1998, pp. 271–272.

interdisciplinary team in conducting a series of scientific studies aimed at better understanding its preservation requirements.[986]

In 1993, the mummy was returned to MNR and placed in the Sala del Lusso, within a specially designed display case developed in collaboration with the Central Institute for Restoration. The case was engineered to maintain environmental stability through continuous monitoring of temperature and humidity, a compartment containing pollutant-absorbing materials, thermal insulation to buffer against external fluctuations, and lighting calibrated to minimize radiation exposure. The interior was lined with neutral fabric to create an atmosphere suitable for the object's long-term preservation, thereby reducing the risk of further biological deterioration.[987]

Within the museum's overall layout, the mummy of the *Bambina di Grottarossa* occupies a central position in the Section of Coins and Goldwork in Palazzo Massimo, located in the basement level. This section is devoted to the display of coins, jewelry, and luxury objects, most of which derive from funerary excavations. While the curators chose not to reconstruct complete tomb contexts, an exception was made for Grottarossa, whose embalming represented an extraordinary and singular ritual in Roman funerary practice. The greatest space in the section is therefore reserved for this burial, presented under controlled conditions of temperature and humidity to balance public access with conservation needs.[988]

This sequence of conservation interventions, spanning from 1964 to 1993, reflects the museum's gradual shift toward preventive conservation and the application of environmental control, marking a significant stage in the evolving practice of displaying and preserving complex organic artifacts within the Museo Nazionale Romano.

26. Commemorating the Museum: The 110th Anniversary Coin and Institutional Self-Representation

986 Ascenzi 1996, pp.205–217.
987 La Regina 1998, p. 271.
988 Cadario, Giustozzi 2012, pp. 74–75.

As MNR approached the turn of the millennium, its efforts to modernize, expand, and reposition itself within Italy's cultural landscape were paralleled by an act of official commemoration: the minting of a celebrative silver coin in 1999 to mark the museum's 110th anniversary. Issued by the Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato in application of a ministerial decree dated 20 September 1999, the coin was valued at 2,000 lire and struck in 835/1000 silver.[989] It was not part of the Jubilee program, nor tied to any specific exhibition event, but rather a gesture of symbolic institutional recognition. Through its iconography, it offers a compact case study in how national museums materialize their identity through portable forms of state-sanctioned imagery.

The coin's design was entrusted to Uliana Pernazza, an engraver at the State Mint trained at the Scuola dell'Arte della Medaglia. The obverse features a careful reproduction of a Roman denarius issued by the Socii Italici during the Social War (ca. 90–88 BCE), depicting the personification of Italia with the inscription *Italia* (reference to the struggle for citizenship and identity within the Roman Republic). The reverse displays the celebrated *Ares Ludovisi*, a Roman copy of a Greek original, long considered among the masterpieces of the museum's classical sculpture collection.[990] As Pernazza confirmed in personal correspondence, these elements were chosen not in consultation with the museum or the Soprintendenza, but through her own extensive independent research, and then finalized by the Comitato Tecnico-Artistico within the Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze (MEF).[991]

The resulting object operates on several levels. First, it participates in the museum's self-historicization[992]: by marking its 110th year with numismatic tribute, the MNR signaled its own institutional maturity, joining the ranks of other centenarian national museums that had become the subject of reflection rather than solely display.[993] Secondly, the iconographic choices reflect a carefully balanced political narrative:

989 Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato 1999.
990 Ibid.
991 Uliana Pernazza, email message to Christina Iannelli, 3 Mar. 2025.
992 Bennett 1995.
993 Macdonald 2013.

Italia on one side, representing a republican, pluralist origin myth rooted in internal contestation; and *Ares Ludovisi* on the other, a martial but idealized embodiment of classical continuity, beauty, and imperial strength, a figure which, as Steven Lattimore notes, blends heroic iconography with aestheticized militarism to project both power and refinement. [994]

This dualism reveals how the museum's image was being framed at the end of the twentieth century: as both guardian of the archaeological canon and as a site where alternative Italic identities could be acknowledged.[995] The fact that *Italia*, a figure born out of rebellion against Roman domination, was selected to stand alongside one of the museum's most celebrated Greco-Roman statuary pieces suggests an awareness (or at least a willingness?) to play with layered narratives of national belonging. In this sense, the coin functioned as a kind of pocket monument:[996] a state-issued microcosm of the museum's mission to preserve, interpret, and represent the complexities of antiquity in modern Italian life.

Notably, despite its commemorative intent, the coin had no direct institutional ceremony or integration with museum programming. As Pernazza noted, "non ci fu nessuna presentazione presso il museo e non sono a conoscenza del fatto che la moneta sia stata venduta presso il museo al momento della sua emissione."[997] The gesture was symbolically rich but logistically detached, reflecting the way in which state commemorative mechanisms can run parallel to, rather than in tandem with, museological agendas. Nonetheless, the coin remains a salient artifact of institutional self-representation, marking a moment when MNR, amid reform and reorganization paused to imprint its own legacy in silver.

994 Lattimore 1979, pp. 277–287.
995 Liverani 2020, pp. 171–174.
996 Nora 1989, pp. 7–8.
997 Uliana Pernazza, email message to Christina Iannelli, 3 Mar. 2025.

Chapter V

22. Museo Nazionale Romano Directors, 1980–2000

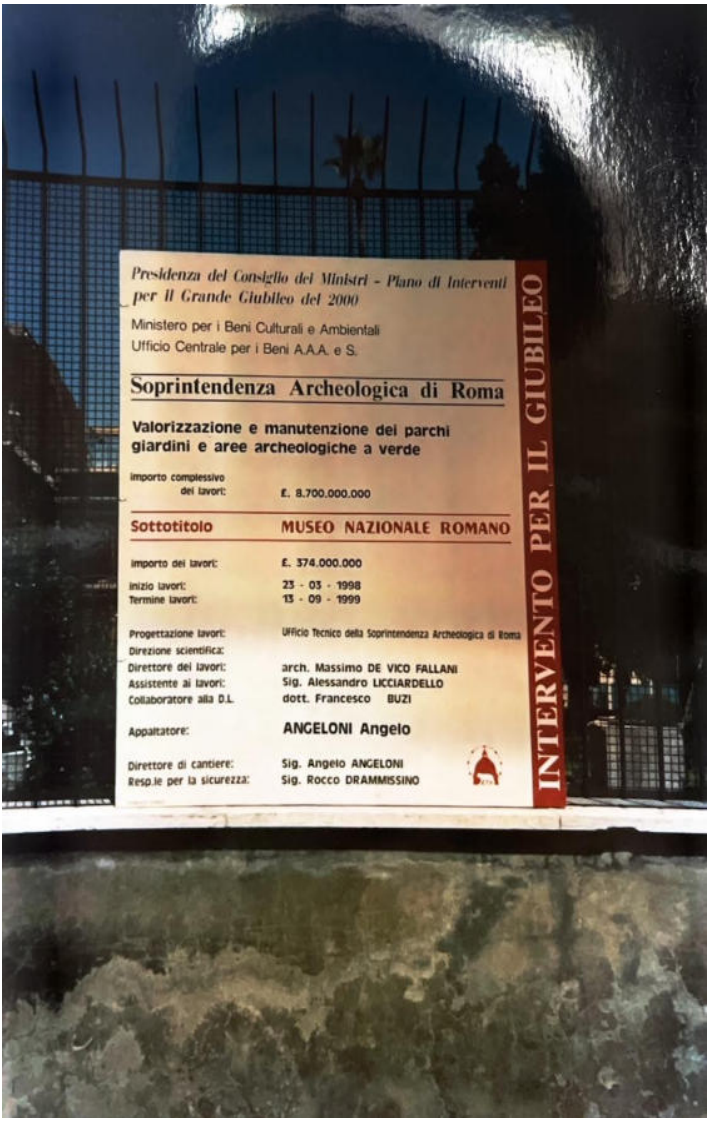
The following table outlines the directors of MNR between 1980 and 2000, a period of significant institutional transition marked by evolving curatorial priorities, new legislative frameworks, and the gradual reconfiguration of the museum's multi-site structure. While documentation for certain years remains incomplete or uncertain, particularly during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the list nonetheless offers a useful overview of the museum's administrative continuity and change across two decades. It is important to note that from 1976 to 2004, the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma was headed by Adriano La Regina, who served as the principal authority over the Museo Nazionale Romano, which at the time was not autonomous but operated as part of the Soprintendenza. The individuals listed here (particularly those associated with the Terme di Diocleziano) functioned as site-based officials rather than autonomous museum directors in a modern sense. From 1998 onward, with the opening of new museum branches such as Palazzo Massimo and Crypta Balbi, directorship became increasingly differentiated across individual sites. This list has been reconstructed through archival research conducted at the Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, supported by internal correspondence and secondary literature, and has been reviewed for accuracy in consultation with current staff at the Museo Nazionale Romano.

Year	**Director**
1980	Stefano De Caro
1981	Pier Giovanni Guzzo

1982	Pier Giovanni Guzzo
1983	Pier Giovanni Guzzo
1984	Pier Giovanni Guzzo
1985	Pier Giovanni Guzzo
1986	Pier Giovanni Guzzo (until mid-year)
1987	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1988	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1989	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1990	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1991	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1992	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1993	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1994	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino

1995	Maria Rita Sanzi Di Mino
1996	Marina Magnani Cianetti
1997	Marina Magnani Cianetti
1998	Marina Magnani Cianetti
1999	Marina Magnani Cianetti
2000	Marina Magnani Cianetti

27. Photographs by Alessandro Licciardello, taken outside the Terme di Diocleziano, photos printed 28 October 1999. *Archivio della ex Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma*, Busta 98, fasc. *Museo Nazionale Romano – Giubileo 2000*.




INTERVENTO PER IL GIUBILEO


Cargo




MAR99

28. The "Sottosuolo" Exhibition, Preventive Archaeology, and the MNR

This expands on the reference made in Chapter 5 to the exhibition *Roma. Memorie dal Sottosuolo. Ritrovamenti archeologici 1980–2006* (*Sottosuolo*), hosted at MNR. It provides a fuller account of the exhibition's curatorial aims, its relationship to preventive archaeology, and its significance in the broader trajectory of Rome's heritage management after the Jubilee of 2000.

The Roma. Memorie dal Sottosuolo. Ritrovamenti archeologici 1980-2006 exhibition (Sottosuolo), held at the MNR, marked a significant curatorial effort to present archaeological discoveries made in Rome over a quarter of a century. The exhibition did not merely showcase material finds but served as a broader reflection on the relationship between archaeology, urban development, and the institutional responsibilities of heritage preservation. By situating these objects within the framework of ongoing infrastructure projects, Sottosuolo offered a rare opportunity to critically examine the methodologies underpinning archaeological work in modern urban contexts.[998]

A key theme of *Sottosuolo* was its direct engagement with preventive archaeology, a field that has emerged in response to the increasing threats posed by urbanization and public works projects. As Fabio Fortinguerra argues, preventive archaeology is not merely a mechanism to mitigate destruction but a proactive means of incorporating archaeological knowledge into urban planning processes, ensuring that the past is not erased by development but integrated into the evolving urban landscape. Unlike traditional archaeology, which has historically been centered on known sites and controlled excavations, preventive archaeology is inherently reactive, intervening when construction threatens to obliterate archaeological evidence.[999]

The origins of preventive archaeology in Europe can be traced to legal and institutional developments that sought to reconcile heritage conservation with economic growth. In France, the Carcopino Law of

998 Tomei 2006, pp. 19-23.
999 Fortinguerra 2023, pp. 129-132.

1941[1000] laid the groundwork for state-supervised excavations, a system that evolved into the structured practice of archéologie préventive by the late 20th century. The establishment of the French National Institute for Preventive Archaeological Research (INRAP) in 2001 formalized a nationwide strategy for proactive archaeological intervention.[1001] Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the introduction of the Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) in 1990 reinforced the principle that developers must finance archaeological assessments before construction begins.[1002]

Italy, by contrast, was slower to adopt a systematic framework for preventive archaeology. While salvage excavations were conducted in response to post-war urban expansion, it was not until the 1985 Legge Galasso that a more structured approach to heritage protection was implemented.[1003] The Sottosuolo exhibition directly reflects this historical trajectory, as many of the artifacts it presented were the result of belated but increasingly rigorous interventions by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma. Large-scale infrastructure projects (i.e. the Rome Metro extensions, highway expansions, and urban renewal schemes[1004]) necessitated an archaeological response that, over time, developed into a clear method of preventive excavation.

The exhibition functioned as both an academic inquiry and a public engagement tool, illustrating how preventive archaeology has shaped contemporary understandings of Rome's subterranean heritage. The materials displayed, ranging from domestic artifacts and funerary remains to architectural fragments, exhibited the scale of archaeological discoveries made beneath modern Rome. Many of these finds

1000 The Carcopino Law of 27 September 1941 established state ownership over buried archaeological remains in France and centralized control of excavations under state authority. It laid the groundwork for modern preventive archaeology. See: Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives (Inrap), "Legislation, Procedures and Funding," https://www.inrap.fr/en/legislation-procedures-and-funding-12007.

1001 Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives (INRAP). "What is Preventive Archaeology?" INRAP, 6 December 2016, https://www.inrap.fr/en/what-preventive-archeology-12006.

1002 In the United Kingdom, Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16), introduced in 1990, established that archaeological remains are a material consideration in planning decisions and that developers are responsible for financing archaeological assessments prior to construction. See: Darvill 2019.

1003 Settis 2002.

1004 See e.g., Metro C S.p.A. 2023.

originated from emergency excavations in areas undergoing urban redevelopment, a practice that aligns closely with the principles of preventive archaeology.

This exhibition also served as a commentary on the inherent tensions between archaeological preservation and urban planning. The exhibition's catalog, curated by Maria Antonietta Tomei, emphasized how Rome's rapid expansion continually redefined the role of archaeological authorities, requiring a delicate balance between heritage conservation and economic development.[1005] The juxtaposition of excavation photography, conservation reports, and recovered artifacts within the exhibition space reinforced the idea that Rome's archaeological record is not static but is instead shaped by the city's evolving spatial and political landscapes.

The MNR's role in hosting Sottosuolo is particularly relevant in this context. Unlike many other European institutions that primarily exhibit objects from controlled excavations, the museum's collection increasingly reflects the outcomes of rescue and preventive archaeology. This shift represents a broader museological challenge: how to contextualize objects that were not uncovered in traditional archaeological campaigns but rather in response to infrastructural necessity. In this sense, Sottosuolo engaged with contemporary debates in museum studies concerning the presentation of fragmented and displaced archaeological narratives.[1006]

Sottosuolo highlighted the necessity of integrating preventive archaeology into museum practice. The exhibition provided a model for how institutions can bridge the gap between archaeological fieldwork and public dissemination, ensuring that materials recovered from urban excavations contribute to broader historical narratives rather than being relegated to storage. The exhibition's emphasis on collaboration between archaeologists, conservationists, and urban planners exemplified an interdisciplinary approach to cultural heritage management.

1005 Tomei 2006, pp. 19-23.
1006 Merriman 2004.

As Italy continues to grapple with the challenges of safeguarding its archaeological heritage amid ongoing urbanization[1007], exhibitions like Sottosuolo serve as critical reflections on the evolving role of museums in contemporary society. Here we see how preventive archaeology changed how the MNR operated, turning it from a static collection into a place actively involved with the remains it preserved.

1007 On the legal and policy framework for preventive archaeology in Italy, see Italy, Law No. 431 of 8 August 1985 (the "Galasso Law"), Provvedimenti urgenti per la tutela delle zone di particolare interesse ambientale; Legislative Decree No. 42 of 22 January 2004, Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio; Legislative Decree No. 163 of 12 April 2006, Codice dei contratti pubblici relativi a lavori, servizi e forniture, and Legislative Decree No. 50 of 18 April 2016, Codice dei contratti pubblici, art. 25 ("Archeologia preventiva"); Ministerial Decree 20 March 2009, No. 60, Regolamento per l'individuazione dei soggetti abilitati alla redazione della relazione archeologica; and DPCM 14 February 2022, Linee guida per l'archeologia preventiva.

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CHAPTER IV

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