

From Pen to Pixel

The Roman Forum: A new reading of documentation

edited by Patrizia Fortini

DESCRIPTION:

Efforts to build, rebuild and maintain the Forum Romanum, Rome's historic urban epicenter, are likely as old as the place itself - some 2800 years. As a result the historic significance and archaeological richness of the Forum cannot be overestimated. Despite its many changes the Forum Romanum's survival today represents an outstanding example of cultural heritage continuity. Its highest possible protection status among monuments conservation agencies in Italy and its early listing on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1980 are testaments to this.

Due to its remarkable physical survival, the Forum Romanum has been the object of extensive research, documentation, restoration and preservation efforts over the past two centuries especially. The sophistication of these measures evolved to include a wide range of expertise. Lay interest among antiquarians and architects in Rome's past from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century was supplanted by the emerging new disciplines of archaeology, architectural restoration and museology. From the late nineteenth century corresponding advancements in archaeological method and conservation theory and science were increasingly applied. From this time on as well, expectations for preserving and presenting the Forum Romanum were high, the famous site being a matter of intense Roman pride, political interest, and serving as a 'must see' destination for visitors to Rome.

Leading historians, archaeologists and conservators have been central to the story of the Forum's survival and interpretation. While numerous noted antiquarians and historians preceded him the architect and archaeologist Giacomo Boni (1859-1925) was unusual, even prescient, in his approach and treatment of the place during his tenure as director of excavations of the Forum Romanum from 1898 until 1925. His combined talents as an architect, archaeologist and conservator set a standard at the time for careful research, thorough documentation, and responsible conservation measures.

The sponsors of the DHARMA conference have wisely chosen to focus on archaeological research and conservation in the Forum during Giacomo Boni's tenure since his work reflects early 'best practices' in researching, preserving and interpreting such places. To frame the discussion some precedents and influences of the work of Giacomo Boni are offered below.

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