

FORMATION - TRANSFORMATION - REPRESENTATION OF AN URBAN LANDSCAPE: THE NORTH-EASTERN SLOPES OF THE PALATINE HILL AND THE AREA OF THE SO-CALLED "TERME DI ELAGABALO"

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The research began with the aim of recomposing and retracing the evolution of the urban landscape of the north-eastern slopes of the Palatine with a *focus* on the site occupied, starting from the Severian period, by a building with a courtyard known in literature with the name of "Terme di Elagabalo". The latter represented a sort of "champion" for which an attempt was made to develop a system of dismantling and reassembling of the building following on the one hand the *chaîne opératoire* of the construction site of the third century AD and on the other the supply of individual construction elements.

The complex sequence brought to light during the long history of archaeological investigations sees the overlapping of entire blocks pertinent to different urban and monumental structures in turn obliterated by later interventions and / or by the continuous spoliations in the medieval and modern age up to be partially or entirely removed from the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century earthworks. The transformations that have taken place on the landscape have affected not only the anthropic component but also the natural environment that from the beginning conditioned the various urban and monumental systems.

On the methodological level, the research focused on the study of the geological and geomorphological system of the site and on the relationship between the natural environment and settlement solutions.

What did the north-eastern slope look like at the time of the first anthropogenic testimonies? How and for what purpose has man modified it? What functional relationship existed between the environment, the infrastructures and structures found in the stratigraphies? How have the various urban and architectural systems been conditioned by the forms of the natural landscape? What were the decisive interventions that gave us back the landscape still visible? What strategies and constructive solutions have been used?

To answer these questions, the research project has moved on different levels in a continuous comparison between macro and microsystem: from the study of the landscape to the precise analysis of archaeological data. The long tradition of studies on the geological formation of the hilly system of Rome, the data relating to the geology and geomorphology of the Palatine hill and the results of archaeological investigations at the north-eastern slopes of the hill and on the terrace of Vigna Barberini have constituted the documentary basis from which to extrapolate useful information for the understanding and representation of a topographic framework general referred to the palatine slope in the various phases. To these were added the detailed data emerged from the analysis of the construction site and the structures of the Severian building of the so-called "*Terme di Elagabalo*" thus being able to insert the Severian building activity on the north-eastern slope within a topographic context characterized by long-lasting environmental, urban and architectural constraints.

The data collected are managed within a specially developed archaeological information system and for which dedicated procedures have been developed for the registration, analysis and transmission of information through the use of databases, applications and open-source formats. In particular, when it comes to data sharing and use aspects, the entire system is already preconfigured to be transferred to a webGIS platform with a view to making the entire dataset open and accessible (open and public).

Starting from the characterization of the geological substratum of the Palatine and through the main transformations that took place on the north-eastern slopes of the hill from the protohistoric age to the third century AD., a series of trends have been traced that have characterized human interventions in the long history of the site.

The morphology of the area with its slopes conditioned the settlement choices already starting from the protohistoric age determining the need to obtain roughly horizontal planes, cutting and counterfeiting the slope both in the E-W direction and in the N-S direction.

To this configuration all the buildings until the Severian age adapted, arranging their rooms on progressively higher levels, removing any pre-existence in the western area, more detected, where the structures of the imperial age are in direct contact with the geological bank, and eliminating the differences in height in the eastern part with fills of considerable thickness, which have consequently preserved longer and more articulated sequences.

The insistence with which the same places are witnessed to the succession of urban and monumental systems has also determined the almost total cancellation of the forms of the original landscape.

As for the analysis of the building of the so-called "Terme di Elagabalo", the field activity involved the creation of new surveys relating to the wall palimpsests of the Severian complex for which three-dimensional survey techniques such as close-range and drone terrestrial photogrammetry were experimented. These techniques have been calibrated based on two differentiated analysis scales: on the one hand the general study of the architectural components of the complex and on the other the detailed analysis of the facing samples.

Alongside the important activities, the structures were filed, according to the most modern criteria of the archaeology of architecture: all the data collected were merged into a data structure specifically created for the analysis of the built but integrated within the information system dedicated to the broader study of the landscape.

From the analysis of the facing samples, a relevant data emerged regarding the construction sequence of the complex of the so-called "Terme di Elagabalo" which I believe can now be attributed with certainty to the first campaign of Severian interventions (191/192-210/218 AD). The analogy found both in the materials and in the method of implementation between the pillars and structures of the so-called "Terme di Elagabalo" indicates in fact, if not the contemporaneity (the tank for extinguishing the lime presupposes a pause), a certain consequentiality being able in fact to have the same lots of material and probably the same workers at work.

Starting from these considerations, I believe that the construction of the building of the so-called "Terme di Elagabalo" is to be related to the building activity of Septimius Severus: the building would therefore have been completed perhaps already before 204 AD and very rarely beyond 211 AD.

Finally, the analysis dedicated to the quantification of the bricks of the curtains has seen the development of a series of procedures that exploiting the functions of calculation and analysis in GIS it is hoped will contribute to the development of new research conducted with rigorous methods in the study of Roman architecture in bricks.