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Horti in the City of Rome: Emulation and Transcendence in the Late Republic and Early Empire

Simon Wood

Introduction

Suetonius states that the emperor Otho expended some 50,000,000 sesterces in attempting to complete the *Domus Aurea* (*Oth.*7). Unfinished on Nero's death, its huge scale provoked a literary invective condemning Nero's posthumous reputation, Pliny the Elder suggesting that Nero's palace encircled Rome (*HN.*36.111), and Martial that 'a single house stood in all the city' (*Spect.*2.4). The emphasis placed on the vastness of the *Domus Aurea* is significant, drawing our attention to the real reason for opposition; not the palace itself, but its sprawling grounds which climbed Rome's hills and dominated the heart of the city. One need only consider the actions of Vespasian in founding the Flavian dynasty to confirm this assertion; replacing Nero's expansive estate and enclosed lake with the Colosseum (*Suet.Vesp.*9.1), whilst the palace itself survived until the reign of Trajan before its destruction by fire. More pertinently for this paper, the grounds of the *Domus Aurea* reveal what *horti* had become by A.D. 68, evolving from their early Republican kitchen-garden origins to expansive green areas for public benefit under the Julio-Claudians.

This paper intends to tackle one aspect of this diverse subject, namely the manner in which Rome's late Republican elite and Julio-Claudian emperors exploited *horti* as an influential (propaganda) medium, seeking to emulate and transcend the models of their predecessors in an attempt to validate their positions of authority. In an effort to highlight this trend succinctly, four case studies of *horti* in the city of Rome will receive analysis: the *Horti Luculliani*, the first great set of *horti* to grace the capital, the competing *horti* of Pompey and Julius Caesar, the Augustan *Campus Martius*, and Nero's *Domus Aurea*. Although this makes it necessary to omit detailed discussion of private *horti* such as the *Horti Maecenatiani* on the *Esquiline*, it was through **public** *horti* that Rome's aristocrats and emperors were able to embrace and truly influence a diverse city-populace, fulfilling their political objectives and cultivating their self-styled public images in the process.

The Horti Luculliani

In his discussion of *horti* in the city of Rome, Pliny the Elder (*HN.*19.50) comments that 'Nowadays indeed even under the name of gardens people possess the luxury of regular farms and country houses actually within the city'. While it would take the destruction wrought by the A.D. 64 fire under Nero to make the creation of *horti* 'within the city' a reality, his description highlights the significant transformation *horti* underwent in little more than a century; introducing Rome's poorest to a level of luxury previously reserved for the aristocratic elite. During the mid-late Republic, the fortunes amassed by Roman generals saw them construct palatial villas and vast estates (*horti*) away from the city of Rome in Roman Campania, cluttering the shoreline along the Bay of Naples and conveying the 'impression of cities' (*Plin.Ep.*2.17.27; *Strab.*5.4.8). Providing the Roman elite with an alternative life of *luxuria* away from Rome, such an existence was nonetheless incompatible with their political responsibilities in the *Forum Romanum* (D'Arms 1970: *passim*). The general Lucullus was the first to bring luxury *horti* to Rome in the late 60's B.C. (Jolivet 1987: 875-904; Troester

2008: esp. 49–76). Overlooking the *Campus Martius* from their elevated position on the *Pincian*, they were renowned for their lavishness even during the Empire when they became an Imperial holding (Plut.*Luc.*39.2), a fate that befell many of Rome's most prominent estates. Unlike later *horti*, these were a private domain, allowing Lucullus to retire from political life, entertain his aristocratic peers in his famed dining rooms, and mingle with Greek intellectuals in his libraries (Plut.*Luc.*42.1-2). However, their proximity to Rome kept him close enough to the political centre to interfere in the affairs of his great rival, Pompey (Plut.*Luc.*35.7). Indeed, it was the topography of Lucullus' *horti* that was especially significant; close enough to Rome for ease of access, yet outside the city walls, enabling him to withdraw himself from the chaotic activity of the urban centre. Surrounding himself with 'his costly edifices, his ambulatories and baths, and still more his paintings and statues' (Plut.*Luc.*39.2), it was here on the outskirts of Rome that Lucullus could submerge himself in a life of Hellenistic *luxuria*, not dissimilar to his existence on the Bay of Naples (Plut.*Luc.*1.4, 38.2-4). In this respect, the *Horti Luculliani* set a crucial precedent, leading to the transformation of Rome's urban periphery into an opulent cultural retreat for the wealthy minority (Zanker 1996: 204–05; Champlin 1982: 99–101). Furthermore, it highlighted the potential of *horti* as a method of self-display to rival architectural ventures, a concept both Pompey and Julius Caesar would exploit to great effect in the coming decades.

The grandeur of the *Horti Luculliani* was not typical of the numerous villas and adjacent gardens/allotments lining Rome's many access roads. In fact, it is likely that only the *Horti Sallustiani* could have rivalled the size and sumptuousness of Lucullus' estate. As Nicholas Purcell (2001: 548–49) has rightly suggested, the exact composition of Rome's *fascia verde* – the 'green belt' that enveloped the capital from the late Republic onwards – is difficult, if not impossible to quantify (Fig. 1). Nonetheless, his terming of Rome's peripheral *horti* as 'peri-urban' is more than plausible, assuming a position on the outskirts of the city and so separate from Rome's densely packed urban sprawl, yet free from the true *suburbium* beyond. Edward Champlin provides further clarification, classifying Rome's peripheral *horti* as 'sub-urban' (suburb-*horti*-city), that is, as the inner ring of the *suburbium* (Champlin 1982: 98–9). What can be said is that luxury *horti* served as archetypal venues for self-display, a categorical statement of the proprietor's wealth and social standing. *Horti* owners embellished their estates with abundant Greek artworks for aesthetic pleasure (*amoenitas*) (Stewart 2003: 250), along with water features, baths, libraries, galleries and aviaries. This was not only intended to impress a visiting audience, namely aristocratic peers visiting on business (*negotium*) or leisure (*otium*), but the *horti* proprietor too, serving as a pivotal means of self-affirmation in the promotion of his self-image (Beard 1998: 31–2; Champlin 1982: 104–05). Cicero's writings (Cic.*Att.*4.10.1; *Brut.*24; *Orat.*110) reveal how the Roman elite immersed themselves in a private world of leisure within their *horti*, mingling with their senatorial colleagues and sharing in rhetoric, philosophy and other intellectual pursuits. In an effort to provide inspirational backdrops for their activities, they surrounded themselves with statues of renowned Greek thinkers from the distant past such as Plato, Socrates and Aristotle (Zanker 1996: 201, 206–08). As Seneca would later write,

'One must acknowledge one's spiritual ancestors and honour them as gods. Why should I not possess the images of great men to inspire my mind and celebrate their birthdays? I worship them and model myself after these great names' (*Ep.*64.9–10).

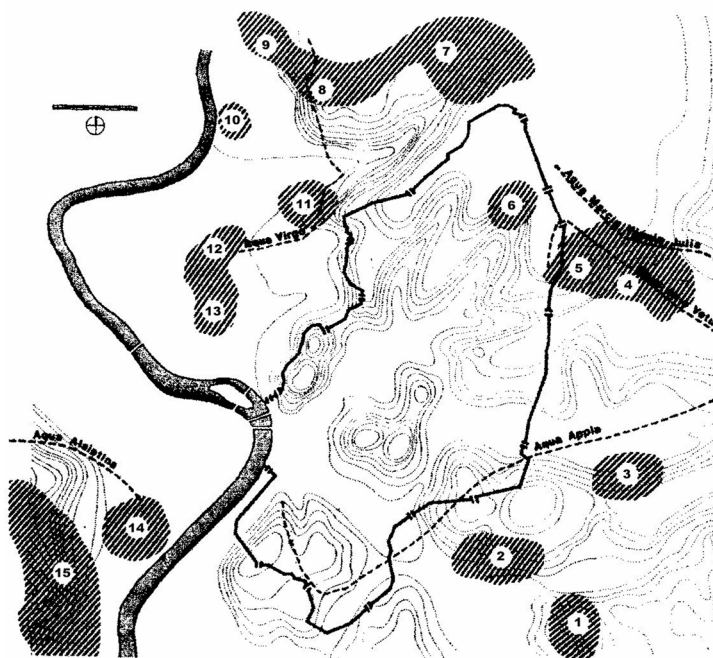


Figure 1: Aqueducts and gardens (*horti*) of Augustan Rome. 1. Horti Asinii; 2. Nemus Camenae; 3. Horti Vectilii (date uncertain); 4. Horti Maecenati; 5. Horti Lamiani and Maiiani; 6. Horti Lolliani; 7. Horti Sallustiani; 8. Horti Luculliani; 9. Horti Aciliorum; 10. Mausoleum of Augustus funerary gardens; 11. Campus Agrippae; 12. Stagnum and Horti Agrippae; 13. Horti Pompeiani; 14. Nemus Caesarum; 15. Horti Caesaris. (Richard H. Abramson, from Favro 1996: Fig. 81).

The Horti Pompeiani and Horti Caesaris Trans Tiberim

Of course, statuary was but one component of luxury *horti*, a combination of art, architecture, water features and landscaping leading to the creation of ornate, highly contrived settings. They remained, to all intents and purposes, the preserve of the Roman elite until the advent of the Augustan Age at least, and so of no tangible benefit to the wider city populace. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that Augustus' opening up of *horti* was without precedent. This was first evident during the political turmoil of the late Republic as Pompey and Julius Caesar vied for supremacy. Their battle for dominance manifested itself throughout Rome's urban fabric and the neighbouring *Campus Martius* as they sought to outmanoeuvre each other via publicly orientated projects, Pompey's stone theatre and enclosed temple of *Venus Victrix* being countered by Caesar's Forum and temple of *Venus Genetrix*. Both men conceived lavish *horti*, Pompey's in the *Campus Martius* adjacent to his portico and stone theatre, Caesar's on the right bank of the Tiber overlooking the *Campus*. The issue of public access is of particular significance here, since they were the first to appreciate the influential potential of green spaces, opening up their *horti* to the *plebs urbana* in order to fulfil their personal objectives. It is nonetheless true that Pompey's stone theatre, portico and surrounding *horti* signified an area which, for the first time, was conceived with the pleasure of the plebs in

mind (Patterson 1992: 197). Plutarch writes of the masses going down to Pompey's gardens, probably to a public banquet, as part of Pompey's efforts to secure the election of Afranius as consul (*Pomp.*44.3–4). It seems likely that with the theatre and portico permitting admission to all citizens, his *horti* would have allowed public access also, or at the very least to specially designated areas (see Boatwright 1998: 74). Lying next to his theatre, the *Porticus Pompeii* contained enclosed gardens and accompanying fountains (Prop.2.32.11–16) in the form of a central grove, or *nemus*, 'interiorised *horti*' which complemented the lavish green areas outside (Gleason 1990: 10–11). Typical of other porticoes and religious sanctuaries, Pliny records that it incorporated numerous famous artworks (*HN.*35.59, 114, 126, 132), many of which would have been positioned within the central *nemus* in accordance with the character of exterior *horti* (Gleason 1994: 19). A famed location for social gatherings (Catull.55.6; Mart.11.1.11, 11.47.3; Prop.2.32.20), it afforded some of the most popular walks in the Augustan Age according to both Ovid (*Ars am.*1.67–8, 3.387–8) and Propertius (4.8.75). Collectively, Pompey's *horti* were an area for leisure, offering entertainments, relaxing walks and decorative artworks within fertile grounds. Their location in the *Campus Martius* was hugely significant in this respect, since they provided a sense of escapism from Rome's crowded, dirty cityscape thus far denied to the urban poor. Unquestionably, the *Horti Pompeiani* signified a considerable advance on the *Horti Luculliani*, underlining the untapped potential of green space as public space, and affording an unprecedented level of public *luxuria* to the *plebs urbana*. In addition, Pompey's estate set a valuable precedent for Augustus, revealing the influential potential of the relatively unexploited *Campus* in the dissemination of Augustan ideology.

The *Horti Caesaris trans Tiberim* should be seen as a direct challenge to the *Horti Pompeiani*. Positioned on the river's right bank along with a series of other aristocratic holdings, it was essentially a private estate and the venue where Caesar hosted Cleopatra in 45 B.C. (Cic.*Att.*15.15.2). However, in attempting to outmanoeuvre Pompey, Caesar is known to have hosted a grand public banquet in his *horti trans Tiberim* also in 45 B.C. (Val. Max.9.15.1), where according to Dio (43.42.1) he feasted the entire populace. The true extent of Dio's assertion may be questionable, but it certainly exemplified Caesar's exploitation of the communal meal as a popular measure (Plut.*Caes.*5.5, 55.2, 57.5; Suet.*Iul.*26.2). Additionally, it underlines the extent of Caesar's *horti* in that it was capable of hosting such a grand, large scale spectacle. As with Pompey's *horti*, Caesar's expansive gardens would have afforded Rome's poorest citizens a visual treat, surrounded by numerous statues, paintings and other works of art within verdant grounds on the banks of the Tiber, allowing them to bask in the ambience of their surroundings away from the chaos of Rome beyond. It is significant that while Pompey's *horti* passed on to Mark Antony and in turn Agrippa, Caesar chose to will his estate and all its enclosed artworks to the Roman people on his death (Cic.*Phil.*2.109; Dio Cass.44.35.3; Suet.*Iul.* 83.2). This would have been a conscious ploy, intended to counter the daily access offered by the *Horti Pompeiani* in Caesar's lifetime. It is possible that Caesar could have announced his intentions to the people at the banquet in 45 B.C; it would have been a particularly astute case of political opportunism (D'Arms 1998: 42). It is evident that Caesar's generous benefaction to the masses set a valuable precedent for Agrippa, who would likewise will his *horti* to the Roman people (Dio Cass.54.29.4). In a broader sense, it reinforced the concept of *horti* as public space in the Roman psyche, providing Augustus with the impetus to transform the *Campus Martius* into a luscious communal region of colossal proportions.

The Augustan Campus Martius

The emperor Augustus possessed the authority, the resources, and the time to implement *horti* at Rome on a more comprehensive scale than his predecessors. The Augustan Age witnessed Rome's transformation into a city of greenery, improving the city's physical appearance in the manner of great cities of the Hellenistic east. Cleopatra's Alexandria was characterized by tree-lined streets and lavish gardens (Strab.17.1.8), whilst Antioch had its expansive Daphne Park (Strab.16.2.6), establishing the perception that a great city required ornamental foliage and public green spaces (Favro 1996: 178–79). In emulating and ultimately transcending these models, Augustan Rome became a city of greenery as well as marble (Suet.*Aug.*28.3), reiterating its status as an imperial capital. Landscaping and topiary, relatively quick to implement and a cheaper alternative to grand-scale architectural projects, gave Augustan Rome a more vibrant appearance (Plin.*HN.*12.12; 16.140). Rome's crowded, ill-planned cityscape (Livy.5.55.2–5, 6.4.6) could not accommodate green areas of considerable size – this would not be possible until after the Great Fire of A.D. 64. Although *horti* moved closer to the city and began to subvert Rome's city walls in the form of the *Horti Maecenatiani* and *Horti Lamiani* on the *Esquiline* (Purcell, 2001: 556), it was in the *Campus Martius* to the north of Rome (Fig. 2) that Augustus could implement *horti* on a truly unprecedented scale. As part of Rome's broader topographical expansion during the Augustan Age, the transformation of the *Campus* would have had a centralising effect on formerly peripheral *horti*. As a result, the aforementioned *Horti Caesaris*, *Horti Luculliani* and neighbouring *Horti Sallustiani* would have assumed an enhanced visual and topographical importance (Purcell 2007: 368). These estates had the benefit of overlooking the *Campus* from their respective positions on the *Pincian* and *trans tiberim*; public access to the *Horti Caesaris* affording visitors panoramic views back across the Tiber over the now unrecognisable Field of Mars. Conversely, a greater number of people could survey these *horti* in closer proximity from within the *Campus* itself; the *Horti Caesaris* viewable alongside a whole host of lesser gardens on the Tiber's right bank, whilst the prestigious estates of Lucullus and Sallust towered imposingly above the plain.

The region's susceptibility to flooding from the Tiber River meant that prior to the advent of the *Principate*, Pompey's theatre and adjacent *horti*/portico was the only monumental project to adorn the *Campus Martius*. Recognising the untapped potential of Rome's northern flood plain, Augustus commissioned Agrippa to drain the *Campus* as part of his overhaul of Rome's sewage system during his *aedileship* of 33 B.C. (Dio Cass.49.43). As a result, by the time Augustus ascended to power, he was able to transform the *Campus Martius* into a planned, monumental district during the 20s B.C. (Strab.5.3.8), an area where *horti* would play an ideologically significant role. In doing so, it is not unreasonable to assume that the identity of the *Campus* as a public area was transformed via *horti*. Despite being categorised as public land (*ager publicus*) since the advent of the Republic, the region's function as a public pasture and area for military training (Dion. Hal. 5.13.2; Hor. *Carm. saec.*3.7.25–28) was far removed from the defined, communal pleasure zone it would become at the advent of the *Principate*. Although remaining *ager publicus* during the turmoil of the Late Republic, the sale of areas near the *Capitoline* into private ownership in the time of Sulla (Oros.5.18.27), coupled with the construction of numerous temples as victory monuments, assuredly detracted from its' long-term public identity. Whilst Pompey went some way to reversing this trend with his theatre, portico and *horti*, it was Augustus' extensive implementation of *horti* and leisure facilities which transformed the *Campus* into a unique area for public recreation and relaxation. Porticoes, baths, theatres, and water features set within expansive *horti* – all would contribute

to the fulfilment of this unprecedented public ideology. This was a hugely significant achievement for Augustus, underlined by his treatment of the *Theatrum/Porticus Pompeii*; ensuring that Pompey's leisure complex did not retain its status as a garden-theatre and, crucially, its associated ideological connotations (Gleason 1994: 24–6). Clearly, Pompey's successful benefaction to the Roman people could not be allowed to endure in its original form – such a powerful statement of public munificence provided by the transformed *Campus Martius* had to be interpreted as an *Augustan* achievement alone.

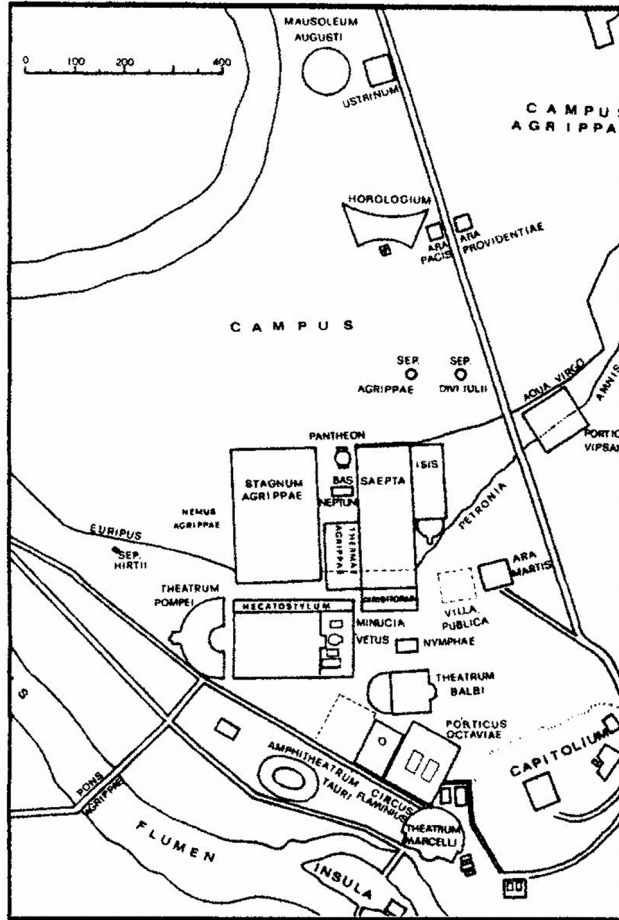


Figure 2: Plan of the Campus Martius, Rome, in the Augustan period. (Davies 2000: Fig. 93).

Many famous structures and monuments adorned the *Campus Martius* at this time. To the north, the *Mausoleum Augusti* dominated the region, whilst further south the *Pantheon*, *Saepta Julia*, and *Diribitorium* reiterated the monumental character of the *Campus*. However, it was as a recreational area set within expansive public *horti* that best defines the ethos of the Augustan *Campus*, when the northern and central sections remained largely open prior to the additions of

later emperors. Writing in the Augustan Age, Strabo's description of the northern/central *Campus* (5.3.8) captures its quintessential character;

'the works of art situated around the *Campus Martius*, and the ground, which is covered in grass throughout the year, and the crowns of those hills that are above the river and extend as far as its bed, which present to the eye the appearance of a stage-painting – all this, I say, affords a spectacle that one can hardly draw away from.'

The description of the *Campus* as a 'stage-painting' is particularly relevant, a pointed reference to the many public *horti* either bounded by or adjacent to the *Campus*. Incorporating a combination of large scale water features and leisure facilities, it also provided an idyllic setting where Romans could enjoy walks and a variety of recreational pursuits, Strabo (5.3.8) speaking of a 'multitude of people who exercise themselves by ball-playing, hoop-trundling and wrestling.' To the north, visitors to the region could stroll in the lavish funerary gardens of the Augustan Mausoleum (Strab.5.3.8; Suet.*Aug.*100.4), whilst on the other side of the *Via Flaminia* dissecting the Field of Mars, the *Campus Agrippae* was set out as a public park (Gell.14.5.1). It was here that a huge map of the world was housed in the *Porticus Vipsania* (Mart.4.18.1–2; 1.108.3), a powerful statement of the *Pax Romana* and Rome's mastery over the known world. As the capital's main access road from the north, the *Via Flaminia* afforded the huge crowds entering and leaving the city an impressive view of the *Campus Martius* in its entirety. Elevated above the low-lying *Campus*, it would have highlighted the region's status as a monumental forecourt to Rome beyond (Favro 1993: 237–50; Zanker 1990: 139–43), its open, green northern/central portions countered by the already built-up area to the south. As a consequence, it was especially important for those structures punctuating the open areas of the *Campus* to offset its *horti*. To this end, the gleaming white marble of the *Pantheon*, the *Mausoleum Augusti* and *Ara Pacis* counterbalanced the region's abundant greenery, presenting a powerful visual reference to the Augustan Golden Age (*aureum saeculum*) which Rome basked in after 17 B.C. The Mausoleum is an especially relevant example. Strabo (5.3.8) mentions that its towering marble walls were crowned by an earthen tumulus and poplar trees, rising imposingly above the *Campus* to provide a physical extension of the surrounding funerary gardens. It would have provided a commanding sight for viewers both within the gardens and those looking north from the central *Campus*, a towering bronze statue of the *Princeps* at the summit (Strab.5.3.8) reiterating the status of the *Campus Martius* as a truly *Augustan* region.

At the heart of the *Campus Martius* were the *Thermae Agrippae*, a complex that allowed for bathing, rigorous exercise and walks within a public park (Yegul, 1992: 133–37; Ball, 2003: 232–38). As the first of the great imperial bath buildings, it was a venue which combined leisure facilities and abundant works of art within the tranquil surroundings of public *horti*. Agrippa located the renowned *Apoxyomenos* statue (the Body-scraper) before the baths, one of 300 statues to grace the public sanctuaries and green spaces of the *Campus Martius* (*HN*. 34.62, 35.26, 36.121). Together, the facilities and green spaces of the *Thermae Agrippae* would have afforded visitors a diverse recreational experience, but on an altogether grander, more comprehensive scale than Pompey's *horti* and portico. By this stage, Pompey's *horti* had in all likelihood passed to Agrippa, retaining their status as a public area. However, it was Agrippa's creation of large-scale water features that particularly separated the Augustan *Campus* from the exploits of Pompey and Caesar. Lakes and artificial watercourses permeated the region, the *Stagnum Agrippae* assuming a dominant presence at the heart of the *Campus*. Rectangular in

form and lined with porticoes, it complemented the adjacent baths by providing a venue for swimming and large scale festivities, the famed Banquet of Tigellinus in the reign of Nero a notorious later example (Tac.*Ann.*15.37). Ovid speaks of plural *euripi* (watercourses) as one of the beauties of the *Campus* (Pont.1.8.37–8), a reference to the man-made canal which drained Agrippa's lake to the Tiber and to a channel which is thought to have taken water from the *Aqua Virgo* (Lloyd 1979: 193–204). Speaking of the latter channel, both Ovid (Pont.1.8.37f) and Seneca (Ep.83.5) confirm that it functioned as a bathing facility for the baths. Across the Tiber to the west, Augustus also constructed a vast body of water called the *Naumachia Augusti*. Some 1,800 feet long and 1,200 wide, it was the venue for a mock naval battle commemorating the dedication of the Temple of *Mars Ultor* in 2 B.C. (Vell. Pat.2.100.1; Suet.*Aug.*43.1; Dio Cass.66.25.3). Being worthy of mention in the *Res Gestae* (RG. 23), it too was adjacent to yet another public park (Tac.*Ann.*14.15; Suet.*Tib.*72.1).

The theatre of Pompey was the first permanent theatre to grace Rome. While the city would have to wait until the reign of Vespasian for the Colosseum, the Augustan Age saw the construction of three smaller entertainment structures in the south of the *Campus*; the *Theatrum Marcelli*, the *Theatrum Balbi*, and the *Amphitheatrum Tauri*. As with the projects of Agrippa, these buildings had the collective effect of celebrating the munificence of Augustus as city father (*pater urbis*), since it was his mandate as emperor that permitted the construction of such structures (Suet.*Aug.*29.5). Complementing the theatre of Pompey, they allowed for an unprecedented number of people to be entertained at any one time, promoting the ethic of unabated leisure during the Augustan *aureum saeculum*. Radiating the sun from their marble exteriors, the visual effect would have been striking; towering above the many *horti* of the region, and highlighting the comparative openness of the *Campus* to the north. Collectively, it confirmed the Augustan *Campus* as a defined leisure zone, the Field of the war god Mars transformed into a field of greenery where *horti* flourished. Ultimately, the Augustan *Campus* was a groundbreaking addition to Ancient Rome, advancing on preceding *horti* in scale, diversity, and level of public access. Likewise, it signified a unique blending of public green space and monumental buildings, a balance which would be lost forever with the structural additions of Nero, Domitian, and later emperors.

The Domus Aurea

Undoubtedly, the *Domus Aurea* represented the pinnacle of *horti* at Rome (Fig. 3). The accounts of Suetonius (Ner.31.1) and Tacitus (Ann.15.39) confirm that Nero's first palace, the *Domus Transitoria*, sought to link imperial residences on the *Palatine* with the *Horti Maecenatiani* on the *Esquiline*, allowing the youthful *Princeps* to pass freely between them at his leisure (Ball 2003: 2). It is safe to say that the *Domus Aurea* would have fulfilled a similar role, but on a wholly more comprehensive, grandiose scale to its predecessor. Exploiting the destruction of the Great Fire (Tac.*Ann.*15.42), its expansive grounds assumed an overwhelming presence in the heart of the city, embracing an area of between 100–200 acres (see the competing accounts of Van Essen (1954) and Warden (1981)). Climbing Rome's hills and dominating the would-be Colosseum valley, it dared to challenge 'the veto of nature' according to Tacitus (Ann. 15.42) by transferring the countryside to the centre of Rome (*rus in urbe*), refuting Roman morality and turning the natural order of things upside down (Champlin 1998: 340–42). Contrary to popular opinion which perceives Nero as a madman, his actions need to be considered as those of a youthful emperor aiming to legitimize his rule (Elsner 1994: 112). Egotistical, yes, artistically vain certainly, but such criticisms do not mean the *Domus Aurea*

and its lavish *horti* were unplanned. Rather, Nero's actions need to be interpreted as a direct challenge to the urban/horticultural legacy set by Augustus some half a century before, aiming to emulate and ultimately transcend the efforts of the first *Princeps* in the *Campus Martius*, but doing so in the heart of Rome.

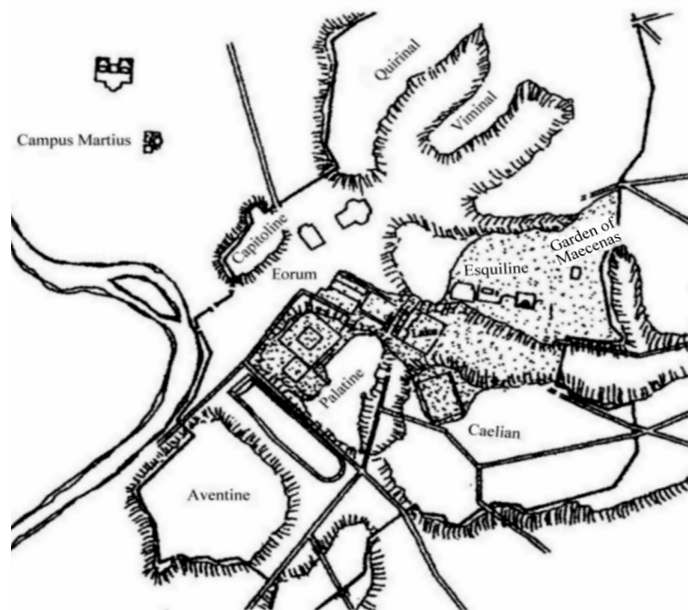


Figure 3: Schematic map of Rome in Neronian times, with the *Domus Aurea* area stippled. (Ball 2003: Fig. 1).

In the same way that Nero's palace would mark the advent of the Roman architectural revolution, so the *Domus Aurea* estate gave *horti* a new, innovative guise completely alien to Rome. Suetonius (*Ner.*31.2) states that it incorporated 'tracts of country, varied by tilled fields, vineyards, pastures and woods, with great numbers of wild and domesticated animals', whilst Tacitus (*Ann.*15.42) places emphasis on the 'fields and lakes and the air of solitude given by wooded ground alternating with clear tracts and open landscapes'. Embracing nature in both its wild and domesticated forms (Purcell 1987: 199), it is plausible that these varied settings offered a visual allusion to the many lands Rome held sway over, one where the Roman Empire was, metaphorically speaking, transferred to the imperial centre. To this end, viewers could ascend the straightened *Sacra Via* leading to the palace's vestibule and look down on a microcosm of the known world, a highly contrived setting that was intended to amaze and overwhelm viewers (Champlin 1998: 339–40). The *Stagnum Neronis*, a huge lake around which these diverse landscapes were gathered, formed the centrepiece of the estate. It must have been of considerable size, Suetonius stating it was, 'like a sea, surrounded with buildings to represent cities' (*Ner.*31.2). It is possible that the giant lake could have symbolised the Mediterranean as the centre of the Roman world, though this remains open to debate. Contrary to the long held belief that the lake was of irregular form, recent excavations have shown it to have been rectangular and surrounded by porticoes (Panella 1995: 51–5; 1996).

This is especially significant in the context of the Augustan *Campus Martius*, for it can be seen as a deliberate attempt to emulate the *Stagnum Agrippae*. Nero would embellish the *Campus* himself, his baths and adjacent gymnasium notable additions (Suet.*Ner.*12.3; Tac.*Ann.*14.47; Dio Cass.61.21.1). However, it is Nero's imitation of Agrippa's *stagnum* which emerges as a definitive attempt to transcend Augustus; emulating the *Stagnum Agrippae*, but transcending it by locating the *Stagnum Neronis* in the heart of a new Neronian Rome.

Public access to Nero's sprawling *horti* is a hugely important issue, and it is intriguing that there is no definitive answer. The aforementioned references of Pliny the Elder (*HN*.36.111) and Martial (*Spect.*2.4) accuse Nero of dominating Rome by treating the city as his house, further supported by a contemporary epigram recorded in Suetonius (*Ner.*39); 'Rome has become a house; citizens, emigrate to Veii; but watch out that the house does not extend that far too'. Such an invective would suggest that in taking over the city, Nero denied the populace access to his luscious *horti*. In reality, this could not be further from the truth. Various pieces of evidence can be cited to suggest the youthful *Princeps* needed, and in fact wanted, to invite the people into his vast grounds. First, Nero chose to straighten the *Sacra Via* which linked the *Forum Romanum* to the giant vestibule of the *Domus Aurea*, an act which encouraged people to ascend the *Velia* to his front door (Griffin 1985: 140). Also, Nero's construction of the *Porticus Miliariae* nearby (Suet.*Ner.*31.1) would have made this already thriving commercial zone all the busier with additional shops/markets. Interestingly, there is no archaeological evidence to support the presence of boundary walls/gates around the *Domus Aurea* estate, indicating that Nero did not hinder access to his *horti* or to the roads which inevitably crossed the grounds (Champlin 1998: 334-35). Besides, it would have been politically dangerous for Nero to alienate the masses by forcing them to circumnavigate his estate to traverse Rome. Then there is Pliny the Elder's account (*HN*.36.163) of Nero rebuilding the temple of *Fortuna Seiani* in a translucent marble, and 'including it in the Golden House'. In replacing a building destroyed in the A.D. 64 fire, it seems unlikely that Nero would have denied the populace access to the temple on the premise that it fell within his *horti*. The same can be said of another rebuilt temple, *Jupiter Stator*, situated just south of the *Domus Aurea*'s vestibule. As Miriam Griffin (1985: 140) has pointed out, Nero would have been seeking an audience, not privacy, with the temple located so close to his palace.

As with the Augustan *Campus Martius*, it is important to consider the character of Nero's expansive *horti* as a public venue. There can be little doubting that, compared to the *horti* of the Augustan *Campus*, Nero's contribution in bringing about *rus in urbe* provided a more spectacular venue. Whereas Augustus consciously embraced existing Republican structures in his creation of an Augustan region, the *Domus Aurea* signified a far more individualistic, emphatic statement of the Emperor's majesty, reaffirmed by its location in the heart of the city rather than on the outskirts. The topographical character of the *Domus Aurea* estate is especially relevant in this context, being usefully interpreted as a bowl incorporating the valley and hillsides, but excluding the summits (Champlin 1998: 343). Whatever the vantage point, looking down from the *Velia* on the colossal *stagnum* or up from the luscious *horti* at the shining façade of the *Oppian* residence, the *Domus Aurea* would have functioned as an amphitheatre, enveloping viewers and compelling them to survey their surroundings. It is unquestionable that this was a consciously staged, public venue where Nero sought to propagate his self-image to a captivated audience. As Edward Champlin (1998: 343) aptly states, 'People are meant to look. Privacy is not an issue'.

As Nero's coinage testifies, the Great Fire of A.D. 64 marked the advent of his self-proclaimed 'solar ideology', with the youthful *Princeps* actively promoting his association

with the sun god, Sol. The *Colossus Neronis*, a 120 foot bronze statue of Nero cast in the guise of Sol, was intended to stand in the giant vestibule of the palace (Suet.*Ner.*31.2). Although it is doubtful whether the *colossus* was erected during Nero's lifetime, it would have glorified Nero in the manner of a Hellenistic king; gazing out over a new Neronian Rome from its elevated position on the *Velia* (see Smith (2000: 536–38), who plausibly suggests that the *Colossus Neronis* never actually stood in the vestibule of the *Domus Aurea*, further supported by Champlin (2003: 304)). Likewise, it is probable the exterior of the palace was coated in gold (Suet.*Ner.*31.2; Mart.*Spect.*2). Radiating the sun and creating dazzling light effects, it would have provided a visually potent reminder of Nero's associated deity to viewers both within the *Domus Aurea's* luscious *horti* and beyond in other parts of the city (Hemsoll 1990: 29; Champlin 1998: 338–40). While the solar ideology of Nero's palace has received widespread debate (see L'Orange 1942: 68–100; Boethius 1960; Griffin 1985; Hemsoll 1990; Champlin 1998), the expansive estate within which it was set must have been equally significant in promoting a Neronian *aureum saeculum*. This was an age where a Rome of 'measured lines of streets, with broad thoroughfares, buildings of restricted height, and open spaces' (Tac.*Ann.*15.43) would rise from the ashes, the *Domus Aurea* with its palatial, emblematic *horti* the focal point of a new Neronian Rome. Reference has already been made to Nero's riotous banquet in the *Campus Martius* in A.D. 65, an occasion of unrestrained excess altogether untypical of Roman society;

'He constructed, then, a raft on the Pool of Agrippa, and superimposed a banquet, to be set in motion by other craft acting as tugs. The vessels were gay with gold and ivory, and the oarsmen were catamites marshalled according to their ages and their libidinous attainments. He had collected birds and wild beasts from the ends of the earth, and marine animals from the ocean itself. On the quays of the lake stood brothels, filled with women of high rank; and opposite, naked harlots met the view' (Tac.*Ann.*15.37)

Utilizing the *Stagnum Agrippae* and its surrounding *horti*, it signified a reversal of societal norms, introducing the Roman plebs to a level of lavishness previously reserved to the elite at Baiae on the Bay of Naples (Cic.*Cael.*35; Sen.*Ep.*51.1–4; D'Arms 1970: passim). This was not a one-off event. Similar revelries had concluded the *Juvenalia* in A.D. 59 (Tac.*Ann.*14.15; Dio Cass.61.20.5), and Nero was renowned for banqueting in public in a variety of venues both within Rome and further afield at Ostia and Baiae (Suet.*Ner.*27; Tac.*Ann.*15.37). Uninhibited behaviour of this nature recalled the *Saturnalia*, a temporary state of affairs in Roman society where drinking and gambling replaced business throughout the city; masters served their slaves, and slaves might act as judges (Macrob.*Sat.*1.7.6; Sen.*Ep.*47.14). It has been plausibly suggested that Nero intended to introduce a perpetual *Saturnalia* at Rome, casting himself in the guise of *Princeps Saturnalicus* (Champlin 1998: 340). Recreating the pleasures of Baiae in the heart of Rome, the Roman poor would have been Nero's closest friends, the *Domus Aurea* an impressive venue for such audacious festivities; a literal stage for theatrical display, with Nero assuming the lead role. Crucially, it should be remembered that Nero was 'carried away by a craze for popularity' in the words of Suetonius (*Ner.*53), one factor which explains why the youthful *Princeps* would have welcomed the Roman plebs into the grounds of the *Domus Aurea*: he was an emperor who wanted to be seen! In addition, it is worth noting that Nero's embracing of the lower orders in such revelries would have served a dual purpose. Hated by the aristocratic elite for his actions after A.D. 64, they would have provided Nero with the popular support necessary to counter his aristocratic enemies. It would also have allowed Nero

to satisfy his own base instincts, legitimising his behaviours by sharing them with the ill-educated, immoral masses. Contrasting with the more typically Roman leisure pursuits of the Augustan *Campus*, the *Domus Aurea* intended to offer the Roman people something wholly different and more outrageous, its luscious *horti* and giant lake providing an iconic venue for unrestrained excess in the centre of Rome. Crucially perhaps, it mirrored Nero's eccentric character, a statement of his own sense of self worth (Suet.*Ner.*31.2), and a categorical attempt to cement his place in history. In this, Nero certainly succeeded.

Conclusion

The *Domus Aurea* marked the zenith of luxury *horti* in the city of Rome, culminating an evolutionary process that had begun with the *Horti Luculliani* over a century earlier. The Neronian experiment of *rus in urbe* was an unequivocal failure, compelling Domitian and Hadrian to confine their lavish estates beyond the capital at Alba and Tivoli respectively. One may question whether this would have been the case had Nero ruled for as long as Augustus or Hadrian; had he done so, the topography of the city of Rome would certainly have been very different (Elsner 1994: 123). As has been shown, the development of *horti* in this period saw green spaces assume an ever-increasing public identity and function, a fundamental shift which correlated with the progressive transferral of *horti* from the urban periphery to the centre of Rome. The growing public character of *horti* from Republic to Empire can likewise be linked with the evolving aims and objectives of *horti* proprietors, the blatant self-display of the Republican elite being replaced by the Emperor's use of mass persuasion as *pater urbis*. Whereas self-display served the needs of the individual exclusively, mass persuasion brought reciprocal gain to the *horti* proprietor as well as his public audience (see Jowett and O'Donnell 1999: 1). Evidently, the transition from self-display to mass persuasion should be directly associated with the increasing level of public access to *horti* across the period. For example, whilst the private *Horti Luculliani* functioned as a venue for self-display alone, the estates of Pompey and Caesar were something entirely different; celebrating the power and wealth of their owners, but affording the *plebs urbana* reciprocal benefit in the form of ornate artworks, recreational pursuits, and temporary escapism from Rome's crowded cityscape. Indeed, it is highly plausible that the public green spaces of the ensuing Julio-Claudian era were motivated by mass persuasion, the transformed *Campus Martius* and expansive *Domus Aurea* estate providing all Romans with colossal green spaces and leisure pursuits on an unprecedented level. Yet simultaneously, the magnificence and benevolence of the Emperor remained an all-pervasive message, ensuring these areas would be perceived as definitive Augustan and Neronian regions respectively. Such powerful statements of grandeur and munificence were intended to endure beyond the *horti* proprietor's lifetime, with the result that Republican and Imperial *horti* alike would continue to influence the urban/horticultural strategies of successors (Elsner 1994: 113–16). Therefore, it is evident that the Augustan *Campus Martius* drew inspiration from Pompey's *horti* and associated leisure facilities, whilst similarly, the expansive grounds of the *Domus Aurea* and its enclosed lake were strongly influenced by the open green spaces of the *Campus Martius* and the central *Stagnum Agippae*. Furthermore, it should be remembered that in spite of his demise, Nero's radical reinterpretation of *horti* created a major dilemma for the Flavians, one that would influence and severely test their use of, and attitude towards, green space in the city of Rome in the wake of *rus in urbe*.

Epilogue

As has been stated, the *Domus Aurea* provided an enduring legacy for the succeeding Flavian dynasty (Darwall-Smith 1996: 35–41). Their destruction of the *Domus Aurea* estate denoted a conscious attempt to banish the memory of Nero, the construction of the Colosseum on the site of the *Stagnum Neronis* a forceful statement of their right to rule. Likewise, the Flavians can be seen to have redefined *horti* as public areas, refuting the Neronian model and seeking a return to the propriety of the Augustan Age. According to Dio (66.10), Vespasian is known to have ‘dwelt little in the *Palatium*, but for the most part lived in the *Horti Sallustiani*, and there received anyone who wished it, not just the senators, but also of the others’. Whereas Nero utilized the *Horti Serviliani* as a private residence after the Great Fire (Tac.*Ann.*15.55), it was in all probability set up as a public park under the Flavians. A venue rich in Greek works of art, including marble statues of Praxiteles and Scopas (Plin.*HN.*36.23, 25), it would have compared to the many *horti* of the Augustan *Campus Martius* decades earlier where statues proliferated. The construction of the *Templum Pacis* can be seen to have paralleled the many porticoes of the Augustan Age, the likely incorporation of green spaces creating a form of ‘interiorised *horti*’ in the centre of Rome. It is perhaps fitting that many of the numerous artworks on display within the *Templum Pacis* were seized from the private reception rooms of the *Domus Aurea* (Plin.*HN.*34.84); Vespasian returning art to the Roman people as Augustus had done nearly a century earlier. Green spaces in the city of Rome regained a sense of propriety under the Flavians, but one aspect remains true of all periods from the *Horti Luculliani*, through the horticultural revolution of the Augustan Age, to Nero’s *Domus Aurea* and beyond; it was crucial to emulate and transcend preceding models, *horti* functioning as a powerful means of self-display and mass persuasion not unlike Rome’s urban landscape. In spite of his downfall and unfulfilled plans, it may be that Nero was more acutely aware of this potential than any of his predecessors.

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