**Managing archive documents regarding an archaeological site.**

**An on-going project for the Imperial Fora in Rome**

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This paper presents part of an on-going research at its very early stage, proposed as part of a Ph.D. program in Management and Development of Cultural Heritage[1]. The research is based on a work carried out in the past few years in collaboration with the Superintendence of the Municipality of Rome, consisting in the research of archive documents concerning the history and the topography of the area of the Imperial Fora in Rome until the present era[2]. This work led to the collection of a huge amount of documents (written documents, plans, images, photos) now preserved in copies in the offices of the Superintendence in Rome[3].

The research I am going to present here starts from this large amount of data. Could the interpolation of different kinds of documents coming from different archives be helpful in the understanding of the site? How to inter-relate each other different sources concerning the history of the archaeological area and the life of people who lived in those places?

The area of the Imperial Fora in the center of Rome witnessed different phases, from the antiquity up to the present time. Over a period of about 3000 years, both activities of "construction" and "destruction" have shaped the image of the area, its relationship with the surrounding landscape, and its function. In this two-faced process of formation of the modern city, "new data" produced during contemporary excavations and "old data" preserved in the archives of the city are, together, the basis for the comprehension of the evolution of the archaeological area (Fig. 1).

The documents collected are diverse in chronology (XIV-XX century) and were found in many archives in Rome: State and Municipal Archives[4], Archives linked with the church as an institution[5], Archives of the Superintendence[6] and Archives of Researchers[7].

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[1] IMT, Institute for Advanced Studies, Lucca, Italy.

[2] The collaboration with the Superintendence of Rome started in 2008. Up to now, more than 1000 documents have been collected (see MENEGHINI 2009).

[3] Written documents have been transcribed into word files; plans, images and photos have been scanned.

[4] *Archivio di Stato*: documents before 1861; *Archivio Capitolino*: documents from 1860 to 1920; *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*: documents after 1920.

Written documents are both public and private. The most significant part of the public material comes from the offices involved in the administration of cultural heritage in Rome over the years[8]. Among private documents, we mostly find texts produced by the notaries between the XVI and the XIX century concerning properties in the area, and private letters of people living in that region. Moreover, there are documents produced by churches built over the Imperial Fora since the IX-X century: lists of the goods owned by the churches, lists of people living in the area and description of the excavations made near the churches.

Among graphic documents, there are old cartographies (from the XVI to the XVIII century), cadastral drawings from the XIX century, drawings and plans of private buildings and churches built on the ruins, and plans made during excavations in the last two centuries.

Some of these documents have already been used by researchers to investigate the story of some elements in the area (i.e. BERNACCHIO 2010, MENEGHINI 1993), while many others are still unknown. This collection of documents could help in reconstructing roman building and in understanding both in urban and social terms, the district born over roman ruins and destroyed during the urban works of the XIX-XX century first and under the fascist regime later (INSOLERA-PEREGO 1983).

Original documents are in historical archives in Rome, public institutions that are accessible. Nevertheless, the consultation of these archives is a long process, because documents related to the topic we are interested in are not always easily identified. Moreover, consultation is bound by opening hours and staff supply.

The opportunity of a direct access to different kinds of archive documents concerning the history of the Imperial Fora (even if in copy) is therefore crucial for the study of the area. To be effectively available, accessible and useful for further researchers, these documents need a logical organization through a singular system that also allows the interpolation of them.

The idea behind this Ph.D. research is therefore to mend ideally pieces of social history and urban development concerning the area of the Imperial Fora: linking different documents from various sources together would enable us to fill the gaps created by historical events.

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[5] *Archivio del Vicariato, Archivio Segreto Vaticano.*
[6] *Archivio della Soprintendenza Speciale di Palazzo Altemps* (Superintendence of the State), *Archivio Storico* and *Archivio Disegni della Nuova Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali* (Superintendence of the Municipality).
[7] *Archivio Lanciani* (stored in the Archaeological Library in Rome BIASA).
[8] *Commissione per gli Abbellimenti di Roma* and *Commissione per la conservazione delle chiese di Rom*a during the napoleon period; *Camerlengato* between 1815 and 1854; *Ministero del Commercio, Belle Arti, Industria Agricoltura e Lavori Pubblici*, between 1855 and 1870; *Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Divisione antichità e Belle Arti* between 1861 and 1945 and *Segreteria Particolare del Duce*, between 1922 and 1945. These documents record the maintenance and excavation works made in the area.

The part of the research I am focusing on here is the creation of a system for the management of these archive documents and for their connection to the maps of the area, thus making possible for scholars to extract from the system chronological and spatial information.

Data from archives are usually organized through databases that enable to search archives through key words[9]. These systems however do not link information from different archives and do not give any spatial evidence. Introducing the space (as the geographical dimension of historical facts) in the analysis of this documents, it is possible to compare characteristics/events/phenomena with others existing or having existed in the same geographic space (BISSCHOPS 2012) and to study spatial variations in the set of documents.

Since the research is at its very early stage, the system has not been created yet. In this phase, a good system seems to be the G.I.S. (Geographic Information System) that allows storing and dynamically representing data from multiple sources, enabling a long list of different analysis. G.I.S., born for geography and urban planning, is nowadays accepted in the mainstream of archaeological practices as a system for storing, retrieving and quantifying archaeological data[10]. It is a perfect system for the juxtaposition of different kinds of data: a database management system built around two linked components, the spatial database and the attribute database. The former describes location and shape of physical and non-physical entities that are identified by lines, dots or polygons having spatial coordinates. The latter hold non-spatial data about spatial entities (BISSCHOPS 2012). This system would enable the combination of attribute data from various sources on the basis of their geographical location and, at the same time, it would allow the integration of familiar database operation (queries, statistical analysis) with the visualization and geographic analysis offered by maps.

In the case of the Imperial Fora, sources are various and give different perspectives on how the area was used. Plans or textual descriptions of medieval and later buildings recording also more ancient structures (Fig. 2), as well as plans and descriptions of excavations from XIX and XX, give information about imperial buildings. Documents such as deeds (notarial acts that testify transfers of properties or sales), taxation systems and lists of people recorded in churches, could be used to reconstruct spatial patterns of urban properties and temporal changes in properties holding. The same documents, together with descriptions of places, personal letters, inventory records from churches, etc. could be linked to topographical

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[9] Examples are, in Italy, the SIUSA (the Unified Information System by the Archival Superintendence) or systems created for smaller private archives, like the *Archivio Chini* (Lido di Camaiore, Lucca), completely reorganized and digitized.
[10] For the use of G.I.S. in archaeology, see WEATLEY-GILLINGS 2002.

evidences (still existing or not) in order to analyze how the space was used in different periods and to rebuild the social dimension of the district.

Building the system, the first task will be the creation of a cartographic basis, to georeference maps from different periods. Following tasks will be the creation of the relational database and the creation of the connections between texts and geographical evidences.

The system could also be used to make analysis and produce different kinds of maps. For example a map of the findings from the roman period in the area, with a link to a story of their location; a diachronic sequence of archaeological maps (period maps); maps of spatial evidences, to make visible on the same map features with the same characteristics (both architectural and social characteristics).

In order to do that, we should incorporate in the system maps, ancient plans/drawings, and written documents. The last are often very long, therefore a way either to include them into the system or to translate them into attributes should be found.

The system we are talking about is similar to what have recently been defined as "deep maps" (VON LUNEN-TRAVIS 2013): "more complex maps (using the term broadly) of the personalities, emotions, values, and poetics, the visible and invisible aspects of a place". In these maps: "each artifact (a letter, a photo, a painting, oral or video) would constitute a separate record anchored in time and space, this allowing us to keep them in relationship, and each layer would contain the unique view over time of an individual or a social unit […], fusing qualitative and quantitative data within a real and conceptual space". This brings us - as humanists - to the necessity of using G.I.S. to represent the "geography of space" as culture and not simply as mapped location.
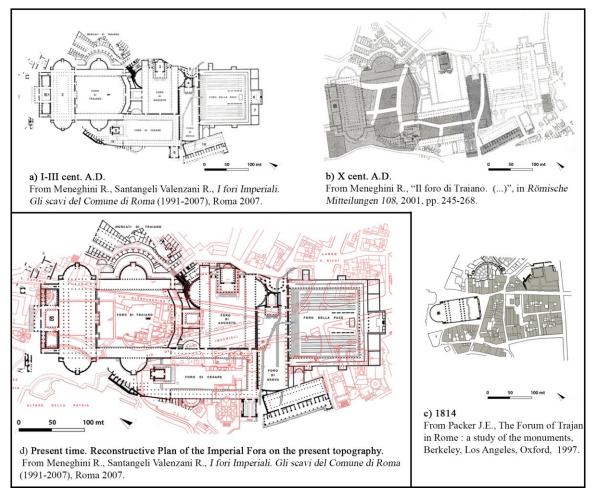
# FIGURES



a) I-III cent. A.D.
From Meneghini R., Santangeli Valenzani R., *I fori Imperiali. Gli scavi del Comune di Roma* (1991-2007), Roma 2007.

b) X cent. A.D.
From Meneghini R., "Il foro di Traiano. (...)", in *Römische Mitteilungen 108*, 2001, pp. 245-268.

c) 1814
From Packer J.E., The Forum of Trajan in Rome : a study of the monuments, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1997.

d) **Present time. Reconstructive Plan of the Imperial Fora on the present topography.**
From Meneghini R., Santangeli Valenzani R., *I fori Imperiali. Gli scavi del Comune di Roma* (1991-2007), Roma 2007.

**Figure 1**. Main changes in the topography of the area, from the I century A.D. until the present time
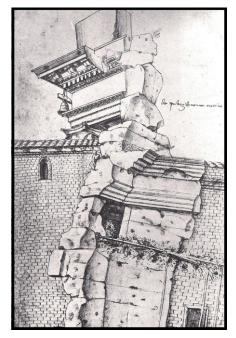


**Figure 2.** View of one of the churches in the Trajan Forum.
In the foreground, ruins of the Forum. Drawing by Simone del Pollaiolo (XV century)

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