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Edited by Leonhard Schmitz

Excerpt

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THE  
CLASSICAL MUSEUM.

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I.  
ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF ROME.

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PART II.  
1. THE ROMAN FORUM.

THE Roman Forum is the spot with which are connected all the most interesting associations and the most stirring recollections of ancient Rome. Around it are grouped almost all the localities inseparably associated in the mind of the scholar, with the great names of antiquity, and the rising splendour of the early city; while it is the centre also round which are gathered the most stupendous and magnificent monuments of its imperial greatness. Of the latter, many remain, at least in partial preservation, to tell their own tale; but of the edifices or monuments which adorned the Forum in earlier times, not a single one now subsists in its original state; and we are reduced almost entirely to the resources of ancient literature, and the scanty information we can glean from the scattered notices of classical writers, if we attempt to restore the Forum as it existed in the days of Gracchus or of Cicero. Much assistance may, however, still be derived from existing remains, when once rightly understood. Many of the temples, and other public buildings, erected in the days of the republic, though restored or rebuilt under the emperors, still continued to occupy the same situations as before. In other cases, we have sufficiently accurate information to enable us to point out where a more

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## 2 ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF ROME.

ancient edifice was destroyed, to make way for one of which the vestiges are still visible. Hence, in regard to the Forum especially, it is necessary that the investigations of the topographer should assume something of a historical form; and much of the confusion and embarrassment of the earlier antiquarians, arises from their endeavouring to bring together edifices of the most distant periods, and reconcile conflicting testimonies which in fact referred to two states of things entirely different. This evil has been greatly aggravated by the deference usually paid to the catalogue which passed under the name of P. Victor, in which all the names that occur in ancient authors are heaped promiscuously together, and the works of the kings and those of the emperors are enumerated in succession, as if they had been still standing side by side in the fourth century. It is to M. Bunsen that we are indebted for having first cleared a way through this chaos, and by distinguishing accurately the different epochs in the progress of the Forum, and pointing out the periods of the destruction as well as the restoration of many of the buildings that surrounded it, enabled us to form a clear and satisfactory conception of its condition at several successive periods.

Such a historical investigation was absolutely necessary, before we could attempt to apply our knowledge to the explanation of the monuments still existing, or interpret aright the evidence of the localities themselves. Even the important key furnished by the results of recent excavations would have been comparatively useless, had it not been for these preliminary inquiries. On the other hand, all the learning and ingenuity of M. Bunsen would have been in great measure thrown away, or could at best have led to very questionable results, had it not been for a few fixed points which have been gained by the process of excavation.

The first and most important result thus obtained, has been the determination of the position and the limits of the Forum itself; a preliminary question, without answering which, it was evidently impossible to stir another step with safety. Yet it is only within a very few years that this important point can be considered as determined; and as the erroneous views long prevalent on this subject still retain their place in most of the popular treatises and guide-books, it may be as well briefly to review the history of this long-disputed question.

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The earlier topographers appear to have entertained little doubt upon the subject. Biondo, though he never distinctly states his views upon this point, seems to have taken it for granted that the level space, called in modern times the Campo Vaccino, was the site of the ancient Forum.<sup>1</sup> The same view is more clearly expressed by Lucio Fauno and Marliano, but both these writers fall into the error of extending its limits as far as the Arch of Titus, and the ridge which extends from thence towards the Esquiline Hill. The great difference of level between that part of the Forum near the foot of the Capitol and the Arch of Titus, though in great measure concealed from view by the enormous accumulation of rubbish in the lower parts of the space thus limited, was alone sufficient to render it improbable that the whole could have been comprised in the open area of the Forum; the certainty that it was not so, was obtained at a later period by an excavation made in front of the church of SS. Cosma and Damiano, when the ground in front of that church was found to be occupied with the remains of ancient buildings,<sup>2</sup> thus proving that the open space could not have extended beyond the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina,—the pavement in front of which, has the same level with that adjoining the Arch of Septimius Severus. Previously to this discovery, Donatus had already started the hypothesis that the Forum occupied the valley on the *west* of the Palatine rather than that on the north, as agreeing more accurately with the statement of Dionysius,<sup>3</sup> that it was situated between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills. This view was adopted by Nardini; and became, through him, part of the received creed of Roman topography down to a very recent period. It was

<sup>1</sup> *Roma Instaurata*, Lib. II. § 63, 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Memorie di Santi Bartoli*, p. 234. (ap. Fea, *Miscellan.* tom. I.) Incontro SS. Cosmo e Damiano, nel mezzo appunto del campo Vaccino, fu cavato, in tempo del pontificato di Alessandro VII., da Leonardo Agostini; e vi si trovarono edifizii sotterranei in quantità tale, che non pareva che mai vi fosse stata piazza alcuna: ben è vero che non parevano delli tempi li più antichi.

<sup>3</sup> Lib. II. c. 66, where, in speaking

of the foundation of the Temple of Vesta, he says, that Numa erected it *ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ τῶν τε Καπιτωλίου καὶ τοῦ Παλατίου χωρίῳ, συμπροκλιμίνων ἤδη τῶν λόφων ἐνὶ περιβόλῳ, καὶ μίσης ἀμφοῖν αὐτῆς τῆς ἀγορᾶς, ἐν ᾗ κατισκυιάσται τὸ ἱερόν.* But in describing the construction of the Forum itself, (II. 50.) he only marks it as *τὸ ὑποκείμενον τῷ Καπιτωλίῳ πεδίῳ*, an expression equally applicable to both views of the matter.

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developed with much learning and industry by the late Professor Nibby in his work, *Del Foro Romano*, published in 1819, and was still unhesitatingly followed by Mr Burgess in 1831. Piale had indeed ventured, as early as 1818, to attempt the defence of the older view, in opposition to the authority of Nardini; but his suggestion met with little favour.<sup>4</sup> At length, in 1835, the progress of the excavations carried on in the Forum, brought to light facts which may be considered as having set the question at rest for ever. The importance of these discoveries was instantly perceived by M. Bunsen, who, in an address, delivered to the Archæological Institute at Rome in 1835, sketched out the general outlines, which he afterwards developed more fully and satisfactorily (not without considerable corrections,) in a memoir in the annals of the same Society in 1837, as well as in the fourth volume of the *Beschreibung*. The restoration of the ancient Forum may be now looked upon as founded on a secure basis; and whatever changes in matters of detail the progress of excavation may hereafter render necessary, it is probable that the leading features will require little alteration.

The Forum itself, not being designed to admit of the passage of wheeled carriages, was paved with broad flags or slabs of stone of Phocas, while the streets which bounded it, were paved in the same manner as all the others of ancient Rome, with polygonal blocks of the hard basaltic lava, usually distinguished by the name of *silex*. Hence, wherever we find a pavement of this description, we may be sure that we have reached the boundaries of the Forum properly so termed. Such a pavement had been long known to exist in front of the Temple of Faustina; and it was found, on examination, to correspond precisely in direction with that passing under the Arch of Severus: an accidental excavation in the seventeenth century had also brought it to light at an intermediate point near the Church of Sta Martina.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the limit of the Forum on this side could admit of no doubt, and had indeed been universally received; Donato, Nardini, and their followers, however, regarding it as marking the

<sup>4</sup> Even Niebuhr, so late as 1823, was still under the dominion of the generally received opinion, a circumstance which materially detracts from the value of the otherwise important hints furnished

by him to M. Bunsen, and published by the latter in the third volume of the *Beschreibung*.

<sup>5</sup> Ficoroni, ap. Fea, *Miscell.*, tom. 1. p. 157.

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breadth of the Forum, instead of the length. But when excavations were carried on beyond the column of Phocas, towards the south, it was found, that there existed a similar pavement on that side also, running in a direction nearly, but not accurately parallel with the preceding; separated from the Forum by a slightly raised ledge or curb-stone, and bounded on the opposite side by the elevated steps of an extensive building, which was proved by an inscription discovered on the spot to be no other than the Basilica Julia.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately the excavations were carried no farther, and have not since been resumed; but the pavement thus brought to light, corresponds with a portion discovered immediately in front of the three columns, commonly known by the name of the Temple of Jupiter Stator; and thus enables us at once to mark the line that bounded the Forum on this side throughout its whole extent. The two sides being thus determined, the extremities are fixed by the nature of the ground itself, the foot of the slope beneath the Capitoline Hill at once determining the boundary in that direction, while the opposite limit must have been equally marked by the commencement of the ascent to the Velian Ridge.<sup>7</sup> Although the ground in this part has not yet been uncovered, the fact already mentioned of the discovery of remains of ancient buildings in front

<sup>6</sup> The mode in which this important fact was established, is worthy of notice, as an instance how much ingenuity and learning may be frequently required, in order to interpret fully the results obtained by the process of excavation. The fragment actually found, contained only the words—

. . . . .  
 . . . . . A . . . . .  
 . . . . . ASILICA . . . . .  
 . . . . . ER REPARATAE  
 . . . . . SET ADIECIT

which would appear to throw but little light on the matter. But Dr Kellermann immediately suggested that this fragment was only a portion of an inscription preserved entire by Gruter, (171—7.) which runs thus :—GABINIVS . VETTIVS . PROBIANVS . V C . PRAEF . VRB . STATVAM . QVAE . BASILICAE . IVLIAE . A .

SE . NOVITER . REPARATAE . ORNAMENTO . ESSET . ADIECIT . The original of Gruter's inscription is no longer forthcoming, but it is said to have been found near the column of Phocas; thus leaving no doubt that this, as well as the fragment now discovered, belonged to the pedestals of two statues set up in the Basilica at the same time. Gabinius was prefect of the city in A. D. 377, a period with which the form of the letters and style of execution of the fragment are strictly in accordance.

<sup>7</sup> It may be as well here to state, that by the Velian Ridge I mean the elevation that runs across from the Palatine towards the Esquiline, and separates the valley of the Forum from that in which the Coliseum stands. The proofs of this view, which is that of M. Bunsen, will be given hereafter.

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of SS. Cosma e Damiano renders it certain that the open space of the Forum could have extended in this direction very little, if at all, beyond the angle of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina.

The space thus circumscribed, forms an irregular quadrangle—the two longer sides not being parallel, but diverging towards the Capitol—of about 630 French feet in length, with a breadth varying from 100 to 190 feet, an extent undoubtedly small when considered with reference to the city in the days of its greatness; but this circumstance, though it appears to have had much weight with some modern antiquarians,<sup>8</sup> can certainly not surprise us, if we bear in mind that the limits of the Forum were fixed in very early ages, and never underwent any alteration. Before the close of the republic, indeed, it had become altogether insufficient for the purposes it had originally served; but it was then impossible to enlarge it; and additional space was gained by the erection of spacious basilicas around it, and subsequently by the construction of other forums in the neighbourhood by successive emperors.

But not only did the discovery just mentioned at once determine the true position of the Forum, and enable us to fix its limits; but it rendered most important assistance towards the restoration of its details. The situation of the Basilica Julia, once determined, became a stepping-stone towards the arrangement of many of the other buildings which surrounded the Forum. It was known in the first place from the Monumentum Ancyranum,

<sup>8</sup> Mr Burgess is particularly severe upon the writers who contended for this "slip of a Forum," to insist on which, he observes, "may now be well nigh stamped with folly." (*Antiq. of Rome*, vol. i. p. 341.) This was written, or at least published, in 1831; only four years afterwards, this *piece of folly* was proved to be unquestionably the true view of the subject. The late Professor Nibby, indeed, still continued to maintain the old opinion; and in his latest work, (*Roma Antica*, tom. ii.) even had recourse to the extraordinary expedient of regarding the line of pavement in front of the Basilica Julia, as marking

the northern limit of the Forum instead of the southern; and transferring the whole space between the column of Phocas and the Arch of Septimius Severus, to the Forum of Cæsar! It is needless to comment on this last despairing struggle of an expiring theory. M. Canina, on the contrary, with the candour which marks the character of all his investigations, at once admitted the importance of the new discoveries, and adopted in the last edition of his work the same limits for the Forum as those fixed by M. Bunsen,—(*Indicazione Topographica di Roma Antica*, 3a edizione, Roma 1841.)

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that this Basilica was situated between the temple of Saturn, (which stood on the slope of the Capitol,) and that of Castor and Pollux. Hence the latter, which certainly faced the Forum, must have been immediately beyond the Basilica on the side farthest from the Capitol, and must either have been the temple, of which the three columns are still standing near Sta Maria Liberatrice, or have stood between that and the Basilica itself. Again, we know that the far-famed temple of Vesta, the most important sanctuary of Rome, stood very near to, if not actually adjoining, that of the twin deities: it was almost at the foot of the Palatine, and at the same time close to the Forum, on which the Regia, a building inseparably connected with it, directly fronted. The combination of these circumstances would leave little doubt that the temple of Vesta occupied nearly the site of the modern church of Sta Maria Liberatrice: a conclusion already arrived at upon very different grounds by some of the earlier topographers, and which derives a most important confirmation, from the fact that in this spot were discovered, early in the sixteenth century, not less than twelve inscriptions, some honorary, some sepulchral, in commemoration of Vestal virgins. It is a well known fact, that among the other privileges enjoyed by the Vestals, was that of being buried within the city: the place of their sepulture is nowhere mentioned; but no spot would seem more likely to have been selected for the purpose than the immediate neighbourhood of the sacred precincts, where they had lived and died. This last circumstance alone had led M. Fea in 1827, even while he still clung to the views then prevalent concerning the situation of the Forum, to place the Temple of Vesta in the spot just assigned to it.<sup>9</sup> Even Nibby, who transferred it to S. Teodoro, felt himself compelled to admit that the place where these inscriptions were found, must have been in some mode or other connected with the sanctuary. To the important bearing of the point thus established upon the questions connected with the Sacred Way, I shall have occasion hereafter to recur.

Again, the well known passage of Statius, concerning the equestrian colossus of Domitian, which had hitherto been rather a stumbling-block than an auxiliary to antiquarians, now at

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<sup>9</sup> See his plan of the Forum, republished by M. Bunsen in the *Bullett. d. Inst.* 1835.



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length becomes clearly intelligible; and some of the points there described being fixed beyond the possibility of doubt, we are enabled thereby to determine the situation of others. It stood nearly in the centre of the Forum, with its back turned towards the temples on the slope of the Capitoline hill: on its right hand, the Basilica Julia, on the opposite side the still more splendid Basilica Æmilia, while in front, and therefore at the narrow extremity of the Forum, under the slope of the Velian hill, was placed the Temple of Julius Cæsar. All this is stated with a distinctness and accuracy rarely to be found in a poetical description:

Par operi sedes: hinc obvia limina pandit  
 Qui fessus bellis adscitæ munere prolis  
 Primus iter nostris ostendit in æthera divis.  
 At laterum gressus hinc Julia tecta tuentur,  
 Illinc belligeri sublimis regia Pauli;  
 Terga pater, blandoque videt Concordia vultu,  
 Ipse autem puro celsum caput aëre septus  
 Templa superfulges, et prospectare videris,  
 An nova contemptis surgant Palatia flammis  
 Pulchrius; an tacita vigilet face Troïcus ignis,  
 Atque exploratas jam laudet Vesta ministras.

From the last lines it would appear that the head of the statue was slightly turned to the right, so as to look directly towards the Palatine; in which case the Temple of Vesta,—supposing it to have occupied the situation above assigned to it,—would have exactly met its view. The position thus obtained, both for the Æmilian Basilica and the Temple of Cæsar, may be farther supported by arguments drawn from other sources; but before we attempt to proceed farther with the restoration of the Forum, as it existed in the days of Domitian, it is necessary to cast a retrospective glance upon its condition in earlier times.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most important services rendered to Roman topo-

<sup>10</sup> In the following account of the Forum, and the changes it underwent, it is to be understood that M. Bunsen's views have been followed, whenever the contrary is not expressed. The authorities from ancient writers have been very carefully collected by M. Becker, to whose *Handbuch* the reader is referred for such of them as it did not

appear necessary to insert. The limits of an article like the present have naturally rendered it impossible to notice all the arguments brought forward by Becker and Urlichs in regard to the disputed points. I have therefore contented myself with mentioning those which appeared to my own mind the most convincing.



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graphy of late days, has been the establishment of clear ideas concerning the nature of the Comitium, and the relation in which it stood to the Forum; and here it is to Niebuhr<sup>11</sup> that we are indebted for first pointing out the true state of the case, while his views have been elaborately developed, and judiciously applied to the results of recent discoveries, by M. Bunsen. That the Comitium was originally nothing more than an open space, in which the assemblies of the patricians, the Comitia Curiata, were held, seems to have been generally admitted: but by a strange misconception of a passage in Livy,<sup>12</sup> which, beginning with Flavio Biondo,<sup>13</sup> was transmitted in succession through the whole series of topographers down to Nibby and Burgess, it was supposed that it had been subsequently roofed over, and converted into a covered building. Yet not only does the passage in question, when rightly understood, expressly *exclude* any such idea, but, as Niebuhr has justly observed, the occurrence of such prodigies as the falling of milk and blood, instead of rain, *on the Comitium*, and the growth of the sacred fig-tree on the same spot, all serve to shew that it must have still remained an open, uncovered area. We are indeed told in very early times, that it was *inclosed*,<sup>14</sup> but in terms which by no means necessarily require us to regard it as clearly distinct from the Forum, much less as constituting any thing like a separate *edifice*. On the other hand, from the frequent mention of buildings or other monuments, which are spoken of at one time as being *in the Forum*, at others *in the Comitium*, and still more clearly from a passage of Pliny, where he describes the sacred fig-tree as being "*in foro ipso ac comitio*,"<sup>15</sup> we may safely infer that it was a part of the Forum itself. It appears indeed to have been in the earliest times the Forum for political purposes. Not only were the Comitia held here, but it was the place

<sup>11</sup> *Röm. Gesch.* i. p. 444. not. 990; *Beschreibung*, III. p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> xxvii. 36. *Eo anno primum, ex quo Annibal in Italiam venisset, comitium tectum esse, memoriæ proditum est, et ludos Romanos semel instauros, &c.* It is strange that the words in Italics should not have been sufficient to show that the covering over of the Comitium was a temporary thing of periodical recurrence, like the ludi Ro-

mani, which are mentioned directly afterwards. Crevier, in his note on the passage, saw the difficulty of these words, but was so wedded to the received idea of the Comitium, that he proposes to alter the text.

<sup>13</sup> *Roma Instaurata*, II. 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Fecitque idem (Tullus Hostilius) et sapsit de manubiis comitium et curiam.* *Cic. de Rep.* II. 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Plin. H. N.* xv. 18 (20.)

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where the judicial tribunals were established, as they continued to be down to a comparatively late period: it was here also that were erected all the earliest honorary monuments, on which account it is more than once designated by Dionysius<sup>16</sup> as the most conspicuous or most noble part of the Forum. When shows of gladiators were exhibited in the Forum—the usual place for such displays before the erection of the amphitheatres<sup>17</sup>—the Comitium was set apart as the place of honour for the most distinguished spectators, and on these occasions was covered over with a temporary roof or awning, a circumstance which gave rise to the misconception already alluded to.

All these circumstances seem to lead distinctly to the conclusion adopted by M. Bunsen, that the Comitium occupied the upper or narrow end of the space above assigned to the Forum, a result already arrived at by some of the earlier topographers, who however made the mistake before mentioned, of extending its limits far beyond the truth, so as to reach to the Arch of Titus. M. Becker, who follows the same view, has also remarked that it is here we find all the earliest edifices, which were referred by tradition to the four first kings of Rome; the remaining space was the *plebeian* Forum, and served at first only as a market place, or for other purposes of ordinary life, not for any of those higher objects to which the hallowed precincts of the patrician place of meeting were devoted. Tarquinius Priscus was the first who even surrounded the lower parts of the Forum with porticoes and ranges of ordinary shops.

Of the buildings which in very early times surrounded the Comitium, the most important was the Curia Hostilia, originally erected by the king from whom it derived its name, as the place of assembly for the Senate, and which continued to serve that purpose down to the time of Julius Cæsar. It is continually mentioned in the closest connection with the Comitium, so as to leave no doubt of its looking immediately upon that open area, where we frequently hear of the people assembling to await the decision of the Senate, or attempting to influence its

<sup>16</sup> Τῆς ἀγορᾶς τῆς τῶν Ρωμαίων ἐν τῷ κραισίῳ χωρίῳ. 1. 87. ἐν τῷ φανηρωτάτῳ τῆς ἀγορᾶς. 11. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Even Julius Cæsar exhibited a show of gladiators in the Forum, on

which occasion he caused not the Comitium only, but the whole extent of the Forum, to be covered with a similar awning.—Plin. *H. N.* xix. 1, (6.)