

The Tombs of via Latina



The entrance to the archaeological area lies on the right side of Via dell'Arco di Travertino, not far from Via Appia Nuova; in the park you can see a stretch of about 450 meters of the ancient Via Latina, lined with a series of very important funeral monuments. The area was discovered by Lorenzo Fortunati, who carried out the excavations at his own expenses between 1857 and 1858; the excavations were then completed according to the will of Pope Pius IX. Immediately after the Unity, in 1879 the new Italian State expropriated the lands belonging to Barberini family. At the beginning of the 20th century, after a restoration campaign led by Rodolfo Lanciani, the area was transformed into an archaeological park, according to the initiative by Minister Guido Baccelli.

Competence: Archaeological Department of Rome

Web site: http://archeoroma.beniculturali.it/siti_archeologici/suburbio/tombe_via_latina o <http://www.coopculture.it/heritage.cfm?id=89>

1) Die-shaped Sepulcher

On the right side of Via Latina, immediately after the entrance, there is the parallelepiped tuff concrete nucleus of a die-shaped sepulcher, entirely deprived of its original covering. On the side facing the town you can read a 1858 plate, in memory of the excavations carried out by Fortunati.



2) Barberini Sepulcher

Immediately after there is a monumental brickwork sepulcher, called Barberini Sepulcher, from the name of the ancient princes owning the area.

It is a two-story sepulcher with an inaccessible underground floor. It was built with two-color bricks, typical of the second half of the 2nd century AD (the age of Antonini emperors). As usual in the "temple-like" sepulcher typology, the funeral chamber was situated in the basement: here there was the famous "Barberini" sarcophagus with the representation of the myth of Protesilaus and Laodamia. It is now preserved in the Vatican Museum. At the first floor, the funeral ceremonies were held. Also the decorative features are entirely made of bricks, like the projecting strips with angular capitals, the window and door frames, and an architrave on brackets running all around the building. The entrance at the first floor is situated on the opposite side of the road: within the building, with walls in bricks and parallelepiped blocks of tuff (the so-called "opus vittatum"), there are traces of the mosaic floor, of the plaster covering the walls and the cross vault of the second floor, while the covering of the first floor was demolished in the 18th century, when the sepulcher was used as a barn.



3) Fortunati 25 Sepulcher

On the left side of the road there are several sepulchers partially preserved. Among the others, there is a sepulcher made of bricks, of which only the underground funeral chamber remains. This chamber is rectangular and lightened by two splayed little windows, with traces of the covering cross vault. On the walls, which were covered with marble slabs, there were two niches for the cinerary urns, where there are traces of the paintings adorning them, with human and animal figures.



4) Stretch of Via Latina

In the point where the III milestone was probably set, there is a stretch of the ancient paving of Via Latina, with the original "basoli" (big polygonal stones in basaltic lava) and the so-called "crepidini", that is the lateral pavement in dirt road for the passage of pedestrians. In this stretch the roadway is 3.90 m wide and about 10 m long.



5) Valerii Sepulcher

On the right side of the road, after a series of minor structures, you will get to a very interesting two-story sepulcher, arbitrarily called Valerii Sepulcher, according to an inscription found in the area of the Villa of Demetriade. The sepulcher, almost entirely reconstructed in its elevated part, has a rectangular plan and is characterized by a two-column portico on the front; the upper floor has a rectangular window and a double weathered covering.



The entrance opens on the road through a fence on semi-columns and pillars, from which you get to an outdoor area: here two symmetrical staircases lead to the two underground sepulchral chambers, both covered with a barrel vault. The most important sepulchral chamber, in origin covered with marble slabs, perfectly preserves the wonderful stuccos of the vault, which is divided into medallions among connecting frames. The central medallion presents a veiled character riding a griffon (a fantastic winged animal, with the head of an eagle and the body of a horse) symbolizing the soul of the dead in its journey to the sky; in the middle of the other medallions and frames there are mythological and fantastic figures among floral shoots. Also the lateral lunettes of the vault are entirely decorated with stuccos.

The sepulcher probably dates back to the second half of the 2nd century AD.

6) Rest Area with Spas

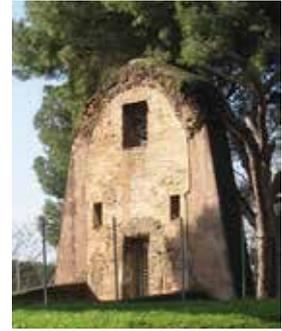
Around the Valerii Sepulcher, on the right side of the road, there are the ruins of spas linked to a statio, that is a rest area for the travelers going along Via Latina.

Along the road you can see two pillars which originally supported statues and represented the entrance to the structure. One of the rooms of the spas preserves a stretch of mosaic floor, while two basins around the Valerii Sepulcher were used to provide the plant with water.



7) "Bacelli" or "C" Sepulcher

Always on the right side of the road, after the Valerii Sepulcher, you can see a brickwork sepulcher, of which only the façade remains: the latter faced a narrow side-street of Via Latina in the direction of Appia Antica. The underground funeral chamber houses two rows of burial cells on three levels, according to an intensive burial typology born at the beginning of the 2nd century AD, when the inhumation rite began to prevail. In the 16th century the sepulcher was used as a church.



8) Circular Sepulcher

In front of the Valerii Sepulcher, on the opposite side of the road, there are traces of a circular brickwork sepulcher, consisting of two concentric circles united by transversal walls. The entrance lies behind Via Latina, where you can find rests of marble decorations and column fragment.

9) Pancratii Sepulcher

On the left side of the road there is the Pancratii Sepulcher. Today we only preserve its underground section covered by a modern roofing; the elevated part was probably "temple-like", similar to the typology of the sepulchers we have already seen. The vestibule, where you enter from a two-flight stair, has a four-arch basement, on which the sarcophagi were placed. During the excavation five sarcophagi have been found: one of them can be dated back between the 3rd and the 4th century AD and bears the name of the funeral board of Pancratii, which gives the name to the tomb and is still preserved in the sepulcher.



In the sepulchral chamber you can still see a floor with a scale black and white mosaic delimiting a big smooth marble sarcophagus around which the tomb was built, while the other seven sarcophagi, preserved in the Vatican Museum, were placed along the sides. The wonderful stuccos and frescoes adorning the cross vault and the upper part of the walls are of particular importance. In a circular medallion in the middle of the vault there is a representation of Jupiter in flight with the eagle; in the middle, in front of the entrance and in a larger frame, there is a representation of Paris, while in another opposite frame Priam asks for the bodies of Hector and Achilles; on the left side there is a musical contest between Hercules and Bacchus, while on the right there is the wedding of Alcesti.



In the lateral lunettes there are representations of false architectures, floral elements, landscapes, and mythological figures. Considering the building techniques and the decorations, the sepulcher can be dated back to the Adrian Age (first half of the 2nd century AD).

10) Calpurnii Sepulcher

After the Pancratii Sepulcher, again on the left, there is the Calpurnii Sepulcher, of which you can only see the underground sepulchral chamber covered with cross vault, with arches made of bricks along the walls, housing the sarcophagi.

11) Villa of Demetriade

Behind the Pancratii Sepulcher, there is an area with brickwork and basin belonging to a big villa, which was discovered by Fortunati and then buried again, partly destroyed in 1964 for the creation of a football ground. Considering the building techniques, in "opus reticulatum" and brickwork, and the stamps on the bricks, the villa can be dated back between the 1st century and the first half of the 3rd century AD. From the middle of the 5th century AD, the Roman matron Demetriade, the owner of the complex, transformed the villa into a place of Christian worship, by building the basilica housing the relics of St. Stefano. Several sculptures and decorative fragments have been found in the area. Nowadays they are preserved in the Vatican Museum.



12) Basilica of St. Stefano

In the middle of the 5th century AD, during the pontificate of Leon I (440-461), in the central part of the Villa of Demetriade, near the peristyle, a basilica dedicated to the protomartyr St. Stefano was built. It had one nave and two aisles, on columns of Corinthian capitals; currently we preserve the apse in the so-called "opus listatum", the confession below the altar, where the relics of the saint were preserved, and the baptistry at the bottom of the left aisle, consisting of a small swimming-pool you can enter from a small ladder. In the 9th century a bell tower was added to the basilica: it was active until the 17th century.

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