

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

Vicus Caprarius

From Rome with Love

Robert and Karla

Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

Plate 12

Vicus Caprarius — the ‘City of Water’

Location: Underground archaeological area near the Trevi Fountain, Rome



Nine metres down: the excavated Roman buildings, with the modern structure built directly above them.



An ancient staircase and brick walls (opus latericium) inside the insula, with water standing at the lowest level.

A selection of the coin hoard found on the site, each coin labelled with its emperor and dates (4th century AD).

Description

An underground archaeological site a few steps from the Trevi Fountain, found in 1999–2001 during the restoration of the former Cinema Trevi and now open about nine metres below today's streets. The dig revealed part of an Imperial-era Roman apartment block (insula), later remodelled into a grander residence, and — most remarkably — a huge brick water tank, the castellum aquae (distribution tank) of the Aqua Virgo aqueduct: the very aqueduct that still feeds the Trevi Fountain above. Lit blue to evoke the water that once filled it, the site is known as the 'City of Water.' These views move from the excavated buildings to the water tank and chambers, and end with a selection of the coin hoard found here. The background below is drawn from the site's own placards.

Inscription & Translation

No single inscription; the displayed coins carry Roman imperial legends such as GLORIA ROMANORVM, VICTORIA AVGGG, SALVS / SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE and VOT·XX·MVLT·XXX.

These are standard 4th-century coin legends: 'Glory of the Romans,' 'Victory of the Emperors,' 'the Health / Security of the Republic,' and vows (vota) for the emperor's tenth and thirtieth years of rule. The hoard runs from the Constantinian dynasty through Theodosius and Arcadius, with one older bronze of the emperor Claudius still in circulation.

Date & Age

The buildings are of the Imperial age: the south building had a public function from the 1st century AD and was transformed under the Emperor Hadrian (after 123 AD) into the castellum aquae, holding about 150,000 litres. The tank was abandoned around the 6th century, most likely after the Goths cut Rome's aqueducts in 537 AD. The coin hoard spans the 4th century AD, and the site itself was rediscovered in 1999–2001.

Artist / Creators

This is archaeology rather than the work of one artist. The buildings are Roman Imperial construction in opus latericium (brickwork); the castellum belonged to the Aqua Virgo, the aqueduct completed by Agrippa in 19 BC. The site was excavated in 1999–2001 by Rome's archaeological superintendency (supervised by Claudio Mocchegiani Carpano) during building works, and is now run as the museum 'Vicus Caprarius – La Città dell'Acqua.'

Significance

A rare chance to stand inside ancient Rome beneath the modern city. Its great prize is the castellum aquae — the only distribution tank of the Aqua Virgo ever found, though ancient sources record as many as eighteen along the aqueduct's course through the city. Because the Aqua Virgo still supplies the Trevi Fountain, this site connects directly to that monument: the water that astonishes visitors at the fountain runs through a network in use since 19 BC. The coin hoard, and the amphorae and lamps also found here, trace the daily life — and the Mediterranean trade in oil, wine and food — of the people who lived above these walls until the buildings were abandoned in the 5th–6th centuries.