

# Rome Away From Home: Changing Views of the Tiber's Opposite Bank

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## Introduction

Rome was the centre of the Empire; but our understanding of the ancient city is still heavily skewed toward elites. This is due to the type of sources often used (literary texts written by and for the aristocracy), and – more importantly – the parts of Rome we investigate.



Fig. 1. Map of Rome; Transtiberim circled.

My research sets out to combat this, by looking specifically at Transtiberim, the only part of Rome on the right bank of the city. By incorporating archaeological, textual, and artistic sources, this work aims to chart the development of a pointedly non-elite area of Rome; reframing the study of the ancient urban experience.

## Late Republic/Early Empire (45 BC-AD 64)

### Key Sources

- 45 BC: 'Sometimes I think of buying property on the other side of the Tiber (*Transtiberim*), chiefly because I can't think of any location which would be so much in the public eye' Cicero, *Att.* 12.23.3.
- 45 BC: Julius Caesar bequeaths his gardens located there to the Roman people; he had given a public feast there in 46 BC
- 2 BC: The *Naumachia Augusti*, a huge reservoir for the performance of naval battles, completed by Augustus. The *Aqueduct Alsietina* (or *Augusti*) built to provide it with water.

### Interpretation

In the early part of the Empire, the area does not seem particularly atypical: it is even relatively 'well to do' with Cicero thinking to buy property there, and numerous elite houses. However, unlike the rest of Rome, which was frequently patronised by Emperors, the *Naumachia* is the only large-scale Imperial project ever built here.

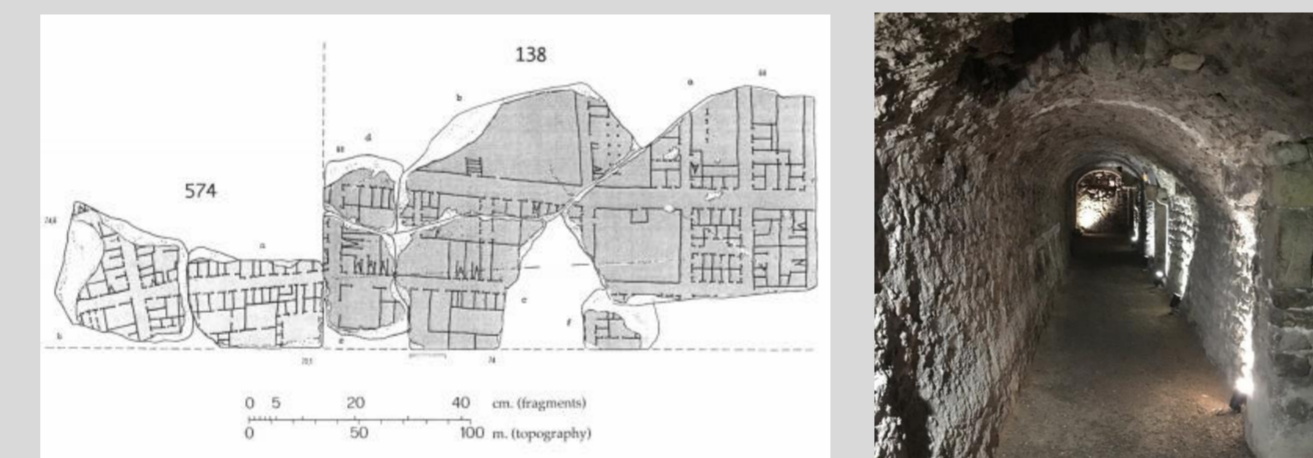
## Mid-Empire (Late 1<sup>st</sup> to Early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD)

### Key Sources

- The Severan Map, a huge early 3<sup>rd</sup> century map of all of Rome, shows that *Transtiberim* had become dominated by mercantile activity, with several *Horrea* (warehouses) along the riverbank. This has been confirmed by archaeological investigation.
- The poets Martial and Juvenal (late 1<sup>st</sup> century) allude repeatedly to its working-class character.
- Within 100 years, the *Naumachia* appears to have fallen into disuse.

### Interpretation

With stinking tanneries, ruined monuments and disreputable trade emblematic of *Transtiberim*, the area quickly lost any elite appeal, becoming instead a by-word for criminality and lower-class activity.



Figs. 2 & 3. Fig. 2. (left) showing the section of the Severan Map depicting the *Transtiberim* riverbank with *horrea* (From Tucci 2004); Fig. 3. image of the interior of a surviving *horreum* (Narbonne, France).

## Late Empire (Mid 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century AD)

### Key Sources

- The *Regionary Catalogues*, two records listing buildings in the fourteen Regions of Rome, each name *Transtiberim* as the most populous area, with particularly high numbers of *insulae*, low-rent apartment houses long associated with lower classes.
- Religious diversity apparent in the construction of the so-called *Syrian Sanctuary*, and the numerous *Tituli* (early churches in private homes) found here.

### Interpretation

By this point it is clear that *Transtiberim* stood apart, both as a centre for religious diversity and for its unparalleled population density. The emergent predominance of the Vatican area, just north of *Transtiberim*, shows how, despite the lack of imperial attention, force of numbers and activity shifted the centre of the city across the river.

## Conclusion

From the Late Republic to the end of the Empire, the *Transtiberim* area developed from an elite idyll of gardens and aristocratic residences, to a densely populated centre for religious diversity and industrial professions. While some term this decline, this poster has sought to reframe this progression positively, as a window into understanding the city as experienced by its non-elite inhabitants.

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### Acknowledgements

The author thanks Hanan Fara and Narmin Ismayilova for their comments on an earlier draft of this poster.

