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**Provenance and identity of a large bronze statue currently
in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

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Manuscripts

Review

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3 **Provenance and identity of a large bronze statue currently in the Metropolitan**
4 **Museum of Art, New York**
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8 Paul N. Pearson
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11 *A large bronze statue in the Metropolitan Museum in New York is currently identified as*
12 *the emperor Trebonianus Gallus. According to an early account, it was excavated with*
13 *many other statues in the remains of an ancient hall near San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome,*
14 *in the early nineteenth century, but this story has recently been dismissed as probable*
15 *invention. Here additional information is presented that lends credence to the traditional*
16 *provenance and supports a proposal that the hall in question may have been in the*
17 *headquarters of the imperial horseguard. New evidence is presented for the history of the*
18 *statue, and that the identification as Trebonianus Gallus was made prior to its final sale.*
19 *However an alternative is proposed which could explain various peculiarities of the piece:*
20 *the emperor Maximinus I 'Thrax', reportedly a physical giant of a man.*
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38 IN 1905 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired a large bronze statue,
39 supposedly of the Roman emperor Trebonianus Gallus (reigned AD 251-253), from a
40 vendor in Paris.¹ It can be traced securely to the collection of the distinguished St
41 Petersburg architect Auguste de Montferrand (1786-1858) who claimed the statue as
42 Julius Caesar and that it had been excavated near the church of San Giovanni in
43 Laterano, in Rome, by Count Nicolas Nikitich Demidoff (1773-1828).² The veracity of
44 this account, however, has recently been questioned.³
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54 The statue (inv. no. 05:30) is currently on display in Classical Greece and Rome
55 Gallery at the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 1). At just under 8 feet (241.3 cm) tall and
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3 executed in striking style, it is not to everyone's taste: a previous director of the
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5 museum described it as 'the ugliest work of art in the Met'⁴ Although it was originally in
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7 pieces and was heavily restored in the early nineteenth century, with additions
8
9 including a wreath and fig-leaf (both now removed), metallurgical analysis has shown
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11 that most of what remains is original and its current appearance is close to how it would
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13 have appeared in antiquity.⁵ This includes the head which, despite appearing too small
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15 for the body, is made of ancient metal and fits well on the torso.
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20 That the statue is third-century is accepted by all modern commentators. This is
21
22 based on the mode of construction and various stylistic features, including the close-
23
24 cropped military haircut and beard that was fashionable in that period. That it is likely
25
26 to be an emperor is also widely accepted.⁶ The statue adopts a commanding pose, which
27
28 could either be *adlocutio* – addressing the troops – or, as most modern commentators
29
30 prefer, originally holding a spear and long sword (*parazonium*);⁷ either pose would be
31
32 suitable for an emperor. The cloak (*paludamentum*), although it is a restoration,
33
34 replaces another that was original to the piece and indicates military command. The
35
36 heroic nudity was in a long tradition for the of depiction of emperors.⁸
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41 Despite that, the piece has some puzzling features. For instance, the subject is
42
43 wearing unusual leather sandals ornamented with a grotesque face. Metallurgical
44
45 analysis and evidence from the mode of construction indicate that the right foot is a
46
47 restoration but the left is probably ancient, although it is possible that it did not
48
49 originally belong to the piece.⁹ If it did, it would be very unusual, as other nude imperial
50
51 statues are barefoot. Most strange of all is the huge body. It may be that the body is
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53 'generic' and the statue as it is seen today is best thought of as a poor composite,
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55 somewhat out of proportion originally, and then affected by post-burial distortion and a
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3 long history of heavy restoration. However some commentators prefer to see it as a
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5 deliberate composition intended to stress the strength, height and power of the
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7 emperor. This has led to intriguing questions of the statue's significance in art-history
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9 terms, in the transition from the classical ideas of the early empire to the more stylised
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11 images of Late Antiquity.
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15 Some new details of the statue's history are presented here and the supposed
16
17 findspot near San Giovanni in Laterano is re-assessed. It is argued that the traditional
18
19 provenance may be broadly correct, and a possible precise location is suggested based
20
21 on the known archaeology of the area. It is also argued that various peculiarities of the
22
23 piece are better explained if the subject is Maximinus I 'Thrax' (reigned AD 235-238)
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25 which, if correct, could affect the way the statue is interpreted.
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33 <H1>Questioning the provenance 34

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37 Auguste de Montferrand was a leading architect to the Russian court.¹⁰ That the statue
38
39 was once owned by him is beyond dispute: he published a description of it and there is a
40
41 surviving photograph of it in his palatial townhouse in St Petersburg.¹¹ Montferrand
42
43 provided an account of its discovery, as was supposedly recounted by an unidentified
44
45 'mason' who knew the details:
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49 In my youth, when I was studying in Rome, a distinguished person from the Russian court obtained from
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51 His Holiness Pope Pius VII the permission to carry out, at his own expense, excavations in a vineyard,
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53 located not far from St John Lateran. Many statues, including the one in question, bas-reliefs and other
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55 fragments of sculpture were the result of these excavations, which lasted almost two years, and whose
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57 cost reached 100,000 piastres. After so great an expense, Mr N. N. de D. believed he had to suspend his
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59 research . . . Our statue was found in these excavations; it was knocked off its pedestal, lying in pieces and
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3 buried beneath the ruins of a hall of which it had occupied the centre. Because it was feared that the
4 statue would attract the attention of the directors of the pontifical museums, and that its importance
5 would give rise to the desire to acquire it, the pieces were immediately packed up and sent to Florence,
6 where, in the absence of their legal owner, they were neglected for many years. Eventually, they were
7 restored and displayed to the impatient curiosity of scholars and connoisseurs.¹²
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16 'Mr N. N. de D.' is Count Nicolas Nikitich Demidoff, a renowned art collector with a
17 special interest in classical sculpture. Demidoff was one of the super-rich, serving as
18 Russian ambassador to the court of Tuscany. From his appointment in 1817 (or possibly
19 1819) until his death in 1828, he seems to have divided his time between Florence and
20 Rome. When in Italy he was renowned for philanthropic schemes and lavish
21 receptions.¹³ Montferrand was a protégé of Demidoff's and, after his death, he remained
22 a friend of the family, for instance helping to redesign their town house in St Petersburg
23 in the 1830s.¹⁴
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35 Montferrand went on to explain how the statue came to his possession thanks to
36 the generosity of the young Anatole Demidoff (1813-1870) who had inherited it from
37 his father's estate. On hearing Montferrand express admiration for the statue, Anatole
38 ordered it packed up and transported to Montferrand's residence as a gift. (An
39 alternative story, that it was acquired in lieu of a gambling debt, is discussed below.)
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47 In 1970, Montferrand's account was described as 'somewhat suspicious, and it is
48 doubtful whether the story is based on any facts'.¹⁵ More recently it was brought into
49 serious question by Elizabeth Marlowe,¹⁶ who considered it probably false and designed
50 to increase the value of the piece among art collectors. Marlowe noted that the statue
51 could have been purchased on the general art market, and suggested that it could as
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3 well have come from the Balkans where Anatole Demidoff is known to have travelled.
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5 Marlowe made this argument as part of a more general case, that many fine and
6
7 important artworks have dubious pedigrees, and claims of provenance should not be
8
9 repeated uncritically. That is surely true; however various lines of evidence, some not
10
11 considered by Marlowe, lead this author to suspect that the provenance is probably
12
13 genuine.
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17 Montferrand was a respectable architect, sculptor, and connoisseur, and there is
18
19 no other evidence that he may have been prone to invention. One charming detail we
20
21 have of his later life in St Petersburg is that 'any Sunday he indulged in rearranging the
22
23 statues, using 25 labourers from 9 a. m. to lunch-time'.¹⁷ The statue remained in his
24
25 possession up to his death and there is no evidence that he ever intended to sell the
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27 piece, the pride of his collection.
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31 Montferrand's account has precise and colourful details such as the papal
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33 permission; the vineyard near San Giovanni in Laterano; the ancient hall; the large scale,
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35 expense and duration of the investigation; that many other artworks were also
36
37 excavated; and, perhaps most of all, a hint of impropriety. Of course, all good lies have
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39 the ring of truth, but less elaborate options would surely have been possible if the
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41 intention was to claim a false provenance to increase the value.
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47 The restoration confirms that the statue was originally in pieces, as Montferrand
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49 had said, which points to an archaeological find. If Montferrand had never been in
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51 Rome, as Marlowe claimed,¹⁸ his choice of locality for Demidoff's fictitious excavation
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53 might have been arbitrary, yet we now know that very rich second- and third-century
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55 archaeological remains survive in the area of San Giovanni (recall that according to
56
57 Montferrand, his statue was Julius Caesar, hence presumably he thought it was from the
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3 first century BC). The detail that the site was in a vineyard might seem *ad hoc*, and yet
4
5 the area around the Lateran basilica was surrounded with vineyards belonging to the
6
7 estates of great houses (this point is discussed further in the following section). The
8
9 basilica itself was built in the early fourth century by Constantine I on the Caelian Hill,
10
11 atop the remains of the barracks complex of the *equites singulares augusti*, or imperial
12
13 horseguard. These buildings had been hastily demolished following Constantine's
14
15 cashiering of the guard in AD 312, but splendid archaeological structures were
16
17 preserved, including many of the original rooms, floors and walls, connected by
18
19 stairways. Directly beneath the Constantinian basilica is the new fort (*castra nova*) of
20
21 the *equites singulares*, built by Septimius Severus in the closing years of the second
22
23 century. A few hundred metres to the north are the remains of the first fort (*castra*
24
25 *priora*) built by Trajan around a century earlier. Both of these complexes were in use
26
27 down to the time of Constantine.¹⁹ As Michael P. Speidel remarked:

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33 In one of history's fair ironies . . . Constantine raised a striking monument to the horse guard. When he
34
35 razed its fort and graveyard, he hoped thereby to blot out its memory – instead he saved it. The rubble of
36
37 the fort and the graveyard safeguarded vast treasure troves of inscriptions and graven images.²⁰

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42 Much statuary has been recovered from the area of the Lateran over the
43
44 centuries including, possibly, the famous equestrian bronze of Marcus Aurelius, now in
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46 Rome's Capitoline Museum, which is first recorded as having been on display in the
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48 Lateran palace in the eighth century. Maria Bianca Felletti Maj was apparently the first
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50 to connect Montferrand's account to these facts and suggest that the statue in the
51
52 Metropolitan Museum may originally have been from the horseguard barracks²¹.
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3 That the statue was at one time in Italy and part of Demidoff's substantial
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5 bequest to his sons, Pavel and Anatole, is fairly well attested. Much of the collection was
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7 exported from Tuscany to Russia on the Count's death in 1828, and both the export and
8
9 import licence lists are published. These contain a large inventory of ancient and
10
11 modern artworks. The export licence refers to a 'statua colossale di bronzo' and the
12
13 import license to a 'grande statua (em bronze antique) di grandezza colossale' which
14
15 previous commentators have cautiously identified with the Metropolitan piece.²²
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20 Demidoff was an avid collector and could have acquired the statue on the art
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22 market as were, undoubtedly, other pieces in his collection.²³ It is therefore important
23
24 to consider whether it is likely that he would have funded an excavation near the
25
26 Lateran. As discussed by Marlowe, it is well known that Demidoff did finance one
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28 excavation, in 1822, at another site about a mile from the Lateran in the Via dei Quattro
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30 Cantoni. A brief notice of the results were published in 1823.²⁴ The excavation was
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32 conducted with papal authority and the works of art were split between the Vatican and
33
34 Demidoff collections. Various pieces of statuary from that excavation appear in the
35
36 customs licences of 1828. Some were later purchased by the Hermitage Museum in St
37
38 Petersburg, where they are now on display.²⁵
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43 Marlowe described this excavation as 'Demidoff's one foray into the world of
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45 Roman archaeology'.²⁶ However, Demidoff also acquired pieces of statuary that are
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47 listed in the Hermitage collection as coming from excavations at the House of Varus in
48
49 Tivoli (a well-know site and staple of the Grand Tour), although it is not clear whether
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51 or not he directly funded that work.²⁷ More evidence of his ambition, not discussed by
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53 Marlowe, comes from a contemporary account that at one point he was planning to
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55 excavate the entire Roman forum to a depth of 10 or 12 feet (c.3 – 3.5 m) using 500
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3 convicts and agricultural labourers, but later abandoned the scheme.²⁸ Hence the
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5 possibility of another excavation in the area of the Lateran, on an ambitious and costly
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7 scale, fits the pattern.
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11 The most obvious detail in Montferrand's account capable of corroboration is the
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13 papal permission, which might have left documentary evidence. The most likely place
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15 for such a record is the catalogue of the Camerlengato in the State Archive of Rome at
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17 Corso del Rinascimento (I am very grateful to Professor Paolo Liverani for this
18
19 suggestion, and to Professor Luigi Piga for searching the archive for the period 1817-
20
21 1830 with this specific query in mind). However, there is no mention there of the
22
23 excavation, and Demidoff does not appear in the index of names, although it should be
24
25 noted that the archive is incomplete for the period of interest and it is not obvious that
26
27 permission for excavation would necessarily have been recorded here. There is no
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29 record either of the excavation that Demidoff is known to have conducted with papal
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31 permission at the Via dei Quattro Cantoni.
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37 There is, however, one positive piece of evidence that Demidoff did indeed
38
39 conduct an excavation near the Lateran. One of the ex-Demidoff pieces now in the
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41 Hermitage, a marble statue of Antoninus Pius, is described as 'Trouvée à Rome en 1825
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43 près de la Porte du Latran (?) Entré en 1851 en prov. de la coll. des Demidov' (Found in
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45 Rome in 1825 near the Lateran Gate (?) Entered in 1851 from the Demidoff
46
47 collection).²⁹ Although the entry has a question mark, the reason for which is unknown,
48
49 it does seem to provide evidence of an actual excavation because the more numerous
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51 items that Demidoff purchased from other pre-existing collections are all listed with the
52
53 formula 'origin unknown'. The Lateran Gate in the Aurelian Wall is adjacent to the
54
55 church of San Giovanni. A statue of Antoninus Pius was also included in the Demidoff
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3 customs lists of 1828.³⁰ It seems possible, therefore, that the Hermitage Antoninus was
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5 one of the 'many statues' described by Montferrand as having been recovered from the
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7 same hall as the large bronze, and exported at the same time, but like other aspects of
8
9 the story, the case must presently rest on the balance of probabilities.
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13 One final piece of evidence that may be relevant to this discussion is that entries
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15 in the catalogue of the Camerlengato for 25 July 1829 and 27 February 1830 record the
16
17 acquisition by the Vatican commissioners, from an unknown vendor, of two antique
18
19 statues of Titus and 'Giulia' (presumably the empress Julia Domna or Julia Mamaea)
20
21 which are recorded as having been found in a garden next to the 'Canonica' of San
22
23 Giovanni in Laterano ('rinvenute in un' orto contiguo alla Canonica').³¹ A Canonica is the
24
25 residential part of a church complex and would appear to refer to the Lateran Palace,
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27 which stands adjacent to the basilica on the north side. The first entry is dated four
28
29 years after the supposed discovery of the Hermitage Antoninus Pius and one year after
30
31 Demidoff's death and the export of much of his collection to Russia. However, the record
32
33 could represent either some form of re-sale from the Demidoff excavation or continuing
34
35 discovery of valuable statuary from the same location (recall that in Montferrand's
36
37 account the excavation was suspended because of the expense, implying that the site
38
39 was not fully worked out).
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48 <H1>The Villa Giustiniani / Via Tasso site

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51 These details, combined with Montferrand's description may provide clues as to the
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53 precise findspot. To reprise, Montferrand's account could refer to any time during
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55 Demidoff's residence in Italy (1817-1828). The account refers twice to 'excavations' in
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3 the plural, in a vineyard not far from San Giovanni in Laterano. The statue was in
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5 fragments beside its pedestal in the centre of an ancient hall, along with many other
6
7 statues and bas-reliefs.
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11 The Lateran complex was, in the early nineteenth century, surrounded by the
12
13 gardens and estates of palatial houses. An indication of the appearance of the area is
14
15 provided by an eighteenth-century print by Giovanni Piranesi ('Vedute di Roma' series,
16
17 published between 1747 and 1778) (Fig. 2). The precise layout in 1748 is recorded in
18
19 Giambattista Nolli's highly detailed city map of that year.³² There is no evidence for
20
21 major changes in land use between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,
22
23 so a satellite image of the area was aligned as accurately as possible with Nolli's map
24
25 and the known archaeological remains (Fig. 3).
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29 Montferrand's account could refer to various vineyards in the Lateran area (see
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31 Fig. 3B, labelled 8a-f), but if we assume that the Hermitage Antoninus Pius statue found
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33 'near the Lateran Gate' was from the same excavation, it would imply that the Gate
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35 'near the Lateran Gate' was from the same excavation, it would imply that the Gate
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37 (labelled 5) was visible from the site, narrowing the search to the eastern side of the
38
39 Lateran basilica. If the attested findspot of the statues of Titus and Julia, discussed
40
41 above, is also the same, then the gardens of the Villa Giustiniani would be most likely
42
43 because the Lateran Palace (labelled 2) directly overlooks that plot.
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47 The Villa Giustiniani site was well known for having produced many ancient
48
49 marbles, statues and busts, from its construction in the early seventeenth century and in
50
51 subsequent excavations in the eighteenth century (the house survives as the Casino
52
53 Massimo in a reduced plot, labelled 4 in Fig. 3).³³ This prior history might well have
54
55 excited the interest of Count Demidoff and it therefore seems conceivable that he came
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57 to some arrangement with the villa owners (by then the Massimo family) to conduct
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3 some large-scale excavations among the vines to search for more antiquities, acquiring
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some large-scale excavations among the vines to search for more antiquities, acquiring
papal permission for the venture. If the date of discovery of the Antoninus is correct
(1825), and the works took two years as stated by Montferrand, then the excavation
could have followed the Via dei Quattro Cantoni dig which was concluded by 1822.

The grounds of the Villa Giustiniani were extensively built over towards the end
of the nineteenth century when the modern street plan was laid out. At the start of these
works, in 1885, there was another excavation, this time financed by a Monsieur Maraini
(one of a family of entrepreneurs from Switzerland; it is not certain which one). Several
short accounts were published in learned journals and art magazines. Based on
inscriptions, the site was conclusively identified at that time as the headquarters of the
castra priora (first fort; sometimes given as *castra vetera*, old fort) of the imperial
horseguard, the *equites singulares*. The distinguished archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani
provided some details about these discoveries:

I shall never forget the wonderful site we beheld on entering the vestibule of the old barracks of the
Equites Singulares in the Via Tasso. The noble hall was found to contain forty-four marble pedestals, some
still standing in their proper places against the wall facing the entrance, some upset on the marble floor,
and each inscribed with the dedicatory inscription on the front and with a list of subscribers on the sides.
Some bear dedications to the Emperor commander-in-chief, as, for instance: "To the Genius of our
Emperor Antoninus Pius. The Thracians honorably dismissed from the regiment of the Equites Singulares
after twenty-five years of service . . . have raised by subscription this marble statue."³⁴

A similar account of the 1885 excavation also refers to a 'noble hall' and remarks
that two statues – one of Bacchus and another, headless, but possibly representing the
Genius of the Barracks – were also found, together with fragments of many others, at
that time.³⁵ This indicates that most of the statues that once adorned the pedestals had

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3 previously been removed. Lanciani's notebook from 1885 has been published³⁶ and his
4 records of various walls and features were included on his great archaeological map the
5 *Forma Urbis Romae*, as published between 1893 and 1901.³⁷ This map refers directly to
6 major excavations (*grandi scavi*) of 1885-6 (Fig. 3D; note that the *castra priora* is
7 wrongly labelled *castra nova* on this map). At this point on the map, the end of a large
8 building is depicted, shown as a single room of about 13 m internal width with five
9 semicircular niches on the west wall, presumably for statues (labelled 7 in Fig. 3D and
10 shown with an asterisk on Figs. 3A and 3B). The layout of the *castra priora* is not known,
11 but this is a reasonable location and orientation for the basilica or cross-hall of the fort.
12 If so it would have been built on a monumental scale. The precise location of this
13 western wall is below the centre of the Via Tasso (41°53'18.37' N, 12°30'23.81' E). The
14 rest of the hall must have stretched away an indeterminate distance to the east, across
15 an area marked as a vineyard of the Villa Giustiniani on Nolli's map (Fig. 3, labelled 8c)
16 and now occupied by modern city buildings and their secluded gardens, with further
17 roads beyond. Another large hall with an apsidal ending, also uncovered in 1885, occurs
18 just to the west on the opposite side of the ancient Roman road that runs along the
19 modern Via Tasso. This runs along the precise alignment of the modern Via Francesco
20 Berni, in an area shown as formal gardens belonging to the Villa Giustiniani on Nolli's
21 map.

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47 It is suggested here that the 'noble hall' described by Lanciani, most likely the
48 one marked as no. 7 on Fig. 3, could be the same as that originally excavated by
49 Demidoff, who had carted away many statues leaving their pedestals behind. The rapid
50 progress of the work in 1885 (completed in less than a week) might indicate that it was
51 mostly removing backfill from an earlier excavation. This suggestion could be proved if
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3 fragments discovered in the 1885 excavation could be linked to the Demidoff collection.
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5 Unfortunately, enquiries via the National Museum in Rome, with the assistance of
6
7 Professor Francesca Boldrighini, have failed to find any trace of the fragments, which
8
9 may never have been collected. The Bacchus, which was considered very fine, was taken
10
11 to the Maraini mansion in Switzerland but its current location is unknown. It may be
12
13 worth speculating as to why Demidoff had not recovered the desirable Bacchus.
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15 However, in Montferrand's account his work stopped when the money ran out, so
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17 possibly it was from part of the complex never excavated by him.
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22 Demidoff was more interested in art than archaeology, then a nascent field, and
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24 the heavy pedestals may not have been considered worth recovering. That was the fate
25
26 of the pedestal on which the big bronze originally stood, according to Montferrand, who
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28 unfortunately provides no indication of whether it had been inscribed. Remarkably, the
29
30 pedestal of Antoninus Pius singled out by Lanciani above could be the very one the
31
32 Hermitage Museum statue once occupied! It is the same size as the modern pedestal on
33
34 which it now stands. The pedestal survives, along with six others excavated in 1885, and
35
36 is now on public display at the National Museum in Rome. Examination of the top
37
38 surface reveals where iron brackets once attached, although it cannot be determined
39
40 whether it once supported a bronze or marble statue. Unfortunately the remaining
41
42 forty-four pedestals described by Lanciani no longer survive, or probably were never
43
44 removed from the excavation site.
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50 In summary, despite attempts to find documentary evidence for Demidoff's
51
52 excavation, the case for it having actually occurred currently rests on the balance of
53
54 probabilities. Montferrand's account has a high degree of plausibility, given what is
55
56 known of Demidoff's level of ambition, the layout of the Lateran area and its known
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3 archaeology, such that there seems no good reason to dismiss it. It is even possible that
4
5 an ancient hall excavated in 1885, and identified at that time as the basilica of the
6
7 imperial horseguard, was the very same location. This is still a testable proposition
8
9 since it seems likely that extensive archaeology survives below the Via Tasso and in the
10
11 gardens of the modern buildings, potentially including material evidence of the history
12
13 of excavation at the site.
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16 17 <H1>Trebonianus Gallus or Maximinus Thrax? 18

19
20 After Montferrand's death in 1858, his collection was dispersed and the statue came
21
22 into the hands of Parisian art dealers Rollin & Feuarent. According to C. M. Fitz
23
24 Gerald,³⁸ there was an initial botched restoration attempt before the piece went into
25
26 storage for a long period, until a second, more successful restoration led to its
27
28 reappearance 'about two years' before its acquisition by the Metropolitan Museum in
29
30 1905. Fitz Gerald did not name the vendor, but left the impression that it was Rollin &
31
32 Feuarent (as was inferred by the author of a short report summarizing Fitz Gerald's
33
34 account published soon after).⁴⁰
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40 However, some interesting additional details are found in the Parisian
41
42 newspapers *Le Figaro* and *Le Radical* from 1910.⁴⁰ These report a court case in which a
43
44 Monsieur Van Branteghem was suing a Monsieur Triantaphylos for 100,000 francs, a
45
46 fifth of the statue's estimated value, on the grounds that it was he who had recognized
47
48 its worth and identified it as the emperor Trebonianus Gallus. Both articles include a
49
50 brief history of the statue, including the alleged discovery near the Lateran in Rome,
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52 and include the additional detail, or possibly embellishment, that Demidoff had sold it to
53
54 Montferrand after a gaming loss. They also indicate that the statue had, for a while,
55
56 belonged to Triantaphylos, who, it seems, had bought it from its previous owner
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3 (unknown) having initially seen it set it up next to a goldfish pond in a garden in the Rue
4
5 Saint Georges.
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8 Van Branteghem (dates unknown, but described as an old man) had been a
9
10 lawyer by profession, and one-time famous collector of Greek vases.⁴¹ Triantaphylos
11
12 [*sic*] was presumably Evengelos Triantaphyllos, dates unknown, another art collector.
13
14 Van Branteghem had apparently been contracted by Triantaphyllos as an agent for the
15
16 sale, which he tried, unsuccessfully, to arrange with the British Museum and the Louvre.
17
18 He also claimed to have written a pamphlet justifying the identification (which does not
19
20 seem to have survived), that had increased the value. Eventually Triantaphyllos sold it
21
22 himself to the Metropolitan Museum for just 65,000 francs. Van Branteghem lost the
23
24 case as the court ruled that Triantaphyllos had retained the right of direct sale.
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29 At that time acquisition, the Metropolitan Museum staff accepted Van
30
31 Branteghem's identification: in two publications, it was claimed that the identity as
32
33 Trebonianus Gallus was conclusively established by comparison with coin portraits.
34
35 This was supported by a coin donated by the journalist William Laffan who was serving
36
37 on the acquisitions committee. The claim has been repeated in various museum
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39 publications and other works over the years,⁴² but by the 1970s two other writers
40
41 questioned the identification on the basis that the features do not correspond closely
42
43 with those of other statues more securely identified as that emperor.⁴³
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48 What has been described as the 'brutish visage'⁴⁴ is remarkable but not
49
50 unprecedented in imperial portraiture, but the physique, if indeed it is considered part
51
52 of the composition and not a poorly constructed 'generic' body of heroic type, is the
53
54 most peculiar aspect and has attracted significant comment. A description from 1987
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56 commented:
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3 A noble Etruscan by birth, Gallus... was reputedly proud not of his ancestry but of his wrestling ability,
4 which he confirms by wearing boots appropriate for the palaestra [gymnasium]. His massive frame and
5 improbably small head point up to the intent of this nearly eight-foot-tall bronze: to impress or intimidate
6 the populace through his sheer strength... Although his pose is one routinely adopted by Roman emperors
7 - recalling Greek heroic and athletic statues - the statue's disproportion, wrestling gear, and brutish crew
8 cut and stubbly beard, no longer evoke the ideals of classical Greece in the days of Augustus.⁴⁵

14 A similar, more recent description makes similar observations:

17
18 ... its disproportionately large muscular body intimidates through its sheer physical presence, and is
19 reminiscent of over-muscled Herculean bodies of wrestlers, boxers and gladiators ... The massive nude
20 body, then, marked out this emperor as an extraordinary physical figure in the midst of the third-century
21 crisis, while preserving in the commander's paludamentum ... and the stern stubbled face, stout neck and
22 cropped hair the auctoritas of a Roman military leader, and in the contours of the skin, wrinkled brow,
23 fleshy torso and gently sagging pectorals the seniority and experience expected of an effective Roman
24 emperor ... Trebonianus was drawing upon multiple traditions and associations in this imperial image:
25 its corpulence both contrasted with the waifness of recent emperors and tapped into the strength and
26 vigour of the camp and the exceptional physical presence of professional fighters and athletes. And far
27 from harmonizing these traditions, the artist went to great lengths to underline the composite character
28 of the piece: the head is some two-thirds the scale of the body and the inflated torso is almost a caricature
29 of the Polykleitian ideal from which it is derived. The very disproportion of this extraordinary statue,
30 represented most strikingly by its gutsy display of flesh, marked a bold (and typically late antique)
31 rejection of the orthodoxies of classical portraiture.⁴⁶

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46 As the Metropolitan Museum's own notes point out, "The massive nude body itself
47 resembles that of an athlete or gladiator ... rather than what was typical for a
48 representation of an emperor'.⁴⁷ and a recent commentary agrees that " the massive
49 chest of the statue recalls *a pankriatiast's* [wrestler's] figure".⁴⁸

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3 Unfortunately, very little is known about Trebonianus Gallus because of the
4 extreme paucity of historical sources relating to his reign, but there is nothing to
5 suggest that his official image was as some kind of strong-man. Nor is there anything in
6 the historical record to suggest that he was either embarrassed by his ancestry or proud
7 of his wrestling ability. On his coinage and on the Vatican bust he wears a confident,
8 relaxed, expression. Here it is suggested that a more plausible subject is Maximinus I
9 'Thrax' (Caius Julius Verus Maximinus; he was referred to as 'Thrax', the Thracian, in
10 later writings), who reigned a little earlier, AD 235-238.
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22 Maximinus was a professional soldier who rose through the ranks and eventually
23 became emperor on the assassination of Severus Alexander (reigned AD 222-235).⁴⁹ He
24 was probably in his early sixties on his accession, and he was reputedly ashamed of his
25 provincial origin, which he tried to cover up. The most reliable historical source for him
26 is Herodian, who had a career in the imperial and public service – hence it is likely that
27 he would have seen Maximinus in person. He described Maximinus as 'of such
28 frightening appearance and colossal size that there is no obvious comparison to be
29 drawn with any of the best-trained Greek athletes or warrior elite of the barbarians'.⁵⁰
30 Before his accession Maximinus had been known for his role in training the troops.
31 Many stories of his great size and strength, including being an unbeatable wrestler, can
32 be found in another, more dubious source, the *Historia Augusta*.⁵¹ This reports that
33 Maximinus started his career as an imperial bodyguard (*stipator corporis*) in Rome,
34 which means he would probably have been enrolled in the horseguard (coincidentally,
35 or perhaps even suggestively, the unit whose headquarters have been uncovered in the
36 Lateran area and where the statue may have once stood).
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3 The historical accounts of Maximinus's gigantic stature led a medical expert with
4 an interest in ancient history to propose a diagnosis of acromegaly,⁵² a pituitary
5 disorder which causes an excess of growth hormone. If Maximinus was indeed such a
6 giant, it could force an artistic reappraisal of the colossal bronze, which may have been
7 more lifelike than has generally been appreciated. Indeed a possible association with
8 Maximinus has not gone entirely unnoticed: one previous author juxtaposed an image of
9 the statue with quotations referring to Maximinus's gigantism, suggesting that together
10 they might represent a new type of strong-man imperial image adopted by emperors of
11 the third century.⁵³ A simpler option is that the statue is Maximinus himself: so is there
12 a resemblance with other known images?
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26 Three fairly complete busts of Maximinus survive, albeit having been broken up
27 in antiquity.⁵⁴ All are based on the same model, the original of which may have stood on
28 the Palatine Hill: the top half of the head, in finest marble, was discovered there and is
29 currently on display at the Palatine Museum. The other source for images of Maximinus
30 is the coinage. The portraiture on the Roman series has been discussed by various
31 authors.⁵⁵ There are three, very distinct styles of portrait. All have a close-cropped
32 military haircut, furrowed brow and prominent nose and chin, and a commanding
33 expression (features that resemble those of Trebonianus); but in profile they are very
34 different (Fig. 4). The Type 1 portrait (Fig. 4a), which is restricted to the first emission
35 of the mint in 235, has a rounded profile. The Type 2 portrait (Fig. 4b), which appeared
36 in early 236, is similar above the nose but is much more prognathous. The Type 3
37 portrait (Fig. 4c), which was issued from later in 236 up to the end of his reign, is
38 powerful and square headed, with an extraordinarily jutting jaw-line and prominent
39 nose. The marble statuary seems closest to the Type 2 image.
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3 From the front, the bronze in the Metropolitan museum is similar to the marble
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5 statues, especially the facial expression and the spacing of the features, including the
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7 eyes, nose, point of the chin, furrowed brow and hairline (compare Fig. 5a and 5b). The
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9 Trebonianus in the Vatican Museum (Fig. 5c) is much less similar. However in profile
10
11 the features of the Metropolitan bronze are unlike the marble statues and resemble
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13 more closely the Type 1 portrait on the coins (see Fig. 4d). Putting the evidence
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15 together, it would appear that the statue has the closest relation to the rare Type 1
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17 portrait on the coins, dating from the beginning of the reign in 235, when it might
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19 conceivably have been ordered. Perhaps one reason why specialists have not previously
20
21 suggested that the statue could be Maximinus is that he is more commonly associated
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23 with the Type 3 portrait, which bears little resemblance to the statue in profile.
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29 As previously discussed, the statue wears unusual leather sandals which are
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31 decorated with a peculiar face with open mouth surrounded by scrollwork (see Fig. 1c-
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33 d). They have been compared with the open-toed boots of wrestlers or military parade
34
35 boots.⁵⁴ It is possible that the sandals did not originally belong to the statue, but if they
36
37 did they could help with the identity. Here a tentative suggestion is made that the face
38
39 may represent Silenus, a figure associated with the cult of Dionysus, a perpetually drunk
40
41 old man commonly depicted with an open mouth. The cult is ancient and may have
42
43 originated in Thrace where it was very popular, and it was favoured by the
44
45 horseguard.⁵⁶ It is difficult to imagine an Italian aristocrat like Trebonianus identifying
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47 with it, but it fits better with the hard-drinking image of Maximinus that comes down to
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49 us from the ancient sources.
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57 <H1>Conclusion

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3 The traditional provenance of a colossal bronze statue now in the Metropolitan Museum
4 of Art has recently been contested. That provenance, as described by its one-time owner
5 Auguste de Montferrand in 1849, was from an ancient hall discovered during an
6 excavation by Count Demidoff in an in a vineyard near San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome.
7
8 Despite this author's attempts to find documentary or material evidence to confirm that
9 the excavation took place, it must be admitted that the case for it is currently
10 circumstantial. It remains possible, as has been suggested by others, that the story of the
11 discovery was concocted by Montferrand from afar, for reasons of personal gain. But to
12 this author, the degree of verisimilitude in Montferrand's account is such that it seems
13 much more likely than not that the findspot was genuinely in a vineyard near San
14 Giovanni, as originally stated. If so, the Villa Giustiniani / Via Tasso site, which we now
15 know was once the headquarters of the imperial horseguard, and which has produced
16 abundant ancient statuary both before and after the supposed period of Demidoff's
17 excavation, is a highly plausible location.
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35 The statue has been identified as the emperor Trebonianus Gallus ever since Alfonse
36 Van Branteghem first suggested it in the early twentieth century. Here it is argued, on
37 the basis of the facial features and commanding expression, that a more likely subject is
38 Maximinus I 'Thrax' (reigned 235-238) who was, reputedly, a giant of a man. The bronze
39 may have been made specifically for display in a military context. If the body of the
40 statue is indeed part of a deliberate composition and not a generic nude hero, it may
41 depict Maximinus as emperor-drillmaster, or emperor-as-Hercules, in recognition of his
42 extraordinary physique and military reputation as was promoted during his reign.
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18
19 correspondence and sharing materials. Ian Haynes (Newcastle University) first
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21 suggested to me that the location of the fort of the *castra vetera* might be worth
22
23 investigating as a possible location for the statue's discovery. I thank him, also, for
24
25 leading a memorable tour of the spectacular archaeology belonging to the *castra nova*
26
27 directly underneath San Giovanni in Laterano. Francesca Boldrighini (National Museum
28
29 of Rome) assisted in various enquiries. Paolo Liverani was very helpful in suggesting
30
31 how to approach the Vatican archive and, as a non-Italian speaker, I am tremendously
32
33 indebted to Luigi Piga for searching those archives with my query in mind on two
34
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36
37 discussions about the statue. The British School in Rome assisted my enquiries and
38
39 provided excellent library facilities. An anonymous reviewer provided much useful
40
41 advice including discovering the article in *Le Radical* for 1910.
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50 51 **Notes and references** 52

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51
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53
54 followed here, by Marlowe, op. cit. (note 2), at p. 5. Marlowe suggested that the
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2
3 for the identification; see also discussions in Neverov, op. cit. (note 2) and Marlowe
4
5 op. cit. (note 2). Note that von Köhne, op. cit (note 11) is probably in error by stating
6
7 that the statue remained in Demidoff's palace in Tuscany until 1848; see Marlowe
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10
11
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44
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15 paper also shows photographs of a very well-preserved section of wall discovered
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17 close by. Part of what appears to be Lanciani's map was reproduced by Speidel, op.
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34 40 The sources are Anonymous, 'Gazette des Tribuneaux', *Le Figaro*, 23 April 1910, p.
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36 4; and Anonymous, 'Les peregrinations de l'empereur Gallus', *Le Radical*, 28 May
37
38 1910, p. 4. Presumably Triantaphyllos had acquired it from a previous owner who
39
40 had in turn bought it from Rollin & Feuarent. The articles suggest that it was
41
42 Montferrand who had carried it to St Petersburg (*Le Figaro*). This contradicts
43
44 Montferrand's own account, and also the evidence of the customs licences
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46 published by Argenziano, op. cit. (note 22), which seem to suggest the piece was
47
48 shipped along with many other works by his sons after the count's death. It may be
49
50 that the articles were based on von Köhne, op. cit (note 11) and the reference to a
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52 gaming loss was an embellishment. Note, for completeness, that another very
53
54 different version of events comes from an apparently unreliable newspaper report
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2
3 by Anonymous, 'Statue of a Caesar for the Art Museum', *New York Times*, 4 August
4
5 1905, which suggests that the identification as Trebonianus was made 'when the
6
7 statue was moved to the house of Prince Demidoff in St Petersburg' and that the
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9 statue 'was dug up 50 years ago' and had been 'bought at public auction with other
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11 statuary of the Demidoff collection after the Prince's death in 1870', all of which
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13 seems to be wrong. The claim that the statue had been dug up about fifty years
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15 before its acquisition by the Metropolitan Museum (i.e. around 1855) was widely
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17 repeated at the time. The error was compounded in other sources which relate that
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19 the excavation was conducted with permission of Pope Pius IX (officiated 1846-
20
21 1878) near San Giovanni in Laterano, as opposed to Pius VII (officiated 1800-1823)
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23 in Montferrand's account: see, for instance, Anonymous, 'Items from the Art
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25 Museums', *Brush and Pencil* 16, (1905), pp. 47-50: presumably someone noticed
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27 that the pope did not fit the date, and so changed the number.
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49 *History*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
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53 Hemingway, McGregor and Smith, op. cit (note 4) where the identification is
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55 described as 'not absolutely certain but probable'.
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3 43 Bergmann, op. cit. (note 6); M. Wegner, *Das römische Herrscherbild: Gordianus III.*
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20 drew a comparison with the image of the emperor Caracalla.
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22
23 45 Mertens, op. cit. (note 41) at p. 153. Hemingway, McGregor and Smith, op. cit. (note
24 4) attribute this suggestion to M. Anderson as cited in that work.
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30 47 Anonymous, op. cit. (note 42).
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38 **Figure captions**

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41 Fig. 1. Large bronze statue in the Metropolitan Museum (inv. no. 05.30), height c.8 ft.
42
43 (2.44 m). A: front; B: back; C and D; detail of left sandal. Photographs reproduced
44
45 from S. Hemingway, S. McGregor, and D. Smith, 'The bronze statue of Trebonianus
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47 Gallus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Restoration, technique, and
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49 interpretation', in E. Risser and D. Saunders (eds), *The Restoration of Ancient*
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51 *Bronzes: Naples and Beyond* (Los Angeles, 2013), pp. 113–36.
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54 Fig. 2. Print of the Piazza and Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, by Giovanni Battista
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56 Piranesi, published c.1747-78, showing prominent landmarks including the Lateran
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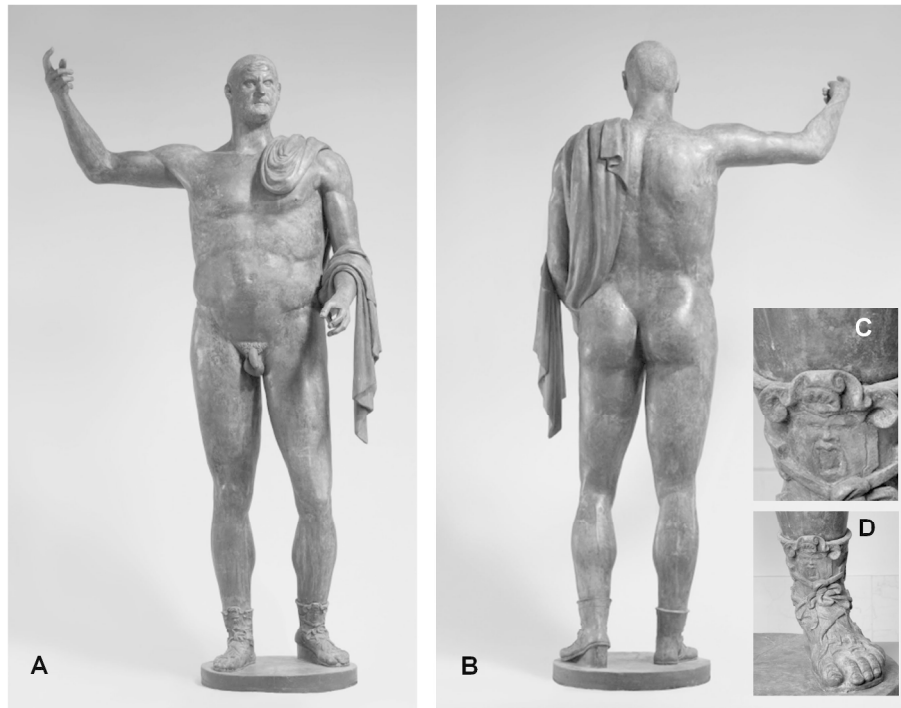
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3 Baptistry (octagonal building to right foreground), Egyptian obelisk, Lateran Palace
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5 (square building behind obelisk) and west end of the church of San Giovanni (to the
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7 right of the Palace). The Lateran Gate, another prominent landmark, is not visible
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9 because it is behind the church. The inset highlights the distant area on the left
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11 which lay within the grounds of the Villa Giustiniani (now the Via Tasso area), and
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13 may show a vineyard (see Fig. 3). Author's collection.
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16 Fig. 3. Maps of the Lateran area. A: Satellite image showing 1, Church of San Giovanni; 2,
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18 Lateran Palace; 3, Lateran obelisk; 4, Villa Giustiniani (now Casino Massimo); 5,
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20 Lateran Gate in the Aurelian Wall; 6, Porta Asinaria (the Roman-era gate); 7,
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22 western end of the probable hall of the first fort (*castra priora*) of the imperial
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24 horseguard (*equites singulares*) now beneath the Via Tasso, from Google Earth. Note
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26 that the view in Fig. 2 was drawn from the corner of the piazza in the left centre of
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28 the main map, looking east. B: Giambattista Nolli's map of 1748 aligned as precisely
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30 as possible showing features 1-7 and 8a-f, vineyards, including 8b and 8c belonging
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32 to the Villa Giustiniani, from <http://nolli.uoregon.edu/default.asp>; C:
33
34 Reconstruction of the pre-Constantinian archaeology of the Caelian Hill showing the
35
36 two forts (*castra priora* and *castra nova*) of the *equites singulares* from A. M. Colini
37
38 *Storia e topografia del Celio nell'antichità* (Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di
39
40 Archeologia: Memorie 7 (1994), pl. 24. D: Detail of Lanciani's archaeological map
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42 *Forma Urbis Romae* (1893-1901) showing 7, the location of the excavations of 1885
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44 including detail of the hall of the *equites* with what appear to be five niches along
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46 the western wall, which is shown as below the centre of the modern Via Tasso,
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48 reproduced from D. Colli, M. Martines, and S. Palladino, 'Viale Manzoni, Via
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50 Emanuele Filiberto. L'ammodernamento della linea A della Metropolitana: nuovi
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Fig. 4. Profile views explored. There are three distinct types of portrait on the coins of Maximinus I, here shown by bronze sestertius and silver denarius denominations (see text for discussion) A: Type 1; B: Type 2; C: Type 3. These can be compared with profiles of the Metropolitan Museum statue (D), the Capitoline Museum statue (E) and a bronze sestertius of Trebonianus Gallus (F). Note that both D and E are left profile views that have been reversed electronically for ease of comparison with the coins. All coins reproduced with permission from CNG coins. D, from S. Hemingway, S. McGregor, and D. Smith, 'The bronze statue of Trebonianus Gallus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Restoration, technique, and interpretation', in E. Risser and D. Saunders (eds), *The Restoration of Ancient Bronzes: Naples and Beyond* (Los Angeles, 2013), pp. 113–36. E, photo: author.

Fig. 5. Comparison of portraits from the front. A: Statue of Maximinus in the Capitoline Museum; B: Statue in the Metropolitan Museum; C: Bust of Trebonianus Gallus in the Vatican Museum. Photographs A and C: the author; B: from S. Hemingway, S. McGregor and D. Smith, 'The bronze statue of Trebonianus Gallus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Restoration, technique, and interpretation', in E. Risser and D. Saunders (eds), *The Restoration of Ancient Bronzes: Naples and Beyond* (Los Angeles, 2013), pp. 113–36.



Large bronze statue in the Metropolitan Museum (accession number 05.30), scale: about 8 ft. (2.44 m) tall. A: front; B: back; C and D; detail of left sandal. Photographs reproduced from S. Hemingway, S. McGregor, and D. Smith, 'The Bronze Statue of Trebonianus Gallus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Restoration, Technique, and Interpretation,' in E. Risser and D. Saunders (eds.), *The Restoration of Ancient Bronzes: Naples and Beyond* (Getty, 2013), pp. 113–136.

254x190mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Print of the Piazza and Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, published c. 1747-1778 showing prominent landmarks including the Lateran Baptistery (octagonal building to right foreground), Egyptian obelisk, Lateran Palace (square building behind obelisk) and west end of the church of San Giovanni (to the right of the Palace). The Lateran Gate, another prominent landmark, is not visible because it is behind the church. The inset highlights the area on the left far distance which was within the grounds of the Villa Giustiniani (now the Via Tasso area), and may show a vineyard (see Fig. 3). Author's collection.

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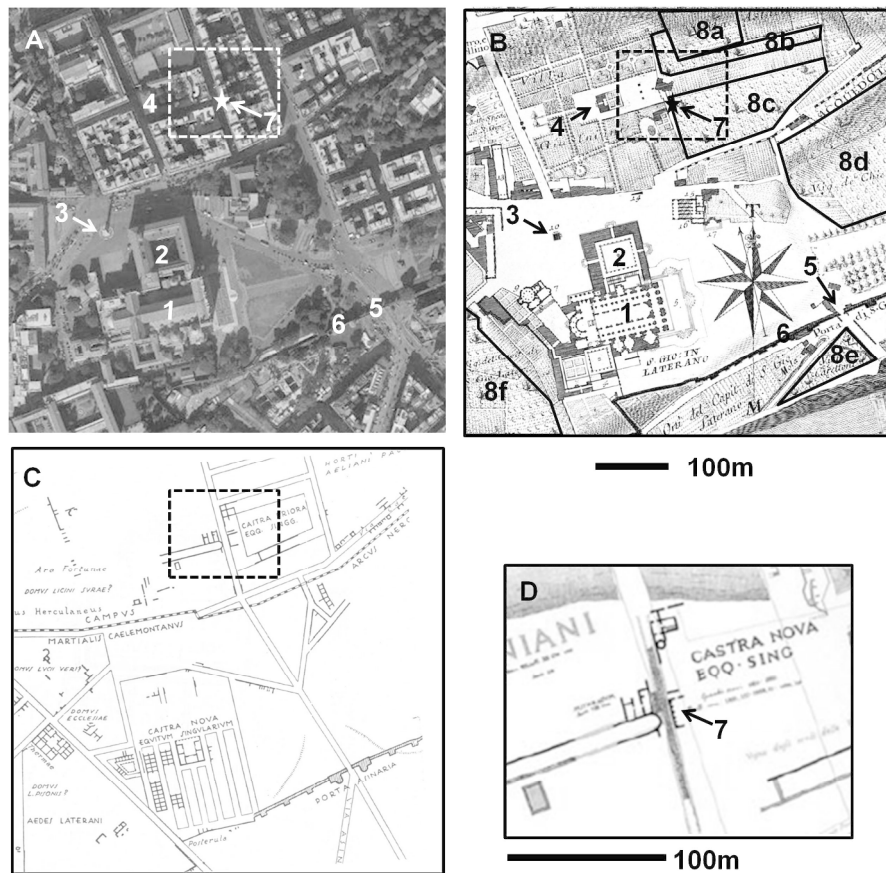


Fig. 3 Maps of the Lateran area. A: Satellite image showing 1, Church of San Giovanni; 2, Lateran Palace; 3, Lateran obelisk; 4, Villa Giustiniani (now Casino Massimo); 5, Lateran Gate in the Aurelian Wall; 6, Porta Asinaria (the Roman-era gate); 7, western end of the probable hall of the first fort (castra priora) of the imperial horseguard (equites singulares) now beneath the Via Tasso, from Google Earth. Note that the view in Fig. 2 was drawn from the corner of the piazza in the left centre of the main map, looking east. B: Giambattista Nolli's map of 1748 aligned as precisely as possible showing features 1-7 and 8a-f, vineyards, including 8b and 8c belonging to the Villa Giustiniani, from <http://nolli.uoregon.edu/default.asp>; C: Reconstruction of the pre-Constantinian archaeology of the Caelian Hill showing the two forts (castra priora and castra nova) of the equites singulares from A. M. Colini *Storia e topografia del Celio nell'antichità* (Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia: Memorie 7, 1944) (1994), at pl. 24. D: Detail of Lanciani's archaeological map *Forma Urbis Romae* (1893-1901) showing 7, the location of the excavations of 1885 including detail of the hall of the equites with what appear to be five niches along the western wall, which is shown as below the centre of the modern Via Tasso, reproduced from D. Colli, M. Martines, and S. Palladino, 'Viale Manzoni, Via Emanuele Filiberto. L'ammodernamento della linea A della Metropolitana: nuovi spunti per la conoscenza della topografia antica' in *The Journal of Fasti online*, 2009-154 (2009).

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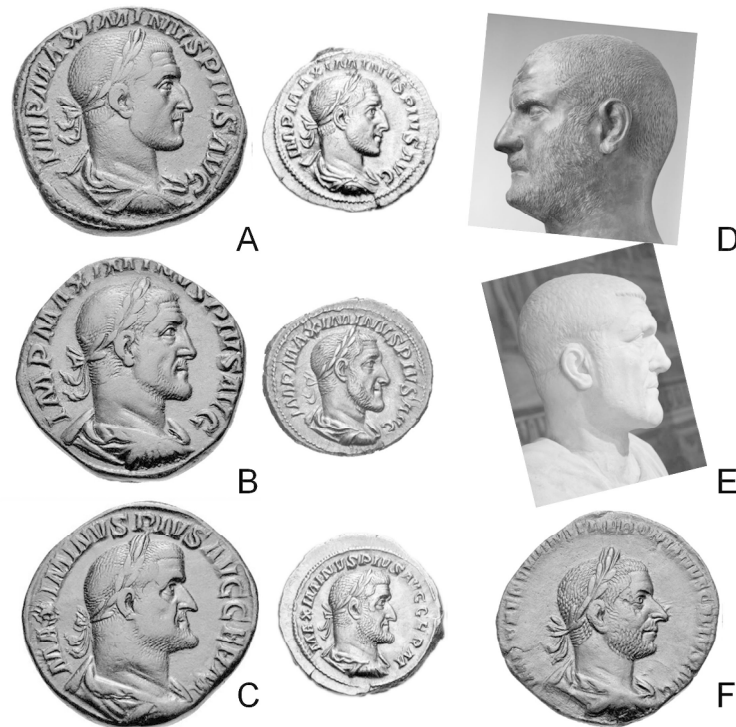


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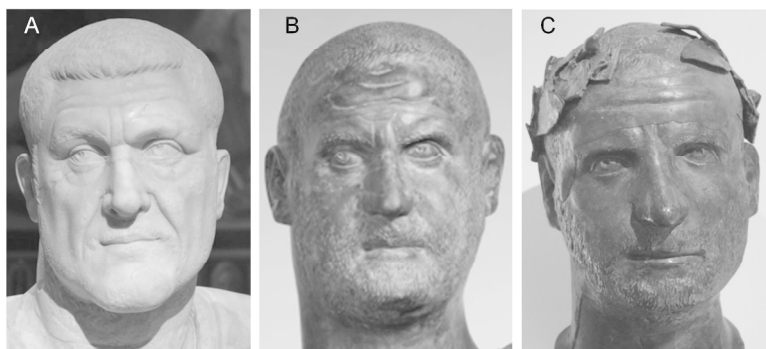


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