

fig. 1
Location of the principal public urban sites in ancient Roman times



- S | sala borsa
piazza maggiore
two towers
- 1 | forum (hypothetical location)
- 2 | temple (Augustan age)
- 3 | temple (Republican period)
- 4 | basilica
- 5 | theater
- 6 | entrance arch to the forum area
- 7 | bridge over the Aposa stream

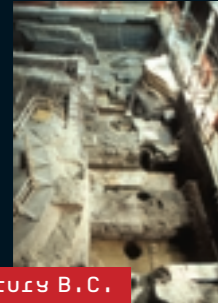


fig. 2
General view (from east) of the excavations



fig. 3
Terracotta antefix with Gorgon head in relief (Republican period)

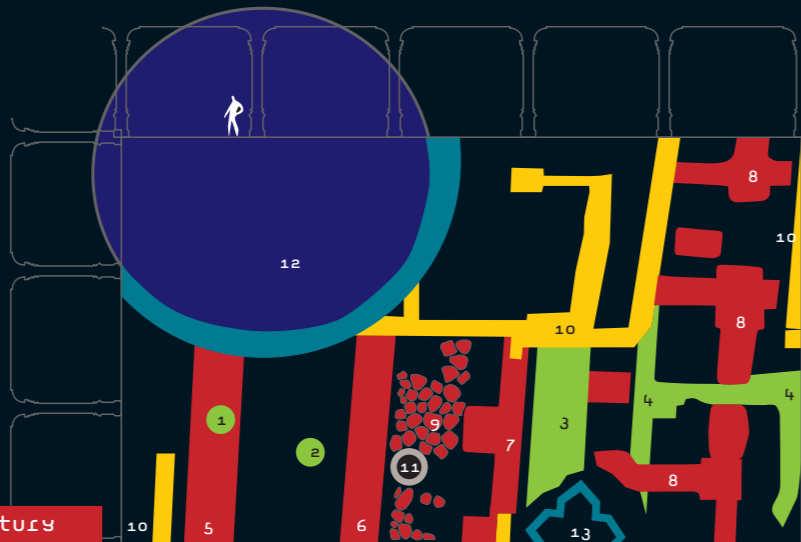


fig. 5
Schematic plan by period of archaeological finds



fig. 4
Column base of the Roman basilica

Camaleon acaulis flore luteo ad autumtendente



fig. 6
Ulisse Aldrovandi, Plates of animals, plants, flowers and fruit

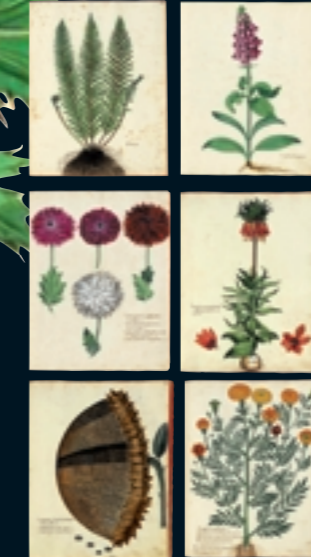


fig. 9
Watercolor by Carlo Sartì (1840). Firemen drill in the Courtyard of the ex Giardino dei Semplici

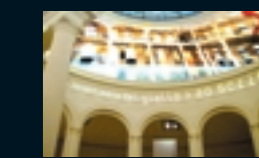


fig. 10
Images projected onto the cupola of the Exedra

Bononia

In Roman times the urban layout of Bologna, or Bononia (189 B.C.), reflected the city plan that characterized the late Republican colonies. These were organized according to a geometric pattern consisting in streets at right angles, thus forming an almost square-shaped plan that was divided by the *cardo* and the *decumanus* (fig. 1). What the north part of the civic palazzo that faces the Neptune Square was over the centuries is "narrated" by the **>archeological excavations<** begun during the restoration and rebuilding of the covered square, a platform that is suspended both in space and time guides us along a fascinating and stimulating stroll through history. From the formidable wall foundations of the cistern created during the Renaissance by "il Terribilia", as you pass over the Roman basilica's foundations and continue along the Medieval tower-house's walls, you can see the star-shaped tank that was once located at the center of one of the botanical garden's four parterres created by Ulisse Aldrovandi during the 16th century.

The basilica

The civic basilica of Bononia dates back to between the end of the second century and the beginning of the first century B.C. and was used by the citizens as a place of assembly and as a hall of justice. This basilica, presumably rectangular in shape, was twenty meters wide and about seventy meters long. It was divided by two rows of columns that separated three distinct naves in which the central nave was wider than the two side aisles. The early wooden structure was adorned with architectural decorations in terracotta. Among these, a Gorgon's head (fig. 3) was found during the 1920s archeological digs. A coeval column base was also found close to a brick wall during these excavations and is today housed in the city's Archeological Museum (fig. 4). Next to the basilica's foundations very evident remains of an ancient road pavement dating back to the Augustan age can be seen. The finding of two aligned, undecorated creek water wells is also noteworthy. These two wells can still be seen and were undoubtedly intended to serve the city's numerous inhabitants.

- II century B.C.**
 - 1-2 wells
 - 3 sewers
 - 4 layout of building foundation in perishable material
- I century B.C. - early III century A.D.**
 - 5-6 basilica wall foundations (I century B.C.)
 - 7 new wall perimeter of the enlarged basilica (II-III century A.D.)
 - 8 layout of foundation for construction in rows with pillars/columns
 - 9 road pavement (Augustan age)
- XIII century A.D.**
 - 10 wall structures for domestic constructions
- XIV century A.D.**
 - 11 brick well
- XVI century A.D.**
 - 12 cistern
 - 13 cross-shaped tank for hydroponics

From Decay to Medieval Reconstruction

After the subsequent transformations in Roman times, from the end of the fifth to the seventh centuries A.D. this area was subject to increasingly conspicuous and insidious signs of decay that ultimately brought about the collapse of the structures and the loss of the valuable material used. This tragic situation lasted until the thirteenth century when there was a true recovery and civic constructions of noteworthy effort and cost were erected one and a half meters above the Roman ruins (fig. 5). Under the Visconti Family reign in Bologna during the Middle Ages the palazzo became a true fortified citadel, the headquarters of the troops who defended the fortress.

Viridarium, Tower, Scuderie (stables)

In 1360 the papal legates succeeded the Visconti Family. Among these legates, the prominent diplomat Egidio de Albornoz and Androino de la Roche deserve special mention. In that same year, de la Roche purchased a unit of 35 houses on the north side of the palazzo. This area was intended for the creation of a large garden surrounded by embattled and fortified walls and which was inspired by the Pope's residence in Avignon. Enormous sums of money were spent on the *viridarium*, or palazzo garden, created right in the section of the city that was the most built-up. The horse stables and the living quarters for the palazzo's papal guard were situated near the garden. Its fort-like aspect was maintained until 1376 when the city revolted against the Cardinal Legate and was granted autonomy by the Pope. This, however, did not last long because in 1401 Giovanni Bentivoglio proclaimed himself ruler of the city. In the Fall of 1506 Pope

Julius II entered Bologna and exiled the Bentivoglio Family. Two years later the palazzo consolidated itself as a fortress with the construction of the Tower that faced the Canton de' Fiori. Other significant structural changes occurred between 1554 and 1555 when the architects Stefano Grandi and Antonio Morandi were entrusted with the restructuring of the interior of the **>scuderie<**. They substituted the old pillars with two rows of Tuscan-style columns, thus making this area resemble a "basilica."



fig. 7
Anonimo Emiliano, Horti Bononiensis Ichnographia, drawing in pen with watercolors, XVIII century

The Orto dei Semplici

In 1568 Ulisse Aldrovandi transformed the Cardinal Legate's viridarium into a botanical garden with flowerbeds of different geometric shapes. This new garden was inspired by Padua's Giardino dei Semplici (1545) and the Giardino Pisano (1547). The "orto dei semplici" derives its name from a Medieval classification attributed to the Scuola di Salerno that listed the fundamental herbs considered as being essential for a good pharmacopoeia: thyme, rosemary, sage, sweet marjoram, wood sorrel, etc. (fig. 6). Ulisse Aldrovandi was the botanical garden's caretaker for fifty years, enriching it with exotic species from India, Africa and America: a true laboratory of naturalistic experimentation in which modern-day Botany finds its origins. The garden plan consisted in four rectangular *parterres* with different designs that contained four irrigation tanks (fig. 7). The remains of the cross-shaped tank, which was used for the cultivation of aquatic plants, can be

seen in the north-west section of the **>archeological excavation<**. The irrigation system was regulated by a cistern located at the center of the garden and is today marked off by the "semicircle" on the floor of the **>covered square<**. In 1587, Francesco Morandi, know as il Terribilia, constructed a delightful Corinthian-style edicola above the cistern. In 1886 this was moved to the Pinacoteca's courtyard because of the construction work for the future Sala Borsa. Today, a copy of this can be seen in the courtyard of Palazzo d'Accursio (fig. 8).



fig. 8
Drawing in pen with watercolors of the cistern at the center of the Orto dei Semplici, XVIII century

From Garden to Training Camp

In 1765 the botanical garden was moved to via San Giuliano, and later during the Napoleonic period to its definitive location at the Palazzina della Viola, where today it is still the School of Agronomy's botanical garden. At the end of the nineteenth century the palazzo's garden was definitively transformed and the final steps taken in eliminating the ancient public garden made room for a grassy courtyard used for over a century as a training and drill camp for the city's militia and firemen (fig. 9).

The Entrance from the Neptune Square

In 1870 the Municipal Council decided to use the part of the garden that was adjacent to the present-day Neptune Square so as to build a semicircular structure, the entrance or **>exedra<**, that we see today (fig. 10). A few rooms on the ground floor that were once part of the Cardinal Legate's living quarters during the summer months were included. At first, this new area was set aside for a telegraph office. Later, it was used as the post office (fig. 11).

fig. 11
Post Office, postcard reproductions, early XX century



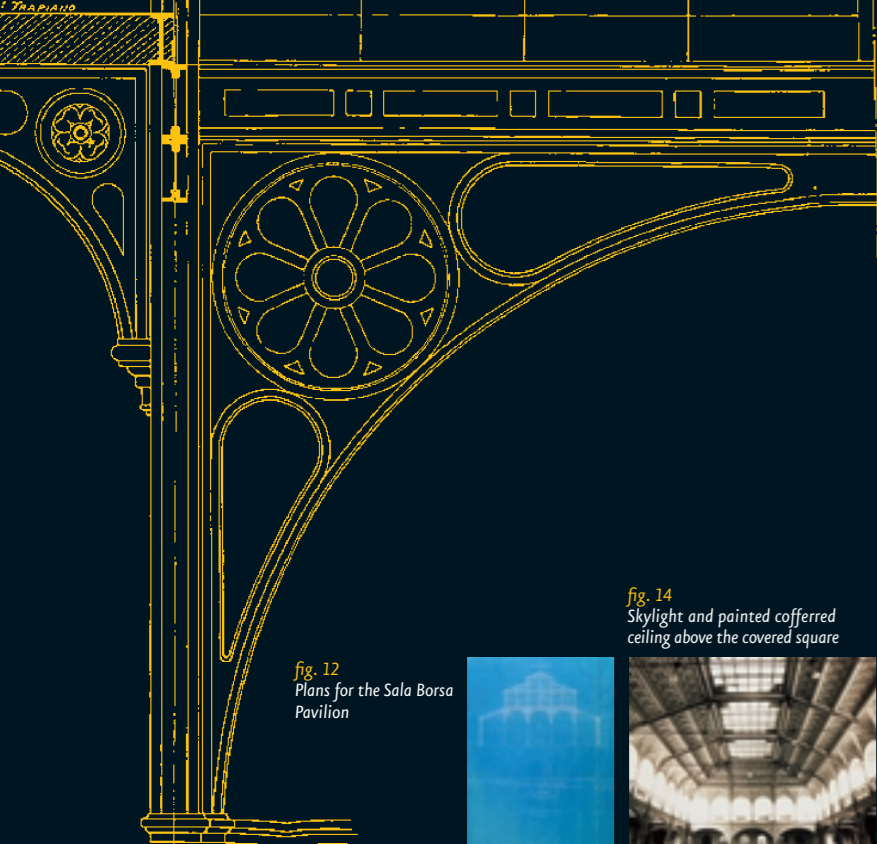


fig. 12
Plans for the Sala Borsa Pavilion

fig. 14
Skylight and painted coffered ceiling above the covered square

fig. 16 a / b / c /
The three levels of offices and the two walkways

XX century

fig. 15
The Sala Borsa's public

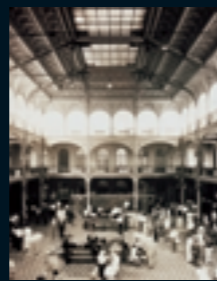


fig. 18
July 17th, 1926
The inauguration of the new Sala Borsa



fig. 19
Basketball at the Sala Borsa, 1953-1954 season

XXI century



many thanks to

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From Sage to Cast Iron

The promoters of the new Sala Borsa project greatly assisted in turning this part of the palazzo into the city's economic and social center. These Bolognese entrepreneurs wanted to erect a new building that was intended for stock trading, market transactions and commercial exchange in the place of the garden, the courtyard and the cistern. As a result, the viridarium with its five centuries of history was eliminated so as to make room for the new iron structure, which at that time was greatly admired and innovative (figs. 12,13).



fig. 13
Perimetric walkway of the first pavilion in iron, cast iron and glass

A Large Skylight

Between 1883 and 1886 a pavilion in cast iron and glass was constructed and which today still maintains its original "basilica" layout with a spacious central area >the covered square< that is illuminated by a skylight (fig. 14). The arcade is held up by a series of arches that rest upon slender cast iron columns that support a roof with four slopes made with metallic reinforcements. This project, which was in part inspired by the Sala Borsa in Paris, is characterized by its wide use of iron, which was already employed in the post office's skylight. The project is attributed to the company of Alfredo Cottrau and Paolo Boubée, the Impresa italiana di costruzioni metalliche, in Naples. The progressive decline in commercial transactions and exchange caused a constant and relentless decrease in the number of people who made use of the Sala Borsa. As a result, the offices were definitively closed in 1903.

The 1920s Transformation

Between 1917 and 1920 under the Socialist administration of the city's mayor, Francesco Zanardi, the Sala Borsa hosted an economical restaurant, a few bank counters of the Cassa di Risparmio and an office of the National Tourism Agency. In 1922 the Cassa di Risparmio was authorized by the Municipal Government to use the entire Sala Borsa for a period of fifty years. This bank wanted to enlarge and renovate the area so as to have the Sala Borsa relive its past as the city's center for business transactions and exchange (fig. 15).

Art Nouveau and Reinforced Concrete

In 1924 work was begun under the supervision of the engineer Francesco Tassoni for the second and third walkways that are located around the covered square's entire perimeter. This new project was in perfect harmony with the order of the offices that were already present on the ground floor (figs. 16 a,b,c). Moreover, included in this new project were two splendid underground rooms >the Collamarini rooms< with stucco decorations and Art Nouveau frescos. The beauty of these rooms was enhanced by the light which came from the transparent glass (fig. 17). This is one of the first examples in Bologna of a reinforced cement structure, which was quite innovative at that time. This work cannot be attributed with certainty, but credit is usually given to the Bolognese architect Edoardo Collamarini, even though the hypothesis of collaboration among the most qualified

professionals during those years is more probable. The inauguration of the Sala Borsa caused a great stir among the city's inhabitants and a large number of people participated in the solemn ceremony held on July 17th, 1926 in the presence of the Minister of Finance, the Count Volpi di Misurata (fig. 18). The construction work continued until 1930 when the cistern, which was designed in 1587 by Pietro Fiorini on the north side of the viridarium, was converted into a bank strongroom.



fig. 17
Room known as Collamarini grande, underground level

From the Post-World War II Period to the 1950s

During the post-World War II period numerous changes were made to modernize the Sala Borsa. In the 1950s the covered square was turned into a sports center and hosted basketball games and even boxing matches. During the day regular business dealings took place, and in the evenings the caretakers would clean the floor and position the basketball hoops so that the players could practice. On the days of the games the side parterre and the walkways were teeming with fans and the >covered square< became a true lion's den (fig. 19).

fig. 20

The puppets of Demetrio Presini



From Puppets to Books

In 1976, the first and perhaps only permanent Puppet Theater, the famous Teatrón di buratón, was inaugurated on the inside of the Canton de' Fiori Tower, which was once the north part of the palazzo fortress. Today, this area is home to the >children's and young adults'< library section. This puppet theater was directed by Demetrio Presini and lasted until the 1990s (fig. 20).

Today

In more recent years, the Sala Borsa hosts the Municipal Government's administrative offices. The first attempts in recuperating this area were part of the larger urban renewal project known as the Parco Urbano di Piazza Maggiore. In 1989 an important decision was made which assigned a cultural role to the Sala Borsa. The most recent restructuring works maintained the layout of the pre-existing structures and the stratification of the constructions accumulated over seven centuries of urban history. Today, the Sala Borsa once again gives witness to the centrality and importance of this site in its new role as library, treasure-trove of knowledge and multi-media center (fig. 21).



fig. 21
The Sala Borsa today: Covered Square, Collamarini grande, Scuderie (stables)



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FONDAZIONE CASA DI RISPARMIO DI BOLOGNA



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