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ADRIANO.

LE ARTI
AL POTERE

Nero and Hadrian. The arts in power
Tivoli, Villa d'Este, 24-25 February 2022

DEADLINE FOR THE PROPOSALS:
30 SEPTEMBER 2021

Organised by
Andrea Bruciati, Alessandro Viscogliosi

International interdisciplinary conference
Autonomous Institute of Villa Adriana and Villa d'Este,
Ministry of Culture

in collaboration with
Sapienza, University of Rome

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Nero and Hadrian: two emperors united by a passion for the arts; both reformers in the artistic and also, in particular, in the architectural and administrative spheres. Two characters, the first much discussed, the second much less. Recent critics have portrayed them in an innovative and pioneering light, at least from a purely cultural point of view.

Their passion for the arts is a well-explored topic, but rarely refers to both of them: yet, when assessing the most famous creations only, the *Domus Aurea* and Villa Adriana in Tivoli, fundamental signs of continuity can be perceived.

Hadrian's great interest in architecture and a desire to experiment with new forms and structural solutions was fully applied in the residential complex of Villa Adriana, thanks to the considerable development of building techniques imparted during previous experiences in the imperial age, like that of the *Domus Aurea*. Just like Nero's residence, in which the buildings alternated with sumptuous gardens with basins, pools, nymphaea and fountains, in Villa Adriana, despite being in a territorial and landscape context distant from the urban dimension, the spaces containing buildings were also interspersed with multiple forms of greenery and water features; the different sectors responded to a precise logic based on intended use, combining public and official elements with elements of a private and intimate nature.

Looking at the decorative features, the *Domus Aurea* represented a huge leap forward with respect to the past, with a quantity and quality of paintings and marble coverings, inconceivable in previous eras. Following Nero's example, the stuccoes, paintings and marbles, along with other rare and exotic materials such as gems and precious metals, were also carefully distributed according to the status of the rooms at Villa Adriana, to achieve effects of refined elegance and wonder. The same goes for the sculptural elements, with original statues of Greek art placed alongside works especially commissioned to decorate the new spaces and convey the message of imperial power and magnificence. The *Domus Aurea* and Villa Adriana are emblematic examples of the will of the two emperors to pass on precise political, philosophical and ideological choices.

In Rome, Hadrian's building activities became materially intertwined with Nero's pre-existing constructions, as in the Palatine imperial residence or the temple of Venus and Roma on the Velian Hill, where the vestibule of the *Domus Aurea* was functional in the construction of the religious building, involving the extraordinary repositioning of the Colossus of Nero in the square of the Flavian Amphitheatre. A propensity for spectacularisation in the use of urban spaces found an ideal terrain in Campus Martius, a backdrop for Emperor Julius-Claudius's aquatic festivals and at the same time a source of inspiration for the Egyptian-style settings of Villa Adriana, as well as a place dedicated to the creation of grandiose building projects, such as the Baths of Nero and the Pantheon.

The historical and material evidence that links the affairs of the two emperors goes well beyond Rome, as in the case of the imperial villa in Anzio: the spectacular complex built on the coast of Lazio, although inextricably linked to the memory of Nero, also contains considerable material traces accompanied by literary evidence that refers to Hadrian's stays in Anzio. It is a well-known fact that both emperors were interested in the Phlegraean Fields area. This was dictated not only by the healthiness of the area and the beauty of the landscape, but also by the strategic importance of the villages of Cumae, Baiae, Pozzuoli and Miseno for the economic and military interests of the empire.

The charm of Hellenism transpires for both emperors in all the displays of imperial power, both public and private, as well as in the architectural designs enriched by suggestions and references to the refined culture of the eastern provinces.



These examples reveal how human experience and the historical legacy of the two emperors were intertwined. The conference intends, for the first time, to explore this aspect, with the particular aim of examining the possibilities offered by art, architecture, theatre and literature for developing new languages and consolidating that intertwining of culture and politics that became distinctive in the image of power until the present day, without forgetting the huge legacy left by the two historical figures and their influence in the arts exercised over the centuries.

The conference is open to Italian and foreign researchers and academics, who will be able to participate with contributions linked primarily to the topics of art, archaeology and architecture, while also evaluating both personalities from a historical, anthropological and psychological point of view, resulting in an extended and diversified multidisciplinary investigation of both emperors and their tangible and intangible legacies.

In this regard, the following themed itineraries have been highlighted:

SESSION 1 / ARCHITECTURE AS A LANGUAGE OF POWER

Urban and architectural designs
Territory and architecture
Architectural legacy

SESSION 2 / THE POWER OF IMAGES

Artistic production
Painting and sculpture
The legacy in the visual arts

SESSION 3 / COMPARING THE PERSONALITIES

History and philology
Anthropology and psychology

These itineraries are accompanied by a themed outline strictly concerning the contemporary arts and the ways in which these figures were portrayed in art.

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INFO:

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For the articles selected, each speaker will have a maximum of 20 minutes. Participation as a speaker at the conference is free of charge. We plan to publish the documents. Articles in Italian and in English will be accepted.

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