

P O M P E I I

03



E-Journal

Scavi di Pompei

12.03.25

Rubbish and public memory at the Stabian Gate: when archaeology defines an urban gateway*¹

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At the Stabian gateway

As we learn from our textbooks, a Roman town is often demarcated by a *pomerium* or a wall, or in any case by a physical or sacred boundary (Gros 1996, p. 26; De Sanctis 2015). At Pompeii, if we leave aside the debate of the *pomerium*, the city was indeed demarcated from the Archaic period, by the course of a wall that remained unchanged until Roman times, with the wall itself undergoing various rebuilds (*fig. 1*) dating to the Samnite period, the end of the fourth century, and the end of the second century, just before Sylla's siege of 89 BC (Guzzo 2007; Fabbri, Ducatelli, Zabotti 2021). With the foundation of the colony in 80 BC and the establishment of the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) under Augustus, the wall lost its defensive function, but retained its role as an urban boundary, albeit with one major transformation that profoundly altered the Stabian Gate, in the form of funerary monuments dedicated to the great local

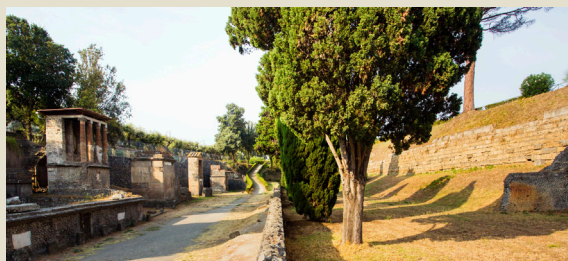


fig. 1



fig. 2

aristocracy, built just outside the gate (*fig. 2*). Excavations carried out in the 19th century, particularly those between 1889 and 1890 (Fiorelli 1889, pp. 280-281; Sogliano 1890, p. 44 and pp. 329-330; Sogliano 1891, pp. 273-275), revealed two funerary monuments in the form of benches arranged in a hemicycle, known as *scholae* in the Pompeian tradition. These hemicycle benches are obviously an invitation to stop and honour the memory of the deceased. The *in situ* inscriptions have made it possible to identify the owners of the monuments in question: the first honours the memory of *M. Tullius* (*EE* 8, 330), a *princeps* of the Augustan era, active in public life from 20 BC. The second is the *locus sepulturae* (burial place) of another magistrate by the name of *M. Alleius Minius* (*EE* 8, 318 = *AE* 1891, 166), who was less well known but belonged to the grand family of the *Alleii*.

*The English text was revised by Talia Smith (Brown University). This project by the École française de Rome in collaboration with the École Pratique des Hautes études is part of the research programme on the necropolises of Porta Nocera and Porta Stabia.

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The same area, on the edge of the site, was excavated by the Archaeological Park of Pompeii in 2001-2002, and again in 2016-2018 and 2019-2020, exploring the road and its surroundings within a radius of 70 meters, as far as the junction with the road to Nocera (Osanna 2021, pp. 213-418; Galeandro *et al.* 2021). These recent excavations have confirmed the presence of imposing funerary monuments dedicated to the most eminent members of the local aristocracy at this entrance to the town. It has also shown that, in the Flavian period, this arrangement was complemented by the construction of tombs directly on the road surface, a phenomenon that was still going on

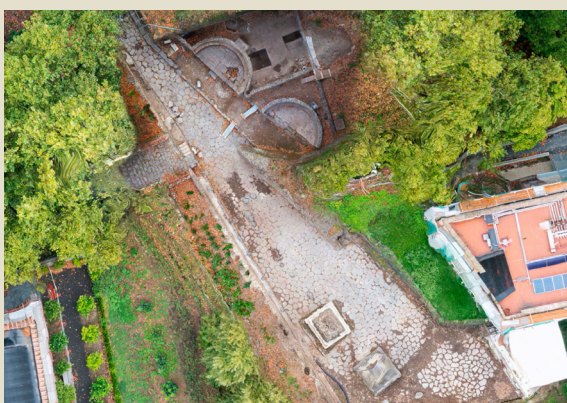


fig. 3

in AD 79, as workmen had been busy laying the foundations for a new tomb shortly before the eruption.

A closer look also reveals the particular nature of this road: it widens from the gate to form a sort of public square outside the city walls (fig. 3), with an unusually wide paved platform on the eastern side. This is precisely where the monuments of *M. Tullius*, *M. Alleius Minius* and *Cn. Alleius Nigidius Maius*, a great notable of the Neronian era, stand (Osanna 2019, pp. 233-272; Osanna 2021).

In addition, Grete Stefani has recently re-examined all the archive material concerning the Stabian Gate which revealed that two additional *schola* monuments were seen in the 19th century, south of and aligned with the monuments of *Tullius* and *Alleius Minius*, one of which is attributed to *Gn. Clovatus* (*CIL X*, 1065) (Stefani 2021). There were therefore, four monuments with benches facing the road, which took on the appearance of a public square. The recently excavated mausoleum, adorned with an inscribed list of the deeds of *Cn. Alleius Nigidius Maius*, was therefore placed in line with these *scholae* (fig. 4).



fig. 4

Clearly, the attribution of the first monument to *M. Tullius*, who is known to have dedicated a temple to Fortune Augustus in AD 3, indicates that this monumental display of the memory of the city's great figures at one of its entrances took place around AD 10-20. This raises a number of questions: why such a monumental display at one of the city's entrances? Why at the end of the Augustan era? What effects did it have on this entrance to the city, and what occupied this space before these funerary monuments were erected? These are the questions that guided the archaeological research throughout the three seasons of excavations (2021-2023) within the funerary enclosures of *M. Tullius* and *M. Alleius Minius*. In this article we will illustrate how archaeology can help define the gates to a city and understand the limits of urban space.

Rubbish and funerary monuments: an analysis of the archaeological facts

Seven trenches and the survey, conducted between 2021 and 2023, of around twenty sections behind the tombs of *M. Tullius* and *M. Alleius Minius*, provided answers to the questions posed (*fig. 5*) (Van Andringa,

Duday 2021; Van Andringa, Duday 2022; Van Andringa, Duday 2023). The first campaign, which concentrated on the *Tullius* enclosure, led to the identification of a thick backfill that was very rich in ceramics from the Imperial period, complicated by the presence of inclusions of modern glass and ceramics. In Pompeii, the levels *in situ* are very often contaminated by contemporary layers that lie directly on the archaeological soils. The latest test pit (SD 5), excavated in 2023, allowed us to identify the mix of layers and materials which compromises this layer of backfill that rests on the Augustan level. The description of the excavations carried out in 1889-1890 shows that the *Tullius* enclosure was covered by a mound of destruction material attributed to the earthquake of AD 62/63. We now know that these pre-eruption dumps rested on layers that were contemporary and anterior to the Augustan period, which was partially mixed during undocumented excavations, probably during the time of Amedeo Maiuri, who worked on the gate and wall (Maiuri 1930). Fortunately, underneath this layer of disturbed fill with modern inclusions, the levelling identified in 2021 was still intact, and this was confirmed in other trenches indicating that an earth platform was constructed on the eastern side of the road contemporaneously with the



fig. 5

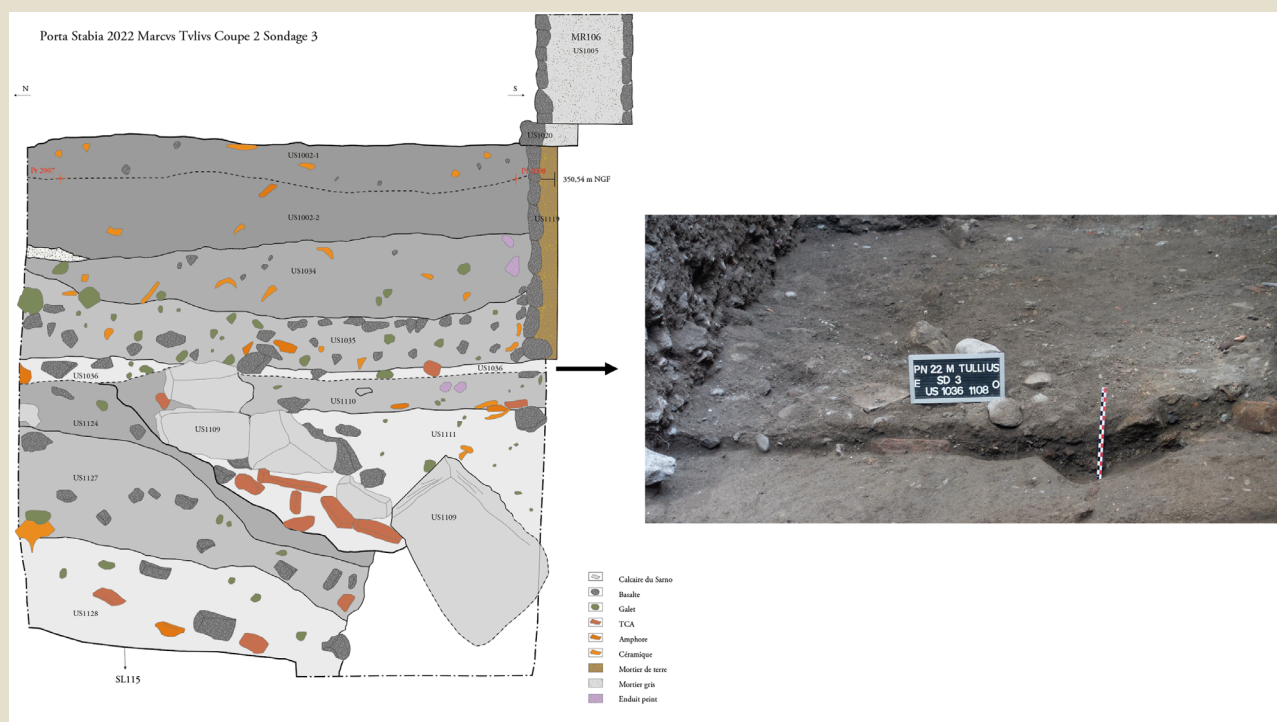


fig. 6

complete rebuilding of the road, which was transformed into a *platea* by a widening of the carriageway to the east (fig. 6). In 2023, the test pit SD 7 showed that this platform not only supports the monument to *M. Tullius*, but that it also extends southwards. In other words, the major works undertaken by the public authorities were aimed at installing a platform on the eastern side of the road, so as to accommodate an edilitary programme, in this case a series of tombs designed to publicly honour local notables. This was indeed a carefully thought-out and planned civic programme designed to completely redevelop the entrance to the town, right up to the junction with the road to Nocera. The levelling layer laid the groundwork for the construction of the monument to *M. Tullius* (fig. 7). The foundation trench for the hemicycle was dug directly into this layer of backfill; the excessive depth of the foundation was likely meant to ensure the stability of the monument. The large blocks of the hemicircular bench were then installed upon the masonry foundations. A pedastal completed the structure, on top of which stood a column, fragments of which have been preserved, which perhaps bore a decorative element like a *canthara*, as on the

schola preserved in its entirety at the Nola Gate. Immediately behind the monument to *M. Tullius* and beneath the Imperial-period backfill, the 2021 survey revealed an area of burning, with crushed and broken bowls *in situ* (fig. 8). The immediate thought was that this was a funeral pyre, until further study by Henri Duday revealed that all the bones and bone splinters from the area in question were of animal origin. So, as yet unidentified fruit and animal offerings were burnt on an open flame,



fig. 8

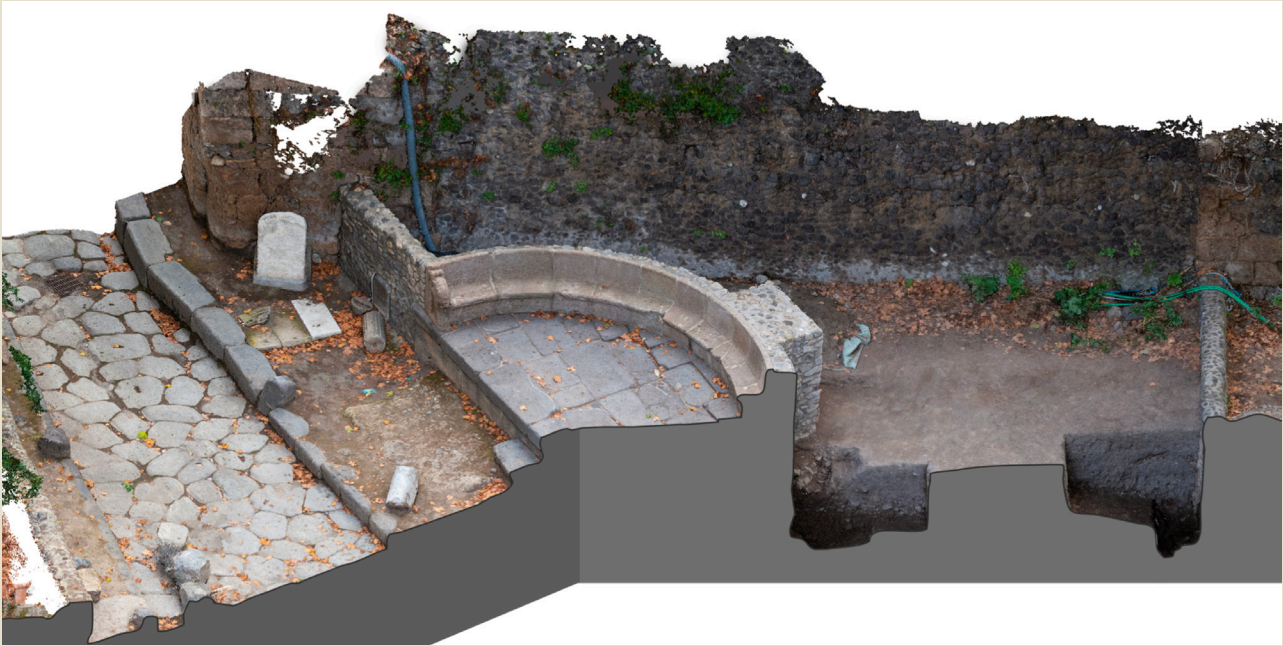


fig. 7

and liquid was poured over it, as the cups seem to attest. In short, this assemblage makes it possible to identify a collective ritual sequence that took place during the construction of the monument to *M. Tullius*, at least before the platform was raised and the enclosure walls built.

There is no trace of burnt human bone to indicate the presence of a cremation area, and there is no trace of a burial or funerary arrangement inside the enclosure behind the *schola*. It would seem that *M. Tullius* was not cremated on the spot, unless we accept the idea that the cremation took place by the monument and that it was conducted in such a manner so as not to leave the slightest bone fragment in the cremation area, which is unlikely. It is far more likely that, *M. Tullius* was cremated elsewhere, likely near his family tomb, which must be located in one of Pompeii's necropolises. This means that the *schola* was built as a cenotaph to celebrate the memory of a notable figure who had devoted himself to the public good. This commemoration occurred in a very particular context, that of the advent of the Principate of Augustus, in which *M. Tullius* played an active part.

M. Tullius, who is known to have been one of Augustus' Italian clients, took the initiative of establishing a new public cult in Pompeii, that of *Fortuna Augusta* obviously closely linked

to the imperial family (Van Andringa 2015; Coutelas *et al.* 2017). Following the example of Octavian and the temple of Apollo, *M. Tullius* had the temple of *Fortuna Augusta* built on his property, next to his house. His proximity to the emperor was further symbolised by the installation of statues representing *M. Tullius* and the emperor inside the very *cella* of the temple. It was therefore a new kind of notable that was being celebrated at the Stabian Gate, no longer simply the custodian of the community's activities as attested by the *faciendum curavit* inscriptions from the previous era, but a public benefactor of *the civitas* in the image of the *princeps*.

But let's return to the archaeological record. The test pits excavated in *M. Tullius*' funerary enclosure showed that the levelling layer from the Augustan period rests on massive backfill that was deposited against the slope of a bank that runs parallel to the city wall about 6 metres to its south (fig. 9). This hollow (FO 114) was filled with successive layers of backfill; each layer containing various amounts of material, particularly ceramics. Adrien Malignas has shown that the ceramic assemblages are fairly heterogeneous, with a mixture of material dating from the 2nd century BC to the

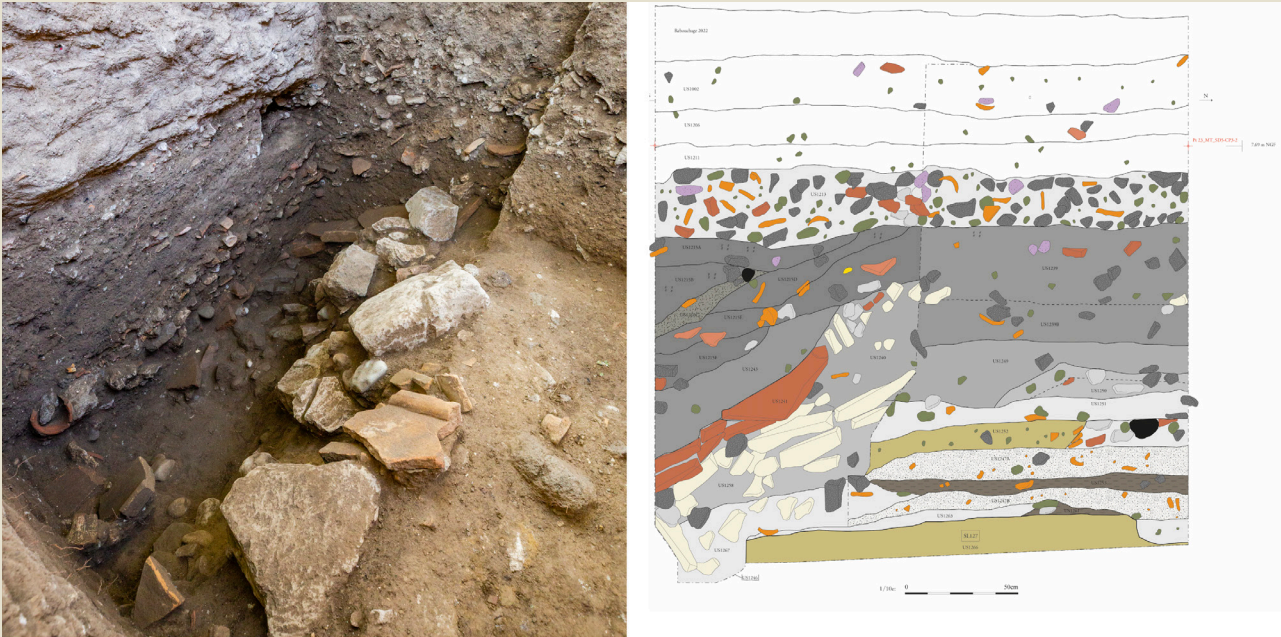


fig. 9

Augustan period. The most recent material was not an intrusion, as it was found in abundance in the lower US of the fill. It was therefore a dump where the material was mixed, heterogeneous and unorganised. The filling of FO 114 therefore took place at the earliest at the beginning of the 1st century AD, certainly at the same time as the construction of the *M. Tullius* monument. The heterogeneous nature of the ceramics shows that this was not just a

site of primary discharge but backfill mixed with a variety of previously discarded materials, such as a metal dump from a workshop in town. This assemblage is composed of a variety of iron elements, a gold ring, by-products of casting, fragments of filters, and a plumb line; the refuse of artisanal activity such as smelting, forging, and plumbing (fig. 10). Further south, there are other types of dumps being studied, which contain other types of urban rubbish



fig. 10



fig. 11

and reveal the rich information to be found in layers of waste (fig. 11).

Before these massive embankments were constructed, before the entrance to the town was raised, and before the monumentalisation of the area, we find something quite different, not earlier tombs which must have been located elsewhere and probably at some distance from the town walls, but an embankment with a fairly steep slope to the south. This embankment was built on top of other backfills and dumps containing homogenous pottery from the second half of, or even from the end of, the 2nd century BC; this would place the creation of the embankment at the end of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 1st century BC. This period corresponds to two specific events: firstly, the rebuilding of this section of city wall, where the large blocks of Sarno limestone were replaced with a wall constructed in *opus incertum*, and secondly, Sulla's siege of 89 BC for which we have numerous testimonies, in particular slingshot bullets found on the slopes of the Porta Nocera necropolis.

So, does this slope correspond to an embankment or a ditch? The test pit dug further south, behind the *schola* of *M. Alleius Minius*, yielded no clues, other than a large amount of fill from the 1st century BC, indicating that the slope continued downwards to the south. This information is essential, however,

as it shows that the only possible hypothesis is that it is a defensive ditch created during the last phase of the wall's restoration: it is hard to imagine an embankment that descends very low, leaving the road in need of suspension, or a road that follows the very steep slope of the embankment. Another clue is provided by A. Maiuri, who carried out a deep excavation on the other side of the Stabian Gate to uncover a bridge that provided access to the Augustan gateway and spanned a ditch that he attributed to the defensive system of the wall (Maiuri 1930, p. 195).

Before the ditch and below the fill from the 2nd half of the 2nd century, the ground surface sloped down to the west and south, the function of which is enigmatic. In this area we find an external occupation layer that bears signs of a development along the road that must have been located further down, perhaps in connection with a structure of which the test pits revealed no trace.

A new way of entering the city, a new way of thinking about the city

If we gather all the threads of evidence at the Stabian Gate, the archaeological data allow us to investigate the dialectic established by the municipal authorities between funerary spaces dedicated to members of the local elite and the entrance to the town (*fig. 12*). Two inscribed markers give us information about the owner of the tomb near the gate, *M. Tullius*, who, as an eminent member of the aristocracy in the Augustan era and benefactor, built the Temple of Fortune Augustus around the change of era and dedicated it in AD 3.

The death of this figure in the years that followed ushered in a complete remodelling of the entrance to the town, since the planning of the *schola* dedicated to him necessitated the construction of an enormous platform that extended southwards from the entrance to the city and was set up for the erection of other tombs. Of these other tombs, one belonged to *Alleius Minius*. The two other monuments, which are not visible today, were attested in the 19th century and were aligned along the road adjacent to the first monuments. Therefore, at the entrance to the town, there was a succession of four *scholae* lined up with benches (*see fig. 4*).

We can also see that the construction of the platform upon which these monuments sit did not respect the alignment of the Republican road, but that it was part of a genuine town-planning scheme. Indeed, the eastern edge of the road, which was built expressly to accommodate these funerary monuments of the local aristocracy, was completely redesigned to form a space that flared out towards the south-east, taking on the appearance of an agora outside the town, or a *platea* if we want to use the appropriate Latin term. The public nature of the layout, confirmed by the inscriptions on the tombs, clearly indicates that this was a staging intended by the municipality to honour and showcase the most deserving members of its elite. Celebrating the memory of the city's great figures at the entrance to the town involved the installation of funerary monuments, structures that are perfectly suited to a memorial function (Van Andringa 2018). In Latin, a tomb is called a *monumentum*, and the legal texts state that its function is to preserve memory (*Dig. XI, 7, 2, 6*).

It then remained to be seen whether such a staging, which used the tomb to celebrate local civic pride, involved organising a funeral or burying the dead in situ. This is why we looked for traces of possible pyres in the burial enclosures of the two currently accessible

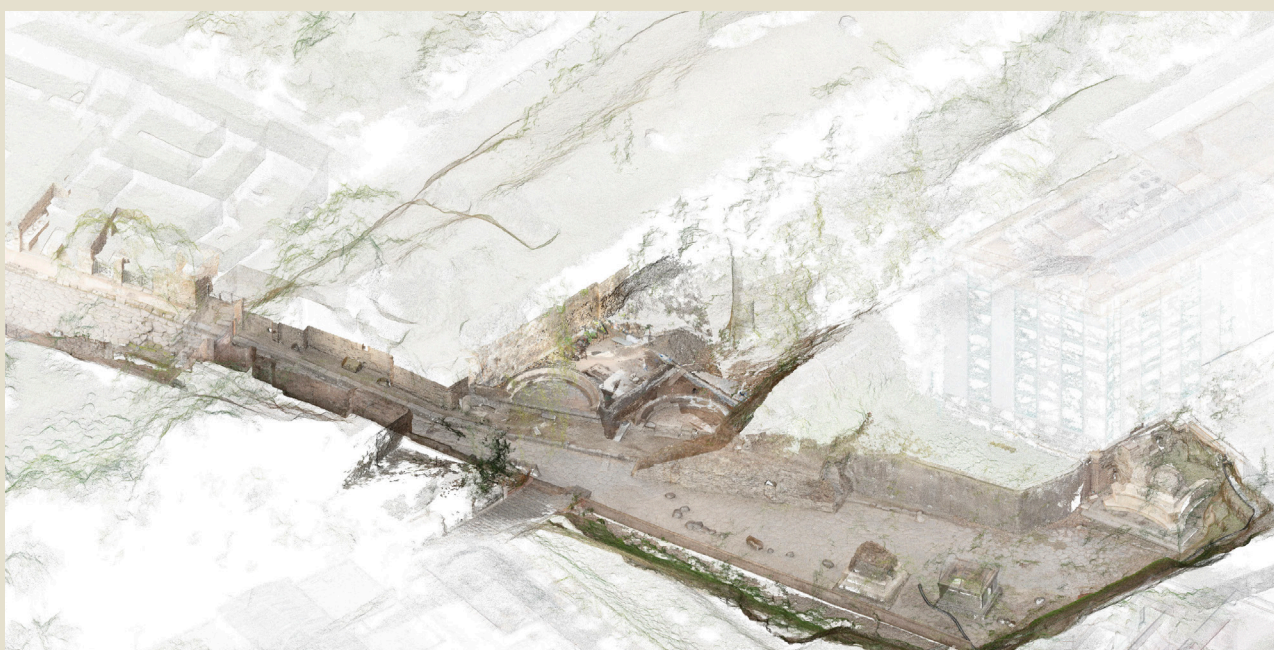


fig. 3

monuments, those of *M. Tullius* and *M. Alleius Minius*, as well as the remains of burials that would have indicated the presence of family burial areas. The results of the various test pits dug in the enclosure of *M. Tullius* and in the enclosure of *M. Alleius Minius* are indisputable. On the one hand, there were no funerary structures, tombs or pyres that could be used to identify “active” funerary areas. These monuments of unusual architecture, these *scholae*, are cenotaphs or, more simply, memorials to the great figures of the city who, like the *princeps*, had distinguished themselves by benefitting the community, from *M. Tullius* in Augustan times to *Cn. Alleius Nigidius Maius*, the owner of a tomb recently identified at the end of the sepulchral alignment (Osanna 2019, pp. 233-272; Osanna 2021, p. 273). Admittedly, the test pit to the rear of the *schola* of *M. Tullius* revealed the *in situ* remains of an area of burning, contemporary with the monument, but the remains were burnt directly over a flame (fruit, animal offerings, liquids) clearly indicating a collective ritual (in relation to the construction of the monument?) and not a funeral pyre.

On the other hand, it is certain that the environment created by these funerary monuments was completely new, since test pits have shown that the platform built at the beginning of the 1st century AD replaced a ditch and embankments mixed with rubbish dumps active in the 2nd and 1st century BC. For the period prior to *M. Tullius*' monument, therefore, there are no funerary structures, just a defensive ditch that was filled in, which shows that the city implemented a plan of monumentalisation of the Stabian Gate and city wall at the end of the Augustan period.

At the end of the Augustan era, the desire to celebrate the first among the citizens in the image of the *princeps*, Rome's first benefactor, led to a complete remodelling of this entrance to the city, with the creation of an outdoor public square dedicated to the celebration of these important citizens, who were ultimately considered to be part of the city's history. This is clearly shown in the transcription of the deeds of *Cn. Alleius Nigidius Maius* during the Neronian period. He came to occupy

the last vacant site on the eastern edge of the *platea*. The last of Pompeii's great men to die before the eruption took their places in Flavian tombs built directly on the pavement! As the eruption approached, a mausoleum was being built on the paving blocks of the road itself, proving that despite the urban crisis after the earthquake of 62/63AD, the town continued to honour its illustrious dead. From the end of the reign of Augustus, as you entered the city through the Stabian Gate, you would pass monuments celebrating the memory of great figures who, like the *princeps*, had devoted themselves to their homeland. More generally, the example of *M. Tullius* illustrates how the superposition of rubbish and memorial monuments in the archaeological record relates to how the evolution of the Roman political system modified the very organisation of the local municipal system, now fully embodied by the personal action of its high aristocracy. As for the Stabian Gate, it would become the main gate to the city of Pompeii.

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Raccolta immagini

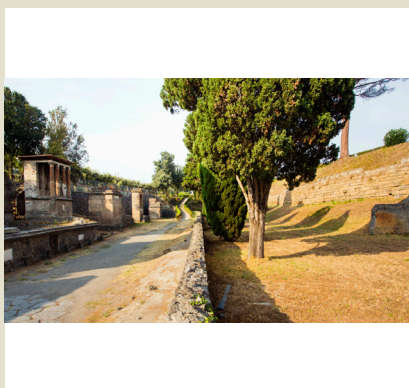


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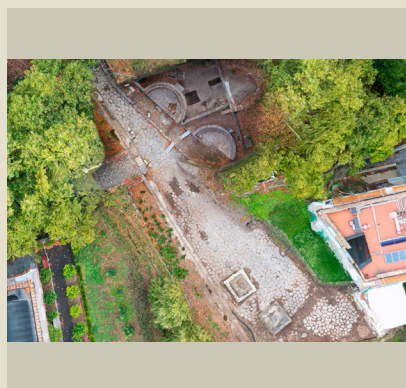


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fig. 4



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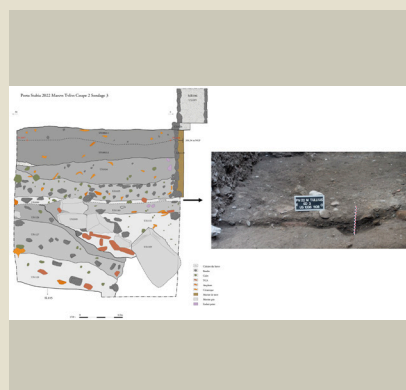


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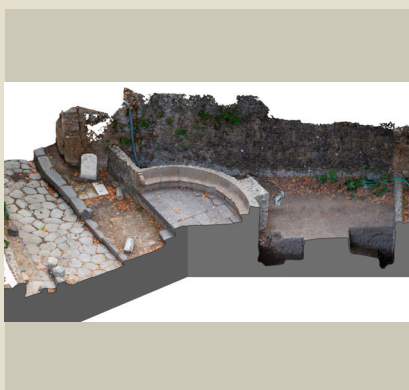


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fig. 8



fig. 9



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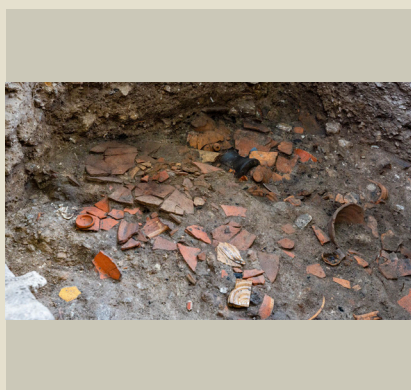


fig. 11



fig. 12

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Riferimenti tavole e figure

Fig. 1 - Urban boundary at the Nocera Gate. On the right, you can see the town wall and a no-man's-land that is almost certainly public and bounded by a wall (photo by F. Giraud).

Fig. 2 - The Stabian Gate and the funerary monuments of *M. Tullius* and *M. Alleius Minius* (photo by F. Giraud).

Fig. 3 - Orthophoto of the Porta Stabia necropolis (photo J. Laiho).

Fig. 4 - Plan of the Porta Stabia necropolis showing the funerary monuments excavated or identified in the 19th century: I. *Schola* of *M. Tullius*; II. *Schola* of *M. Alleius Minius*; III. Anonymous *schola* found in the 19th century (plan unknown); IV. Monument with quadrangular bench by *Gn. Clovatus* found in the 19th century (plan unknown); V. Monument attributed to *Gn. Alleius Nigidius Maius*; VI. Anonymous monument built on the street; VII. Anonymous monument built on the street. A final monument was under construction further south in AD 79 (plan by J. Laiho, additions by W. Van Andringa).

Fig. 5 - View of the various trenches dug during the 2021-2023 campaigns (photos by F. Giraud and J. Laiho).

Fig. 6 - North-south section of test pit SD3 (the southern wall of the *M. Tullius* enclosure is on the right) and photograph of the Augustan-period levelling layer (Survey and drawing: E. Dias; photo by F. Giraud).

Fig. 7 - Axonometric view of the *M. Tullius* monument with trenches 2021 (doc. J. Laiho).

Fig. 8 - Burning area behind the monument to *M. Tullius* (photo by F. Giraud).

Fig. 9 - The embankment/ditch FO 114. On the right, cross-section of test pit SD5 (2023, survey and drawing by E. Dias). The layers sloping towards the south (left) are the fillings of the slope. On the left, photograph of the embankment filled with material from the 1st century BC (photo by F. Giraud).

Fig. 10 - Dump from a forge (1st century BC) (photo by F. Giraud).

Fig. 11 - Rubbish dumped in the ditch (photo by F. Giraud).

Fig. 12 - Axonometric view of the Porta Stabia necropolis (doc. J. Laiho).