

ROMAN RUINS IN THE BASEMENT OF THE INSTITUTE OF PHYSIOLOGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PISA

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The city of Pisa arose along the right bank of the river Arno at its confluence with the Serchio along the edges of a vast area of marshes and lagoons. Pisa was already known to exist in very ancient times, probably several centuries before 1000 B.C.

Its origins are shrouded in mystery, having been attributed by Greek and Roman authors to the Phocaeans or to peoples of Ligurian extraction. Around 1000 B.C. Pisa was subjugated by the Etruscans for a brief time; this conquest proved to have a positive influence on the city, which absorbed much from the more evolved Etruscan civilization (1). Archaeological remains show that already in archaic times and certainly from the second half of the sixth century B.C., Pisa had already become a transit port for Greek and Phoenician goods to and from Gaul. The wealth and power of Pisa declined towards the end of the 3rd century B.C., when in order to defend themselves from attacks on land and sea by the Liguri, they appealed to Rome for help, thus entering into her expanding political sphere. It hence became a Roman military base, first against the Liguri, then against the Gauls and Carthaginians.

The first real development plan which conferred on the city its primary organic structure along orthogonal North/South and East/West axes came into being thanks to Octavian Augustus, between 31 and 27 B.C. Various descriptions testify to the vitality of Pisa in Roman times and to the splendor of her buildings, of which only a few insignificant ruins remain. These include the so-called "Bagno di Nerone" (Nero's Bath), the remains of a Roman spa from the time of Hadrian; masonry flooring from the I-III century A.D., uncovered below the Piazza of the Cathedral; kiln waste consisting of Aretine pottery shards, etc. Only general evidence remains of the forum, temples, public baths, amphitheater and theater mentioned by contemporary sources (5,6). We will see how the ruins of a Roman building of circular design came to light during excavation work for the construction of the foundation of our University Institute.

The University of Pisa was first officially recognized by Pope Clement VI from Avignon, who on September 3, 1343 emitted the bull "*In supremae dignitatis*" which officially established the teaching of Sacred Subjects, Canon Law and Medicine in the "Studi Pisano" (3). Over the centuries, the University of Pisa flourished owing to the work of many eminent persons. In the field of medicine these include the anatomist Andrea Vesalius (1542-44), Filippo Pacini, discoverer of the homonymous corpuscles, and Carlo Matteucci Professor of Physics, who, following the fundamental research of Luigi Galvani on the electricity of the nerve,

