

THE DISCOVERY (AND REDISCOVERY)
OF A TEMPLE DEDICATION TO HERCULES
BY P. AELIUS HIERON, FREEDMAN OF HADRIAN
(*AE* 1907, 125)

*To Professor Christian Habicht, with
deep gratitude for his mentorship at
the IAS and beyond*

The highway known as the E45 is the longest north-south route in Europe, stretching from Karesuando in the extreme north of Sweden to Gela on the south-central coast of Sicily – a distance of almost 5000 kilometers. In Italy, the road starts to follow the course of the Tiber at Orte in northern Lazio, and then crosses the river a number of times over a section of some 50 kilometers before finally deflecting to its east. The highway’s last Tiber crossing is just northeast of the town of Monterotondo, itself about 30 km northeast of Rome. After traversing the river, the E45 then almost immediately bisects the Via Salaria (which still runs, as it did in antiquity, northeast from Rome to Porto d’Ascoli on the Adriatic coast), and in 2.5 km enters the massive nature reserve “Macchia di Gattaceca e Macchia del Barco”. By this way the highway continues east of Rome toward Tivoli, and then eventually to Naples and points further south.

As it happens, almost precisely at the highway’s point of entry into the “Macchia del Barco”, 100 meters due east of the E45 at Viadotto Rio Pozzo, are the faintest traces of what must have been a large Roman villa of the imperial age. The only remains of the structure now visible at ground level are two blocks of travertine, substantial enough to be seen clearly in Google Earth’s satellite images of the area. Survey work in 1995 detected nearby a few scattered stones of limestone paving, including some worked into an adjoining modern road. Those stones must derive from an ancient road that extended the Via Nomentana from the town of Nomentum (traditionally identified with modern Mentana, just 5 km south of Monterotondo) to the Sabine settlement of Eretum (probably located on the hill Casacotta near modern Montelibretti, 21 km northeast of Monterotondo), and then joined the Via Salaria. For about 4 km further south of these paltry survivals, over the past decade amateur archaeologists from a local chapter of the Archeoclub d’Italia

have uncovered an impressive 130 meter stretch of paving from the same materials, and thus (surely) the same road.¹

It was routine agricultural work in early May of 1906 on a hill known as Ontaneto – literally, “alder grove” – that first uncovered the presence of the imperial villa and traces of the nearby Nomentum–Eretum road. At that time, the site belonged to a large estate known as Tenuta di Tor Mancina, since 1814 the property of the noble Boncompagni Ludovisi family. The head of family, Prince Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi (1832–1911) – whose many titles included Duke of Monterotondo – enlisted a trusted scholar with an expertise in the Roman *campagna*, Giuseppe Tomassetti (1848–1911), to investigate. At that point, Tomassetti had served the Boncompagni Ludovisi family for a full three decades in various capacities, including as a tutor in history for Rodolfo’s three daughters.

By 17 May 1906 Tomassetti had concluded excavations, which can have lasted only a few days. These he summarized in a four page handwritten letter to the Prince, today preserved in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano.² Though Tomassetti soon shared notice of his discoveries in the *Bullettino comunale* for 1906 (which other contemporary journals duly excerpted), the letter to Prince Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi offers the first and fullest account of what he found.³

In the letter, Tomassetti describes (I translate here from the Italian) “an ancient building” of a construction type that he assigned to the second century AD, “consisting of numerous rooms and corridors built of brick, yet having flooring of ordinary white mosaic”. The discovery of a brick stamp of the late Antonine era secures the date. “The structure is supported on the side of the hill by some large niches, probably meant for a fountain that gushed in the plain below”. Indeed, Tomassetti stressed that a significant part of the complex, which he measured as covering 250 square meters, was devoted to a pool for “the collection of rain water... and for its distribution. A long water main of carefully joined

¹ See Turchetti 1995, 47–49; cf. also 36 on the site of Eretum. On the newly-excavated portion of the relevant road, see Paoli–Sgrulloni 2013.

² The letter is: Archivio Segreto Vaticano (henceforth ASV), Archivio Boncompagni Ludovisi (henceforth ABL) prot. 642C no. 180 = Venditti 2008, 318–319 prot. 642C no. 5; Turchetti 1995, 47 and 49 provides a transcription. On the long and close relationship of G. Tomassetti with the Boncompagni Ludovisi, see Boncompagni Ludovisi 1921, 242, 249, 346.

³ See Tomassetti 1906, 87–89. Other contemporary notices: *NS* 1906, 213–214; *AE* 1907, 125–126; *EE* 9 (1910) 485. Contemporary discussion: Ashby 1907, 27; idem 1912, 223–224; Persichetti 1909, 123–124.

terracotta tubes extends northeast of the building”. He also noted remains of the ancient road, skirting the property to its east.⁴

Tomassetti also immediately identified the villa as belonging to an imperial freedman of Hadrian, P. Aelius Hieron, who served as the emperor’s *ab admissione*, i. e., the official in charge of the early morning audience or *salutatio*.⁵ For his most substantial find was an inscribed architectural element, an “epistyle (architrave and pilasters) of Greek marble”, evidently from a small temple to Hercules that Hieron set up on the grounds. Tomassetti transcribed and translated the inscription (carved in two lines) as follows:

HERCVLI · SACRVM
P · AELIVS · HIERON · AVG · LIB · AB · ADMISSION[- - -]

Sacred to Hercules, Publius Aelius Hieron, freedman of the emperor (Aelius Hadrianus), in charge of admissions (presentations).

Tomassetti’s reading of the last word seems to have been erroneous, for in his subsequent note to the *Bullettino comunale* he rendered it as ADMISSIO[- - -].



Fig. 1. Location of remains of villa of P. Aelius Hieron in ancient *ager Nomentanus*, northeast of modern Monterotondo. Credit: Google Earth.

⁴ For the Italian text of this section of the letter and what follows, see Tomassetti ap. Turchetti 1995, 47 and 49. The brick stamp Tomassetti (properly) identified as *CIL XV 622 = S 189*, which dates to ca. 155–160: Steinby 1974–1975, 95 with n. 5; cf. Anderson 1991, 60–61 (with the date 145–155).

⁵ For an overview of the functions of this domestic official, see Saglio 1877, 71–72; de Ruggiero 1886, 92–93.

In this handwritten report Tomassetti continued: “[the] letters are 6 centimeters in height. The architrave, in which the inscription has been cut, is broken into two pieces. The architrave as a whole (it is in three pieces), is 3 meters 60 centimeters in length, from which one may calculate the height of the temple as four meters or more”. He concluded that Hieron’s villa (and its temple) “was overrun and sacked in the dark ages, its objects” – he details some additional, minor finds – “being found in a fragmentary state”. Finally, he reports to Prince Boncompagni Ludovisi that “all of these items and others of less account have been delivered to the supervisor of the Tor Mancina estate”.

We should not be surprised to find an extensive villa from the high Empire at this site, so near to Rome and in the midst of what even today is a rich agricultural area, noted for its vineyards and olive groves. In antiquity, the locality of Tor Mancina belonged to the *ager Nomentanus*, regarded as a profitable area for viticulture. The general territory of Nomentum attracted a series of eminent Romans to set up villas, ranging from Atticus in the late Republic to the poet Martial at the end of the first century AD. For instance, the elder Pliny (*NH* 14. 49–51) tells in some detail how in the Claudian era the grammarian Remmius Palaemon turned a massive profit on an undervalued vineyard in the *ager Nomentanus*, which prompted his rival Seneca to buy the property for four times the price Remmius had paid scarcely a decade earlier. Suetonius relates (*Nero* 48. 1–3) how in early June 68 the emperor Nero fled to his freedman Phaon’s villa “between the Via Salaria and Nomentana”, where he committed suicide.⁶

Indeed, the territory of Nomentum has yielded epigraphic testimony for five other imperial freedmen who had some sort of association with the area, including two from the Flavian era, though none of these are known specifically from a find near modern Monterotondo.⁷ It may be relevant to the case of P. Aelius Hieron that Hadrian had a particular interest in Nomentum, which lay just 21 kilometers from his own massive estate at Tibur (Tivoli). A public inscription dated to AD 136 shows that the emperor paid favor to the town and specifically its temples.⁸

Even given the facts that this territory was rich in villas and that Nomentum had attracted the munificence of Hadrian, it is of some interest

⁶ On the *ager Nomentanus* in general, see Pala 1976; di Gennaro et al. 2005, 1–22; Panella–Simonetti 2014, 297–299. Testimony for notable villas in this era is collected by Philipp 1936, 820–821; see also Pala 1976, 12.

⁷ See Weaver 2005, nos. 814 and 946 (Flavian freedmen), 2527 (freedman of M. Aurelius), and 2695 and 2908 (undatable).

⁸ See *AE* 1976, 114 = Pala 1976, 48 no. 1, 46, 7, on which see Horster 2001, 268–269, arguing that Hadrian was honored at Nomentum for restoring temples.

to find one of his imperial freedmen established here who shows the occupational title *ab admissione*. First, this domestic post was an important one, with the potential for accumulating great influence. Freedmen *ab admissione* together with the imperial chamberlains (*cubicularii*), as P. R. C. Weaver explains, “controlled access to the emperor, and because of their close and confidential contact with the emperor exercised a potent but unofficial (hence uncontrolled) influence on matters of policy outside their strictly domestic sphere”.⁹ Second, for all their importance, we can attach the names of precious few heads of the admissions division to a specific emperor. Other than an *ab admissione* of Galba – who succeeded Nero as emperor in June 68 but whose reign lasted just seven months – P. Aelius Hieron under Hadrian is our earliest datable holder of that title.¹⁰ Indeed, an examination of P. R. C. Weaver’s *Repertorium Familiae Caesaris* shows that Hieron must be counted as one of the most senior freedmen known from the era of that emperor – and, for that matter, of his successor Antoninus Pius. Furthermore, though there are numerous instances of imperial freedmen and freedwomen making various dedications to specific deities, as well as some paying for lavish private constructions, we do not commonly see them building (or even restoring) temples, especially in Rome and Italy.¹¹

G. Tomassetti in his report to Prince Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi rightly explained that “Publius Aelius Hieron was slave and afterward freedman of the emperor Hadrian”. Unfortunately, there is not much more that one can say with certainty about this man’s career. The work of (especially) P. R. C. Weaver has demonstrated the shaky nature of the evidence for a formally regulated *cursus honorum* for imperial freedmen. However one can guess that Hieron was manumitted by Hadrian not before age 30 (the legal age required by the *lex Aelia Sentia* of AD 4, which emperors generally observed for slaves in their service), and

⁹ Weaver 1972, 7.

¹⁰ See Weaver 2005, no. 708 for Ser. Sulpicius Fastus, *ab admissione* under Galba (*CIL* VI 8699 = Dessau, *ILS* 1691). The reign of M. Aurelius offers us our only datable later example. On this, see Weaver 2005, no. 2069 for M. Aurelius Hermes (*CIL* VI 8698 = 33748); note also no. 3030 (= *CIL* VI 8702), and *CIL* VI 4026, with unique title [*ab officii(s) et admiss(ione)*], where the names and thus the dates are irrecoverable. For subordinate freedman members of this branch of the imperial domestic service, see Weaver 2005, nos. 1367 (a *proximus ab admissione* under Trajan) and 2187 (an *adiutor ab admissione*, apparently under M. Aurelius).

¹¹ For independent building or (much more commonly) restoration of temples by imperial freedmen in Italy, see Weaver 2005, nos. 728, 1160, 1364, 1795, 2046, 2249, 2690, 2929, and 3455; for provincial examples, see nos. 1854 (Epirus), 2351 (Africa), 2645 (Malta), 2998 and 3848 (Moesia), and 3910 (Africa).

received the promotion to head of admissions no sooner than ten years after manumission.¹² He probably also lived well past Hadrian's death in July 138 and into the reign of Hadrian's successor Antoninus Pius (reigned 138–161), to judge from the Antonine brick stamp found on the site of his villa. This admittedly speculative reconstruction suggests that Hieron was born at the latest around AD 98, the year of Trajan's accession, unless he had an unusually precocious career. It also is conceivable that he continued his service as *ab admissione* or in another high-ranking domestic post under Antoninus.¹³

As it turns out, the slave name Hieron (or Hiero) is unique for an attested imperial freedman. So it is of considerable interest to find an inscription last spotted in the Palazzo Chigi on Rome's Piazza Colonna, which records a dedication to Hercules by a P. Aelius Hiero. Here is the text, in four (apparently centered) lines on a marble tablet: HERCVLI | SACRVM | P · AELIVS / HIERO. G. Tomassetti did not adduce this inscription (published in the first fascicle of *CIL VI*, that dates to 1876) in his discussion of the excavations at Monterotondo; nor (much later) did Weaver take note of it in his comprehensive *Repertorium Familiae Caesaris*.¹⁴

It is a pity that we do not have a provenance for this item, which on the face of things would seem to refer to the same person as the Monterotondo find, given the rarity of the name and the object of the dedication. The two inscriptions each formulate the dedication to Hercules in the same way. The words HERCVLI SACRVM are the first of the text, they are unabbreviated, and (somewhat unusually for this period) there is no cult title for the god. However in the second text the lack of status and occupational indications for the dedicator and the form of the cognomen (*Hiero* instead of *Hieron*) give pause. It is perhaps just as likely that what we have here is evidence for the activities of a freeborn citizen son of our freedman, rather than the *ab admissione* himself.

This brings us back to the question of motivation. Why did devotion to Hercules lead the *ab admissione* to construct an actual temple to the deity in the *ager Nomentanus*? That must remain an open question, given the

¹² On these expected age minimums, see Weaver 1972, 104, and on the lack of a fixed *cursus*, 268–269.

¹³ For service of imperial freedmen under more than one emperor, see e.g. Weaver 2005, nos. 513 (Claudius and Nero), 1360 (Trajan, Hadrian, and perhaps Antoninus Pius); cf. 1141, 1162, 1425, 1548 (with especially valuable discussion), 1607, 1708, 1760, and 2094.

¹⁴ *CIL VI* 265, said to be “in the storerooms of the Lateran Museum”, with p. 3756 for the amended location; on this inscription, cf. di Gennaro et al. 2005, confusing it with the Monterotondo dedication of P. Aelius Hieron (*AE* 1907, 125).

ubiquity of the god's worship in the Roman world under both the Republic and Empire.¹⁵ One notes that the Spanish emperors Trajan and Hadrian, both from Italica in Baetica, invoked Hercules as their patron, especially in his guise as 'Gaditanus', i.e., "of Gades", where the deity had a large cult center. Antoninus Pius continued and indeed amplified his predecessors' marked attachment to the god. Plus nearby Tibur had a long-established cult of Hercules (as 'Victor'), whose popularity throughout the second century AD is lavishly attested.¹⁶ Added to this is the fact that, starting perhaps with the reigns of Nerva and Trajan but certainly by the time of Hadrian, Hercules was viewed as the protector specifically of the imperial household, which gave rise to his appellation *Hercules domus Augusti*.¹⁷ But the lack of a cult title in our two inscriptions disallows a ready explanation.

T. Ashby saw the remains of Hieron's villa in the *ager Nomentanus* shortly after its 1906 discovery. In the earlier 1970s C. Pala documented the survival of one of the supporting hillside niches that Tomassetti had described, but found the rest inaccessible due to the growth of thick ground cover. By the mid 1990s R. Turchetti, in a careful study of ancient remains in the territory of Monterotondo, found visible at the villa site only the two travertine blocks from its foundations, and the stray paving stones of the Nomentum-Eretum road. "In addition", she notes, "it was not possible to find within the estate evidence of the archaeological discoveries placed there in deposit", i.e. in 1906.¹⁸

The inscribed architrave, at any rate, has been hiding in plain sight – in central Rome. It can be spotted through the large gate at the entrance to the magnificent Casino Aurora, at Via Lombardia 44, residence of the head of the Boncompagni Ludovisi family. One can be forgiven for looking past the inscription. It now fronts the basin of a low rectangular garden fountain combined with other structural elements constructed of concrete. The whole is inserted into a high travertine and brick wall (that features a large relief sculpture of a dragon, symbol of the Boncompagni) on the left side of the entrance. From all appearances, this assemblage served as a water trough for horses.

¹⁵ On which see Wojciechowski 2013, 97–117.

¹⁶ On Hercules 'Gaditanus' as a patron of Trajan and Hadrian, see Barry 2011, 21–23; for Antoninus Pius and his successors, Hekster 2005, 203–217. Hercules cult at Tibur: Várhelyi 2010, 31.

¹⁷ Explicit in *CIL* VI 30901 = *ILS* 1622 (AD 128); in general on this aspect of Hercules, see Wojciechowski 2013, 100–103.

¹⁸ See Ashby 1907, 27; Pala 1976, 116 no. 113; and for the quote Turchetti 1995, 49, with 48 for images of the remains visible in 1995.



Fig 2. Exterior of modern garden fountain at Casino Aurora (Rome), faced with architrave/frieze with dedication to Hercules by P. Aelius Hieron. Courtesy Amministrazione Boncompagni Ludovisi.



Fig. 3. Interior of modern garden fountain at Casino Aurora (Rome), showing inner face of P. Aelius Hieron's architrave/frieze. Courtesy Amministrazione Boncompagni Ludovisi.

The three pieces of the architrave that Tomassetti discovered have been joined together to form an integral part of the basin. But their combined length is almost a meter shorter than he reported (2 m 63 cm as opposed to 3 m 60 cm). There was obviously a fourth piece, now missing, that completed the architectural feature (and with it, the final two letters of the second line of the inscription) on its right. The height of the architrave at its interior left edge (which is the part least recessed in the ground) measures ca. 56 cm; the thickness varies from 14 cm (at the top) to 21 cm. The outside face of the joined pieces has the inscription in the upper half, and in the lower half shows three bands of concave horizontal molding with short and irregular dentils, the uppermost of those bands projecting further than the others. The inside face is uninscribed and has a simpler scheme of concave molding, but in fine profile from top to bottom. Together these features suggest an expensive construction. In formal terms, the exterior is best described as an architrave/frieze, with an architrave (the part with the decorative molding) and frieze (the part with the inscription) worked out of one piece of marble.¹⁹

The text of the inscription shows only slight deterioration from Tomassetti's day. In the first line, a modern concrete join has obliterated the S and part of the A in SACRVM; in the second, only three of the six interpuncts that Tomassetti registered are visible. One also notes that the heights of letters in line 1 (5,5–6,1 cm) are slightly smaller than those in line 2 (6,2–7,2 cm). All the letters are consistently serified and generously spaced (ca. 3,5 cm between elements) until the last three words LIB AB ADMISSIONE], which are slightly more cramped (spaces of ca. 2 cm). Here is the inscription as it now stands:

HERCVLI [S]ACRVM
P · AELIVS HIERON AVG LIB · AB · ADMISSIONE]

It seems clear that the mason who carved the inscription carefully tried to center it on what we may call the frieze. That emerges from the positioning of the first line of the inscription, 89 cm in length, which manifestly was centered above the second, which can be calculated as ca. 192 cm in length, extending past the first line 51 cm on the left and apparently ca. 51 or 52 cm on right. (Had the stone carver not reduced the spacing in the last portion of the second line, he would have upset the close symmetry.)

¹⁹ On the manufacture and general attributes of architrave/frieze blocks, see Gorski-Packer 2015, 18.

This centered text in turn allows us in turn to estimate the original width of the frieze. The distance from the left edge of the stone to the start of the first line is 135 cm; one would expect approximately the same measurement from the end of the first line to the right edge of the stone (which in its fractured state is just 39 cm). So we can calculate the original width of the frieze as 135 cm + 89 cm + ca. 135 cm = ca. 3 m 59 cm. That is just over 12 Roman feet (29,4 to 29,7 cm = 1 Roman foot). As we have seen, in height the combined frieze / architrave measures at least 56 cm, and so – even as we have it – is just under 2 Roman feet.

Proportions for Roman buildings of course differ widely. Even though the elevations of Roman structures do seem to show a strong tendency toward simple arithmetical ratios, the estimated width and height of the architrave/frieze get us only so far in calculating the dimensions of the entire structure. The interior need only have been large enough to house a cult statue.²⁰ Yet Tomassetti's guess that Hieron's temple to Hercules originally reached a height of "four meters or more" (i.e. in excess of 13,5 Roman feet) seems perfectly acceptable. Indeed, a simple and common arithmetical proportion such as 5:4 would yield a structure 15 Roman feet tall given a frieze/architrave 12 feet wide.

So when did the Boncompagni Ludovisi take the inscribed entablature section from their estate at Tor Mancina to the Casino Aurora? Though no precise answer is at hand, a thumbnail history of the two properties helps narrow the possibilities. The Casino, which represents the last remnant of the famed Villa Ludovisi in private hands, was built ca. 1570 and has been a family possession since 1621. In 1885 Prince Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi felt compelled to break up and sell most of the Villa Ludovisi to developers, who created the luxurious business and residential quarter that extends both east and west of today's Via Veneto. He spared the Casino Aurora and a 10000 square meter parcel of land on which it sat, encasing the whole in a massive terrace wall with entrance gate on Via Lombardia.

Yet starting in the mid-1890s, to meet new and crushing financial obligations, Rodolfo had to rent out the Casino, first to the newly-formed American Academy in Rome (for the years 1895–1907), and then briefly to an American philanthropist and poet, Dr. Alexander Blair Thaw of Pittsburgh (for the year 1908). In other words, the Boncompagni Ludovisi did not have clear access to their own property from 1895 through 1908. However sometime in 1909 or 1910 Rodolfo's newly-married grandson Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi (1886–1955), heir to the position of

²⁰ In general on proportion, see Wilson Jones 2003, 71–108 and 179 on the limited requirements for a temple's interior space.

head of family, made the Casino Aurora his principal residence. Young Francesco also turned his attention toward the consolidation of the Casino's terrace walls and comprehensive redevelopment of its grounds, a campaign that would stretch across the years 1910–1917 and then resume again in the mid-1920s.²¹

Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi also had a deep interest in scientific farming and devoted much effort to enhancing productivity at the Tor Mancina estate. The Boncompagni Ludovisi private archive contains photos of Francesco and his young family at Tor Mancina in 1911, the year of the death of his grandfather Rodolfo (on 12 December, aged 79) and his succession to the family's principal title, that of Prince of Piombino. Francesco also implemented major improvements at Tor Mancina in spring 1915, before departing for what would be almost three full years of (highly decorated) war service on the Austrian front and in France.²²



Fig. 4. The family of Prince Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi at Tenuta Tor Mancina, from private photo album, 1911. Courtesy Amministrazione Boncompagni Ludovisi.

²¹ On the Casino Aurora, see especially Felici 1952, especially 345–371 for its history post 1885. On Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi's initial improvements to the Casino (from at least 19 March 1910), see ASV ABL prot. 642D no. 199 = Venditti 2008, prot. 642C no. 19.

²² Note e. g., ASV ABL prot. 642D no. 204 = Venditti 2008, prot. 642D no. 3 (bridge-building at Tor Mancina in March 1915).

Given Francesco's close investment in Tor Mancina and also his grandparents' long association with G. Tomassetti, it seems practically certain that the young Prince will have known about the scholar's excavation of the imperial villa on the property. Though precise documentary evidence is at present lacking, it must be Francesco – rather than his grandfather Rodolfo – who moved the Hieron entablature from its find spot in the territory of Monterotondo to the Casino and eventually repurposed it as the basin for a garden fountain. We have a likely *terminus ante quem* for the transport of the stone from Monterotondo to its present location in Rome: 15 March 1922, when Francesco sold the estate of Tor Mancina to the Istituto sperimentale zootecnico di Roma.²³

It so happens that Prince Francesco's contributions to the Casino Aurora in Rome include an enhancement of its entrance on Via Lombardia and a general systemization of its gardens. To the entrance he (surely) introduced the statues of goddesses (one ancient, one Renaissance) that still today grace the pilasters of its gate. And he must have added the garden fountain (or “horse trough”) with the Hieron inscription to the retaining wall, into which in turn he set high up the large Boncompagni heraldic relief.²⁴ A plan of the Casino Aurora and its gardens dated to 3 April 1914 shows no trace yet of this fountain. Indeed, its creation may date as late as July–August 1926, when Prince Francesco replanted the Casino's gardens, and successfully requested of the Governor's office of Rome permission to construct in the northeast corner of the property a small stable for saddle-horses.²⁵ The recent (2010) discovery within the Casino Aurora of a large trove of additional materials from the family's private archive – as yet uncatalogued – may soon throw further light on the travel and disposition of the Monterotondo inscription.

Our study has treated a previously published dedication of an inscribed architectural element (a partial entablature of a temple to Hercules) by a freedman in the higher registers of the domestic service of the emperor Hadrian. Rediscovery of the actual object – for some time thought to be lost – in the possession of the noble family that sponsored

²³ ASV ABL prot. 642D no. 221 = Venditti 2008, prot. 642D no. 21.

²⁴ The statues and heraldic relief had not yet been added in 1897, to judge from the photograph of the Casino entrance in *Catalogue of the First Annual Exhibition of the American Academy in Rome 1897*, 5.

²⁵ Plan: ASV ABL prot. 614A no. 186E = Venditti 2008, 614A no. 22, reproduced in Benocci 2010, 340. Other improvements of 1925–1926 to the Casino gardens: prot. 614D nos. 192–194 = Venditti 2008, prot. 614D nos. 4–6. Prince Francesco himself served as Governor of Rome from 13 September 1928 through 23 January 1935: see Starocci 2009.

the original excavation allows us at long last to envisage this dedication in three dimensions. Autopsy shows that the editor, G. Tomassetti, reliably transmitted the text but not the measurements of the piece, which he made ca. 25% larger than its actual size. It also reveals this architrave/frieze to be more finely worked than Tomassetti's succinct description suggests. Admittedly these are modest gains. But it is hoped above all that this investigation may serve as a case study in a larger methodological point, that even for the twentieth century close study of family patronage and priorities can shed real light on the fate of the material past.²⁶

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²⁶ I owe special thanks to HSH Principe Nicolò and HSH Principessa Rita Boncompagni Ludovisi for a long-standing collaboration which has made this study possible. I thank also my son, Samuel W. P. Brennan, who in 2012 (when aged 12) first pointed out to me the embedded P. Aelius Hieron inscription.

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This study republishes an inscribed architrave/frieze (*AE* 1907, 125) from a small temple to Hercules that P. Aelius Hieron, freedman and *ab admissione* (head of presentations) of Hadrian, set up at in his villa in the *ager Nomentanus* near modern Monterotondo. After its discovery in 1906 on the Tor Mancina estate of the Boncompagni Ludovisi, it appears the head of family moved the piece to Rome and incorporated it (by 1926) in a private garden fountain, where it has since escaped scholarly notice. The rediscovery of the architrave/frieze allows resumed speculation about the financial means and ideology of its dedicator, who is technically one of the most senior imperial freedmen known from the era of Hadrian (117–138) or his successor Antoninus Pius (138–161).

В статье вновь публикуется текст надписи (*AE* 1907, 125) на архитраве/фризе небольшого храма Геркулеса, построенного П. Элием Гиероном, вольноотпущенником и начальником аудиенций (*ab admissione*) Адриана на своей вилле на территории *ager Nomentanus* (совр. Монтеротондо). После открытия храма в 1906 г. на территории имения Тор Манчина его владелец Бонкомпаньи Людовизи около 1926 г. перевез надпись в Рим, где она служила украшением фонтана в частном саду и потому не попадала в поле зрения исследователей. Вновь обнаруженный архитрав/фриз позволяет судить о и финансовых возможностях посвяителя храма, одного из самых высокопоставленных вольноотпущенников времен Адриана (117–138) или Антония Пия (138–161), и о мотивах его посвящения.

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