

Ruins of ancient Nero's Theater discovered under garden of future Four Seasons near Vatican

July 26 2023, by Nicole Winfield



People walk in the excavation site of the ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, 1st century AD, backdropped by the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Season's Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since

2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini

Rome's next luxury hotel has some very good bones: Archaeologists said Wednesday that the ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to in ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of a future Four Seasons Hotel steps from the Vatican.

Archaeologists have excavated deep under the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020 as part of planned renovations on the frescoed Renaissance building. The palazzo, which takes up a city block along the broad Via della Conciliazione leading to St. Peter's Square, is home to an ancient Vatican chivalric order that leases the space to a hotel to raise money for Christians in the Holy Land.

The governor general of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, confirmed during a news conference announcing the archaeological discovery that the incoming hotel chain was the Four Seasons. News reports have said the hotel is expected to be open in time for the Vatican's 2025 Jubilee, when an estimated 30 million people and pilgrims are expected to flock to Rome.

Officials hailed the findings from the excavation as "exceptional," given they provide a rare look at a stratum of Roman history from the Roman Empire through to the 15th century. Among the discoveries: 10th century glass colored goblets and pottery pieces that are unusual because so little is known about this period in Rome.



An archeologist shows a Medieval glass, dated to the 14th century A.D., coming from the excavation of Roman emperor Nero's theater, during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Season's Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



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Archeologists work in excavation site of the ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, 1st century AD, during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Season's Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



Medieval artifacts, dated between the 10th and 14th century A.D., coming from the excavation of ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, are seen during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Season's Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



1st Century AD Roman artifacts coming from the excavation of ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, 1st century AD, are seen during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Season's Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



An archeologist shows pieces of bone used to carve Christian rosary beads, approximately dated to the 14th century A.D., coming from the excavation of ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater

referred to ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Season's Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



Archeologists work on findings coming from the excavation site of the ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, 1st century AD, during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Season's Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



A double-faced Junus head, approximately dated to the 1st century A.D., is seen among other findings coming from the excavation of ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to in ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Seasons Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



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A fresco is seen on a wall in the excavation site of the ancient Roman emperor Nero's theater, 1st century AD, during a press preview, in Rome, Wednesday, July 26, 2023. The ruins of Nero's Theater, an imperial theater referred to in ancient Roman texts but never found, have been discovered under the garden of the future Four Seasons Hotel, steps from the Vatican, after excavating the walled garden of the Palazzo della Rovere since 2020, as part of planned renovations on the Renaissance building. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Medichini



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Marzia Di Mento, the site's chief archaeologist, noted that previously only seven glass chalices of the era had been found, and that the excavations of this one site turned up seven more.

In addition, archaeologists found marble columns and gold-leaf decorated plaster, leading them to conclude that the Nero's Theater

referred to in texts by Pliny the Elder, an ancient Roman author and philosopher, was indeed there, located at the site just off the Tiber River.

Officials said the portable antiquities would be moved to a museum, while the ruins of the theater structure itself would be covered again after all studies are completed.

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