

Area archeologica di Aquileia e  
Basilica Patriarcale



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# TITUS MACER'S HOUSE

## AN INNOVATIVE PROJECT



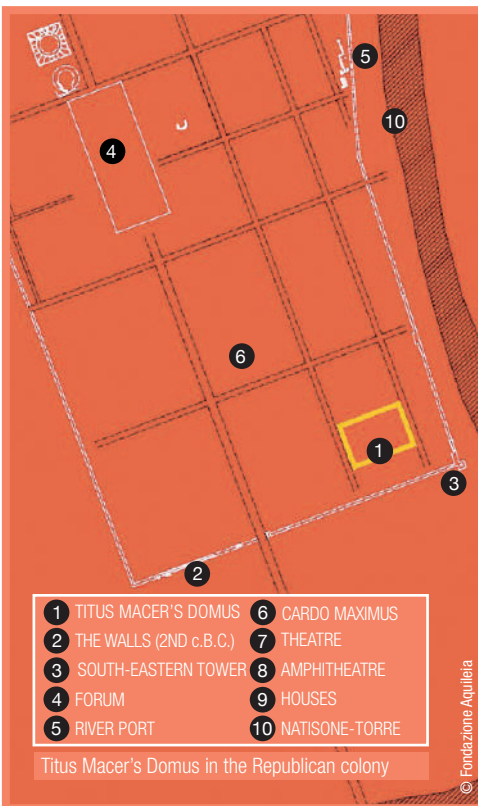
The archaeological area of the Cossàr Estates (after the name of the owners, before it was acquired by the State) opened to the public in the Fifties after the excavations by Giovanni Brusin and Luisa Bertacchi. Several mosaics in this area had been already unearthed in the mid-1800's: **the mosaic of Europe on the bull**, the **“unswept floor”**, as well as the **vine branch with bow** (discovered just outside Titus Macer's house), are **now on display on the first floor of the national archaeological Museum**.

In 2010 the Fondazione Aquileia launched a contest for the valorization of Titus Macer's house. Around the same time, the Department of Archaeology of the University of Padua collaborated in the excavations with the Foundation and the Superintendency (2009-2015).

The winning design, by architect Eugenio Vassallo, was built between 2017 and 2020: **a steel, wood and brick roof creates a highly suggestive recreation of the volumes of a Roman house**. It was inaugurated on September 25th, 2020.

## THE DOMUS WITHIN THE ANCIENT CITY

**Titus Macer's Domus initially belonged to one of the southern blocks of the ancient city.** The block was defined by two parallel roads, one of which is still identifiable from its Euganean trachyte stone paving. It occupied the south-eastern corner of the most ancient city walls, dominated by an imposing square-shaped tower. By the time the house was built, however, a **complete urban renewal** was already under way. The city walls almost completely lost their function in the age of the *Pax Augustea*, and the urban sprawl quickly surrounded them. New residential areas grew in the zone of today's Basilica. The domus, once peripheral, **found itself nearly in the centre of the new city**, only 250 meters from the forum.





## THE HISTORY OF THE DOMUS

At the end of the first century B.C., **several houses stood in this area**. The western house was closed by a wall, which has been discovered under the main representative room (19). This house had a Tuscanic *atrium*: the roof was open above the *impluvium* basin and not supported by columns. The Tuscanic *atrium* **is documented here for the first time in Aquileia**.

Between 25 and 75 A.D. the previous houses were merged to form a new project. The **owner** (Titus Macer?) **created one large domus**, one of the largest Roman urban houses in Northern Italy, **covering more than 1500 square meters**.

The building was often renovated over time, especially the mosaic floors; however, its general layout remained the same until the 4th century A.D.



## VISITING THE DOMUS. THE ATRIUM

The entrance was from the western *cardo* (1) through the *fauces* (“jaws”), with a shop along the northern side (2). The entrance in the public part of the house was from the *atrium* (3), paved with black mosaic, with two wings (6 and 7) increasing the available space.

At the center of the atrium there was **the impluvium basin (now reconstructed) with a well**, more than half of which has been preserved. In this phase, the roof was supported by four columns at the corners of the pool.

In line with the entrance there was **the tablinum (8), the true heart of this part of the house**: here the owner welcomed his guests and his *clientes* and kept his archive and documents. The room next to the tablinum is interpreted as a *triclinium*, a small dining room (9). On the north side, two small rooms (4,5) were *cubicula* (bedrooms).

## VISITING THE DOMUS. THE PRIVATE ROOMS, THE LARGE RECEPTION HALL, THE GARDEN

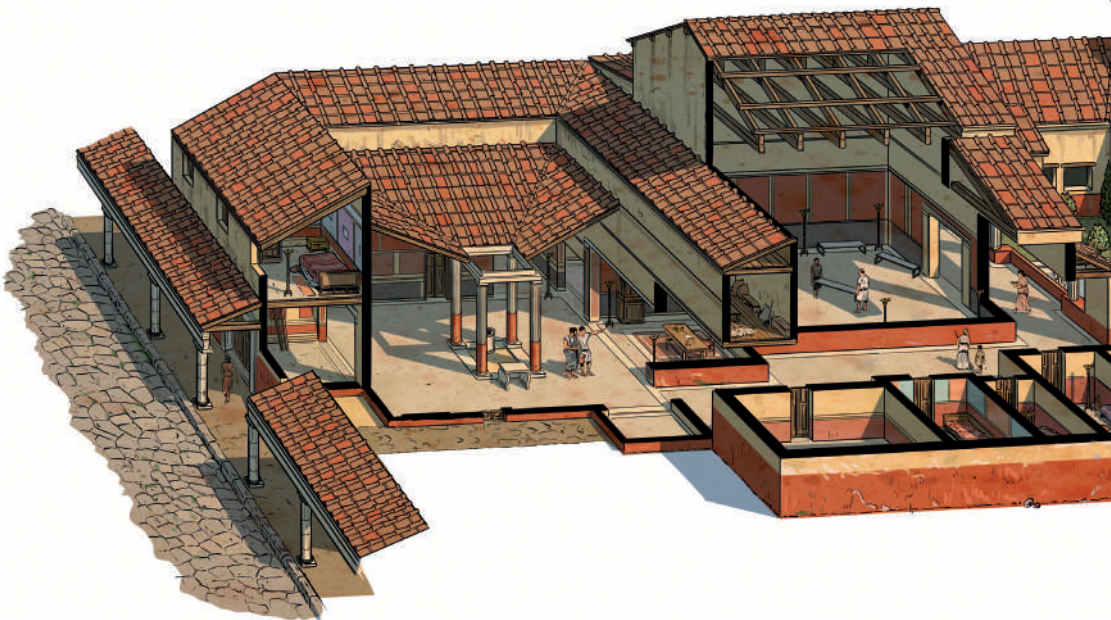
From the atrium, a long corridor in white mosaic (10) led to the garden (16), surrounded by a four-branched *ambulacrum* (15).

**The private rooms of the house lined the corridor:** from west to east we see two living rooms (11 and 12), a bedroom (13), with the classic bipartition of the mosaic floor, another living room (14).

**The large central representative room overlooked the garden** (19), measuring 90 square meters. Remains of a fountain and a mosaic-paved basin were found in the garden in front of it.

**The garden** was probably not open like a classic *peristilium* but **walled on all sides** against the harsh climate at this latitude.

In the north-west corner, a small room (20) was possibly a study, while the adjacent room has been identified either as a **kitchen complete with a cooking counter** or as a **domestic place of worship** (21).

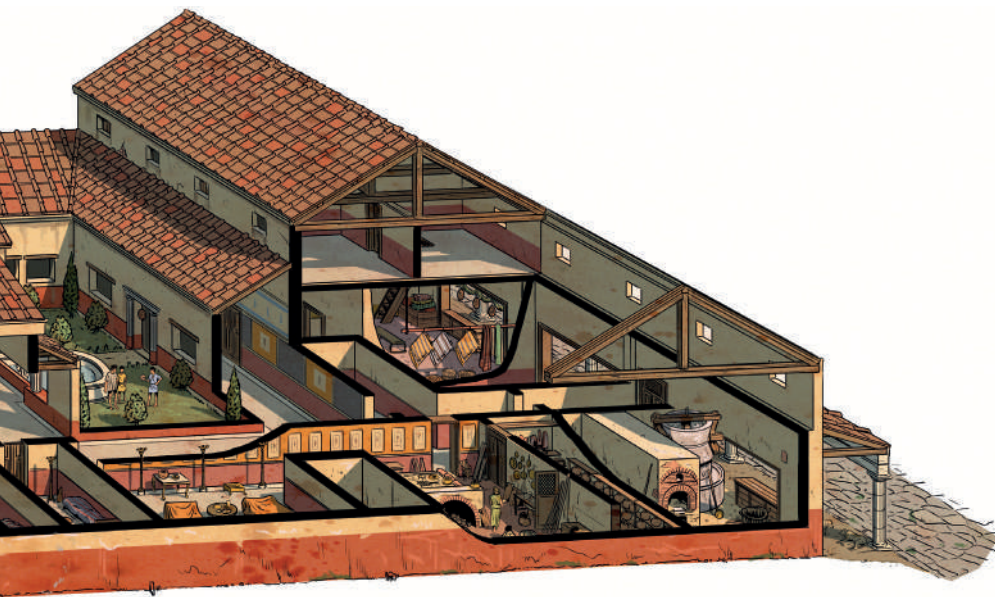


## VISITING THE DOMUS. THE BACK OF THE DOMUS AND THE SHOPS

Another important hall has been identified along the southern side of the garden: a **dining room** (triclinium, 17), with the typical mosaic divided into three decorative areas. Next to it, a rectangular structure has been identified with a fountain. To the east, two rooms (18 and 28) of which only fragments of mortar concrete and cocciopesto floors remain, were probably a kitchen and a utility room. On the southern side of the garden, however, three rooms (23, 24 and 31) lost any remains of the floors, so their function is unknown.

Between the garden and the street, we find **the commercial part of the house, which includes four shops** (25, 26, 29, 30). It is therefore no coincidence **that most of the coins were found here during the excavations.**

The southernmost shop (30) was a **bakery**: you can recognize the lower part of the circular oven, the brick base for a millstone and a counter for bread making. The food was sold directly to customers in the street.



## WHO WAS TITUS MACER?

Titus Macer's name is carved on a **stone weight discovered during excavations** by the University of Padua in the back of the house: T. MACR, i.e. *T(it)i Macr(i)*, "Titus Macer's". Using the same method applied in Pompeii, the house discovered in the Cossàr Estates is thus called "Titus Macer's house".

We don't know who Titus Macer was: unfortunately, the name of the family name (*gens*) between the *praenomen* Titus and the cognomen Macer is missing. **We can only assume that Titus Macer was a wealthy merchant** who could afford to buy two adjacent properties to create a 1,500 square meters new house.

Around the same era, **according to Strabo the geographer Aquileia was a big emporium**: the terminal of the Mediterranean maritime trades and a redistribution hub serving the Danube and the Balkans drawing wealth and well-being from this favorable position.

A 10-pounds stone weight with an iron handle and inscription bearing the name of the owner Titus Macer







Titus Macer's house is a veritable sample of the tastes in vogue for the mosaics between the last decades of the 1st century B.C. and the first half of the 1st century A.D.

**The oldest floors are those of the *tablinum***, with the beautiful meander frame (8), the *caementicium* floor with black stone inserts (11), the mosaic with fragments of stones in many colors (12).

The mosaics of the first half of the 1st century A.D. are mostly black and white (9,12,13,14), with elaborate geometric patterns, or sometimes monochromatic (3,10,19). The bipartition of the floor of room 13 is typical of the bedrooms, while the tripartition of the mosaic of room 17, with the lozenge and "gate" motifs, reappears in the *triclinia*; the checkerboard mosaic is particularly interesting (14).

**The polychrome mosaic with fawn and dog of the study room (20)** was created after this time (late 2nd-3rd century), during renovation works. Finally, the fishing mosaic (4th century) found in reception hall (19), above the white one visible today, is currently being restored for future relocation: the central function of this large room remained intact even in the late imperial age.

## PRECIOUS FINDS

The excavations of the University of Padua gave us an impressive number of finds, from amphorae and ceramics, which help us to understand **the scale of the commercial traffic that brought to Aquileia the most disparate goods** from the most distant regions of the empire, to metal, glass and coins. **A stunning gold ring** with glass paste testifies to the wealth of the inhabitants of the house.

**Almost a thousand coins were found in the archaeological site.** Of these, about 560 belong to a treasure hidden in a hole in the atrium area, when the house was already partially in ruins, around 470 A.D. (20 years after the arrival of Attila...)

The treasure is on display in the national archaeological Museum of Aquileia.

A hoard of 560 coins found in the sector of the ancient atrium of the domus, probably buried shortly after 460 A.D.



© University of Padua

Sestertius with a laureate, draped and loricated bust of the emperor Maximinus, found in the area of the shops and dated 235-236 A.D.

Gold and glass paste ring found in the eastern sector of the house, 2nd-3rd century A.D.



# TITUS MACER'S HOUSE IN 3D

Reconstructive view of the atrium of the domus



© Fondazione Aquileia/Icon/Nudesign



WATCH THE VIDEO

Reconstruction of the porch that separated the house from the paved road on the East side



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## OPENING HOURS

The Domus is **open every day**, with admission every 30 minutes:

- **From November to February:** from 10 am to 4 pm on weekdays; from 10 am to 5 pm on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays (closed on Dec 25th)
- **March and October:** from 10 am to 6 pm
- **From April to September:** from 10 am to 7 pm

## ENTRANCE TICKET

**Tickets for individual visitors** can be purchased:

- **Online** through links available on the sites [www.fondazioneaquileia.it](http://www.fondazioneaquileia.it) and [www.basilicadiaquileia.it](http://www.basilicadiaquileia.it)
- In the **Bookshop of the Basilica of Aquileia** in piazza Capitolo, 4

**Groups** can book tickets **online** through links available on the sites [www.fondazioneaquileia.it](http://www.fondazioneaquileia.it) and [www.basilicadiaquileia.it](http://www.basilicadiaquileia.it).

For more information on how to book group visits, please write to [prenotazione.basilica@gmail.com](mailto:prenotazione.basilica@gmail.com).

Admission is free for: under 18s - groups of students up to secondary school on educational visits, including their accompanying teachers - disabled visitors (upon presentation of the disability certificate at the ticket office). If the disabled visitor is not self-sufficient, free entry is also offered to a companion- journalists - tour guides and tour leaders - one guide per each group - ICOMOS and ICOM members - residents of the Town of Aquileia - FVGCard and FVGCardAquileia holders.

## ACCESSIBILITY

The Domus is accessible to disabled visitors on trirides.

Audio and video by Radio Magica: [www.radiomagica.org](http://www.radiomagica.org)



VISIT AQUILEIA

