

## The *Curia Latina* in *Aeneid* 7

In *Aeneid* 7 Latinus' reception of Aeneas and the Trojans in his *curia* reinforces the civil quality of the negotiations between the peoples of Troy and Italy, with the Trojans desiring political and military alliance with the Latins. Before revealing the contents of their conversation Virgil creates an extended ekphrasis (lines 170-191) to describe the structure in which the parties meet. Scholarly analysis on this passage began with the initial observation (Van Essen 1939) that Virgil appears to recall Rome when describing Latium and its citadel, but Virgil's additional references in the passage to the *curia* as *tectum*, *regia*, and *templum* have complicated discussions as to what the structure's true function and inspiration are. Many studies suggest that Latinus' *tectum* operates mainly as a religious building and that Virgil is influenced in his depiction by specific temples in Rome, either the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline (Camps 1959, Rosivach 1980) or the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus (Rowell 1941, Reckford 1961). I shall argue that the Roman *curia*, particularly the Curia Julia in the Forum Romanum, which was completed (ca. 28 BCE) just as Virgil began writing the *Aeneid*, also inspires the poet's ekphrasis, not only in function but in architectural features as well. Senate houses in Rome as early as the Curia Hostilia were used to conduct official business with foreign embassies, as Latinus does here, and their overall aesthetic appearance and decorative program have many parallels in Latinus' *curia*.

The close interconnections between religion and politics in Rome during the age of Augustus cannot be overlooked; thus my analysis shall begin by briefly examining similarities between temples and *curiae*. I shall consider Varro's discussion (*DLL* 5.155) of the two types of *curia* (one for the Senate, the other for priests performing religious duties) as well as the primary meaning of the word *templum*, which does not refer to an established religious structure *per se*,

but any piece of land that has been consecrated by augurs. The main focus of this paper, however, shall revolve around the architectural features Virgil chooses to represent in Latinus' *curia*, which echo details from the Curia Julia (closely replicated by its successors, the *curiae* of Domitian and Diocletian). Columns, ceiling features, and the arrangement of the statues in Virgil's ekphrasis all replicate the view of someone looking at the architecture of the Curia Julia, both external and internal. The imagery of military and political glory displayed through architectural and decorative features in Latinus' *curia* serves to link Troy, Latium, and Rome; spoils on Latinus' doors recall the palace of Priam in *Aeneid* 2 and the temple dedicated by Augustus to Apollo mentioned in *Aeneid* 8. More importantly, Latinus' *curia* is a monument to his (and Latium's) success, much as the Curia Julia becomes a monument to Octavian Augustus' triple triumph over Antony and Cleopatra, with the inclusion of victory statues and Egyptian war booty on and in the Curia Julia.

I argue that Virgil fashions a kind of ring composition in using the simple richness of the Curia Julia as inspiration for Latinus' *curia*, which in turn is supposed to inspire the later buildings of Rome. In the description of his *curia*, the poet illuminates many details of Latin customs that mimic yet also are meant to influence Roman traditions, which has led one scholar (Nelis 2001) to believe that Virgil chooses to treat "history and purpose" more than architecture in this ekphrasis. However, by projecting Roman architecture and monuments into the past, Virgil emphasizes that architectural and decorative aspects symbolize a significant part of the "history and purpose" of Rome the poet wishes to portray.

## Works Cited

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