

Architectural Competition in the Circus Flaminius Under Augustus

While the propaganda campaign of Augustus Caesar has been extensively examined and analyzed, scholars have not given the monuments of the Circus Flaminius the warranted attention that they deserve. Since the Gracchi “problem” of 132-121 BCE, the city of Rome was basically left to disrepair until Caesar envisioned a public works initiative that was quite magnificent in scale and grandeur.¹ The Circus Flaminius therefore had also been somewhat neglected in terms of the Late Republican building campaigns of the aristocracy, but still managed to offer the Porticus Metelli and the Temple of Apollo Medicus. This paper will examine the renovations and construction in the Circus Flaminius after 34 BCE of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, the Porticus Octaviae as well as the Theater of Marcellus. After having defeated Antony and his comrades at Actium, Augustus seized the opportunity to first alter the temple by Sosius and then later demonstrated his own renovation capabilities through the newly named Porticus Octaviae. The first familial monument was then joined by the Theater of Marcellus, which helped transform the circus into an entertainment district. Therefore, Augustus employed and reformulated architecture and art in a direct response to Apollo Sosianus in order to establish inherent monumental supremacy in the circus while also adding another layer to the “Augustan” narrative. The Augustan narrative, which consists of literary, architectural and gens-centric propaganda served as a catalyst that formulated the transition from the Late Roman Republic to the Early Empire.

The Temple of Apollo Sosianus, first known as the Temple of Apollo Medicus was voted for in 439 BCE and dedicated in 433 BCE² supposedly by consul Gnaeus Julius while his co-

¹ Zanker, Paul. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988, 19.

² Lanciani, Rodolfo Amedeo. *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*. New York: Blom, 1967, 449.

consul Quinctius was fending off the Volscian threat.³ Gaius Sosius celebrated a triumph in 34 BCE for having sacked Judea with Herod under the orders of Antony⁴ and this date seems logical for the initial renovation. Pliny tells us of the numerous pieces of sculpture that littered the inner temple and even provides the names of the purported creators.⁵

Augustus' delayed response to Sosius' installment culminated in the widespread and encapsulating Hellenized portico named after his sister. This monument firmly established the Julio-Claudian gens while also showing that Augustus too, could renovate an older construction. Augustus chose to continue Metellus' tradition of both the extensive portico as well as the intimate museum setting that exhibited spoils of war.⁶ This decision was not half-hearted since Augustus countered the more Tuscan elements of Sosius' reworking, while also showing that he too, as Metellus and Sosius had done before, could congregate splendid works of sculpture.

Ultimately, Augustus self-consciously and even egotistically reworked the Circus Flaminius narrative in a way that would most certainly provide people in Early Imperial Rome with a framework of Julio-Claudian deeds and heritage. While this legacy may have been very hybridized and perhaps even so convoluted in terms of architectural homages and influences that his successors were not able to match the success and monumentality of his campaign, Augustus' vision and ability to make Romans forget about the past decades of internal strife made his building campaign astoundingly successful.

³ Livy, 4.29.7.

⁴ Shipley, Frederick W. *Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome from the Death of Caesar to the Death of Augustus*. Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome, Vol. 9, 1931: 25.

⁵ Pliny, N.H., xxxvi, iv, xxxv.

⁶ Ibid., 155.

Bibliography

Boyd, M.J..The Porticoes of Metellus and Octavia and Their Two Temples. Papers of the British School at Rome, Vol. 21, 1953.152-159.

< <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/stable/40310527>>.

Lanciani, Rodolfo Amedeo. The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome. New York: Blom, 1967.

Pliny, and H. Rackham. Natural History. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Shipley, Frederick W. Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome from the Death of Caesar to the Death of Augustus. Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome, Vol. 9, 1931. 7-60. <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/stable/4238552>>

Zanker, Paul. The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988. Print.