

Hierarchies of Space and Ideology in the Forum Augustum

In 2 BCE Augustus and his regime inaugurated the Forum Augustum, the culmination of several decades of public construction that remade Rome's central urban landscape. Much scholarship focuses on how the Forum communicated traditional Roman values, in particular *pietas* and *virtus*, through the epigraphy and statues found in its porticos (Zanker 1988; Ganzert 1996; Favro 1996; Geiger 2008).

These analyses elucidate one important aspect of the Forum's ideology. However, they leave underdeveloped how the messages found in the porticos were related to the rest of the Forum's architectural design. In other words, how was the Forum's ideology distributed spatially among the porticos, the four hemicircular extensions, or *exedrae*, and the main plaza in front of the temple of Mars Ultor? How did movement around these spaces affect the ways in which its visitors received and understood its ideology?

To answer these questions, this paper examines how the Forum presented values like *pietas* and *virtus* to its visitors as they moved through its spaces. As Romans walked around the complex, they encountered a series of contrasts. Certain areas, like the porticos, were crowded with material to examine while the *exedrae* and central area before the temple only boasted a few items. The crowded areas also emphasized epigraphic elements, while more spacious zones focused on purely visual material. These contrasts structured how visitors received the Forum's vision of foreign policy around two properties: how much material there was to view in a given space and to what degree one required literacy and advanced knowledge of Roman history to understand it.

The Forum was divided into three sections: the two porticos, the four *exedrae* attached to the porticos at each corner of the Forum, and the central square in between the two porticos, where the temple and equestrian statue of Augustus were located. In the porticos, several hundred statues and inscriptions recorded the deeds of famous members of the Julian house and past Roman leaders from Rome's mythical past to the Augustan present. A visitor was presented with many items, both epigraphic and visual, that he or she could contemplate in any order. In the *exedrae* and central area, the flexibility of one's itinerary was greatly reduced. The *exedrae* focused the viewer's gaze on a few dozen statues. In the extant upper *exedrae* (the contents of the lower *exedrae* do not survive), central niches housed Aeneas carrying the *penates* from Troy and Romulus winning the first *spolia opima*, two of the most significant examples of *pietas* and *virtus* in Roman history. The central area boasted just two elements. The temple of Mars Ultor dominated the Forum's central square, signaling Mars' divine sanction of the complex's foreign policy and his oversight over any events that occurred there. The only epigraphy here adorned Augustus' equestrian statue. The statue's placement before the temple asserted the *princeps*' own close relationship to Mars, just as the Temple's pediment, showing Mars, Venus, and Cupid, alluded to Augustus' divine ancestry.

The *exedrae* and central area condensed the Forum's ideology into its most important elements: *pietas*, *virtus*, Mars, and Augustus. Visitors could certainly find these ideas in the porticos, but, with hundreds of statues and inscriptions, they were far less explicitly emphasized, as other interpretations of the statuary and epigraphy were possible. Aeneas and Romulus' statues, Mars' Temple, and Augustus' statue conveyed these concepts more emphatically and in a way that only required one to look at these elements. To connect Augustus

to Mars, for example, one only needed to see Augustus' statue and the enormous temple that dominated one's view behind it.

This paper offers a new framework for examining the ideology of ancient public spaces. It analyzes the Forum's ideology along three axes: the ideas that the Augustan regime sought to disseminate, the Forum's arrangement of those concepts, and how Roman visitors encountered them as they moved around the complex. This approach unites the values associated with ancient monuments with how those monuments were experienced as lived spaces within ancient urban landscapes. All areas of the Forum were not equally important. A hierarchy of spatial ideology focused visitors' attention on the *exedrae* and central area. The Augustan regime ensured that visitors from across Roman society could understand the complex's key messages even if they only walked through those spaces.

Bibliography

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