

# The Horologium of Augustus and its model at Alexandria

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When I first heard of the Horologium of Augustus and of its reconstruction by E. Buchner, in a lecture he gave at Heidelberg University shortly after his investigations, I was impressed by his results, as was the whole audience, which included archaeologists. Subsequently, in the late 1980s, when working on the new volumes of the *CIL* covering the inscriptions of emperors, senators and equestrian magistrates of Rome, I also had to deal with the inscriptions on the obelisk in St Peter's Square. I discovered that this obelisk, translated from Egypt to Rome by Caligula, had originally been set up in Alexandria, where it had served as the *gnomon* of a monumental sundial. I interpreted it as the model for the Augustan Horologium at Rome.<sup>1</sup>

My starting point for the identification of the Vatican obelisk as *gnomon* of a Horologium was the remarkable similarity between the original summit of this obelisk and of the one now in Piazza Montecitorio, which was the *gnomon* of the Solarium Augusti. Both obelisks were crowned by a bronze globe with a spine on the top<sup>2</sup> which in no way corresponds to Egyptian traditions. The only explanation is that in both cases the shadow of the spine, moving across a net laid out on the ground, indicated the change of the time. Convinced by Buchner's results, I also proposed a layout of the Solarium Augusti which not only corresponds to his idea that the Ara Pacis, the Montecitorio obelisk as *gnomon* of the Horologium, and the Mausoleum of Augustus were all planned to fit together, but I completed his reconstruction by reference to the two obelisks placed in front of the Mausoleum, on either side of its entrance. I deduced that this triangular composition of the three obelisks corresponded to the model of Alexandria. The reasoning behind this was that the Vatican obelisk, in my opinion originally a work of Antony, had been, late in 31 B.C., inscribed and inaugurated by Gaius Cornelius Gallus, at this time *praefectus fabrum* of the future Augustus and soon his first prefect of Egypt; and that it seems to have been set up at Alexandria in the same part of the city where in 13 or 12 B.C. Publius Rubrius Barbarus, prefect of Egypt, erected his two obelisks in front of the temple of Augustus.<sup>3</sup> A strong argument for the imitation of Alexandria's monumental sundial by Augustus at Rome was that the lettering of the Solarium Augusti, which we would expect at Rome to be in Latin, was in Greek and included, together with other calendar indications, the entry ἐτησία παύονται ('the summer winds calm down'): this was hardly important for the population of Rome, but very much so for the sailors of a harbour city like Alexandria.

As a non-archaeologist and, not least, as a non-mathematician, I cannot contribute to the discussion on whether Buchner's calculations were always accurate or not, and I must accept the expertise of Haselberger that "the spatial expanse" of the Augustan sundial "remains uncertain in its specific form". There is, however, in my opinion no doubt that Haselberger is right in his view that the Horologium of Augustus is by no means a

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1 G. Alföldy, *Der Obelisk auf dem Petersplatz in Rom. Ein historisches Monument der Antike* (Sitz.-Ber. d. Heidelberger Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl., Jg. 1990. Bericht 2, 1990) especially 55-67.

2 Both globes are now conserved in the Musei Capitolini.

3 They are now in London and in New York, respectively.