

A DEBATE ON THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO PALATINUS

Roma Quadrata, archaic huts, the house of Augustus, and the orientation of Palatine Apollo

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The site which is the chief subject of this article has been known for nearly a century and a half but is still poorly understood. In 1865 Pietro Rosa excavated the podium of a large temple at the W corner of the Palatine. Its identity was at first disputed, but G. Pinza's identification of it as the Temple of Apollo, vowed by the young Caesar in 36 B.C. and dedicated by him in 28, is now universally accepted.¹ No one was in doubt about which way it faced, as may be seen from two typical 19th-c. descriptions:²

The temple ... stands on a lofty platform of tufa rock, artificially levelled. It occupies a very commanding position, overlooking the *Vallis Murcia* and the *Circus Maximus*.

The temple, which is 44 metres long, 25 wide, faces the south-west.

That orientation is taken as a datum by S. Zink in his excellent detailed reconstruction of the building,³ as it has been by practically all the archaeologists who have concerned themselves with it. Only A. Claridge expressed a doubt:⁴

[An] assumption which could be mistaken, given the ruinous state of the site, is that the temple faced out from the hill. The SW side of the podium did once give the impression of a staircase, but the steps were made in the C19 (before all the surrounding ground was excavated and visitors to the Palatine ascended from that direction) and it is worth entertaining the contrary view. The NE half has barrel-vaulted passages in its core, which suits the lighter weight of the front porch, whereas the voids in the SW half argue for more solid tufa construction, to bear the weight of the cella and its precious occupants. Written sources suggest that the temple façade made a tremendous visual impact on those who approached it (as they seem invariably to have done) from the Palatine side, passing the House of Augustus on the way. This is more understandable if it commanded the top of the street beyond the entrance to Augustus' house, rather than some undiscovered pathway up from the valley of the Circus Maximus.

Any comment on the archaeological evidence must await the new plan of the site,⁵ but the literary evidence, which is plentiful, deserves renewed scrutiny. Let us look first at the contemporary poets.⁶

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Our main witness is Propertius, in a poem with the dramatic date of 9 October 28 B.C. The poet addresses his mistress:⁷

1 G. Pinza, "Il tempio di Apollo Palatinus," *BullCom* 41 (1913) 199-224. Cf. O. L. Richmond, "The Augustan Palatine," *JRS* 4 (1914) 196: "of modern theories Pinza's alone approximates to the truth".

2 Respectively, J. H. Middleton, *The remains of ancient Rome*, vol. 1 (London 1892) 162, and R. Lanciani, *The ruins and excavations of ancient Rome* (London 1897) 138.

3 S. Zink, "Reconstructing the Palatine temple of Apollo: a case study in Early Augustan temple design," *JRA* 21 (2008) 47-63, especially 49, 51 and 55 on "traces of the frontal columns' foundations ... the columns of the façade ... frontal foundations," etc.

4 A. Claridge, *Rome: an Oxford archaeological guide* (2nd edn., Oxford 2010) 142-43.

5 Announced at Zink (*supra* n.3) 63.

6 See now the excellent discussion in J. F. Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the poets* (Cambridge 2009).

7 Prop. 2.31.1-16 (transl. G. P. Goold, Loeb edn., slightly adapted); for the date, see *Insc. It.* 13.2.209 (*Fasti Antiaties ministrorum on a.d. VII Id. Oct.*): *Aug. aed. Apol. dedicauit*.