



Landscape Symbolism of Imperial Rome

Reflecting the Transitions from Republic to Empire

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to samuel and betty, salvatore and frances

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

i:	Abstract
ii:	Timeline of Critical Roman Events (106-2 B.C)
Chapter I:	Introduction to Landscape Symbolism
Chapter II:	The Roman Republic and the Layout of the City
Chapter III:	The Theatre Complex of Pompey
Chapter IV:	The Forum of Caesar
Chapter V:	The Forum of Augustus
Chapter VI:	Final Thoughts on Symbolism

A BSTRACT

This work presents research on the symbolic intent of public space in Rome during the fall of the Republic, (61 – 2 BC). The thesis focuses particularly on the three largest public developments occurring during this time period: the Theatre Complex of Pompey, the Forum of Caesar, and the Forum of Augustus. The political organization of Rome was changing during this time period, slowly transitioning from a representative democracy to an imperial dictatorship. Certain elements of the three public spaces that were created at this time symbolize these political transformations. Providing detailed design analysis of these areas will help in understanding the use of symbolic attributes of the public landscape. The specific elements to be studied are: location, orientation, axes, and scale.

The first section of this document will illustrate the various characteristics of public space during the Roman Republic, focusing on the Roman Forum. The symbolic organization of the Roman Forum can be understood by examining the political events during the same period. As greater political responsibility was assumed by military generals, the republican organization of Rome slowly shifted towards a dictatorship. As this occurred, the primary roles (both physically and symbolically) of public developments mirrored these changes. The analysis of “historically significant” public spaces presented in this research hopefully provides a new way of understanding landscape symbolism by establishing a format for the evaluation of historic public spaces. Ideally, this study presents a model to be used in the study of other historic civic sites.

TIMELINE

Critical Roman Events during Period of Research: 106BC – 2BC

106 BC: Birth of Pompey

100 BC: Birth of Julius Caesar

89 BC: Lex Plautia Papiria; citizenship rights to Italians who desire them

73-(71) BC: Pompey's War with Spartacus

67 BC: Gabinian Law: (Pompeius given largest land grant to general in history)

63 BC: Birth of Augustus

60 BC: First Triumvirate (Julius Caesar, Marcus Crassus, Pompeius Magnus)

59 BC: Consulship of Caesar

55 BC: Consulship of Pompey

54 BC: Basilica Julia in the Forum

52 BC: Curia Hostilia burned

48 BC: Assassination of Pompey

46 BC: Caesar supreme magistrate for ten years.

44 BC: Assassination of Caesar

29 BC: Dedication of temple to deified Caesar

27 BC: Dedication of Agrippa's Pantheon

11 BC: Marcellus' Theater

10 BC: Dedication of the altar of the Three Gauls

9 BC: Dedication of the Ara Pacis Augustae

2 BC: Dedication of Augustus' Forum

“The problem of presenting a convincing exposition of symbolic intent that is seldom specifically stated is made difficult by the modern conviction that architecture, apart from its figurative sculptures, has always been created for utilitarian and aesthetic reasons. There has been a prevailing tendency to disregard the political issues involved in the symbolism. This means that architectural symbolism will continue to seem artificial as long as the buildings that embodied it are divorced from the history of ideas, and as long as it is assumed that the motivating factors of architectural creation were always, as they are today, only structural necessity, utility, decorative desire, and a particular kind of taste.”

E. Baldwin Smith

Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages

CHAPTER I

Introduction to Landscape Symbolism

The orientation of space has been a primary focus of constructed landscapes long before the emergence of the city of Rome. In 2700 BC, ancient Egyptians built enormous pyramids at Giza, parallel with a northern axis, that defined perspectives of the horizon. A respect for the natural environment also pre-dated Rome at Stonehenge (circa 1840 BC) where large sculptural stones were aligned with the rising sun in a religious burial ground. In Athens during the 5th century BC, the Acropolis was primarily designed for axial views of the buildings as one entered the space through the Propylea. Whatever the motivation, a general regard for a defined orientation of space is found in these historic site layouts. Constructed landscapes, in many cases, are designed to emphasize abstractions such as a deification, morality, or tradition. The understanding of this spatial orientation, when combined with historical records, can present the landscape as an illustration of power, wealth, or divinity, rather than one of simple aesthetics, or “landscaping”.

From the beginning of landscape design, symbolism was as integral to the development of innovative construction techniques. Religious and cosmic concepts drove the architecture and built space to express, even create, a collective religious doctrine.¹ The city of Rome housed a multitude of iconographic images that represented a doctrine of faith for its citizens, reminding them of religious stories and traditional morals. Landscape was also given such symbolic representation; however, the intent of this symbolism is difficult to understand today, because historical literature rarely explains for the location of an axis or the spatial arrangement of various structures in an open space.

The most valuable source of this information is the landscape itself. Most of the archeological remains of Rome provide the location of the ancient complexes, a physical record that cannot be disputed. Through the evaluation and analysis of such open spaces, certain questions can be answered regarding their symbolic intent. Of particular importance in Rome are the civic developments that occurred during the decline of the Roman Republic (roughly 61-11 BC), as exhibited at: the Theatre Complex of Pompey, the Forum of Caesar, and the Forum of Augustus. These spaces incorporated a wide range of symbolism, representing ideas such as imperial propaganda, divine lineage, and military triumph.

The historical period of these constructions is an essential part in understanding the function of their symbolism. During this time, an expanding empire was rethinking the meaning of “Roman identity”, as the inclusion of more alien

¹ For a more in-depth discussion of this topic, please refer to: E. Topitsch, “Society, Technology, and Philosophical Reasoning,” *Philosophy of Science*, 24, 1954 pp. 275-296

territories, races, and cults progressed.² The senatorial elite of the Republic wished to preserve its collective power in the government, thereby insuring future stability in the wake of an expanding empire. The competitive nature of these men in Roman politics was highlighted by their lavish living quarters within the city. Monumental construction in carved stone was the creation of the ruling order, because it represented wealth, skill, quarries, transportation, and organized labor.³ Since the grandeur of a politician's house was a direct reflection of the power of the individual, so the grandeur of public spaces reflected the city's strength.⁴ The military elite, such as Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus, demanded that the original Roman Forum become the manifestation and symbol of a powerful empire.

The initial attempt to portray the supremacy of Rome within the Forum was to expand it; however, the availability of land, especially in the city's center, was extremely limited. In the cases of Caesar and Augustus, the purchase of additional space occurred on multiple occasions as they tried to garner all available land in the hope of eventually establishing their vision for the city center. Pompey chose a different approach to acquire the needed land; he purchased large areas outside of the sacred walls of the city in the Campus Martius. Located in an undeveloped area, this tract of land allowed the consul to develop a dominant site that he hoped would decentralize the growing city.

In whatever way the leaders chose to symbolize their power and wealth. The focus of this paper is to evaluate the symbolic intent of each strategy and how well

² pg. 7, Hayes, Shelley. The Roman House and Social Identity. Cambridge University Press, University of Bristol. 2003.

³ E. Baldwin Smith. Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages. Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey, 1956.

⁴ This is a more problematic question – private individuals were not suppose to have elaborate houses.

the intervention achieved its goal. In the following chapters, I will discuss the conditions of the original Roman Forum developed in the Republican era. From this fundamental concept of a communal and democratic public space, each new development will be introduced and discussed. I argue that the complexes of Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus reflect the competitive struggle for power in the transforming landscape of Republican Rome. Chapter two will present a brief background of the topography and urban organization of Rome during the Republic, while the remaining chapters investigate the three separate developments.

CHAPTER II

Roman Republic and Layout of the City

Legend and Topography

The origins of Rome arguably begin with the epic battle of Troy. According to mythological accounts, the Trojan citizen Aeneas fled Troy after its destruction at the hands of the Greeks.⁵ Through the ancestry of Aeneas, ancient historians arrive at the mother of ancient Rome, Rhea Silvia. According to Roman tradition, the Vestal Virgin Rhea was impregnated by the God Mars and gave birth to twin boys, Romulus and Remus. Despite this divine birth, the king sentenced Rhea to prison and ordered that the boys be drowned in the Tiber River. When the children were thrown into the river, the waters breached the northern banks lifting the boys to the foot of the Palatine Hill and left them resting on the support of a fig tree.

⁵ Livy, Titus. The Early History of Rome. Vol.1. Translated by D. Spillan, Penguin Books. New York, 2002.

Eventually the twins were found by a “she-wolf”, attracted to the sound of the crying children, who then cared for the infants.⁶

As young men, Romulus and Remus established cities within this territory; Remus creating his town on the Aventine Hill and Romulus placing his on the Palatine. (Figure 2.1) Both areas were defined by the long-established ritual of a plowed boundary known as the *pomerium*. The original *pomerium* of Romulus’ city marks the primitive boundaries of ancient Rome.⁷

During the Republic, the marshy plain adjacent to the Palatine became the center of Roman judicial, economic, and religious activity. The field was defined on four sides by the hills of primitive Rome. The Capitoline and Quirinal hills established the western boundaries, joined by a hill-saddle known as the Velia, while the eastern portion of the forum was bound by the connection of the Palatine and Esquiline hills.⁸ This space was originally used for burials by the inhabitants of the Palatine Hill. Recent archeological findings located these funerary monuments and tombs in the Forum. Before the territory of the forum had been adequately constructed, Rome’s earliest market place, the Forum Boarium, was still functioning beside the Tiber River. However, as the city grew, encompassing the Sabine settlements on the Quirinal, the necessity for a larger and central public space became apparent. The construction of the forum began with the creation of a primitive canal, the Cloaca Maxima (Figure 2.2).

⁶ Boethus, Axel. *Etruscan and Early Roman Architecture*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1978; see also: Carcopino, Jerome. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of the Empire*. Ed. Henry Rowell. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940.

⁷ See Joseph Rykwert, *The Making of a City*.

⁸ Base maps of primary Republican Structures derived from Rodolfo Lanciani.

Because the elevation of the forum was low, a brook that flowed through the valley from Campagna needed to be covered to allow for future development. Following the creation of the Cloaca, other elements of the forum were constructed; among these were the Regia, Rostra, Comitium, the Curia, and arguably the most important, the Basilica. These spaces possessed separate functions that help identify the underlying republican organization of the time. (Figure 2.3)

Regia: The traditional function of this building was to house the chief-priest, given over the space from Numa Pompilius. However, in the times of the republic, the Regia functioned not as the residence of the priest, but rather his office. The building housed the recorded data of the magistrates, events of war, and other early historical information.⁹

Rostra: A stage adjacent to both the Comitium and the Forum that was consecrated at the end of the great Latin war. The Rostra is described in historical texts as a circular building placed upon arches.¹⁰ The platform functioned as a podium for public speaking, primarily for magistrates or senators to address the Forum.

Comitium: An inaugurated plot of open land used for the gathering political administrations. The Comitium was placed on cardinal orientation, much like the Curia Hostilia, at western edge of the forum.

⁹ Huelsen, Christian. The Forum and the Palatine. New York: A. Bruderhausen, 1928.

¹⁰ Frank, Tenney. Roman Buildings of the Republic. Rome, Italy: Sindacato Italiano Arti Grafiche, 1924.

Curia Hostilia: The original senate house of the Roman Republic. It is identified with Tullus Hostilius, where it received its name. Adjacent to the Comitium, the senate house was oriented south on a sacred axis that we will find more apparent in construction in following discussions. ¹¹The Curia was destroyed in 52 BC and rebuilt by Julius Caesar, off the original axis.

The Basilica: The basilica was the quintessential building typology of the Roman Republic. It was created as a place to conduct business during inclement weather, such as the summer sun or heavy spring rains that are common to the Lazio region. The two primary basilicas during the Republic were the Basilica Aemelia and Basilica Julia. The scale and location of these developments in reference to the older construction in the Roman Forum illustrate a clear refinement of function and use. The imposing quality of the Basilica Aemelia was heightened by its proximity to the Curia Hostilia, the senate house. Since the Curia Hostilia was one of the most important buildings of the Republican period, the proximity and orientation of the nearby basilicas established their importance in the Roman Forum.

In the same way, the lack of proximity to the Curia could also lessen the importance of certain buildings in Rome. Buildings constructed outside the pomerium had less significance than those built within the city walls. The primary area in which these outside developments were built was the Campus Martius. (Figure 2.4)

¹¹ Huelsen, Christian. The Forum and the Palatine. New York: A. Bruderhausen, 1928.

The Campus Martius lies west of the sacred *pomerium*, between the Capitoline hill and the Tiber River. During the Republic, it was a low lying region, roughly ten to fifteen meters above sea level that was generally wet and swampy.¹² Because military exercises were forbidden within the sacred boundaries of the city, the site provided the necessary area for this training. The symbolic importance of this region came from its location; by lying outside the city, any major constructions within in it would drastically alter the orientation of other nearby buildings.¹³ The location and orientation of a new development establishes a certain perception of the builder by those who visit the space. This concept of symbolic reputation among the Roman citizens is the foundation of the thesis and will be discussed throughout the text.

Evolution of the Urban Form of the Roman Forum

The organization of Roman democracy changed as the city grew, and with this advancement, the function and layout of the Roman Forum also evolved. Some of the best details of this transformation come from Paul Zanker's chronological depictions of the space. (Figure 2.5)

Zanker's images provide a good foundation for understanding the physical change of the Roman Forum as the empire evolved; however, by adding overlays to the images, as well as providing a historical timeline, the physical changes can be seen to illustrate the three concepts discussed in Chapter One: imperial propaganda, divine lineage, and military triumph.

¹² Platner, Samuel and Ashby, Thomas. The Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929.

¹³ Gleason, Kathryn. "Porticus Pompeiana: A New Perspective on the First Public Park of Ancient Rome." Journal of Garden History. Taylor and Franics LTD. 1994.

The previous images are compelling illustrations of a landscape's representation of governmental organization. The most appropriate application of these principles is portrayed through the construction of the Imperial Fora from 52 BC – 2 BC. Beginning with the Theatre Complex of Pompeius Magnus (Pompey the Great) the role of self-commissioned public space replaced the older ideals of communal developments such as basilicas. The civic spaces given to Rome by Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus allowed the city to mitigate the over-crowding urban core while still incorporating new principles of imperial symbolism. The physical evidence of location, orientation, and scale will allow an in-depth analysis of the spaces, similar to the ones created for the Roman Forum.

CHAPTER III

The Theatre Complex of Pompey

According to many historians, the Theatre Complex of Pompey is not considered one of the “Imperial Fori”. The development was constructed outside the Roman Forum, in an area where no of the other “Imperial Fori” were later constructed. In addition, the creator of the complex, General Pompey the Great, never held the title of Emperor of Rome. Pompey was assassinated in 48 BC, roughly 40 years before the first “official” emperor Augustus was named. However, the fundamental regard

for Pompey's political and military power was apparent during the last years of the Roman Republic, as he was named consul in 55 BC and given the largest land grant ever awarded to a military official under the Gabinian Law.¹⁴ These political privileges represented the high regard that Roman citizens and city officials had for the military leaders at the time – a trend that continued in the following years. This governmental display of recognition of Pompey the Great was the origin for the displays of power of imperial leaders with military backgrounds, primarily Julius Caesar and Augustus. Thus, it can be argued that the Theatre Complex of Pompey represented the general's political power and position within the city and was the first true "Imperial Fora" despite its location and origins.

The Theatre Complex was constructed in 55 BC in the Campus Martius, on a site north-east of the pre-existing Circus Flaminius. Attached to the Theatre was a colonnade 180 meters by 135 meters.¹⁵ The plan of the Theatre reflected similar constructions in Mitylene, Greece. As with many military and political leaders, Pompey utilized various design elements he had encountered throughout his travels. Since the complex was much larger than any of the existing Republican sites, Pompey needed to promote the idea to the Senate.¹⁶ This was done by incorporating a temple at the terminus of the porticus, atop the stone steps of the theater, called the Temple of Venus Victrix. With Pompey's identifying the construction as a religious pursuit, the Senate supported its construction, despite its

¹⁴ Greenhalgh. Pompey, The Republican Prince. University of Minnesota Press. March 1982.

¹⁵ Platner, Samuel and Ashby, Thomas. The Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929.

¹⁶ Gruen, Erich. The Last Generation of the Roman Republic. University of California Press, 1995.

added role as a representation of Pompey's wealth and power and an attempt to decentralize of the over-crowded urban center.

Although the intention to decentralize the city never came to fruition, the space did create ample amounts of public grounds for ambulatories¹⁷ and entertainment. (The Theatre itself was constructed from stone and sat at the terminus of the porticoes' west axis. The Theatre Complex's materiality, the first stone (permanent) theater in the city of Rome, will not be discussed in this research; however the symbolic implications of such a large stone development should be clear.¹⁸) The area for public entertainment was an integral element for the development, allowing Roman citizens to not only enjoy the pedestrian qualities of the open space, but also to interact with local merchants in the adjoining shops and markets. By attracting people away from the central urban areas and into his forums, Pompey was able to envelop the visitors with the symbolic tenants of power, wealth, and divinity through the physical elements of location, orientation, and scale.

The location of the Theatre Complex is of prime importance in understanding the landscape symbolism of the space. Unlike Caesar and Augustus, Pompey chose to construct his complex in the Campus Martius. (Figure 3.1) This area (the Campus Martius or Field of Mars, god of war) is situated west of the sacred *pomerium*, a circumstance that allowed the space to be used for ceremonial

¹⁷ An ambulatory was an integral design element of many Italian landscape developments during this period, allowing the pedestrian to stroll throughout the formally manicured gardens of the space.

¹⁸ The use of stone as a means of construction represented a permanency which was never used for developments of entertainment prior to the Theatre Complex of Pompey. This symbolic characteristic was then transferred through the constructions of Augustus during the "age of spectacle". For more information on this subject please refer to: MacDonald, W.A. The Architecture of the Roman Empire. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965.

burials and, more importantly, military exercises. Development in the area was minimal and included a few Republican-period temples and small porticoes. The newly constructed complex, therefore, was intended to bridge the gap between the well-established urban core of the city and the undeveloped Campus Martius. If this were accomplished the space would have been given more importance, which would correlate to a higher regard for the military activities undertaken on the adjoining sites. This elevated recognition of the military services is the fundamental attribute of Pompey's political career imbedded in his new development. However, this required that citizens use the complex, which Pompey addressed by offering various modes of entertainment (theater, markets, and ambulatory gardens).

The arrangement of areas within the Campus Martius also reflected Pompey's political rivalry with the young Julius Caesar. Professor Kathryn Gleason reinforces this notion in her article on the Porticus of Pompey, stating: "The project was a strategic display of political as well as military power during the height of Pompey's rivalry with Julius Caesar. Caesar would later respond to Pompey's garden and theater by building his Forum Iulium..."¹⁹ If this is true, however, why would Pompey construct his Theatre Complex outside the walls of the city and far from the judicial and economic activity taking place in the Roman Forum? Part of the answer is the focus on decentralization stated previously, while a second, more reasonable, explanation has to do with the scale of the development. If Pompey was to impose his political aspirations through three-dimensional form, his construction needed to be larger than any other existing complex; however, due to the limited

¹⁹ Gleason, Kathryn. "Porticus Pompeiana: A New Perspective on the First Public Park of Ancient Rome." Journal of Garden History. Taylor and Franics LTD. 1994.

open space near the Roman Forum, Pompey decided to construct his complex in the Campus Martius.

The orientation of the Theatre Complex also provides one way to better understand the symbolic characteristics of the space. The primary axis of the complex originates from the center of the Temple of Venus Victrix and terminates at the Curia of Pompey. This provides the fundamental orientation for the other areas of the complex. (Figure 3.2) The alignment of this axis also correlates to the four Republican Temples located east of the site. Since these Temples were developed on the cardinal directions, so too was the Theatre Complex of Pompey.²⁰ This relation to the cardinal directions also correlates to the religious practices of the time. The Curia Hostilia, as mentioned in Chapter II, pre-dated the Theatre Complex of Pompey and aligned with the cardinal directions. The Curia of Pompey was developed along a similar “divine” axis. From this point of orientation, the pedestrian enters the complex from the east. As Prof. Katherine Gleason describes, “the perspective was framed by an avenue of plane trees, stretched westward toward the theater, their even spacing perhaps recalling the even ranks of troops or the procession of the military triumph”.²¹

The orientation, however, was not solely established by the cardinal directions. The form of the Theatre and Temple of Venus Victrix was derived from the existing nearby constructions, primarily the Circus Flaminius and Temple of

²⁰ As stated in Chapter I & II, the general regard for cardinal orientation in the architecture of ancient landscape developments has been a recurring theme in landscape history. For more information on the relation of this to Roman architecture, Gros, Pierre. *Architettura e societa nell' Italia Romana*. Roma, Armando Curcio Editore, 1987. see also: Haselberger, Lothar & Humphrey, John. *Imaging Ancient Rome*. Portsmouth, Rhode Island. The Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2006.

²¹ Gleason, Katherine. “Porticus Pompeiana: A New Perspective on the First Public Park of Ancient Rome.” *Journal of Garden History*. Taylor and Franics LTD. 1994.

Fortuna. (Figure 3.3) This respect and reference to the surrounding complexes not only reflected the designer's attempt to emulate the Republican architecture, but also the attempt to energize the vacant, undeveloped area. The orientation of the Theatre Complex highlights Pompey's intent to reinforce the religious importance of the cardinal directions; however, the identification of Pompey's divinity is more apparent in the dedication of his Temple of Venus Victrix.²²

According to the Roman religious tradition, the goddess Venus Victrix, or Venus the Victorious, was the mother of Aeneas, the forefather of Romulus. This divine lineage is important in understanding the symbolic role the complex played in establishing Pompey's reputation. As a military general, this symbol of victory was essential in furthering political ambitions. By his growing power through the dedication of the Temple to Venus Victrix, Pompey used symbolic imagery as political propaganda.²³ Since Venus Victrix was established as the goddess "in which all victories were possible", it allowed Pompey to highlight the legitimacy of his rule to the citizens. The rivalry with Julius Caesar was also a definitive aspect of the general's design motives. At the time of the Theatre Complex's construction, Julius Caesar was leading Roman troops in Belgium, and had no way of representing his emerging power to the citizens. By utilizing the goddess of military victory, Pompey could properly illustrate his power with no interference from his rival consul, Julius Caesar.

²² It should be noted that the attempt to orient his development upon the cardinal directions is an aspect of which Julius Caesar completely disregards as shall be discussed in the following chapter.

²³ The relation of symbolic imagery and political ambition are essential to understanding Roman architecture and landscape architecture; however, it should be noted that Pompey did not originate this type of symbolism, but practiced it in his complex.

As the government of Rome transitioned towards an imperial dictatorship, it was necessary for the military leaders to maintain their roles as powerful figures within the city. The primary device to highlight this power was the development of the “Imperial Fori”. Although not considered one of the five “Imperial Fori”, the Theatre Complex of Pompey generated a set of design innovations that are embraced in the five Imperial Fori. These include placement, orientation, and scale as symbols of political power.

In the following chapters, these innovations as utilized by the emperors Julius Caesar and Augustus in the constructions of their Imperial Fori, will be illustrated and discussed. Through this, the author will explain how an understanding of the symbolic reinforces created by Pompey in his Theatre Complex is critical in understanding the evolution in the Forum of Caesar and the Forum of Augustus as symbolic civic spaces.

CHAPTER IV

The Forum of Caesar

Reviewing the early letters written by Cicero prior to the construction of Caesar's Forum provides one way to begin evaluating the space. In a letter to Atticus, dated around 54 BC, Cicero describes the new development plans by Caesar in the Roman Forum.²⁴ The specific words which help in identifying the intent of the design are: *monumentum*, *laxare*, and *explicaremus*. As noted by James C. Anderson in his studies of the topography of the imperial fori, these three words cause the most confusion in determining the original design intentions of Caesar.

The first word, *momentum*, is often used to describe a memorial, or physical remembrance. Roman aesthetics primarily utilized imagery for the communication of an ideal or philosophy, much of which took the form of statues or monuments. In

²⁴ For an excerpt of this letter please refer to D.R. Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*, vol. II. Cambridge, 1965, 199.

the case of Caesar's forum, unlike the preceding Theatre Complex of Pompey, the space was originally described by Cicero as a *monumentum*. This means that the development was intended to commemorate Caesar and his defeat of the Gauls. However, if this were true then the space would not have been labeled *forum*, a Latin term which is generally used to describe an open space or marketplace. Therefore the final development of the Forum of Caesar must have not fulfilled the historical idea of a "memorial".

The final word, *laxare*, may also be beneficial in understanding the physical form of the space. In Cicero's letter to Atticus, it reads:

"...illud quod tu tollere laudibus solebas, ut forum laxaremus et usque ad atrium Liberatis explicaremus, contempsimus sescenties HS..."²⁵

The word *laxare* has two possible translations within the context of the letter. If Cicero were to use the primary definition, then *laxaremus* would mean "to expand, stretch, or extend". However, if the secondary definition were intended, the verb would be defined as "to relieve, relax, or ease". According to many, Caesar's intent was similar to the primary definition, whereby his new development would extend the original Roman Forum north. However, James C. Anderson supposes that the verb was used as "relieve", where Caesar wanted to unburden the overpopulated core of the city by creating a new expanse of open space.²⁶ If Anderson is correct, then it would be evident that some regard to land-use and planning was taken into consideration, even during the Imperial Age of Rome. Yet both arguments fail to address the possibility of a third option.

²⁵ For an excerpt of this letter please refer to D.R. Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*, vol. II. Cambridge, 1965, 199.

²⁶ For a more in-depth discussion of James Anderson's hypothesis, please refer to *The Historical Topography of the Imperial Fora*. Collection Latomus vol. 182. University of Georgia, 1984.

Due to the various definitions of *laxare*, it is difficult for scholars to make a definitive argument for either possibility. However, by accepting both definitions as the correct translation, the intent of Caesar's development no longer becomes about form over function, but rather a causal relationship between the two. The Forum of Caesar was built to the north of the existing Roman Forum with its southeast corner located roughly where the Curia Hostilia once stood.²⁷ The expanse or extension of the pre-existing Roman Forum was thereby inevitable through the creation of additional open space. This supplementary area then permitted an alleviation of the overcrowded Forum. The primary intention of Caesar, one can argue, was to physically expand the existing area, which seems more relevant to this time-period when more regard was given to structural appearance than function.

The Forum of Caesar was located directly adjacent to the Roman Forum. The placement of the new development insured the importance of the space during the empire.(Figure 4.1) As Caesar acquired land for the construction, there was a general lack of spatial definition in the existing forum, which included a lack of adequate boundaries (both physical and functional), a non-existent public center, and an ongoing deterioration of important buildings. Until this point in Roman history, the central Forum had always been defined by the natural hills which surrounded it, predominantly the Palatine's connection to the Esquiline, and the Capitoline's connection with the Quirinal. Since the northern side of the space had

²⁷ Platner, Samuel and Ashby, Thomas. The Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929.

never been formally bounded, as the Roman population grew, there was a desire to prevent the extension of the forum into surrounding spaces²⁸.

Unlike the design interventions of Pompey, Caesar sought to address some of the urban problems just discussed. Through location alone, the construction provided two necessary attributes; a clearly defined northern boundary for the Forum, and the reconstruction of the Curia Hostilia. The Forum of Caesar stretched from the Argiletum on the southeast to the Atrium Libertatis on the Clivus Argentarius, which created a structural dialogue with the existing southern basilicas. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the development's location was its construction over the site of the old Senate House. Many contemporary archeological maps show the footprint of the Curia Hostilia, which was located in the south-east of Caesar's Forum. The Republican senate house had not been demolished by Caesar to make way for his building; on the contrary, a fire in 52 BC destroyed the original building, providing Caesar with a unique opportunity to rebuild the most sacred democratic structure in Rome.

The orientation of the Curia Hostilia represented the political organization of the city (see Introduction to Landscape Symbolism). The building was originally set on the cardinal axes with its entrance facing south. After the second building was completed, the Curia stood perpendicular to the Forum of Caesar and no longer followed the cardinal points. (Figure 4.2) This shift of orientation is arguably the single most symbolic design intervention in Roman construction of the period.

Early Roman designers held the cardinal directions in high regard due to its

²⁸ This ideal of re-centralizing an urban core to prevent further extension of development has been a key feature in the urban analysis of American cities. For more information on this topic, please refer to *The City Reader*, Ed. Richard T. Legates and Frederic Stout.

religious symbolism.²⁹ When this orientation changed, it symbolized a shift from a democratic republic under the divinity of the gods, to an imperial dictatorship under the command of an all powerful emperor. With these pre-meditated perceptions of the space in mind, the experiential qualities of the space (orientation and scale) affirm the symbolic characteristics set forth by the location.

The orientation of Caesar's Forum was highlighted by the Temple of Venus Genetrix. This organization is similar to many urban spaces during the Roman Period, where an open space is directly related to a structure in front of it (most often a temple). The Temple of Venus Genetrix is similar in function to that of the Theatre Complex of Pompey, whose Temple was dedicated to Venus Victrix, the goddess of victory. Due to the known rivalry with Pompey, Julius Caesar chose to dedicate his Temple to Venus Genetrix, the goddess of life. This statue represents a higher divinity which would generate a greater reverence among Roman citizens. The temple also provided Caesar with a means to represent physically imperial propaganda and divine lineage, two of the primary concepts related to landscape symbolism. Venus Genetrix was regarded as the goddess of motherhood and domesticity, particularly being the mother of the Julian *gens*. It was Roman tradition to hold a festival in honor of the goddess annually on September 26th. This tradition not only linked Julius Caesar to divinity but also established an annual religious ceremony connected to the military leader.

The Temple of Venus Genetrix was not the only element of orientation in Caesar's Forum that presented qualities of landscape symbolism. The entrances to the forum created a sense of higher regard for Caesar's development than the

²⁹ March 5th, 2006. Jan Gadeyene. Topography of Ancient Rome, Cornell University in Rome, Lecture 2.

existing Roman Forum. If citizens wanted to enter the Roman Forum from the west, it was necessary to enter the Forum of Caesar first. There were also entrances to the south that connected the judicial portions of Caesar's Forum to the adjacent spaces. This constant traffic provided a means of remembrance, similar to other aspects of Roman life where repetitive exposure to imagery was used to establish codes of conduct. Constructing the space in this way ensured a continual flow of traffic that provided a constant engagement with the Temple of Venus Genetrix and a suggestion of Julius Caesar's divine lineage. When compared to previous developments, the Forum of Caesar greatly advanced the methods used to symbolize imperial leadership; however, there was one characteristic of the space which does not measure up to the Theatre Complex of Pompey – scale.

In the period of discussion, 60 BC to 10 AD, the complex constructed by Pompey remains the unrivaled advancement in Roman construction in terms of scale. As discussed earlier, this was possible due to the placement of the development in the Campus Martius. Yet due to the distance between the Theatre complex and the Forum of Caesar, the Roman citizen rarely experienced a direct comparison of the two spaces – an experience that shall become very important in later years with the development of the other Imperial Fora. The Forum of Caesar can be compared with the older Republican buildings of the Roman Forum because of their proximity. A normal ambulatory through central Rome would most likely provide a Roman with a direct comparison of these spaces. Therefore, it is more helpful to compare the building scales of the Roman Forum to the Forum of Caesar rather than the Theatre Complex of Pompey. (Figure 4.3)

The scale of the older republican buildings of the Roman Forum was modest. The largest space was the open area between the buildings, which extended roughly from the Tabularium to the Regia. However, the Forum of Caesar surpassed the archaic scale of this space by a large measure. The reasons for its grandiose scale are two-fold: to provide an alternative area for conducting judicial and economic business, and to alleviate the overcrowded conditions of the existing forum (as discussed earlier). Although many scholars believe that Caesar's Forum failed to relieve the area of the massive influx of people, it can be argued that the space provided a more suitable area to conduct the business of the Senate. With its direct adjacency to the newly constructed Curia Julia, the Forum of Caesar was often frequented by senators and magistrates.

The underlying symbolism embedded in the Forum of Caesar established the symbolism used in later Imperial complexes. Unlike Pompey's Theatre Complex, the Forum of Caesar did not try to change the layout of Rome. Instead, the space utilized the most important aspects of the existing space (location, function, orientation) and modified its use to support the needs of Caesar's reputation. Because the newly constructed Forum provided more areas to conduct business, the senators were more dependent on this complex than the older basilicas of the Roman Forum. Unfortunately for Caesar, the complex he envisioned would not be completed until after his death in 44 B.C. However, the new leader of the Roman Empire, Augustus, would complete this task for him, out of the dedication and respect he had for the fallen emperor.

Augustus not only completed the Forum for Caesar but also dedicated the first Temple to a Deified Emperor, which stood directly west of the Regia. With this new type of civic construction, the physical transformation from a democratic Republic to an Empire was well underway. Just as Julius Caesar intended to instill in the Roman citizens the knowledge of his dominance, so did the new emperor Augustus, as the first leader of the new Roman Empire, construct more complexes than any other leader before him, symbolizing his role as the supreme ruler – and which is best illustrated in his Forum of Augustus.

CHAPTER V

The Forum of Augustus

The city of Rome changed physically, politically, and symbolically within the years (52 B.C. – 11 B.C.). The changing political realities had created powerful leaders such as Pompeius Magnus and Julius Caesar, who had both commissioned large civic developments which altered many elements of the city of Rome's layout. Following the assassination of Caesar, Augustus accepted the responsibility of leading the empire. In this role, Augustus constructed new spaces throughout the entire city, finishing the Forum of Caesar, constructing the stone Theater of Marcello, and rebuilding the archaic space near the Porticus Octavia.³⁰ These developments not only drastically altered the urban fabric of the rapidly disappearing republican infrastructure, but also afforded Augustus the opportunity

³⁰ There are many discussions of the influence Augustus had in the creation of Imperial Rome. Although this thesis specifically analyzes the Imperial Forum of Augustus, the other constructions should be considered equally important. For more information on these developments please refer to Favro, Diane. *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

to physically represent his role as the first leader of Imperial Rome. It was not until 2 B.C. however that Augustus made his most impressive contribution to the urban center by constructing the second Imperial Forum.

The land obtained by Augustus for the building project was directly north of the easternmost portion of the Forum of Caesar. (Figure 5.1) Most of the existing buildings in this location were commercial enterprises primarily made of wood and clay, with some portions of the land having residences. Although the expanse of purchased land far surpassed any prior construction within the Roman Forum, Augustus did not obtain all the land he desired, which is affirmed by Suetonius, a very important biographer of Imperial Rome (c. 69/70 A.D.), who writes:

“Aug., 56.2: ... forum angustius fecit non ausus extorquere possessoribus proximas domos...”³¹

Suetonius also describes the anticipated role the Forum was to play within the context of the city. The Forum of Augustus had two main purposes: to re-configure the spatial layout of the Roman Forum (fixing the problems of overcrowding conditions), and create a new space for the ceremonial activities of the Roman Empire.

The first role of Augustus’ forum was simply a response to the lack of space within the Forum of Caesar. Although the Forum of Caesar was constructed primarily to alleviate problems of congestion within the existing Roman Forum, the completed development proved to small. The second purpose of Augustus’ forum was to provide an area for politically important ceremonies, such as the crowning of

³¹ Anderson, James C. *The Historical Topography of the Imperial Fora*. Collection Latomus vol. 182. University of Georgia, 1984

generals, declarations of war, granting of triumphs, and the place of departure for governors traveling to military provinces. These activities reflect the intended grandeur of the Temple complex which stood inside the forum, and is important when evaluating the symbolic aspects of the space in regard to the three design characteristics of location, orientation, and scale.

Following Caesar's example, Augustus decided to locate his forum within the heart of the city. This location remained the northern edge of all future imperial developments in the center of Rome, until the Forum of Trajan was built in 106 A.D. The northern border of the forum was bounded by a peperino firewall that acted as a buffer between the Subura and the Roman Forum itself. Because the physical characteristics of the location are so closely related to the Forum of Caesar, many of the symbolic attributes are also similar. As the first emperor of Rome, Augustus needed to continually remind the citizens of his supremacy. By establishing an imperial space adjacent to that of Julius Caesar, he accomplished this goal. In evaluating the Forum of Augustus, however, the location is of less importance than the way in which it is oriented and utilized.

The perpendicular adjacency to the existing Forum of Caesar provided Augustus an excellent way to convey the symbolic attributes of power and divinity. (Figure 5.2) If Augustus had utilized the same orientation as Caesar, the citizens would have seen his Forum as an extension or addition to the Forum of Caesar rather than a new own space, that would have negated the fundamental purpose of the development. In these figure illustrations, one can see how a different orientation of the space may have produced two different adjacencies of the Forum.

The orientation of Augustus' forum serves both as a physical and symbolic connection to Caesar's Forum. Because of the contemporary developments of the Via Dei Fori Imperiali during the Fascist period, much of that integral connection still lies beneath the street. However, archeologists still assume the connection of the two (possibly similar to the connection presently seen between the Forum of Trajan and the Forum of Augustus.)

The orientation was also dominated by the enormity of the temple housed within it – the Temple of Mars Ultor. The symbolic characteristics of this temple are very important when understanding the forum's representation of power and divinity. Mars, the Roman God of war, is linked to the origins of Rome by the traditional belief of his impregnating Rhea Silvia, the vestal virgin who gave birth to Romulus and Remus. This idea illustrated the construction practices of this time, by establishing a divine connection between the gods, the founder of Rome, and its current emperor. Augustus established a better means to express his power by using the forum as a place for ceremonial political gatherings, which differed from the functions of Pompey's and Caesar's complexes. While the Theatre Complex of Pompey was primarily used for recreational purposes and the Forum of Caesar was used for conducting business and commercial activity, Augustus decided to develop a space for more governmental activities.

In terms of size, the Temple of Mars Ultor occupies a majority of the space in Augustus' Forum. The scale of the Temple exceeds both Pompey's and Caesar's previous constructions. The two entrances to the Forum are located at the northern and southern boundary, which would establish a direct engagement with the large

temple for any visitor to the space. Many scholars have sketched their interpretation of the temple; however, as archeologists uncover the various qualities of the space, the symbolic role of the temple is becoming even more important in landscape design history.

The sculptures within the Forum of Augustus are the best documented elements of the development. Prior to the construction of the Temple of Mars Ultor, the typical design program was to place a single statue at the terminus of an axis. This was seen in the earlier constructions of both the Porticus of Pompey and the Forum of Caesar; however, in the Forum of Augustus, numerous sculptures are located on three different axes. The placement and identity of the various sculptures is best described by Ovid:

*prospicit in foribus diuersae tela figurae
armaque terrarium milite uicta suo.
hinc uidet Aenean oneratum pondere caro
et tot Iuleae nobilitatis auos:
hinc uidet Iliaden humeris ducis arma ferentem,
claraque dispositis acta subesse uiris.
spectat et Augusto praetextum nomine templum
et uisum lecto Caesare maius opus. (Fasti, 5.551-68)*

Ovid is describing the sculptures being set in a triangular formation. On the western portion of the forum, he describes Aeneas of Troy carrying his father Anchises. On the other side of the forum, within the opposite hemicycle, is a statue of Romulus and other great men of the Roman Republic. In between these two statues are three others, terminating the northern axis of the forum; they are Julius Caesar, Venus, and Mars. (Figure 5.3) The triangular formations of the sculptural placement, as well as the symbolic overtones associated with it, are best described by James C. Anderson.

“Ovid implies a distinction between the portraits surrounding Aeneas and those surrounding Romulus: the former represent the Julian family (though probably a very inclusive view of it, extending even to the kings of Alba Longa), while the latter are heroes of Roman history, both military and civil. Thus the sculptural program must have enhanced the religious aspect of the Forum of Augustus, honoring one group as the descendants and chosen people of Mars...”³²

By presenting the Roman people with an enormous Temple that provided access to the cultural elite of the city, Augustus instilled a symbolic connection between himself and the divinity of Rome. This is a trend we have seen numerous times when discussing the previous developments of both Caesar and Pompey. However, Augustus enhanced the normal functions of a temple by establishing a triangular formation which highlighted the imagery of heroism and divinity.

³² Anderson, James C. *The Historical Topography of the Imperial Fora*. Collection Latomus vol. 182. University of Georgia, 1984

CHAPTER VI

Final Thoughts of Symbolism

Landscape symbolism can be difficult to understand; however, by evaluating civic spaces through the characteristics of location, orientation, and scale, certain qualities of the developments can symbolize the power of the leaders who

constructed them. Although ancient documents generally fail to illustrate the spaces accurately, archeological studies of the constructions reveal the characteristics necessary to understand their symbolism. The lack of adequate documentation on the subject is best described in a quotation from E. Smith:

“Without any intention of begging the issue with the scholarly critics who are historically trained to be suspicious of any interpretations of the past which are not fully substantiated by documentary evidence, it must be pointed out that symbolism in an art as abstract as architecture was always most effective at a popular, instinctive, and illiterate level. This meant during the centuries when the ordinary man was so dependent upon the arts for his conceptual imagery, that symbolism was usually taken for granted and was only expounded, as in the case of the Church Fathers, when it was being readapted to different ideals.”³³

The importance of understanding the symbolic landscape lies in the motives of the designer. The recognition of these intentions allows the landscape architect to recognize similar motives when examining our contemporary cities. Although the landscape architecture discipline is based mainly on addressing utilitarian needs, the integration of artistic components has always been an integral part of the profession.

Landscape architecture, both historically and contemporary, can be evaluated based on the symbolic and physical qualities of the design. Although some qualities of the Imperial Fori were not discussed, such as materiality and construction techniques, the author does not suggest such subjects are irrelevant. If further research was to be completed in these areas, one’s understanding of landscape symbolism would probably change. For example, due to the political

³³ Smith, Baldwin. Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956.

power of certain emperors, the choice to construct open plazas with marble rather than tufa stone may have generated a higher regard from wealthy citizens. This symbolic gesture (the choice of marble) was almost certainly not utilitarian, because of the stone's capacity for weight and short life-expectancy, but rather chosen because the impression suggested to the visitors of the space may have translated into a higher reputation of the designer.

The study of symbolism in landscape architecture is one way to bridge the gap between art and engineering. Until further archaeological excavation of ancient civic spaces is completed, the subject of landscape symbolism will remain somewhat hypothetical. The strategy and evaluation techniques used in this research may be applied to contemporary spaces; however, it should be noted that in the modern world the work of the designer rarely symbolizes ambitions similar to those of the politically powerful in Rome.

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