

The ARCHITECTURE *of*
ROMAN TEMPLES



The Republic to the Middle Empire

JOHN W. STAMPER

University of Notre Dame



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INTRODUCTION: THE AUTHORITY OF PRECEDENT

It is my contention . . . that authority has vanished from the modern world, and that if we raise the question of what authority is, we can no longer fall back upon authentic and undisputable experiences common to all. The very term has become clouded by controversy and confusion.

– Hannah Arendt, “What Was Authority?”

The design of sacred architecture, whether we consider temples, synagogues, churches, or mosques, inherently involves the concept of authority. It is present in the interpretation of a building’s form – that is, we say a building has dignity, unity, conviction, or authority because of the skills of its designer and the quality of its composition. Such authority, *auctoritas*, lends itself readily to symbolic connotations related to the building’s use and the person, institution, city, or state for whom it was built. Vitruvius, for instance, emphasized the link between public buildings and the authority of the state in his *Ten Books of Architecture*, which he addressed to Augustus in the mid-20s B.C.:

when I saw that you were giving your attention not only to the welfare of society in general and to the establishment of public order, but also to the providing of public buildings intended for utilitarian purposes, so that not only should the State have been enriched with provinces by your means, but that the greatness of its power might likewise be attended with distinguished authority in its public buildings, I thought that I ought to take the

first opportunity to lay before you my writings on this theme.¹

Vitruvius’s primary concern was that public buildings in Rome should possess the necessary dignity and authority appropriate for Augustus to express his power. The statement reveals the motivation behind the many large-scale public building projects in Rome: the display of power in costly, elegant structures. There was an obvious link in this sense between authority in architecture and authority in political leadership.

At yet another level, architecture operates in terms of the authority of precedents. Certain buildings, because of the quality of their forms or the reason for their construction, become paradigms, or primary models for later buildings. The first and most important Roman example that influenced many later religious buildings was the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill. Because of its associations with the triad Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva and with the founding of Rome and the Republic, it possessed unparalleled associations with authority. Here again we cross the boundary into politics, for as the philosopher Hannah Arendt writes, Roman politics was based on the sacral character of foundation: “once

something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations.”² Anyone engaged in Roman politics was expected to preserve the memory and the act of the foundation of the state. Similarly, in architecture, builders often sought to recall the character of the Republic’s most important early monuments.

Building on the accomplishments of their ancestors – the tradition and memory of those who came before them, those who had laid the foundations – was an important way in which rulers obtained their *auctoritas*, a word derived from *augere*, “to increase.”³ Those with political authority in both republican and imperial Rome – the elders, senators, consuls, dictators, and emperors – commemorated the city’s foundation through their actions; those engaged in architecture honored the important precedent set by the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus by emulating it. This book shows that certain details of later buildings, for instance, the Temple of Mars Ultor and the Pantheon, were in part references to the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

Precedents in architecture form the basis of a continuous evolution of style and building practice. One architect described precedent as “a form which has been accepted as the proper expression of good logic, fitness and beauty, proven by the test of time and accepted as a standard upon which new expression can be modeled and with which it may be compared.”⁴ Architects in the Roman world operated much more in terms of precedent than most architects are accustomed to today. As Arendt states, the notion of authority has virtually vanished from the modern world. In the culture of self-expression that typifies the contemporary West, where any overt use of an architectural model is often considered derivative and retrograde, it is hard to imagine the necessity for, or the authority of, precedent as it existed in the Roman world. Building types evolved over a long period of time, changing slowly according to new uses and outside influences. Features such as fitness, beauty, or political connotation captured the imagination of later architects and patrons and manifested themselves in subsequent buildings. Through these later generations of builders, the paradigms they followed were modified into new designs that met new conditions.⁵ There were certain periods of high achievement – periods of perfection – and others of decline or decadence. By political and cultural necessity, however, the authority of the models

remained constant. Certainly, the authority of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus was evident throughout the Republic and Empire until at least the second century A.D.

This study examines how Roman designers based the plans of their temples on earlier precedents and how, by such a progressive emulation, members of the Roman ruling class established and maintained their political control. The ancient Romans clearly understood that impressive architectural settings and elaborate public ceremonies were acknowledged modes of demonstrating power or establishing *auctoritas*. The spectacle of a triumphal procession amid glorious marble-clad buildings served as an important form of propaganda for the emperor, meant to impress and mediate between the ruler and the people.

While most books on ancient Roman architecture are organized on the basis of either topography or typology, this one is organized chronologically. There is a great deal to learn by studying the temples at different stages of their development, to see how they evolved over time through successive reconstructions and political regimes. For instance, discussion of the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum Romanum occurs in three of the book’s chapters because it – like most other temples in Rome – was built and rebuilt in three or more distinct periods of time. These periods in turn reflect different attitudes toward precedent, authority, and architectural design. This temple is first mentioned in the section on Etrusco-Roman temples; it is cited again in the discussion of the assimilation of the Corinthian Order; and, finally, its last reconstruction is analyzed in the chapters on Augustus. Each discussion corresponds to a major reconstruction and is addressed within its respective social and political context. Likewise, the all-important Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus is discussed in three chapters that take up its construction by the Etruscans and its reconstructions by Sulla and then the Flavians. This book attempts to link developments in building practice and theory to specific historical events and modes of authority.

The first chapter, “Building the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus,” introduces Rome’s first, largest, and symbolically most important religious structure. It describes its site on the Capitoline Hill, reviews historical accounts of its construction, and situates it within the

political and religious context of Rome in the sixth century B.C. It then recounts how the building was “lost” for several centuries, how it was rediscovered in the nineteenth century, and how our present understanding of its architectural character evolved.

The second chapter, “A New Reconstruction of the Temple,” is more technically oriented than the rest, but it is crucial to understanding the book’s principal theme. It challenges the currently accepted reconstruction of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, focusing especially on the version published in the late 1950s by the Swedish archaeologist Einar Gjerstad. His proposed dimensions of the temple, that is, its width, length, height, and interaxial spacings, are, in my opinion, far too large for the technology of Roman builders in the sixth century B.C. The temple as Gjerstad reconstructs it is such an anomaly in Roman architectural history that it is impossible to relate it to later Roman building practices and styles.

This book proposes a reconstruction that is based on a different interpretation of the building’s physical and written evidence and one that takes into account a comparative study of both contemporary and later temple architecture in Rome. It proposes a building with dimensions that are more in keeping with the capabilities of sixth-century B.C. building techniques and one that is more compatible with later temples. The Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus presented here, in fact, would have been a paradigmatic building, one that had a major influence on the designs of many later temple structures and iconographic programs, especially during the early and middle Empire.

Chapter 3, “Etrusco-Roman Temples of the Early Republic,” provides a comparative study of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus and the Roman temples that were built after the fall of the Etruscans. Among these are the earliest Etrusco-Roman temples of the Forum Romanum, Forum Holitorium, and the Largo Argentina, as well as examples in colonies such as Paestum and Cosa. In the latter, it was especially important for builders to emulate the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus as a way of appeasing Rome and appealing to its political leaders. Although most of these temples from the early Republic were built at a scale about half the size of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, they owe much to it in terms of their plans, architectural forms, and symbolism.

The fourth chapter, “Assimilation of Hellenistic Architecture after the Punic Wars,” analyzes Roman temple architecture in the third and second centuries B.C., an important period of transition from the Etrusco-Roman tradition to the Hellenistic style, especially the Ionic Order. As Rome systematically conquered more territory in the eastern Mediterranean, it increasingly absorbed the architectural forms of Hellenistic Athens, Priene, and Pergamon. This chapter examines temple architecture from this period in the Porticus Metelli, the Forum Romanum, Forum Holitorium, and Forum Boarium. It traces the introduction into Rome of the Ionic Order as it gradually appealed to and was accepted by Roman builders and the public alike as a replacement for the Tuscan-Doric Order.

This chapter also introduces the writings of Vitruvius. Although he wrote his *Ten Books of Architecture* much later, in the first century B.C., his theories most directly apply to the Ionic Order as it developed in the previous two centuries. The Temple of Portunus in the Forum Boarium, for instance, closely corresponds to his theories of architectural beauty. Discussion of Vitruvius’s theories is also important for understanding his systems of categorization according to plan and façade types. These categories apply to most temple architecture from the Republic to the Empire.

The fifth chapter, “The Corinthian Order in the First Century B.C.,” describes the introduction of the Corinthian Order as another aspect of the Hellenistic influence in Rome. Examples of the new style include the Round Temple by the Tiber, the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, Temple B in Largo Argentina, and the Temple of Vesta in the Forum Romanum. At the time these temples were being constructed, the dictator Sulla ordered the use of Corinthian columns in his rebuilding of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus after its destruction by fire. He brought to Rome pieces of marble Corinthian columns from the Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens that were used in part in the Capitoline Temple’s reconstruction. The use of at least the capitals, thus giving it a semblance of the Corinthian style, coincided with the Capitoline Temple’s renewed political importance and served to reassert its role as a significant architectural precedent for many decades to come.

Chapter 6, “Architecture and Ceremony in the Time of Pompey and Julius Caesar,” analyzes Roman

temple architecture in a changing political climate dominated by civil unrest and the emergence of the dictatorship. The assimilation of Hellenistic architecture into Roman building practices that had characterized the second century B.C. began to change at this time. Roman builders and architects continued to be influenced by eastern styles and building techniques, especially those of Asia Minor, but now they also began to exert their own influence on other regions, including Athens. This chapter discusses the theater and temple complex built by Pompey the Great, then focuses on the city's architecture and urban development under Julius Caesar, his transformation of the Forum Romanum, and the building of the Temple of Venus Genetrix in his Forum Julium. Integral to this discussion is an analysis of the role of both temples in the tradition of processions and ceremonies of the late Republic.

The seventh chapter, "Rebuilding Rome in the Time of Augustus," discusses the origins of the Empire after Caesar's assassination, the role played by the second triumvirate in making yet another transformation of Rome's political landscape, and the ascent of Augustus as emperor. Architecturally, it focuses on Augustus's construction projects on the Palatine Hill and in the Forum Romanum, as well as developments in the Campus Martius. In his *Res Gestae*, Augustus noted that he restored eighty-two temples in Rome, an achievement that dramatically changed the city's architectural character. This chapter discusses the temples on the Palatine, in the Campus Martius, and in the Forum Romanum that were built or rebuilt during the first half of Augustus's reign.

Continuing the previous discussion, Chapter 8, "Augustus and the Temple of Mars Ultor," focuses on the emperor's most important building in Rome, constructed in 37–2 B.C. A comparison with the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus as reconstructed in this study reveals dimensional similarities that suggest a direct architectural link. It is a clear indication that Augustus and his architects looked at the Capitoline Temple as a reference point with renewed interest. They saw it as a building to emulate or recall as an important part of Augustus's efforts to establish and maintain the legitimacy of his rule. At the same time, this comparison provides a good review of the substantial differences between the Etrusco-Roman style of the early Republic

and the classicism of Augustus. The architectural forms of temples had changed greatly during the 500-year period between the Etruscans and the early Empire. This comparison demonstrates the precise nature of both the differences and the similarities.

Chapter 9, "Temples and Fora of the Flavian Emperors," provides an analysis of the architecture of the Flavian dynasty from the second half of the first century A.D. The Flavians built a temple in the Forum Romanum and two imperial fora, and they rebuilt the Capitoline Temple not once but twice, both times after its destruction by fire. They also constructed the Arch of Titus, which had an important urban relationship with the Capitoline Temple because it was placed on the axis of the Via Sacra at a point where it precisely framed a view of the temple across the Forum Romanum. It was the Flavians' way of honoring the memory of Jupiter and associating their name with the temple's long history as the symbol of Rome's founding.

Chapter 10, "The Forum Traiani," discusses one of Rome's largest building complexes, built by one of its most prodigious builders. It focuses on the Temple of Divus Traianus, a giant temple begun by Trajan and finished by Hadrian. As with the Temple of Mars Ultor, it points out similarities in the dimensions that may have existed between this temple and those of the Capitoline Temple. Trajan responded to the city's most important architectural precedent, continuing the revival of interest in its history and exploiting its compelling power to sustain the legitimacy of his rule.

Chapter 11, "Hadrian's Pantheon," focuses on the most important Roman building constructed by Hadrian, an emperor who associated himself with both Zeus and Jupiter. It discusses his link to the deities and his emulation of certain aspects of the Capitoline Temple in his design of the Pantheon. Numerous architectural issues are brought up, including the form of the original Pantheon built by Agrippa, the debate over the height of the Hadrianic building's pronaos columns, the question of whether it was a temple or an audience hall, an analysis of its interior architectural features, and its iconographic meaning.

The final chapter, "Hadrian and the Antonines," analyzes Hadrian's Temple of Venus and Rome and two temples built by his successor, Antoninus Pius. It considers Hadrian's link to Zeus in Athens and the

influence of the precedent of the Temple of Olympian Zeus. It concludes with the work of Antoninus Pius and the transformations his architects made in the Hadrianic style.

In summary, this book seeks to draw attention to the authority of precedent in the design of Rome's temple architecture from the early Republic to the time of Hadrian and the Antonines. Crucial to this thesis is the new reconstruction of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which allows us to recognize its central role as a paradigm in Rome's architectural development. Possessing the political status of its association

with the founding of the Republic and its religious authority as the temple dedicated to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, it was by inference the most important architectural model for generations of temple builders. The site of Rome derived its authority from the history of its founding, and the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus symbolized the legitimate access to and the maintenance of political power. Underlying all authority in Rome, this foundation bound every act, including the construction of sacred buildings, honoring the beginning of Roman history and the original authority of its first ruler.