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# Reading the Civic Landscape of Augustan Rome: Aeneid 1.421-429 and the Building Program of Augustus

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## **Reading the Civic Landscape of Augustan Rome: *Aeneid* 1.421-429 and the Building Program of Augustus**

Darryl A. Phillips, Connecticut College

### **The Carthage of Aeneas**

In the first book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Trojan hero Aeneas weathers storms at sea and beaches his ships on an unknown shore. Setting out with his faithful lieutenant Achates, Aeneas finds himself on a hill high above the settlement of Carthage. From this vantage point he is able to read the cityscape below to learn about the inhabitants of this foreign land. He sees the Tyrians building their new city:

*Miratur molem Aeneas, magalia quondam,  
miratur portas strepitumque et strata viarum.  
Instant ardentem Tyrii: pars ducere muros  
molirique arcem et manibus subvolvere saxa,  
pars optare locum tecto et concludere sulco;  
iura magistratusque legunt sanctumque senatum.  
Hic portus alii effodiunt; hic alta theatris  
fundamenta locant alii, immanisque columnas  
rupibus excidunt, scaenis decora apta futuris.  
(Verg. *Aen.* 1.421-429).*

Aeneas admires the mass of the city, once just huts.  
He admires the gates and the noise and the paving of the roads.  
Eager the Tyrians press on in their work: some to extend the walls  
and to fortify the citadel and to roll up stones by hand,  
others to pick a site for a house and to enclose it with a trench.  
They select laws and magistrates and a sacred senate.  
Here some men excavate the harbors; there others place  
the deep foundations for theaters, and they cut out huge columns  
from rocks, fitting adornments for future shows.<sup>1</sup>

This scene of Aeneas' initial encounter with the city of Carthage has attracted much attention from scholars. It is the first developed description of city-building in the *Aeneid* and is given great emphasis by the placement in the lines immediately following of an extended simile

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<sup>1</sup> The Latin text is from Mynors 1969. English translations here and throughout the paper are my own.

that likens the busy builders to bees (*Aen.* 1.430-436). The theme of city building that is presented here is developed by Virgil as a leitmotif of the epic.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have also long debated the relationship between Dido's Carthage as presented in the epic and the building of a new Roman settlement at Carthage that was initiated by Julius Caesar and continued by Augustus.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Virgil's description of the on-going construction of Carthage has brought to mind the building that was going on in Rome at the time that Virgil was writing his epic.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Aeneas' view of Carthage from the hills high above the city has been connected with the view of Rome from Maecenas' house on the Esquiline Hill presented by Horace: "Stop admiring the smoke, the riches, and the noise of wealthy Rome" (*Carm.* 3.29.11-12: *omitte mirari beatae fumum et opes strepitumque Romae*).<sup>5</sup>

It is the connection between Aeneas' view of the construction in Carthage and the building in Rome that I will pursue here. First, by surveying the building activities in Rome in Virgil's day, the connection with the scene in the *Aeneid* becomes clear. Like Virgil's imagined cityscape of Carthage, Rome was buzzing with building activity carried out by leading citizens. As Virgil is seen to reflect the buildings and traditions of contemporary Rome in his description of Carthage, we might then take Aeneas' survey of Carthage as a guide for conducting our own survey of the cityscape of Rome. Indeed, through Aeneas, Virgil provides us with a model for how a Roman might view the construction in the city in the 20s BCE and provides us with a new approach for interpreting the building projects undertaken by Augustus during this pivotal era. As Aeneas reads the cityscape of Carthage, we are invited to read the civic landscape of Augustan Rome and examine from a new perspective Augustus' rise to power.<sup>6</sup> By focusing on public building and civic functions in the city, we are better able to understand this transitional period that saw the end of civil wars, the restoration of republican institutions, and the foundation of the principate. In addition, we gain a new appreciation of Virgil's unique perspective as a witness to the events of the 20s BCE who did not live to see the full development of the state in the later Augustan era.

In describing the building activity in Carthage, Virgil emphasizes the active participation of many different Tyrians. He begins with the collective description of all of the Tyrians pressing on in their work (*Aen.* 1.423: *instant ardentis Tyrii*). His focus then turns to the work of specific groups of men, some who construct the walls and others who survey sites for houses (*Aen.* 1.423-425: *pars ducere muros ... pars optare locum*). Next, we see the new Carthaginians collectively choosing their laws and magistrates and senate (*Aen.* 1.426: *legunt*). Finally, some men are seen excavating the harbors, while others are observed digging the foundations for the theater (*Aen.* 1.427-428: *alii effodiunt ... locant alii*). As we the readers, like our guide Aeneas, have yet to meet the inhabitants of this new city, none of the individual Tyrians are identified by

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<sup>2</sup> Morwood 1991.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the issue and bibliography, see Harrison 1984. Harrison convincingly argues against the notion that Virgil fashioned the scenes in Carthage as a response to contemporary concerns about the curse of Scipio.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Favro 1996 228; Clay 1988 195-196.

<sup>5</sup> For more than a century commentators have made this connection. For example, Page 1894 181; Ganiban 2009 70.

<sup>6</sup> As this paper moves between events in the early 20s BCE, for ease of reference I use the names "Augustus" and "Augustan" throughout the paper, although C. Julius Caesar Octavianus did not receive the honorific name Augustus until January of 27 BCE.

name. Nevertheless, throughout this passage Virgil has structured his description to draw attention to the participation of the many Tyrians who were contributing to the construction of the city. The passage makes it clear that building a city requires many hands.

### The Rome of Virgil

Like the cityscape of Carthage seen by Aeneas, Rome in the 30s and 20s BCE, when Virgil was writing the *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*, was teeming with public building projects sponsored by many different leading men in the state. The *Atrium Libertatis*, a complex that included Rome's first public library, was being built by C. Asinius Pollio in the early 30s BCE.<sup>7</sup> The Regia, the traditional residence of the Pontifex Maximus, was being rebuilt in the Forum Romanum by Cn. Domitius Calvinus.<sup>8</sup> A massive clean-up and expansion of Rome's urban infrastructure was undertaken by M. Vipsanius Agrippa in 33 BCE. Rome's first stone amphitheater was completed by T. Statilius Taurus in 29 BCE.<sup>9</sup> Temples, new and newly restored, were dedicated in honor of Apollo, Diana, and Juppiter Tonans, to name just a few.<sup>10</sup> Roads were restored and newly monumentalized: the Via Flaminia by Augustus<sup>11</sup> and the Via Latina by C. Calvisius Sabinus and M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus.<sup>12</sup> Like the Tyrian settlers in Virgil's epic, many leading Romans in the 30s and 20s BCE were striving to complete new civic buildings to adorn their city. In Rome, the sponsorship of these monuments for the use of the Roman people brought special prestige to each of the individual builders and their families.<sup>13</sup> Virgil was certainly aware of these building activities and was sensitive to the building practices

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<sup>7</sup> Pollio's project was financed from the spoils of his Illyrian campaign for which he celebrated a triumph in 39 BCE. See Richardson 1992 41.

<sup>8</sup> Calvinus restored the Regia with the spoils from his victory in Spain in 36 BCE. Richardson 1992 328.

<sup>9</sup> Dio 51.23.1 provides the date. The construction of the amphitheater followed Taurus' triumph *ex Africa* in 34 BCE. Richardson 1992 11.

<sup>10</sup> Temple of Apollo by C. Sosius, completed c. 30-28 BCE (Richardson 1992 13); Apollo on the Palatine by Augustus, completed in 28 BCE (Dio 53.1.3); Temple of Diana by L. Cornificius, following his triumph of 33 BCE (Richardson 1992 108-109); Temple of Juppiter Tonans, vowed by Augustus in 26 BCE and dedicated in 22 BCE (Richardson 1992 226).

<sup>11</sup> Richardson 1992 415-416. Restoration took place in 27 BCE (Dio 53.22.1).

<sup>12</sup> Following their triumphs in 28 and 27 BCE respectively. See Shipley 1931 31. Shipley's work, with its collection of primary source references, still remains a useful starting point for investigating buildings of this period.

<sup>13</sup> Kuttner 2004 321 succinctly summarizes the Roman practice: "Unlike in other ancient city-states, almost all communally relevant projects were delegated to the individual, shaped and signed by the individual, not by a committee, and remained the legacy of his clan." For an in-depth discussion, see Orlin 1997. Orlin investigates temple building as he demonstrates the tension between aristocratic self-promotion and regulation by the state. Zanker 1988 65-71 showcases the rivalry of competing builders during this period, but his reading privileges the party politics set out by Syme 1939 and downplays the influence of the long standing Republican tradition of aristocratic self-promotion through public building that surely motivated many of these construction projects in the late 40s and 30s BCE.

and traditions of Rome in his own day.<sup>14</sup> In his description of the efforts of the Tyrians to adorn their city, Virgil reflects the building culture and activities of Rome as he knew it in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. As an observer, Aeneas might well be viewing the new construction in Rome as he reads the cityscape of Carthage.

Moreover, Aeneas' survey of Carthage includes more than just buildings. Rather jarring to the modern reader of the *Aeneid* is the unexpected inclusion of civic activities at the center of the list of "works in progress" in Carthage. In addition to the building of walls and the laying of foundations, Aeneas sees the Tyrian settlers selecting "laws and magistrates and a sacred senate" (*Aen.* 1.426: *iura magistratusque legunt sanctumque senatum*).<sup>15</sup> These civic activities form an integral part of Aeneas' survey of the city, and their importance is emphasized by the central position that these activities occupy in Virgil's composition. For Aeneas, and for Virgil's Roman audience, reading the landscape of the city of Carthage also involves noting the civic functions that are underway. It is striking that the imagined cityscape of Carthage includes the hallmarks of Roman political life -- legislative assemblies, electoral assemblies, and meetings of the Senate. Here the parallel between the imagined city of Carthage and Virgil's Rome is developed directly; the civic activities that Aeneas notes are the traditional political functions of the *Senatus populusque Romanus*. Following the lead of Aeneas, if we narrow the focus of our survey of Rome to highlight the sites of the civic activities that captured Aeneas' interest, investigating the places where the Romans in Virgil's day passed laws and elected magistrates and the sites where the Senate met, we no longer see the efforts of multiple builders all striving to adorn the city. Our focus narrows to a single individual. To read the civic landscape of Rome in the 20s BCE from this perspective is to read the story of Augustus' rise to power in the newly restored Republic. While many men adorned the city, Augustus alone served as the patron of monumental new sites that hosted the political activities of the state.

### The Political Cityscape

To begin we might turn our sights to places where the Romans passed laws in Virgil's day. The Temple of Divus Julius in the Forum Romanum is the only location in Augustan era Rome for which we have direct evidence of its use to host legislative voting assemblies.<sup>16</sup> The shrine was begun by the triumvirs in 42 BCE in honor of the newly deified Julius Caesar, but was not completed until 29 BCE when it was dedicated by Augustus alone after the end of the civil wars.<sup>17</sup> The temple was the center of the cult of Divus Julius. Constructed at the site where Caesar's body had been cremated, the new temple became the focal point of the south-east end

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<sup>14</sup> See most recently the arguments presented by Meban 2008 in his analysis of the proem to Book 3 of the *Georgics* and Rebeggiani 2013, who examines the influence of Augustus' buildings in the Forum Romanum on the *Aeneid*.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed the inclusion of civic functions within the list of building projects has led some editors to question the authenticity of this line, even though the manuscript tradition is sound. Austin 1971 148 notes that "the line has full manuscript authority," but "it is nothing that Aeneas could see, only what (from a Roman point of view) would come into his mind when he saw a city being built."

<sup>16</sup> See Phillips 2011 for a full discussion and an argument for the early use of the site for voting assemblies.

<sup>17</sup> Dio 47.18.4; 51.22.2; cf. *RG* 19, where Augustus takes credit for the temple.

of the Forum Romanum.<sup>18</sup> Ample space at the front of the structure could accommodate large crowds, and the temple was specially designed to make use of its commanding position. A speaker's platform with lateral steps leading up to the podium was constructed at the front of the temple. The temple immediately became an important stage for public addresses, and was used throughout the principate.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it likely began serving as a voting venue soon after its dedication in 29 BCE. We know that a law was passed at the Temple of Divus Julius in 9 BCE (Front. *Aq.* 2.129).

While the temple and cult honored Augustus' adoptive and now divine father, the decoration of the site firmly connect the building with Augustus himself. The rostra that Augustus captured from the enemy fleet at the battle of Actium were mounted on the front of the speaker's platform (Dio 51.19.2). Other spoils from Augustus' eastern campaigns were placed inside the temple's cella next to the cult statue (Dio 51.22.2-3; *RG* 21.2). An architectural frieze depicting winged Victories decorated the structure, a fitting decorative scheme that called to mind the earlier victories of Julius Caesar and linked them with the more recent triumphs of Augustus.<sup>20</sup>

Virgil might well have had in mind the new Temple of Divus Julius and its cult statue when he composed the scene early in the *Aeneid* where Jupiter reveals to Venus the fate of her descendants:

*Nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar,  
imperium Oceano, famam qui terminet astris,  
Iulius, a magno demissum nomen Iulo.  
Hunc tu olim caelo spoliis Orientis onustum  
accipies securo; vocabitur hic quoque votis.  
(Verg. *Aen.* 1.286-290)*

A Trojan Caesar of illustrious parentage will be born,  
who will limit his empire at the Ocean, his fame at the stars,  
Julius, a name passed down from great Iulus.  
One day, free from care, you will welcome this man in heaven,  
loaded down with eastern spoils; he too will be called upon in prayers.

The identity of the "Caesar" and the "Julius" referred to in these lines has attracted much attention, as commentators interpret the passage as a reference to either Julius Caesar or Augustus.<sup>21</sup> However, by reading the passage as a description of the newly erected cult statue of

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<sup>18</sup> See Sumi 2011 for a discussion of the symbolic importance of the site, both before and after the construction of the temple.

<sup>19</sup> Octavia's body lay in state in the Temple of Divus Julius, and Augustus delivered a funeral oration for his sister from the rostra of the temple in 11 BCE (Dio 54.35.4-5). Tiberius later delivered the funeral oration for Augustus from this same site (Dio 56.34.4; Suet. *Aug.* 100.3). The so-called Anaglypha Traiani shows the emperor addressing a crowd from the temple's rostra in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE.

<sup>20</sup> For the frieze, see Montagna Pasquinucci 1973 268-272.

<sup>21</sup> See Austin 1971 110 for a summary of the arguments on both sides; Williams 2003 15-18 for a recent discussion and bibliography.

the Temple of Divus Julius, we can reconcile these seemingly opposing views. Julius Caesar's Gallic campaigns had extended the empire to the ocean, and the cult statue of Divus Julius was loaded down with the spoils of his son Augustus' eastern campaigns. Virgil captures this relationship succinctly in these lines. We need not read this passage as pre-figuring Augustus' deification. Instead, we might read it as a poetic description of an important new monument in the city of Rome constructed at the time that Virgil was writing his epic.<sup>22</sup>

It was at the Temple of Divus Julius and in view of the cult statue of Augustus' divine father that Romans met to vote on legislation throughout the Augustan age. In constructing the temple, Augustus honored his father and served as sponsor of a monumental new site for civic activities.

In the same year that the Temple of Divus Julius was completed, at the other end of Forum Romanum a new meeting place for the Senate was opened, the Curia Julia.<sup>23</sup> Construction of a new Senate house at the north-west end of the Forum had first been planned by Julius Caesar to replace the Curia Hostilia. Augustus completed the work on the project, opening the Curia Julia in 29 BCE. Augustus claimed full credit for the building. In the *Res Gestae* (RG 19) he places the Curia in the emphatic first position, at the head of the long list of the buildings he constructed. Dio (51.22) records that Augustus dedicated the building in honor of his father Julius Caesar. The name Curia Julia, of course, honors both Julius Caesar and Augustus himself, as Augustus was an adopted member of the Julian family. The connection to Augustus' recent conquests was emphasized by the placement inside the chamber of spoils from Augustus' Egyptian campaign that decorated a statue of Victory brought to Rome from the city of Tarentum.<sup>24</sup> Like the Temple of Divus Julius, the Curia Julia both honored Julius Caesar and celebrated Augustus' victories.

In the Forum Romanum, the place where Romans gathered to ratify their laws and the principal site where the Senate met both had been given monumental new homes by Augustus. Both sites were closely connected with Augustus' family and Augustus' military victories. The opening of these new venues represents a substantial change. For a century prior to the completion of the Temple of Divus Julius the neighboring Temple of Castor had served as the primary location for legislative assemblies.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the Curia Hostilia in the Forum Romanum, through many restorations, had long been an important meeting place for the Republican-era Senate before the construction of the new Curia Julia.<sup>26</sup> Augustus' new projects permanently changed the landscape of civic life in the Forum Romanum.

Construction of a new venue in the Campus Martius to host elections fell to Augustus' close ally and future son-in-law M. Vipsanius Agrippa. As we shall see, this site also paid honor

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<sup>22</sup> See also Rebeggiani 2013 60-63, who argues that Virgil references the Temple of Divus Iulius, Temple of Castor, and Arch of Augustus in his description of Aeneas' shield (*Aen.* 8.678-681).

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the opening ceremonies for both structures, see Sumi 2005 217-218.

<sup>24</sup> For the statue and spoils, Dio 51.22.1-2. Richardson 1992 103-104; Bonnefond-Coudry 1995 offers a detailed analysis of the decoration and the politics of naming the site in honor of Julius Caesar.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor 1966 25-29, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Bonnefond-Coudry 1989 32-47, sets out the evidence for meeting places of the Senate during the last two centuries of the Republic. For the building history, see Richardson 1992 102-103.

to Augustus.<sup>27</sup> The Campus Martius was the traditional meeting place for the centuriate assembly that elected praetors, consuls, and censors. Because the centuriate assembly was organized in ancient military classes and elected magistrates who would also serve as military leaders, it always met outside the sacred boundary of the city.<sup>28</sup> Although electoral meetings of the tribal assembly might be held in the Forum Romanum or at other locations within the pomerium, at least since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE these meetings seem to have been regularly held in the Campus Martius as well.<sup>29</sup>

Before the middle of the first century BCE the assembly site in the Campus Martius was unadorned. It was Julius Caesar who first proposed to monumentalize the voting enclosure. Cicero (*Att.* 4.16.14) describes Caesar's plan to erect a marble portico one mile in circumference around the site.<sup>30</sup> Caesar's plans were not realized in his lifetime. After his assassination, M. Aemilius Lepidus continued work on the project (Dio 53.23.2). The site was finally completed and dedicated by Agrippa in 26 BCE. Dio tells us that Agrippa named the site the Saepta Julia in honor of Augustus. As with the Curia Julia, the name calls to mind both Julius Caesar, the man who originally conceived of the monumental building, and his adopted son Augustus whom Agrippa honored at its opening. Although we are entirely lacking in specific evidence for the location of elections in the Augustan age, we should envision that most electoral assemblies were held in the Saepta Julia.<sup>31</sup>

Lily Ross Taylor and Lucos Cozza offer a reconstruction of the Saepta Julia in both structure and function.<sup>32</sup> Access to the Saepta Julia was limited, presumably to manage the crowds at elections and to prevent fraud. Voters would gather in the open space to the north of the Saepta and enter the structure on its northern end. Voters were then channeled down rows marked off by ropes. They cast their ballots at the southern end of the enclosure, and then departed through exits located at the south-east and south-west.<sup>33</sup> The entire voting process would be carried out in a monumental new setting enclosed by the largest marble porticoes in Rome where impressive works of art were on display.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For an overview of Agrippa's work in the Campus Martius, later dubbed the *monumenta Agrippae*, see Haselberger 2007 100-129. Haselberger discusses the relationship between Augustus and Agrippa, but does not explore the civic functions of the buildings that are our focus here.

<sup>28</sup> Gell. *NA* 15.27: *Centuriata comitia intra pomerium fieri nefas esse.*

<sup>29</sup> Taylor 1966 47.

<sup>30</sup> See Coarelli 2001 41-43 for a discussion of the relationship between Caesar's plan and the completed enclosure.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor 1966 47-48. The only known exception is an election held during the principate of Tiberius in A.D. 30 (*CIL* 6.10213=*ILS* 6044), on which, see Syme 1956.

<sup>32</sup> For the reconstruction by Taylor and Cozza, see Taylor 1966 47-58. Coarelli 2001 44-45 accepts the external dimensions reconstructed by Taylor and Cozza, but offers a slight modification to the plan for the interior of the site.

<sup>33</sup> Richardson 1992 341 questions the practicality of entering from the north for most Romans who lived to the south and east of the site. Nevertheless, the open space to the north would have functioned well as a staging ground for assemblies. The south was lacking similar space.

<sup>34</sup> Richardson 1992 340-341.



Immediately to the west of the Saepta Julia, and defining along with it the northern edge of development in the Campus Martius, was the so-called Pantheon of Agrippa. The Pantheon was completed within a year of the Saepta Julia.<sup>35</sup> Although the exact nature of the building itself and the full details of its architectural plan remain unknown, recent work has shown that the Pantheon, like the Saepta Julia, had a northern orientation.<sup>36</sup> The front podium on the north side of the structure was approached by lateral stairs, thus creating a speaker's platform similar to the one at the front of the new temple of Divus Julius in the Forum Romanum. It is tempting to envision the platform at the front of the Pantheon serving pre-election functions. Crowds could gather in the open area to the north of the Pantheon and Saepta Julia, hear speeches and announcements from officials standing on the Pantheon's platform, and then proceed into the Saepta Julia to cast their votes. Later in the Augustan period it is possible that the podium of the Pantheon itself even played host to voting assemblies. We know that the special voting centuries created in 5 CE in honor of Augustus' deceased adopted sons Gaius and Lucius Caesar met somewhere outside the Saepta Julia to cast their votes in elections.<sup>37</sup> The location and plan of the podium of the Pantheon make it a likely location for these special electoral proceedings.<sup>38</sup>

Although both the Saepta Julia and Pantheon were built by Agrippa, special efforts were made to associate these sites with Augustus. As we have noted, Agrippa named the Saepta Julia for Augustus, not for himself.<sup>39</sup> Dio (53.27.2-3) reports that Agrippa had also planned to name the Pantheon after Augustus. When the proposal to name the building for Augustus was refused, Agrippa instead erected a statue of Augustus, along with a matching one of himself, in the porch of the Pantheon.<sup>40</sup> Inside, a statue of Julius Caesar was included along with representations of a number of gods. These efforts to honor Augustus separate the Saepta Julia and Pantheon from the other buildings erected by Agrippa that, as we might normally expect, proudly celebrated Agrippa alone as the builder of the structure.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The inscription *CIL* 6.896.1 implies that the building was completed in 27 BCE during Agrippa's third consulship, but Dio (53.27.1-2) notes that Agrippa's buildings in this area of the campus were completed in 25 BCE.

<sup>36</sup> Virgili and Battistelli 1999.

<sup>37</sup> The voting units were created by the Lex Valeria Cornelia of 5 CE, known to us through the later measure to honor Germanicus recorded in the Tabula Hebana. For the text and discussion, see Oliver and Palmer 1954. The ballots of these special voting units were carried into the Saepta Julia to be counted (line 35 of the inscription records: *in saept[a d]eferantur*).

<sup>38</sup> Demougis 1987 suggests that the special voting units met at the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine. While the site's close connection with Augustus makes it an appealing location, it is unlikely that the centuries would have met inside the pomerium. The Pantheon, being both closely associated with Augustus and located in the Campus Martius, seems a more likely location.

<sup>39</sup> Dio 53.23.2. The site is often referred to simply as "Saepta." It appears once in a late source, (Hist. Aug. *Alex.* 26), as "Saepta Agrippiana."

<sup>40</sup> On the statue of Augustus, see Koortbojian 2011 262-264. Koortbojian suggests that the statue of Augustus in the porch of the Pantheon may have been a forerunner of the cuirassed Prima Porta statue type, and was itself likely based on the earlier *statua loricata* of Julius Caesar.

<sup>41</sup> For example, the Basilica of Neptune is explicitly said to have celebrated Agrippa's naval victories (Dio 53.27.1).

It is striking that during a period that saw so much public building sponsored by and celebrating the success of so many different individuals, all of the sites specifically built to host political activities -- meetings of the Senate and both legislative and electoral assemblies -- were sponsored by or closely associated with Augustus. As we read the civic landscape of Rome, we see Augustus serving as a sponsor of political institutions. Through these sites Augustus and his family separated themselves from other builders in the city and became firmly associated with the political landscape of Rome.

Furthermore, epigraphic, numismatic and literary sources suggest that this building activity was part of a deliberate policy of Augustus to bring back and enhance traditional political institutions. In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus' narrative of his own accomplishments, Augustus relates that in 28 and 27 BCE he transferred government institutions from his power to the control of the Senate and Roman people.<sup>42</sup> After the years of civil war, the Senate and the Roman people were to take up their traditional roles as deliberative and voting bodies. An aureus dating to 28 BCE publicizes this very act, celebrating the fact that Augustus restored the laws and rights to the Roman people (*LEGES ET IURA P R RESTITUIT*).<sup>43</sup> Literary sources also record the restoration of popular voting assemblies. Suetonius specifies that Augustus brought back the old Republican form of the assemblies (*Aug. 40.2: comitiorum quoque pristinum ius reduxit*).<sup>44</sup> A near contemporary of the events, Velleius Paterculus notes that the force of laws and the dignity of the Senate were restored (2.89.3: *restituta vis legibus, iudiciis auctoritas, senatui maiestas*), and that the old form of the Republic had been brought back (2.89.3: *Prisca illa et antiqua rei publicae forma revocata*).

The opening of the Temple of Divus Julius, the Curia Julia, the Saepta Julia, and the Pantheon all date to this same period. In the early 20s BCE the building program of Augustus and Agrippa gave a physical dimension to the restoration of political institutions.<sup>45</sup> Not only did Augustus return the Senate and popular assemblies to their former role, but, as we have seen, the Senate and assemblies were given monumental new homes sponsored by and associated with Augustus. As Virgil might have put it, once again the Romans were to select laws and magistrates and a sacred Senate. All of these civic activities would now take place in buildings honoring Augustus. Expanding on Aeneas' survey of Carthage that draws a connection between the construction of buildings and the carrying out of civic activities, as we read the civic landscape of the city of Rome in the 20s BCE we see a new connection being developed between the state and Augustus himself.

## The Contemporary Perspective of Virgil

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<sup>42</sup> RG 34.1: *In consulatu sexto et septimo, postqua[m] b]el[la civil]ia exstinxeram, per consensum universorum [po]tens re[ru]m om[n]ium, rem publicam ex mea potestate in senat[us populi]que R[om]ani [a]rbitrium transtuli.* On the new restoration of the text, see the summary presented by Cooley 2009 257-260. See Galinsky 1996 42-79, Rich and Williams 1999, and Ferrary 2003 for recent discussions of this restoration of Republican institutions.

<sup>43</sup> Rich and Williams 1999 200-201.

<sup>44</sup> Dio (53.21.6: ὁ τε δῆμος ἐς τὰς ἀρχαίρεσίας καὶ τὸ πλῆθος αὐτῶν συνελέγετο) also specifically mentions the return of assemblies at this time.

<sup>45</sup> In discussing Suetonius (*Aug. 28.2*), Sumi 2005 222, notes that the new topography was symbolic of the restoration of governmental institutions by Augustus. While he notes the interrelationship, Sumi does not closely examine the chronology as we have done here.

Looking back on the Augustan age from a century later, the historian Tacitus, in the first book of the *Annales* (1.9-10), famously presents conflicting assessments of Augustus, reading Augustus, on the one hand, as a champion of the Republic and, on the other hand, viewing him as a scheming dynast. The two views set out by Tacitus have provided the framework for assessments of Augustus ever since. As is often the case with Tacitus, an important truth lies behind his remarks. Tacitus recognized, and so ought we, that the same actions can be interpreted in radically different ways. By reading the civic landscape of Rome we are able to see the rival images of Augustus, the noble Republican and self-serving dynast, as two sides of the same coin. Augustus did work tirelessly to restore Roman governmental institutions, and it was this work itself that helped to establish Augustus and his family as an imperial dynasty and ultimately led to the overthrow of the Republican order.

Tacitus was writing a hundred years after these events, in an age when the principate had long been firmly established. In contrast, Virgil provides us with a contemporary vantage point that captures an early step in the transition of government. Virgil witnessed an early stage of Augustus' rise in position and saw first-hand his efforts to become the leading patron of civic institutions in Rome. But during Virgil's lifetime there were still many other individuals who, like Augustus, were themselves striving to adorn the city of Rome and build their own reputations. For Virgil and his contemporaries in the 20s BCE Augustus was just one among numerous builders, but by constructing sites to host political functions, Augustus occupied a special and central place in the newly restored Rome. Virgil bears witness to the rise of Augustus at a time when the full form of the principate had yet to be realized.

Virgil died in September of 19 BCE. Earlier in that same year L. Cornelius Balbus had celebrated a triumph over the Garamantes in Africa (*Inscript. It.* 13.1). Six years later, in 13 BCE, Balbus opened a new theater in Rome, a grand structure financed by the spoils of his victory and bearing his name.<sup>46</sup> Balbus presided over the lavish games that celebrated the opening of the new complex; Augustus was not in attendance as he had yet to return from his tour of the western provinces (Dio 54.25.1-2). To contemporary observers Balbus would have been seen to be continuing a long-standing tradition. For decades leading Romans had sponsored public buildings to adorn the city and to enhance their own reputations. Only in future years would the people of Rome come to realize the significance of this event; Balbus would be the last person outside the family of Augustus to be awarded a triumph and the last to sponsor a public building in Rome to mark his victory.<sup>47</sup> With the Theater of Balbus, the building traditions reflected in Virgil's poems come to an end.

Had Virgil lived just twenty years longer he would have seen a very different Rome than the one he knew in the 20s BCE. Just two decades later, we no longer find multiple builders striving to adorn Rome with public works while building their own reputations. Construction in Rome did continue and the renewed civic institutions were thriving, but now the political buildings along with all other new civic sites were sponsored by Augustus and members of his family. The Romans were still voting on laws and electing magistrates, and the Senate continued

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<sup>46</sup> On the Theater of Balbus, see Richardson 1992 381-382.

<sup>47</sup> For the restriction on triumphs, see Hickson 1991 127-130. See Eck 1984 138-142 for a discussion of the end of senatorial public building in Rome as connected with the end of triumphs by people outside Augustus' family, and Eck 2011 for a detailed treatment of the shift in senatorial building to sites outside of Rome.

to meet, but these civic institutions that were the hallmarks of Roman political life were now housed in venues sponsored by or closely associated with Augustus.

Virgil did not live to see the complete transformation of the city of Rome and the full development of the principate, but in the *Aeneid* we see reflected an early stage of the development and can perhaps also glimpse Virgil's view of the future. Virgil presents a cautionary tale. As the story of Aeneas's stay in Carthage unfolds, Aeneas and Virgil's reader soon learn more about the inhabitants of the new city of Carthage. We learn that the building activity and civic functions in Carthage are being overseen by the Tyrian queen, Dido. Virgil and his contemporaries living through the restoration of Rome in the 20s BCE would also have known who was principally responsible for their own good fortunes. The Romans of Virgil's day understood well the special role that Augustus had taken on, a role that elevated him above his peers. They understood the double image of dynast and defender of the state that Augustus had assumed. In the *Aeneid*, this double image of the queen of Carthage becomes problematic when Dido strays from her duties as leader to pursue her romance with Aeneas. It is then that the building projects and civic activities of Carthage come to a standstill:

*Non coeptae adsurgunt turres, non arma iuventus  
exercet portusve aut propugnacula bello  
tuta parant: pendent opera interrupta minaeque  
murorum ingentes aequataque machina caelo.*  
(Verg. *Aen.* 4.86-89)

The towers under construction no longer rise; the youths no longer train with arms. They no longer prepare the ports or make the battlements safe for war: interrupted, the building projects and the huge threatening walls and the crane as tall as the sky all hang in limbo.

As Dido neglected her duties the construction of the city and the civic functions that were underway in Carthage were broken off. The consequences for Dido were dire.

Augustus, of course, did not suffer the same fate as Dido, but through Virgil's *Aeneid* we can better understand the perceptions and anxieties of a Roman of the 20s BCE. By reading the civic landscape of Augustan Rome as Aeneas reads the cityscape of Carthage, we are able to appreciate from a contemporary view point Augustus' rise to power. By building monumental new sites in the early 20s BCE to host voting assemblies and meetings of the Senate, Augustus lay the foundations for the principate.

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