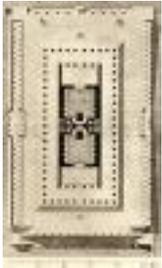




Temple of Venus and Roma (135 CE)

Plan of the Temple of Venus and Roma



[1]

[Reconstruction of the Temple of Venus and Roma](#) [2]



[3]

[Photo of the southern cella](#) [4]



[5]

Patron/Sponsor: Hadrian

Original Location/Place:

Forum Romanum

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):

In loco

Date: 135 CE

Material:

Proconnesian marble; Egyptian grey marble, porphyry, bricks, concrete

Literary reference:

On its planning: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LXIX.4; as *templum urbis Romae*: Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Commentary on the Aeneid* II.227; as *templum urbis*: SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 19 and Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XVI.10.14; as *urbis Venerisque templa*: Prudentius, *Books against Symmachus* I.221; as *templum Veneris*: SHA, *Thirty Tyrants* 32.

Building Typology:

temple

Description:



The Temple of Venus and Roma was erected by Hadrian, and was probably achieved by 135 CE, even if it is possible that Antoninus Pius finished the building. The temple stood on the Via Sacra, the main axis of the Roman forum. The building had colossal dimensions. Therefore, the limits of the Forum, which were enclosed on the north by the Arch of Titus, were extended to include the new temple. The temple, which followed an east – west axis, was set on a huge podium. The platform, which measured 145 m in length along its east-west axis and 100 m in width, was built with bricks and concrete covered by travertine marble. The eastern edge of the podium, as it was built on a slope, stood on arched vaults, which created a series of rooms.

The temple was surrounded by a huge peristyle. The latter consisted in an outer wall, and an inner row of columns of grey Egyptian granite surrounding the temple. The two long sides of the peristyle were entered through a central monumental gate, flanked by two smaller gates, located near the corners. The northern side was entered through a monumental gate located in its middle, characterized by two parallel rows of four columns. The southern side, where the main entryway stood, was dominated by a huge peristyle, which consisted of two rows of sixteen columns, flanked by two gates.

The temple itself stood on a podium, which consisted in a flight of seven steps, or stylobate, which surrounded the temple all around. The temple, as the surrounding portico, was built in the Corinthian order. The temple was a decastyle, dipteral building, i.e. with two concentric rings of ten columns, in white marble, on the front and the back of the building, and two concentric rings of twenty columns on each of the long sides. The main characteristic of the building was the two *cellae*, one for the goddess Roma and the other for Venus Felix, set one against the other, back-to-back. Each *cella* was preceded by a wide *pronaos*; it was entered through a row of four columns in red porphyry, and was characterized by a row of eight columns, which flanked the long sides. While the statue of Roma looked towards the north, in the direction of the forum, the statue of Venus looked southward towards the Coliseum. The statue of Roma is depicted on a *foliis* minted by Maxentius in 308-310 CE. The goddess is depicted seated, dressed in a tunic, and draped in a *stola*, with the head covered by a helmet, while holding the globe in the right hand and a scepter in her left hand. Yet, it seems that the original statue set by Hadrian in the temple, held the *palladium* in her right hand. A large round shield stood at her side, leaning on the ground. It seems that later on, nearby the altar, were added two statues in silver depicting Marcus Aurelius and his wife Faustina the Younger. There is no hint to what the statue of Venus looked like (Coarelli, *Rom: Der archäologische Führer*, p. 55-57).

Commentary:

From its very beginning, the temple created many controversies. First, according to Cassius Dio, the well-known architect Apollodorus of Damascus, who planned the Forum of Trajan as well as the bridge erected on the Danube, strongly criticized the building. For that, he paid with his life (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LXIX.4). Moreover, ancient sources preserve different names for this sanctuary. Thus, while Maurus Servius Honoratus refers to the temple as *templum urbis Romae*, “the temple of the city of Rome,” probably referring to the cult of the goddess Roma (Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Commentary on the Aeneid* II.227), the *Historia Augusta* as well as Ammianus Marcellinus evidently refer to the same cultic building just as *templum Urbis*, “the temple of the City” (SHA, *Life of Hadrian* 19; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The History* XVI.10.14). Yet, Prudentius refers to it as *urbis Venerisque templa*, “the temples of the City and of Venus,” which proves that he was clearly aware that the temple was dedicated to both Roma and Venus (Prudentius, *Books against Symmachus* I.221). Moreover, another passage of the *Historia Augusta* refers to the temple just as *the templum Veneris*, “the Temple of Venus” (SHA, *Thirty Tyrants* 32). It seems, therefore, that the temple did not possess any specific name, as in Antiquity it was known with different names, which sometimes lay the emphasis on only one of the two goddesses to whom the temple was dedicated. According to Cinzia Corradetti, the temple presented many new outstanding features, which served to emphasize Hadrian’s ruling ideology as well as his fondness of Greek culture. First, the main building material used for the construction of the temple was Greek Proconnesian marble. This white marble, which emphasized the “simplicity” of the whole building, was in fact taking the place of the marble coming from the caves of Luna, used from the Augustan period onwards (Corradetti, “Architettura templare,” p. 48). In fact, the temple was partially painted. For example the Corinthian capitals were painted in gold. Yet, the overall impression was that of a simple, whitewashed structure. Besides, the temple presented various features which emphasized its similarity with Greek Hellenistic temples and sanctuaries. First, the temple was set on a podium, surrounded on all sides by a flight of seven steps. This feature, also named *crepidoma*, was one of the main features setting apart the Greek temple from the Roman temple. The latter was set on a much higher podium, and it was characterized by a frontal flight of steps. Hadrian was clearly inspired by Greek Hellenistic temples, such as the sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma and the Artemision of Ephesus, framed by the Ionic order, or the Olympieum at Athens, framed by the Corinthian order. Moreover, the temple was characterized by the use of a dipter plan, or the presence of two concentric rings of columns around the building. Till then, only the two Augustan temples, the Temple of Quirinus and the Temple of Diana Cornificata, presented this unique feature. However, while the Augustan temples traced their source of inspiration to Classical Athens, the temple erected by Hadrian was inspired from the temples of the Hellenistic era. Only the choice of the Corinthian order could make the building fit Roman taste (Corradetti, “Architettura templare,” p. 48). In fact, the



choice of Greek-Hellenistic architectural features served to mirror Hadrian's ruling ideology, inspired by the ideal of the absolute Hellenistic autocrat, no less than by the Roman imperial ideology, well expressed by Pliny's *Panegyric* of Trajan.

The presence of two cultural models, the Greek and the Roman, is mirrored by the choice of a Greek architectural model to frame the sanctuary of two Roman goddesses, namely Venus and Roma, who embodied the rule of Rome over the world. Venus was one of the main deities of Rome. She was the mother of Aeneas, who according to the legend fled to Italy after the destruction of Troy. His descendant, Romulus, founded Rome. As the ancestor of the Roman people, Venus's cult was also connected to military victory and triumph, and she was therefore venerated as Venus Victrix (even if in Hadrian's temple, she was celebrated as Venus Felix, or Venus of Good Fortune / Happiness). Besides, Venus was the mythical ancestor of Augustus, the first Roman emperor, a source of inspiration for his successors. It is also possible that the two cultic statues, back-to-back, mirrored the well-known anagram Amor, or love, which becomes Roma, once spelled backward (Hadrian was very fond of anagrams). In fact, Hadrian joined in one building two of the most important gods connected to Roman imperial ideology. On the one hand, as mentioned above, Venus was the ancestor of Rome's founder and of Rome's first emperor, Augustus. On the other hand, Roma was the goddess who personified the might of Rome and of the Roman people (Corradetti, "Architettura templare," p. 49). It is noteworthy that, till then, no cultic building had been previously dedicated to the goddess at Rome, although the cult was attested in the Greek East from the beginning of the second century BCE onwards, and in the Latin West, from the rule of Augustus onwards.

The statue of Roma set in the temple presented an interesting feature, as she held the *palladium*. This was a small wooden figurine of Minerva, which, according to the legend, had been initially taken by Diomedes and Odysseus from its temple (Virgil, *Aeneid* II.155-199). However, later on, the figurine found its way to Rome, where it was kept in the Temple of Vesta. Hadrian thus chose an iconographic model of the goddess Roma which emphasized its connection with the Greek Hellenized East and its Trojan origins. The *palladium* was one of the seven objects – also named *pignora imperii*, "pledges of rule" – whose possession pledged the eternity of Roman rule over the *oikoumenē*. Logically enough, Roma was worshiped in this temple as *Roma aeterna*, "eternal Rome". Moreover, it seems that the Temple was inaugurated to celebrate the *Parilia*, a holiday traditionally observed on the 21st of April, which celebrated the foundation of Rome (Ovid, *Fasti* IV.762-821; Dionysus of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* I.88).

Thematic keywords:

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- [Venus](#) [7]
- [Roma \(goddess\)](#) [8]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [9]
- [kingship](#) [10]
- [temple](#) [11]
- [cult](#) [12]
- [ancestors](#) [13]
- [lineage](#) [14]
- [Roman hegemony](#) [15]
- [palladium](#) [16]

Bibliographical references: Coarelli, Filippo, [Rom: Der archäologische Führer](#) [17] (Mainz: Philip von Zabern, 2013)

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Mellor, Ronald, ["The goddess Roma"](#) [20] (Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II, 17.2; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1981)

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- [3] http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/reconstitutiontemplevenusetrome.jpg?itok=3qZ_Sr_-
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