



## Temple of Divus Iulius and the Actian and Parthian Triumphal Arches (29 BCE)

### Reconstruction of the Temple of Divus Iulius



[1]

### [The Temple of Divus Iulius](#) [2]



[3]

### [Reverse of a denarius depicting the Actian Arch \(16 BCE\)](#) [4]



[5]

**Patron/Sponsor:** Augustus

**Original Location/Place:**

East side of the Roman Forum

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):**

In loco

**Date:** 29 BCE

**Material:**

brick, concrete, marble, tufa

**Literary reference:**

Appian, *Civil Wars* II.148; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LI.22 and LIV.8; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* II.93-94; Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar* I.88; Vitruvius, *On Architecture* III.3.2.

**Building Typology:**

temple; triumphal arch



## Description:

The Temple of *Divus Iulius* stood between the Parthian and the Actian triumphal arches. The complex included two elements: an elevated platform which faced the temple, served as the *rostrum* and was decorated with the beaks of the ships taken at Actium; and the temple, erected on a podium. The latter was entered from the front by a short stairway passing between the columns of the facade. It was hexastyle prostyle, with a broad *pronaos* and a cella. In the cella stood a colossal statue of Caesar, possibly with a star on the head. Here Augustus dedicated offerings from the spoils of war.

The "Actian" arch, which may have been built as early as 29 BCE, stood on the northwestern side of the temple of *Divus Iulius*. It celebrated the victory over Cleopatra in 31 BCE and the subsequent annexation of Egypt. For the description of this arch, the only sources are numismatic (especially a silver denarius minted in Rome under L. Vinicius in 16 BCE). Apparently the triple arch was composed of a central round arch with a lower, gabled arch on each side. The central arch was surmounted by a *quadriga*, the two lower arches were crowned by a statue of Victoria.

The Parthian arch was erected by Augustus in 19 BCE to celebrate the return of the standards of Crassus that had been captured by the Parthians at Carrhae in 53 BCE (see Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LIV.8). It stood on the southwestern side of the temple of *Divus Iulius*. The best source for its reconstruction is a numismatic one, a silver denarius minted in 19-18 BCE at Colonia Patricia in Spain. The reverse shows a triple arch with a *quadriga* standing on the central arch. This triple arch is unusual. It consists of a lofty central arch with an inscribed attic surmounted by a *quadriga* flanked by lower post-and-lintel *fornices* supported by columns and surmounted by triangular gables crowned by figures of barbarians offering standards to Augustus. It was elaborately decorated. The *fasti capitolini consulares et triumphales* were inscribed on the base of this arch.

## Commentary:

The Temple of *Divus Iulius*, located on the eastern side of the main square of the Roman Forum, between the Regia, the Temple of Castor and Pollux and the Basilica Aemilia, is recorded by most ancient sources. The construction started under the triumvirs in 42 BCE, at the spot where the people had cremated the corpse of Julius Caesar, and it was completed by Augustus in 29 BCE. This complex, which included the temple between the two triumphal arches, had a strong political significance. Built in a public space, the Roman Forum, the center of ancient Rome, it reminded the citizens of Rome of the successes of Augustus and of his ancestry (via his adoption by Caesar). The temple of *Divus Iulius* emphasized the continuity between Julius Caesar and Augustus and gave the latter a legitimacy as heir to the former. The war trophies displayed in the temple further exalted Augustus's foreign policy and emphasized its link to that of Caesar. The two triumphal arches symbolized the two major achievements of the foreign and internal policies of Augustus: the victory over the Parthians and the recovery of the Roman standards lost at Carrhae, on the one hand; the end of the civil wars after Actium and the beginning of the *Pax Romana*, on the other. As Augustus could not directly celebrate a victory over Antony, a Roman citizen, the triumphal arch celebrated the victory over a foreign enemy, Cleopatra VII, Queen of Egypt, ally of Antony. The temple was destroyed by a fire during the reign of Septimius Severus and then restored.

Thematic keywords:

- [Julius Caesar](#) [6]
- [Augustus](#) [7]
- [temple](#) [8]
- [triumph](#) [9]
- [triumphal arch](#) [10]
- [Actium](#) [11]
- [Parthians](#) [12]
- [victory](#) [13]

**Bibliographical references:** Zanker, Paul, [The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus](#) [14] (Ann Arbor (Mich.): University of Michigan Press, 1990)

Simon, Erika, [Augustus. Kunst and Leben in Rom um die Zeitenwende](#) [15] (München: Hirmer Verlag, 1986)

**Other sources connected with this document:** Numismatic item

[Denarius of Augustus depicting the Parthian triumphal arch \(18-17 BCE\) \[16\]](#)

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- [Read more about Denarius of Augustus depicting the Parthian triumphal arch \(18-17 BCE\)](#) [16]

Realized by:

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#### Links

- [1] [https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/Temple\\_of\\_Caesar\\_3D.jpg?itok=bVx5Jvf0](https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/Temple_of_Caesar_3D.jpg?itok=bVx5Jvf0)
- [2] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/file/temple-divus-iulius>
- [3] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/RomaForoRomanoTempioDivoGiulio.jpg?itok=QHfwOrXY>
- [4] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/file/reverse-denarius-depicting-actian-arch-16-bce>
- [5] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/Actian%20Arch%20-%20Copy.jpg?itok=enWzTvwb>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/julius-caesar>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/augustus>
- [8] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/temple>
- [9] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/triumph>
- [10] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/triumphal-arch>
- [11] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/actium>
- [12] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/parthians>
- [13] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/victory>
- [14] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/power-images-age-augustus>
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- [16] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/denarius-augustus-depicting-parthian-triumphal-arch-18-17-bce>
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