

Nina Ylikarjula


Alessandro Viscogliosi has published a monograph on one of the most important extramural temples in ancient Rome. The author develops and refines in this book many of the ideas which he presented in their initial stages in the catalogue of the Berlin exhibition Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik in 1988.

The cult of Apollo Medicus created in the southern part of the Campus Martius, had originally connections with a sacred spring. The medical aspect seems to have prevailed to the end of the third century, when this area was reorganized and known later as that of the Circus Flaminini. Now the cult of Apollo came to be more intimately connected with the triumphal processions and the triumphs, through which the oracular powers of the deity might have played a part. Apollo’s importance in this sense is shown by the inevitable laurel wreath on the triumphators’ heads and more splendidly by the many triumphal monuments concentrating in this area.

The cult goes back to the 6th century BC, when it seems to have been brought to Rome via Etruria, and continues, possibly, all the way to the 5th century AD. During this long period amazingly few changes took place in the building itself, which was constructed as a temple building only at the end of the 430s and dedicated by an early member of the gens Iulia. The temple is known to have suffered during the Gallic invasion, after which it was restored. The senators used the temple as the site of many extramural meetings, and the area in front of the temple with its stairs was used effectively for the ludi Apollinares. It was the theatrical tradition that in the end had its influence on the changes that took place initially through the will of Julius Caesar and then, in his spirit, through C. Sosius and
finally by Augustus. In fact, the temple of Apollo was moved some metres in order to make space for the theatre proper, that is the theatre of Marcellus.

The political tensions and their settlement later between Augustus and C. Sosius, who actually began the rebuilding of the temple in 34 BC, probably had their drastic effect on many features of the building. The Sosian building was meant to be one of travertine covered with stucco, but after the battle of Actium in 31 it turned out to be a building of marble, or rather marbles, reflecting in this way the importance of Augustus’ favourite deity. According to the author, it was still C. Sosius, who had the privilege of finishing the building at his own expense, even though the final touch was given in accordance with the ideas of Augustus. The dedication took place before the year 17 BC, and the new dies natalis was now the 23rd of September, nothing less than the birthday of Augustus. This building was to be the artistic proclamation and show case of Augustan policy.

After this major reconstruction, the building seems to have remained more or less intact into late antiquity. In the Middle Ages new constructions were built over it and even inside the podium. The architectural decoration and the collapsed columns remained more or less intact waiting for the excavators of the 1920s. The first publication by R. Delbrueck came out in 1903. The podium and the pavement were unearthed in 1937–38, when the material not only from the temple of Apollo but also from the surrounding neighbourhood was deposited in haste with little care for its provenance. It was Eugenio La Rocca’s fortunate discovery and reconstruction of the pedimental sculptures in 1985 which led to the new studies on the site. The fruits of these studies are now presented by A. Viscogliosi in his monograph on the development of the architecture and sculptural decoration of the temple.

Of his excellent study I mention as a detail the Corinthian capital, pictured in fig. 64 and presented as a hallmark of the whole building. Its interpretation is full of Augustan political propaganda, providing clues to the divine ancestry and family connections of Augustus. The most challenging tasks for the author must have been, however, the reexamining and summing up the various strata of the podium and the reconstruction of the cella, beautifully supported by many drawings and photographs from old and new excavations. It is obvious that the author has been enjoying doing his research on this rewarding building. At the same time he has also managed splendidly to transmit to the reader a picture of this unique temple which is, despite its many foreign and borrowed aspects, a basically Roman building.

Leena Pietilä-Castrén


This is the first volume of the new series Palilia of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome. In the series monographs on the archaeology of Italy will be published. This publication is based on the writer’s dissertation at the Freie Universität Berlin. In recent years a considerable number of studies on marble in antiquity has been published, partly because of the first three congresses of ASMOSIA (Association for the Study of Marble and Other Stones Used in Antiquity).