

A VISION OF IMPERIAL UNITY: THE TEMPLE OF VENUS AND ROMA¹

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INTRODUCTION

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1. My thanks are due to Mrs.Zeliha Sözüpişkin for typing the manuscript and to Ms.Yaprak Eran for her assistance at the British Institute of Archaeology.

2. For modern skepticism on the account of Apollodorus' death see Boatwright (1987, 119) and MacDonald (1965, 136). One of Apollodorus' criticisms involved the proportions of the temple. Indeed a Greek temple required more clear space around it for viewing, while a Roman temple was normally raised on a higher podium (Barton, 95).

As one of the largest building projects of Hadrian in Rome, the Temple of Venus and Roma captures the eye of the beholder in its ruined state even today [Figures 1-3]. Notwithstanding its gargantuan scale, the renowned edifice is associated with a notorious tale in the ancient literary record as the building that allegedly cost the Syrian architect Apollodorus his life. According to the often quoted account of Dio Cassius in his *Roman History* (69.4), the emperor Hadrian was so incensed at having the architectural flaws of his project bluntly and irrefutably pointed out by a professional that his retribution was fatal [2]. Incidentally, the account is of interest because it suggests that the emperor was personally involved in architectural matters and was perhaps responsible for the actual design of the Temple of Venus and Roma.

In an age when the Roman architectural revolution had reached its apogee, Apollodorus certainly represented the conservative strain in public building. He promoted the Hellenistic style in Rome by using marble trabeation in the Basilica of Ulpia and Forum of Trajan, the largest of the imperial fora. On the other side



Figure 1. Temple of Venus and Roma, seen from the Colosseum (Photograph: S. Güven)



Figure 2. Temple of Venus and Roma (METU Slide Archive)

Figure 3. Temple of Venus and Roma, interior elevation (Photograph: S. Güven)

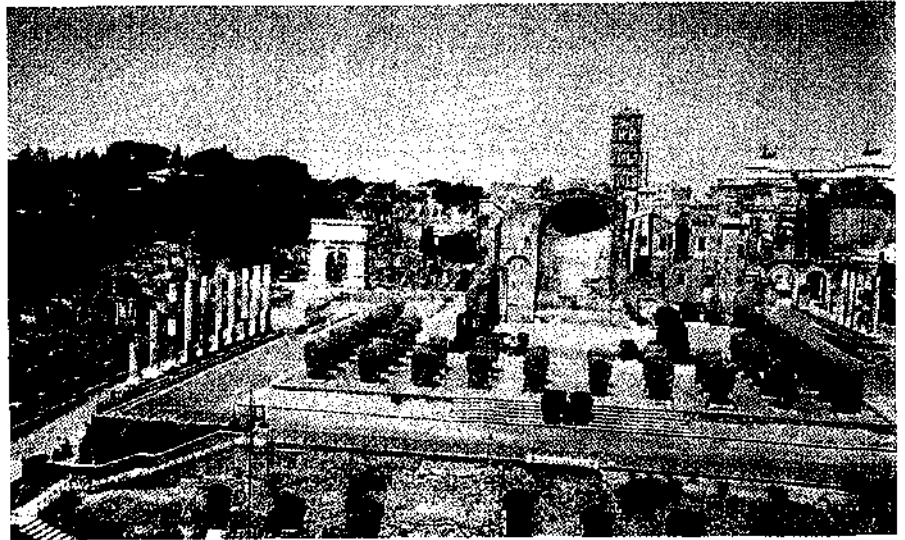
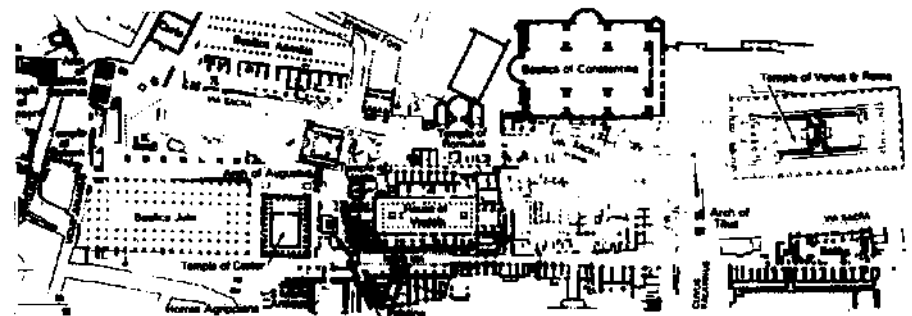


Figure 4. Coin of Antoninus Pius with the Temple of Venus and Roma (Nash II, 498)

Figure 5. Forum Romanum and the site of the Temple of Venus and Roma (Finley, 108)



of this bastion of classicism, it was in the age of Hadrian that the most accomplished examples of Roman curvilinear design came into being as exemplified in Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli (Jacobson, 1986, 85). Yet with its anachronistic peristyle trabeation in the Greek manner, the Temple of Venus and Roma can hardly be said to reflect the progressive architecture in vogue, in spite of its importance and monumentality. In this respect, the conservative and perspicacious remarks of Apollodorus deserve attention since they are levelled not at a new-fangled invention (of the kind that enraged Vitruvius a century earlier) but they criticize a traditional building with a Greek appearance.

Although it is generally posited that Roman religious architecture was, comparatively speaking, more subject to traditional prescriptions, it would be simplistic to explain the design of the temple solely on the grounds of religious restraint. Given Hadrian's openness to change, the many vicissitudes of his character and the contemporary building-boom, it appears that the design of the Temple of Venus and Roma was dictated by a meticulously calculated political motive. In an age when the old and new values on the one hand and the Italic and provincial territories on the other were increasingly welded together, they all found an outlet in Hadrian's vision of a unified empire. In this paper, a framework is created for the contextual study of the Temple of Venus and Roma, with the aim of formulating a working definition of classicism in classical antiquity as a functional political device.

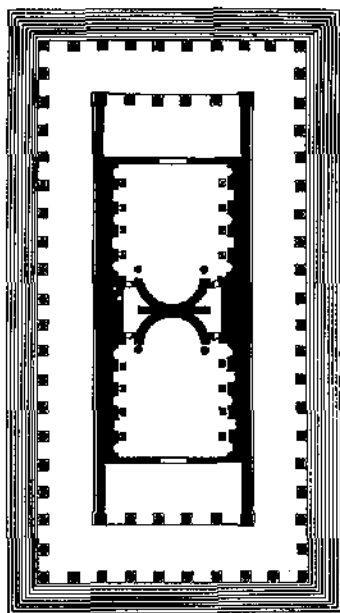


Figure 6. Plan of the Temple of Venus and Roma (Picard and Stierlin, 107)

Figure 7. Cellas of the Temple of Venus and Roma (Photograph: S. Güven)

3. As the only known 'decastyle' temple in Rome, see the elevations on the reverses of Hadrianic and Antonine 'sestertii' (BMC, Emp. IV, p.206, No.1285, pl.30.2). For the identification of the Temple of Venus and Roma with *Templum Urbis*, see Kienast (1980, 402).

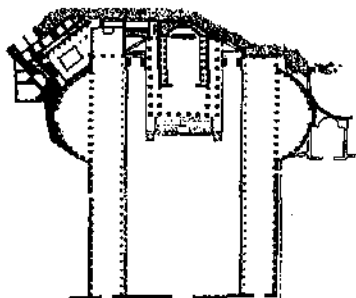


Figure 8. Hemicycle of Forum of Augustus (Picard and Stierlin, 8)



Figure 9. Frontal elevation of the Pantheon (Ward-Perkins, 257)

4. In fact, the Pantheon continues to pose a scholarly debate in terms of its polemical design (Davies, Hemsoll, Jones, 135-153).



THE DESIGN OF THE TEMPLE

Although the definitive monograph of the Temple of Venus and Roma has yet to appear and neither the autobiography of Hadrian nor his biography authored by Phlegon (*SHA, Hadr.* 16.1) (in which we might expect to find the emperor's architectural vision and a comprehensive list of the works completed during his reign) survive, the overall plan, elevation and identification do not seem to be in question [Figure 4] [3].

Eminently situated on the Velia at the far east end of the Forum Romanum [Figure 5], the Temple of Venus and Roma stood near the site of the *vestibulum* or ceremonial court of the *Domus Aurea* where a colossal statue of Nero had formerly risen. The temple proclaimed its importance in a typical Roman manner by its elevation on an artificially constructed platform which overlooked the *Sacra Via* and the Forum beyond, creating a visual backdrop in the east. Its plan however, was *pseudodipteral decastyle* in the anachronistic Ionic fashion (and girdled by a single and double portico in the north and south respectively) which provided it with a Greek appearance rather than a Roman one. At both ends, a roomy *tetrastyle in-antis pronaos* preceded the double *cellas* placed back to back [Figures 6 and 7]. As it faced the Colosseum, the Temple of Venus and Roma indeed surpassed the splendour of the most famous buildings of the Greek east.

In the plan, the double *cellas* of the temple appear as apsed forms within a rectilinear plan. This recalls the Roman practice of hiding progressive architectural forms behind a classical trabeated veneer as attested in the hemicycles of the Forum of Augustus a century earlier [Figure 8]. In this context, we may point to a similar concession to tradition in a later Hadrianic practice as well, as in the domed cylinder of the Pantheon which was masked by a portico in the form of a traditional Greek temple front [Figure 9] [4]. Although this practice of simultaneously accommodating the old with the new is well-attested in Roman public buildings, contrary to what we might expect, brick stamps from the apses of the Temple of Venus and Roma as they stand today [Figure 10] point not to a Hadrianic date but to a rebuilding by Maxentius two centuries later (Brown, 1964, 56; Coarelli, 1975, 99-100). This chronological disappointment has been explained away by Brown as the Maxentian superstructure repeating the original Hadrianic forms of the temple. He supports his argument by pointing out that the cella of the temple of the deified Hadrian, dedicated in 145 A.D. had similar

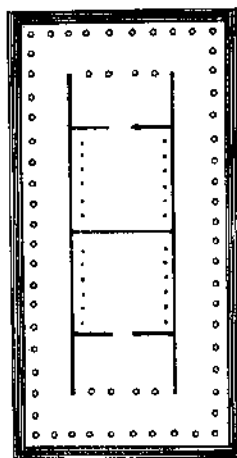
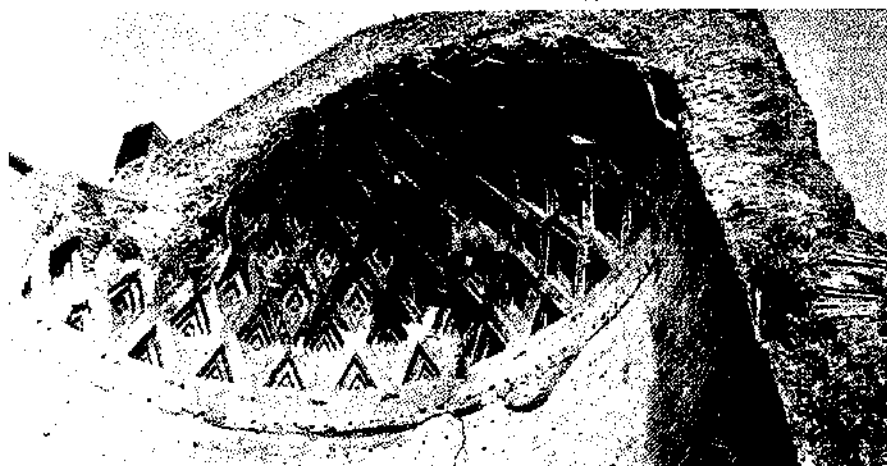


Figure 10. The cella of Venus (Photograph: S. Güven)

Figure 11. Temple of Venus and Roma, plan (Boatwright, 126)

5. MacKendrick, 281; such a pun would not be unexpected of Hadrian. According to literary testimony 'he was also very witty and of his jests many still survive' (SHA, Hadr. 20.7).

6. It ought to be pointed out here that even the most well-known Roman buildings like the Pantheon are not free from controversies of dating in recent scholarship (Heilmeyer, 1975, 327).



forms and proportions. In fact, the urge to detect a Hadrianic touch in the plan has even led to a gimmicky interpretation by some as an architectural pun involving the goddess of Venus and the goddess Roma: Venus represents the goddess of love, love is *amor* and Roma is *amor* spelled backwards [5]. Results of recent archaeological research however, have conclusively shown that the two cellas were rectilinear with no evidence of curvilinear features (Barattolo, 1978, 398) [Figure 11]. This is a surprising feature on at least three counts: firstly, curvilinear design had attained a time-tested structural maturity by the second century. Secondly, Hadrian is known to have had a personal fondness for experimenting with new types of vaults (Dio, *Roman History*, 69.4). Thirdly, considering that the Teatro Marittimo was built earlier, even while making allowances for more freedom in private architecture, the reversion to anachronistic style is striking to say the least [6]. Even the Forum of Trajan with its plethora of trabeated columns that present a striking contrast to the contemporary markets adjacent to it, has four hemicycles in the main courtyard and in the Basilica of Ulpia all of which interrupt the rectilinear rigidity of the plan.

At this juncture, it is significant to come to terms with Hadrian anchored in tradition on the one hand and the fanciful, capricious Hadrian on the other. Does the Temple of Venus and Roma merely represent a stubborn classicism removed from context like the monumental Kocatepe Mosque in Ankara which nostalgically but with futility proclaims the by-gone era of Sinan? It will be demonstrated here that while the classicism is deliberate, it is by no means imitative, neither in a formal nor contextual sense. In Roman religion for example, it has been pointed out that at first glance it is a paradox that while being the most conservative institution, it is simultaneously so open to importing new cults (North, 1976, 2). Similarly, in his efforts to unify the Empire, Hadrian was engaged in two diametrically opposite courses of action:

on the one hand, he tried to give the impression of traditional emperor so as not to alienate Romans, but on the other hand, when he energetically affected innovations whose aims were to incorporate the outlying countries into the Imperial dominion, he was bound to estrange the Romans (Thornton, 1975, 434).

Hence in architecture too, as embodied by the Temple of Venus and Roma, one ought to ask if there is a legitimate problem in reconciling the degree of conservatism with the tradition of innovating. Doing so requires foremost the analysis of the nature of the classic elements and values underlying the design of the Temple of Venus and Roma as well as the character of the new Roman elements as distinguished from the unique product of the whimsical manifestations of Hadrian's will.



Figure 12. Cuirassed statue of Hadrian (Vermeule, 1968, 248)

7. For a popular but compelling account of the restless Emperor and his travels, see (Yourcenar, 1951).

ROLE OF GREEK TRADITION IN HADRIANIC POLICY AND DESIGN

As an emperor whose parental ancestors were from outside Italy, P. Aelius Hadrianus (Figure 12) had an unorthodox pedigree to begin with. Although he is recorded to have gained great proficiency and fluency in Latin due to his intensive study of the language (*SHA, Hadr.III.7*) to cover his deficiency, he still spoke with an accent like a foreign emperor. As for Greek studies, he very earnestly had to apply himself in this sphere too, to the extent that he was given the diminutive epithet 'the Greekling' by some (*SHA, Hadr. I, 4-5*). Perhaps partly due to his Spanish heritage, Hadrian spent a life-time to integrate his foreign subjects into the Empire becoming the most itinerant Roman emperor. In this respect, eleven of his twenty-one years in power were spent abroad [7].

Beginning with Augustus and continuing with Nero, Roman imperial patronage of Greek culture with its revered past had reached its peak. After the military emperors Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, who were not particularly noted for their association with Greek cultural refinement, Hadrian appears as the most philhellene among Roman emperors. Three issues of Greek culture that affirm the importance of Greek influence in the design of the Temple of Venus and Roma emerge with exegetical clarity: first, the cultural ambience in Rome, second, privileges granted to Athens in particular by Hadrian, and third, the influence of monuments in Greek lands.

First of all, from a historical point of view, from Hadrian on, Rome had ceased to be the center of the Roman world. Once the era of military conquests was over, Italy entered the course of decline in relation to the rest of the empire. Rome no doubt maintained its importance but other centers began to emerge which attracted imperial patronage (Ward-Perkins, 1970, 264). In this respect, it must be remembered that even in the heyday of Roman power, Greek culture had a virulent ascendancy in Rome. Even after Hadrian in the late 200's certain Roman families continued to regard Greek culture as a prerequisite for status whereby every Roman came to receive a Greek education, studied Greek literature, rhetoric and philosophy. Hadrian's Greek tastes in particular, fostered the spread of Greek fashions in many aspects of daily life in Rome. After the conquest of Greece, the conquering power had become prey to 'reverse acculturation' (Jones, 1943, 3; Walker, 1989, 221; Alcock, 1989, 5).

Monumental building in Rome during the reign of Trajan and Hadrian had the popular political motive of providing employment for the masses [8]. Both skilled craftsmen and unskilled labourers who had worked in the completion of Trajan's Forum were re-employed by Hadrian. Among these was perhaps Apollodorus himself who as a Hellenistic artist from Syria had been instrumental in forming the taste and style of the capital (MacDonald, 1965, 129). Most important however, is the strong possibility of migrant craftsmen perhaps from Pergamum working in Rome [9]. In this case, at least one provenance for the stylistic features in profiles of the order and architectural mouldings bearing Greek or Asiatic influence becomes clear. In addition, rather than using the white Carrara marble as Trajan had done in his forum basilica and monumental column, Hadrian preferred the blue-veined marble of Proconnesus to match the skill of imported workmen.

Secondly, the special esteem under which Athens was held by Hadrian, effectively demonstrates the tenacity of the emperor's penchant for Greek culture. Ancient testimony is explicit in the privileged treatment of Athens which was generously

8. Brunt (1980, 92, 97) explains that in the pre-industrial city of Rome, one might expect a considerable labour force engaged in building operations under building emperors, especially Trajan and Hadrian, but also Nero, Vespasian and Domitian.

9. See Boatwright (1987, 20, 30, 237-38) and Strong (1953, 138). In this respect, Walker (1989, 221) rightly points to the ascendancy of Greek craftsmen and materials at Rome, a rise that within two generations was to have a profound effect upon the quality and quantity of architectural decoration and monumental sculpture in the capital.

10. See also Millar (1971, 426-427) about the granting of imperial favours and the Athenians petitioning Hadrian for the 'laws' which he gave them. This included the unusual favour of providing Athens with an annual grain supply. Geagan (1979, 392) also gives detailed account on the financial assistance to Athenians.

reciprocated by its citizens [10]. No other provincial city could match the extent of imperial largesse bestowed upon Athens by Hadrian.

He bestowed many favours on the Athenians and sat as president of the public games (*SHA, Hadr. XIII, 1-6*);

Hadrian completed the Olympieion at Athens, in which his own statue also stands and dedicated there a serpent which had been brought from India. He also presided at the Dionysia first assuming the highest office among the Athenians and arrayed in the local costume, he carried it through brilliantly. He allowed the Greeks to build in his honour the shrine which was named Panhellenium and instituted a series of games in connection with it; and he granted to the Athenians large sums of money, an annual dole of grain and the whole of Cephallenia (*Dio, Roman History, VIII, 69,16*).

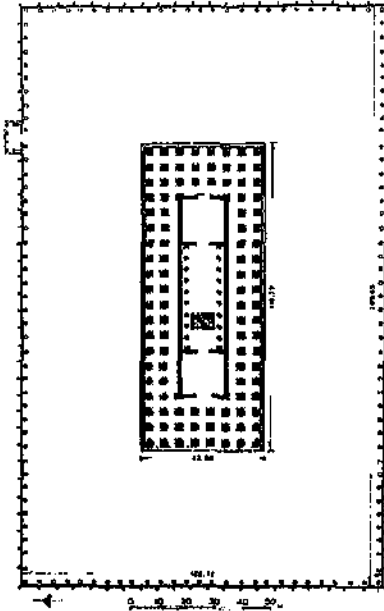


Figure 13. The Olympieion, Athens (Abramson, plate 1)

11. See Barattolo (1978, 400; 1973, Fig. 1) for the most up-to-date measurements; I have not been able to obtain Munoz (1935) who deals with the subject extensively.

The scale and quality of Hadrian's gifts to Athens especially in architectural benefactions are no mere coincidence or personal aberration. They reflect a deliberate policy to impart Athens with a befitting image as the projected center of the Panhellenion, that was officially inaugurated by Hadrian in 131/2 AD. This was a political as well as cultural institution whereby Hadrian foresaw the realization of a unified empire. In the words of Spawforth and Walker (1985, 79), with the inclusion of the provinces of Achaia, Macedonia, Thrace, Crete-and-Cyrene and Asia in the league 'for the first time in the Roman East, a permanent territorial entity larger than a single province had been created'. In connection with the league, the imperial cult which involved the worship of the emperor, also promoted the unity of the Greek people in the empire. The impressive list of statue bases of Hadrian in the Greek world and the incidence of ninety-four altars to Hadrian in Athens alone constitute weighty testimony to the worship of Hadrian in Athens (Benjamin, 57, 83-86). After the formulation of the league and the dedication of the Olympieion (the Temple of Zeus Olympios) that was finally completed by Hadrian, the vision of unity was prefigured when cities from all over the East dedicated statues of Hadrian Olympos at the Olympieion. Pausanias (1.18.6) also tells us that there were bronze statues of the cities in front of the columns of the Olympian Zeus, clearly indicating Hadrian's political intentions concerning the importance of Athens.

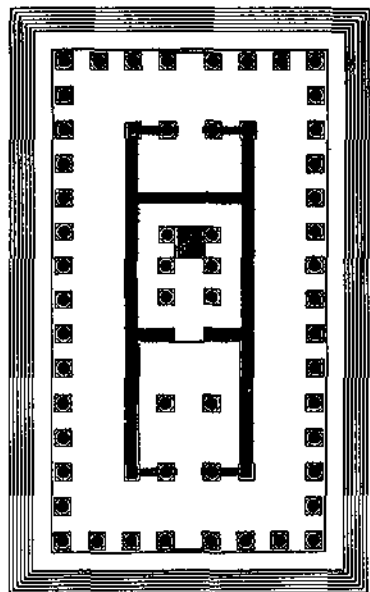


Figure 14. Temple of Artemis Leukophyrene at Magnesia on the Maeander (Human, figure 30)

As for the influence of monuments in Greek lands upon the conception of the design of the Temple of Venus and Roma, the first monument that comes to mind is naturally the Olympieion in Athens. Although Brown states categorically that the Temple of Venus and Roma was designed as the counterpart of the Olympieion at Athens, of the same length, though with added width there is not much else that is formally similar (Brown, 1964, 56) [Figure 13]. On the other hand, if we consider first the proportions, second, the *pseudodipteral* plan and third, the double *cella*, a more direct relevance with Greek monuments may be discerned. The proportions of the temple are based on a double square whereby the *cella* and *opisthodomos* relationship corresponds to 2:1 [11]. This is a repetition of the proportional principle employed by Hermogenes of Alabanda in his Temple of Artemis Leukophyrene at Magnesia on the Maeander [Figure 14]. In support of the temple at Magnesia as a veritable influence on Hadrian and the possibility of his observation of Hermogenean principles at first hand may be cited Hadrian's sojourn in nearby Ephesus to the north during the winter of 123 AD, as well as a probable visit to Magnesia between March and June of 129 AD during the emperor's second visit to Asia Minor (Barattolo, 1978, 401).

12. See plans of the Hellenistic and early imperial pseudodipteroi in Asia Minor reduced to the same scale in (Howe, 61).

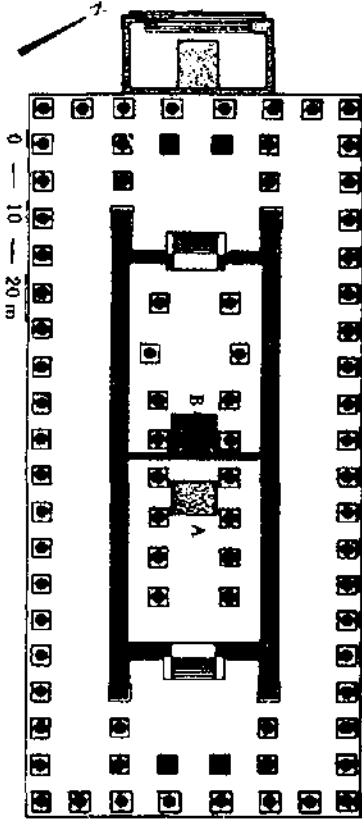


Figure 15. The Temple of Artemis at Sardis (Gruben, 156)

13. Although the date of the conversion is controversial, some scholars believe the temple was divided as early as 200 B.C. to make room for Zeus Polieus while others attribute the change to the imperial cult in connection with the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138-161).



Figure 16. Obverse of Hadrianic coin (Dal Maso, 3)

14. For a list of the imperial temples and shrines in Asia Minor see Price, 1984, 249-274; see also Vermeule (1959, 29 ff) for the goddess Roma in the numismatic art of the Roman empire.

The *pseudodipteral* plan was by no means a rarity and is well-attested in the Greek East as well as in Italy. Apart from the Temple of Artemis at Magnesia, the Temple of Apollo Smintheus at Chryse, the Temple of Aphrodite and Messa at Lesbos, the Temple of Apollo Isotimos at Alabanda, the Hekateion at Lagina, the Vespasianic-Domitianic temple at Ephesus, the Temple of Augustus and Roma at Ankyra, the Temple of Zeus at Aizanoi, the Temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias and the early Imperial temple at Sardis all conform to the *pseudodipteral* type of plan [12].

The third but most important feature that may point to a Greek derivation, namely the double dedication of a temple, also appears in Greece prior to the dedication of the Temple of Venus and Roma. At least four such temples are described by Pausanias. According to his account there were joint dedications to the Carnean Apollo and Ypnos (Sleep) in the Temple of Aesculapius at Sicyon (Pausanias, II.X.2); to Ares and Aphrodite in a double sanctuary on the road from Argos to Mantinea (Pausanias, II.XXV.1); to Ilithya and Sosipolis respectively in the front and back of a temple at Olympia (Pausanias, VI.XX.2-6); and to Aesculapius and Latona in a partitioned temple at Mantinea (Pausanias, VIII.IX.1). Hadrian's three visits to Athens and their juxtaposition with the testimony of Pausanias on these non-extant buildings suggest the possibility of influence (Geagan, 1979, 392, 394, 397; Barattolo, 1978, 402). Hadrian's arrival in Athens in the September of AD 124 and his excursion to Megara and Argos in December, then his grand tour of the Peloponnesus including Mantinea and Olympia would have provided the architecturally inclined emperor with ample opportunity to observe Greek precedents. Whether the temples were specifically designed to accommodate double dedications or whether they underwent transformation to include a shared dedication or had a single cella for two deities is irrelevant here. What is important is the ready prototype. As far as Asia Minor is concerned, Barattolo (1978, 404) rules out the possibility of a second dedication to Zeus of the Temple of Athena Polias Nikephoros at Pergamon. Other examples that come to mind include the divisions of the cella of the Temple of Artemis at Sardis [Figure 15] and the single cella with double dedication of the Temple of Roma and Augustus in Ankyra that was associated with the imperial cult [13].

ROLE OF ROMAN TRADITION IN THE DESIGN OF THE TEMPLE OF VENUS AND ROMA

Hadrian, as far as we can tell from the meagre evidence on his traits of character was certainly not a person of weak temperament. Even in seemingly trivial issues he was aware of the value of change. Hence, as pointed out by Thornton (1975, 445) by becoming the first emperor to wear a beard [Figure 16] he popularly sought to promote his image as a harbinger of new policies to come. However, Hadrian was equally keen to propagate his image also as a traditional emperor, since to win the trust and cooperation of the senate was a *causa sine qua non* for an auspicious reign.

In this regard, what was new about the cult of Venus and Roma was the inauguration of the worship of Roma in Rome itself. In fact, the Temple of Venus and Roma was the first temple of Roma in the capital of the Romans (Kienast, 400). In the provinces of the Empire the worship of Roma had been an important component in the articulation of the ideology of the imperial cult [14]. This somewhat anthropomorphic idea of incorporating the emperor was not alien to the Greek religious tradition. In Rome however, it may be argued that the introduction of the new cult inevitably needed a new temple.

One of Hadrian's primary concerns was to create a framework of legitimacy for the radical changes that he introduced. In other words, while being the progressive innovator, he also needed to maintain a popular front as the staunch guardian of Roman tradition.

Hadrian compellingly sought to affirm the latter stand by his emulation of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. It was Augustus who established the *Pax Romana* and the greatness of Rome. Hadrian would follow along the same lines. Hadrian's policy to foster links with the Augustan age is reflected particularly well in his 'restoration' of the Pantheon which had been begun by Agrippa under Augustus. Although the plan and scale of the new Pantheon had no physical similarity to its rectangular version under Augustus, Hadrian acknowledged the name of Agrippa on the simple inscription on the *epistyle* of the porch to the Pantheon as the maker, rather than his own.

In the Temple of Venus and Roma however, the ideological link is more apparent. As the ancestress of the Julian line, Venus was the principal goddess of Augustus and had a pedigree which could be traced all the way to the founding of Rome. Hence Venus was not only familiar to the Roman tradition but appropriate as an ideological convention. Roma was also directly connected with Augustus and the worship of the emperor in the provinces. By establishing the worship of Roma in Rome itself and combining it with that of Venus, Hadrian in fact consciously paved the way for Emperor worship in Rome itself (Thornton, 1975, 445). Such political expediency through confected ancestry was not unheard of. For example, it has been suggested that Philip, for political reasons deliberately emphasized the proximity of his Philippeion at Olympia to the tomb of Pelops as a way to reveal his kinship through Herakles to the local hero Pelops (Miller 1972, 172; Onians, 1988, 21).

Promoting the traditional Roman gods while looking to the Greek East in the choice of design to house these gods was symptomatic of the unifying imperial vision of Hadrian. Just as the Olympieion would serve to unite the Greeks under the Panhellenion, the Temple of Venus and Roma was intended to perpetuate and to consolidate the unity of 'all' the Romans in the entirety of the Roman world under the official imperial ideology.

As an epilogue, it may be confidently put forward that the contemporary ultra-modern architecture which was the concomitant outcome of the Roman architectural revolution had been deliberately eschewed in the design of the Temple of Venus and Roma. No sinuous bending forms pulsed behind the subdued refinement of the columnar exterior. Scalewise too, the temple boasted the exuberant dimensions of the sixth century B.C. temples of Ionia [15]. None the less, it would be a myopic focus not to realize that the temple embodied neither an old-fashioned denial of the present nor a sterile academic revival of the past. Rather, it assertively represented a tribute to the genesis, continuity and universality of Roman power by exalting the stable conventions of Greek classicism that was to endure for centuries.

15. In fact, the temple took eighteen years to build, and was completed after Hadrian's death.

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VENÜS VE ROMA TAPINAĞI: İMPARATORLUKTA BİRLİĞE DOĞRU

ÖZET

Roma başkentinin gösterişli yapılarından birisi olan ve Colosseum'un az ötesinde yükselen ünlü Venüs ve Roma tapınağının, gözünü budaktan sakınmayan Şam kökenli saray mimarı Apollodorus'un yaşamına malolduğu antik kaynaklarda anlatılır (Dio Cassius, *Roma Tarihi*, 69.4). Öyküye bakılırsa, Apollodorus, tapınağın tasarımında gözden kaçan birtakım teknik beceriksizlikleri açıksözlülükle dile getirdiği için mimari yeteneklerinde iddialı olan İmparator Hadrian'ın hoşlarına uğramıştı. Dedikodu kokan bu antik çağ öyküsüne adı karışan tapınağın Hadrian döneminde inşa edildiği ve dördüncü yüzyılda yeniden elden geçerek son halini aldığı arkeolojik saptamalarla kesinlik kazanmıştır (Barattolo, 1973, 1978). Bu verilere göre, tapınağın şimdi de ayakta kalan cesur kavisli, birbirine arkasını vermiş apsilerden oluşan ikiz sellaları Maxentius dönemindeki restorasyonun sonucudur. Yakın bir zamana kadar, bu restorasyonun Hadrian dönemindeki inşaatın özgün formunu tekrarladığı düşünülmekte idiye de, tuğla damgalarının kronolojik analizi, kesinlikle köşeli sellaların varlığını doğrulamaktadır. Bundan başka, Venüs ve Roma tapınağında çağdaş Roma mimarlığının başlıca özelliklerinden birisi olan vurgulu ön cephe anlayışına da uyulmamış, Yunan tapınaklarının dört yanı basamaklı peristil düzeni uygulanmıştır.

Ancak, Hadrian zamanında sarayın hazinesinden destek gören inşaatların sayıca artışının gözlenmesi yanında, Roma mimari evriminin gerek yapısal, gerekse mekansal tasarımda en yetkin aşamasına ulaştığı ve geleneksel Yunan öğeleriyle bir sentez oluşturduğu bilinmektedir. Özgün Roma tasarım dilinin artık özel mimarinin sınırlı kapsamından çıkıp anıtsal kamu yapılarında da boy göstermeye başladığı bu ortamda, Venüs ve Roma tapınağının nostaljiye kaçan, hatta gerici denebilecek ölçüde tutuculuğu göze batmakta ve bir soru olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Yenilikçi formlarını geleneksel cepheler ardında gizlemiş de olsalar, Augustus Forum'u ve Pantheon gibi birçok önemli yapı, resmi ve dinsel kimliklerine karşın Roma mimari devriminin kilometre taşları olmaktan geri kalmamışlardır. Bu durumda, Venüs ve Roma tapınağında yalnızca dinsel mimarinin sınırlayıcı etkisinin sözkonusu olamayacağı açıktır. Hadrian'ın çok

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yönlü ve renkli kişiliği yanında, bağınazlıktan uzak bir yönetici özelliğini sergilemeye önem vermesi ve o sıralarda Roma başkenti ile çevre merkezlerindeki inşaat furyası, tapınağın tasarımındaki seçimin bir rastlantıdan çok, bilinçli bir propaganda hesabına yönelik, politik bir manevra olduğunu düşündürmektedir. Bu varsayımın birinci nedenini Hadrian'ın doğu kültürüne olan duyarlılığı, ikincisini ise İtalya'nın iç dinamiği ile temellendirmek olanaklı görünüyor.

Roma başkentinin de artık ana merkez olma ayrıcalığını paylaşmaya başladığı bir zamanda, İspanya kökenli ve yöneticiliğinin yirmibir yılından onbirini İtalya dışında geçirmiş bulunan İmparator Hadrian, Yunanistan, Anadolu ve Mısır'daki yerel mimariyi iyi tanımakla kalmamakta, oralardaki tebasına, özellikle Atina halkına seçkin bir ilgi göstermektedir. İtalya'da ise, Roma ve Venüs tanrıçalarına ortak tapınma yolunu açmak kıvrak bir zeka ürünüdür: Venüs, ilk Roma İmparatoru Augustus'un Roma kentinin kuruluşuna dek inen soyunu temsil ederken, Roma'ya doğu eyaletlerinde imparatorluk adına tapınılmaktadır. Bu iki tanrıçayı aynı çatı altına almakla, Hadrian Roma'da da imparatora tapınma yolunu açmış olmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Venüs ve Roma tapınağının, Roma imparatorluğunun doğudaki ve batıdaki tüm halklarının birliğini simgeleyen amaçsal bir kimliği yüklenmesinin öngörüldüğü söylenebilir. İmparatorluğun idari merkezinde mimari biçimlenmesi doğuyu çağrıştıran bu yapı, aynı zamanda dinsel ve sivil ideolojiyi birleştirmek yolu ile çığır açan ve Roma'da Tanrıça Roma'ya ithaf edilen ilk tapınak olacaktır. Roma gücünün sürekliliğini ve evrenselliğini simgelemeyi amaçlayan tapınak, bunu çağdaş mimarinin dilinden çok Yunan klasisminin kanıtlanmış saygınlığı ile gerçekleştiriyor.