

Trevor MAHY Reading Caesar Back In: The Temple of Mars Ultor and the Forum of Augustus

In this paper, I offer an alternative approach to understanding the Temple of Mars Ultor and the Forum of Augustus complex by returning to consider it from its very beginning, that is to say, its alleged origin in a vow made by Caesar Octavianus on the eve of battle against Caesar's assassins at Philippi in 42 BCE. My purpose in doing so is to add to our modern understanding of this building complex by restoring to it a key element of its very essence. In other words, to read Caesar back in where he has, quite literally, been written out.

The traditional view has been that Augustus sought to downplay and to distance himself from his earlier involvement in the civil wars (44 – 30 BCE), something which necessitated that Caesar recede into the background. Given that the Temple of Mars Ultor and the Forum of Augustus were not dedicated until relatively late in Augustus' reign (2 BCE), and that this building complex was the most significant of Augustus' vast building program in Rome, it has naturally come to be seen as the embodiment of Augustan golden age ideology (e.g. Zanker 1988). The result is that Mars Ultor has, in our understanding, become almost exclusively associated with the negotiated return of the standards from the Parthians (20 BCE), a vengeance on behalf of the entire Roman people that better suits this traditional understanding of Augustan ideology (e.g. Weinstock 1971; Herbert-Brown 1994; Rich 1998). The aim of my paper, on the other hand, is to demonstrate that this was not solely how this building complex was perceived in antiquity, and that, therefore, we need to arrive at a more encompassing understanding to take this into account.

Although there are, as befits a building complex of this significance, numerous references to it in the ancient sources, there are a few in particular that cannot be properly explained by the traditional approach. These are the focus of my examination in this paper, and the key pieces of evidence in my argument for an alternative approach. Foremost is the entry in Ovid's *Fasti* for 12 May (*Fast.* 5.545-598), a passage specifically about the god Mars Ultor, his temple, the Forum of Augustus, and the *ludi Martiales*. Central to this passage is the clear identification of the god Mars Ultor with the avenging of Caesar, and of the building of his temple with Caesar Octavianus' vow at Philippi. Significantly, this is also the version given by Suetonius (*Aug.* 29.2). The evidence for the continuance of this identification of Mars Ultor as a personal avenger is supplied by an incident described by both Suetonius (*Calig.* 24.3) and Dio (59.22.6-7), in which the emperor Caligula dedicated three swords to Mars Ultor for thwarting a conspiracy. However, in the same passage from the *Fasti*, Ovid also describes Mars Ultor's second act of vengeance, namely the return of the standards from the Parthians. In my conclusion, therefore, I propose a more encompassing approach to this building complex, namely that these two identities of Mars Ultor, that of the personal avenger of the leader of Rome, and that of the Roman people as a whole, must be seen as fused, and in much the same way as that of the person of the *princeps* became fused with Rome itself.