

Revisiting, Reviving, and Reconstructing the Severan Septizodium: Solving the Severan Monument's Function and Format

When considering Severan architecture, scholars most often turn to the Severan Arch in the Forum Romanum and the Baths of Caracalla for extensive study; however, the Septizodium is the only Severan monument fully attributed to the first Severan, Septimius Severus. The function and overall structure of the Septizodium is highly disputed, and because almost nothing discernable remains of the monument, scholarship is sparse. Lusnia (2004) and Thomas (2007) have conducted the most recent studies. They challenge reconstructions commonly accepted from the 19th century (Dombart 1922, Hülsen 1886), but new theories for the monument's function and format are not ventured. Fortunately, many sketches of the remains of the monument were done in the 16th century placing it clearly next to the Palatine. Richardson (1992) asserts that what is visible in these drawings is likely somewhat less than 1/3 of the original structure. An unimpressive portion of its foundation currently remains. The magnitude of different marbles found during excavations indicates an extremely lavish and wealthy monument that certainly would have been of greater importance for Severan Rome than scholarship has attributed (Lusnia 2004). However, its function on the Via Appia, in the palatial district, in Rome, and the Empire at large is not clear.

Therefore, this paper will revisit the many assertions scholars have made concerning the Septizodium. I will propose new theories regarding why Septimius Severus chose the Via Appia and the southeastern corner of the Palatine as the location for this seemingly strange monument. I will examine how the Septizodium works via programs and sightlines along the Via Appia, while comparing it to Augustan and Hadrianic visual narratives along the Via Flaminia. After examining the location for this structure, I will focus on the architecture of the monument in order to explain its function. Some have questioned that the monument was a magnificent

nymphaeum, arguing that ancient plumbing in the area does not support this theory (Iacopi 1993). I will explain how the nymphaeum of Nero's Domus Transitoria and theories about water effects in the Domus Flavia support the assertion that the Septizodium is a water spectacle linked to the Imperial Palace. In conjunction with Thomas (2007), I will challenge speculations that the monument was never completed, and I will provide a new physical reconstruction of the Septizodium making it larger than previous models (Gorrie 2001). I will argue the structure was a seven-bayed nymphaeum that completed the Severan architectural narrative in Rome. As part of the Severan program, it was intended to compliment, parallel, and interact with the prior Augustan architectural narrative (Cooley 2007). Ultimately, the Septizodium was meant to stand as a monument to the Antonine and Severan dynasties, commemorate Septimius' North African heritage (Ward-Perkins 1976), and to celebrate his Parthian victories. I will conclude that the 'Kaisersaal' movement in architecture of the Roman East and North Africa directly influenced the format and function of the Septizodium (Longfellow 2011, Mitchell 1985, Yegül 1982).

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