The site of the Varian Temple of Elagabal in Rome: a topographical and astronomical approach to the question

Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado and Raúl de la Fuente Marcos

I. The state of the question.

Baetyl of Elagabal in Emesene Temple [1]

Baetyl of Elagabal drawn by quadriga [2]

Ancient historians refer to a temple in Rome, dedicated to the Syrian sun god Elagabal, by his high priest, the Roman emperor here called Varius.[3] Among these historians are Cassius Dio Cocceianus (henceforth Dio),[4] Herodian,[5] and the author(s) of the ***Historia Augusta***.[6] On the basis of their texts, it has been thought that Varius either built a new temple, or rededicated an existing one, expropriated from some other deity, in order to house his god's principal cult object: a large black meteorite, or *baetyl*, which Varius brought from its temple at Emesa, in Syria, to Rome.[7]

Indeed, Herodian distinguishes between two such Roman temples, one

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[1] Coin of Marcus Aurelius, Syrian mint, Donaldson, ***Architectura Numismatica***, 1859, table 19.

[2] Coin of Varius, ***BNF*** Elagabale 1219.

[3] Otherwise commonly, but erroneously, called Elagabalus or Heliogabalus, after the name of his god. The question of this emperor's proper nomenclature is addressed in Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, ***Existence, Identity, Nomenclature: a basis for Studia Variana***, *Tsukuba University Area Studies* 22 & 23, 2004.

[4] ***Dio*** 80.11.

[5] ***Herodian*** 5.5.8.

[6] ***HA / AH*** 1.6; 3.4.

[7] See Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, ***Iter Principis: Elagabal's journey from Syria to Rome?***, *Tsukuba University Area Studies* 21, 2003.

urban, the other suburban, and describes the ceremonial passage between them of the baetyl, on a cart drawn by six horses.[8] Herodian's suburban temple of Elagabal in Rome has conjecturally been located somewhere in the Ultraesquiline complex formed by the *Circus Varianus, Palatium Sessorium, and Amphitheatrum Castrense*, near the church of *Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*.[9] Alternatively, it has hypothetically been placed at the Transtiberine archaeological site known as the Syrian Temple of the *Vigna Bonelli*, in *Via Dandolo*. The latter site, unlike the former, yields considerable artefactual evidence, dating back before Varius, to the reigns of Caracalla and Septimius Severus, of the worship there of Elagabal. [10] It is, however, not this suburban, but rather an urban temple, built or adapted, according to our sources, by Varius, which concerns us here.

Neither Dio nor Herodian situates Varius' urban temple of Elagabal at any particular location in Rome. The ***Vita Heliogabali*** in the ***Historia Augusta***, however, states (in modern printed editions) that Varius *templum Romae in eo loco constitutit in quo prius aedes Orci fuit*: "founded a temple for his god on the site of an earlier shrine of Orcus." [11] It subsequently places this temple *in Palatino monte iuxta aedes imperatorias*: "on the Palatine hill next to the imperial palace." [12]

It may be noted that, in accordance with the epistemological and methodological assumptions underlying ***Studia Variana***, the group of studies to which this belongs, no proposition of fact, referring to a presumed extratextual reality, may here be made on the basis of allegations found in ancient historiography alone. Thus, unless artefactual evidence of this temple is found, whether in the form of coins or inscriptions depicting or referring to it as such, or in that of an archaeological site with ruins identified as such by artefacts found in situ, its very existence, as well as its location, must be classed as an hypothesis, rather than a fact. This hypothetical urban temple, therefore, as distinct from the actual pre-Varian suburban temple in Trastevere, is henceforth referred to here as the Varian Temple of Elagabal in Rome (VTER).

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[8] ***Herodian*** 5.6.6–7. Though he cites six horses, coins only show four, constituting a quadriga.

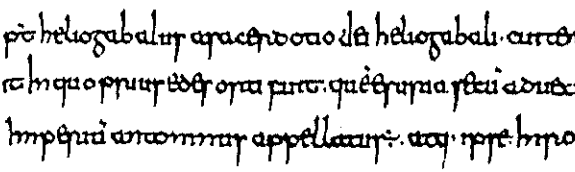
[9] Leoni, Laura, ***Il Culto del Sol Invictus Elagabal a Roma (218–222). Le ragioni di un fallimento.*** Tesi di Laurea, Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza," Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Anno Accademico 1999–2000, p. 29–32.

[10] Chausson, François, ***Vel Iovi Vel Soli, Quatre Études autour de la Vigna Barberini (191–354)***, MEFRA, 107–2, 1995, p. 661–765, esp. p. 662–718, ***I.Aedes Beli.***

[11] ***HA / AH*** 1.6.

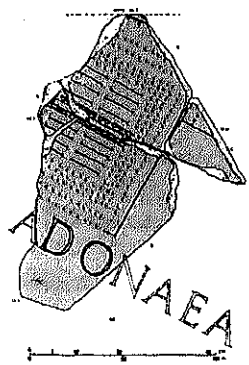
[12] ***HA / AH*** 3.4.

From the early Renaissance onward, its existence assumed, on the basis of the cited passages from ancient historiography, the location of the VTER constitutes a subject, first of antiquarian, then of scholarly conjecture. Conducted on that basis alone, it leads, for several centuries, to no consensual conclusion. This may be because, although much ingenuity is spent speculating on the possible location of the ***Historia Augusta's*** *"aedes Orci,"* there is no independent record, historiographical or archaeological, of any such place. This absence leads, eventually, to the suspicion that this *"aedes Orci"* may be a mistranscription or misreading, thence to re-examination of the manuscript tradition, and finally to the proposition of hypotheses, substituting for it *(a)edes orti, aedes Hortae, Adonaea hortus, and Adonidis or Adonaea(e) (h) orti.*



The Bamberg manuscript of ***Historia Augusta, Antoninus Heliogabalus (HA/AH) 3.4.*** [13]

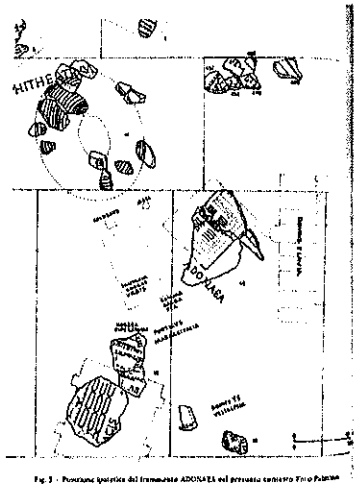
These last three hypotheses, supposing the passage in question to refer to a putative temple of Adonis, are related by some scholars to a fragment of the *Forma Urbis Severiana (FUR)*, a Severan marble map of Rome, which bears a possible reading of *[A]do[naea]*, and seems to depict some sort of garden.



The ADONAEA fragment of FUR [14]

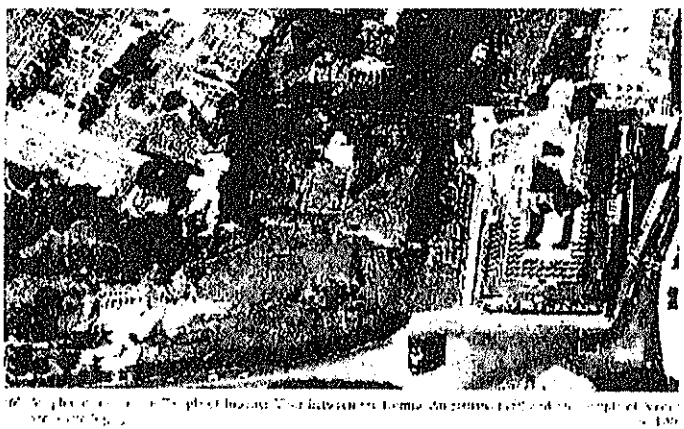
[13] Coarelli, F., ***(Porticus) Adonaea, Aedes Heliogabali, Aedes Iovis Ultoris. La Tomba di Antinoo?*** MEFRA, 98-1, 1986, p.230-253, esp. p. 243-5 text & n. 84.

[14] Rodriguez Almeida, E., ***Forma Urbis Marmorea, Aggiornamento Generale*** 1980, 1981, p. 48 -53 & tav. xxxv.46 Adonaea.



Hypothetical position of the ADONAEA fragment in the presumed context of Forum and Palatine[15]

This, in turn, through an hypothesis relating that fragment of the *FUR* to a site on the Palatine, leads to the hypothesis that the site of the VTER may have been that now known as the *Vigna Barberini*.[16]



The Vigna Barberini ("Temple of Iuppiter Ultor," centre)[17]

[15] Rodriguez Almeida, E., ***Forma Urbis Marmorea, Nuovi elementi di analisi e nuove ipotesi di lavoro,*** *MEFRA,* 89, 1977–1, p. 219–256, esp. p. 229–233.

[16] Nibby, Antonio, ***Roma nell'anno 1838,*** Roma, 1839, Parte II, ***Antica, Palatino,*** p. 446–456.

A different line of enquiry, based on numismatic investigation, begins with the publication, by Froehner, in 1890, of this drawing of a coin of Varius. Froehner believes that its reverse depicts the Palatine temple of Elagabal, which he equates, erroneously, with that of Jupiter Capitolinus.[18]

Varius

Severus Alexander

A further step in this line of enquiry may be taken by comparing the reverse of this coin with that of one of Varius' successors, Severus Alexander. It is reproduced here alongside a photograph of a plaster cast of that of Varius, as it is in the plate of illustrations to an article published by Studniczka in 1901.[19] The coin of Severus Alexander depicts a temple of Jupiter, so designated in the faint reverse legend with an epiclesis that may read "Ultor" or "Victor". In the text of his article, Studniczka alludes to a comparison between the two coins, and attributes its performance to Froehner, who has supposedly, in effecting it, thereby rectified his own previous error. Studniczka, however, fails to cite any source where a record of that alleged compari-

[17] Nash, Ernest, ***Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome,*** 1968, Vol.1, p.537-541: ***Iuppiter Ultor.***

[18] *Froehner,* W., ***Variétés Numismatiques,*** IV, *Annuaire de la Société Française de Numismatique,* XIV, 1890, p. 469-71.

[19] Studniczka, F., ***Ein Pfeilercapitell auf dem Forum,*** in *Mitteilungen des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Roemische Abteilung,* 16, 1901, p. 273-282, & Plate XII.

son may be found. Nor does he perform the comparison himself, or argue in support of its conclusion, which he merely reports: that the structure depicted on the coin of Severus Alexander is the same as that depicted on the coin of Varius. Were this to be so, it would mean that Severus Alexander, who is alleged to have sent the baetyl back to Syria,[20] may have rededicated the Palatine temple of Elagabal to Jupiter Ultor or Victor, perhaps thereby returning it to its original dedicatee.

Considering, in another study in this series, Studniczka's contribution to this discussion, I perform the comparison attributed by him to Froehner, between the coin of Varius and that of Severus Alexander. There, I suggest it is likely that these two coins do indeed, despite certain differences of detail, depict, from different angles, the same temple.[21]

FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

Two coins of Severus Alexander compared by Bigot

[20] ***Dio*** 80.21.2.

[21] Arrizabalaga y Prado, Leonardo de, ***Anaglyptica Variana: Column capitals with sculptural reliefs and associated fragments, related to the cult of Elagabal,*** *Tskukuba University Studies in Language and Literature*, 43, 2003, p. 174–182.

Bigot, in 1911, develops a thesis with a similar conclusion, but based on quite different evidential grounds, comparing the coin of Severus Alexander shown by Studniczka with another of that same emperor's. The latter coin depicts, close up, and inequivocally labelled, a statue of Jupiter Ultor, seated, in profile. Bigot finds this deity identical with that depicted frontally, and more distantly, on the former coin. He then goes on to propose, on the basis of a perceived similarity between the propylaeum depicted on the former coin, and the remains of the monumental entrance to the *Vigna Barberini*, then thought to correspond to a structure called *Pentapylum*, that the VTER was located there.[22]

670 The remains of the Pentapylum on the Via di S. Bonaventura. Poc 393

Ruins of the monumental entrance to the Vigna Barberini [23]

Subsequent discussion of the question of the site of this temple has frequently revolved around Bigot's thesis, equating the VTER with that of Jupiter Ultor. Such discussion has, however, been vitiated by an error, transmitted undetected from one scholar to another: the mistaken belief that Bigot's thesis is based on comparing the same two coins as those cited by

[22] Bigot, P., ***Le Temple de Jupiter Ultor et la Vigna Barberini,*** *Bulletino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma,* 39, 1911.
[23] Nash, E., ***PDAR, Iuppiter Ultor.***

Studniczka, one of Varius, another of Severus Alexander.[24] In fact Bigot does not cite any coin of Varius, but rather compares two coins of Severus Alexander. It is difficult to understand how this error arises, since Bigot's article opens with the words: "*La médaille ci-dessous* (fig. 1) *est d'Alexandre Sévère,*" and his reference to the second (fig. 2) is followed by the words: "*Elle est aussi d'Alexandre Sévère.*" Bigot does not, therefore, compare two different images, on coins from two different reigns, of what may be the same temple, but rather two different images, both on coins of a single reign, of what may be the same deity, seen at different distances, from different angles. One coin shows the outside of the relevant temple, with a distant deity face on. The other shows a deity close up, in profile, presumably enthroned inside.

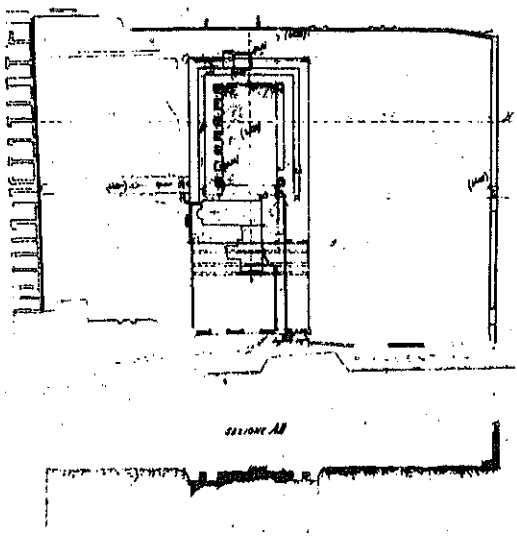


Fig. 9 – Plan des fouilles Bartoli et du temple découvert sur la terrasse de la «vigna Barberini». S.d., archives de la Surintendance archéologique (cl. EFR, *VB*, 184).

Bartoli's plan of the temple revealed by his excavations [25]

[24] Castagnoli, F., ***Su alcuni problemi topografici del Palatino,*** Atti *della (Reale) Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rendiconti, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche,* 34, 1979, 331 ss; Coarelli, F., ***La tombe d'Antinoüs à Rome,*** *MEFRA,* 98, 1986, p. 230–253; Chausson, François, Vel Iovi ***Vel Soli, Quatre Études autour de la Vigna Barberini (191–354),*** *MEFRA,* 107–2, 1995, p. 661–765, esp. p. 718–743, ***Jupiter Ultor***; Cecamore, C., ***"Faustinae aedemque decernerent" (SHA, Marcus, 26), les fragments 69–70 de la "Forma Urbis" et la première dédicace du temple de la Vigna Barberini,*** *MEFRA,* 111–1, 1999, p. 311–349.

[25] Royo, Manuel, ***Topographie ancienne et fouilles sur la Vigna Barberini (XIXe siècle-début XXe siècle),*** MEFRA, 98–2, 1986, p. 706–766.

From 1930 onward, the *Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma* initiates excavation of the *Vigna Barberini* under the direction of Alfonso Bartoli. He quickly discovers the base of a temple in the middle of the site, but finds nothing clearly to link it with any particular deity. Excavation proceeds sporadically, with no major new finds, until in 1985 the *Soprintendenza* entrusts an excavation in greater depth and scope to *L'École Française de Rome*. This is conducted until 1999, and its preliminary findings are shown in an exhibition at the *Museo delle Terme* in 2000–2001, entitled ***Il Giardino dei Cesari.***[26] The most important of these findings is that of the site's stratigraphy, now revealed for the first time. This shows that the *Vigna Barberini* is an artificial platform, built on the rubble of earlier hillside structures, dating from prehistoric times to the Julio-Claudian period. The platform, with more or less its present shape, is of Flavian date, and at that time contained a portico surrounding a central garden. On this level, there are traces of Hadrianic and Antonine structures or remodellings. On top of these, a Severan level corresponds to that of the base of the temple found by Bartoli. That temple's foundations are very solid and go very deep. Because of their extreme hardness they have not been excavated.

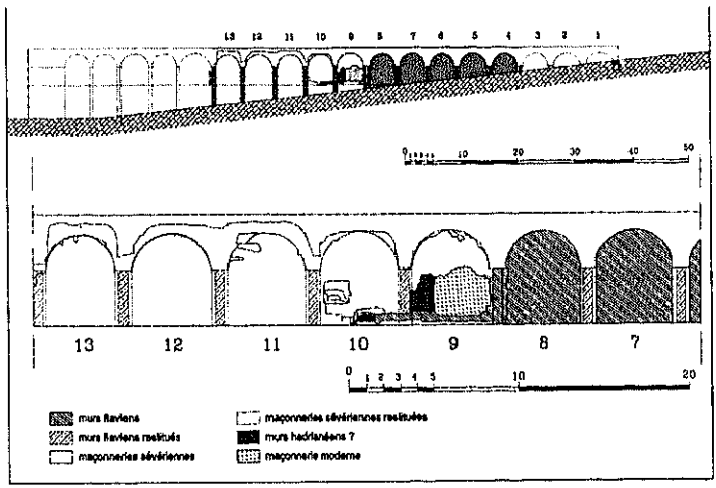


Fig. 4 – Rome. Palatin. Dessin en coupe des soutènements occidentaux de la terrasse de la Vigna Barberini en détail mettant en évidence les restes de différentes périodes de construction, principalement flavienne et sévérienne (dessin Patrizia Veltri).

Section showing the stratigraphy of part of the Vigna Barberini[27]

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[26] ***Il Giardino dei Cesari, Dai palazzi antichi alla Vigna Barberini sul Monte Palatino,*** Villedieu, F. (ed.), ***Guida alla Mostra,*** 2001.

[27] Villedieu, Françoise, & Veltri, Patrizia, ***Les Soutènements Nord-ouest et Nord de la Terrasse de la Vigna Barberini (Palatin),*** *MEFRA,* **111,** 1999-2, p. 749-778.

II. A Topographical approach to the question.

Despite all these important findings, no artefactual link to any particular deity has so far been established. Even so, current archaeological opinion identifies the Severan temple of the *Vigna Barberini* with the VTER. [28] In the words of Françoise Villedieu, directress of the final phase of the recent excavations, *"c'est un acquis."*[29] Such an affirmation may not, however, in accordance with this study's epistemology and methodology, be echoed here.

I therefore wish now to approach the question of the site of the VTER on the basis of topographical evidence, derived from direct examination of the *Vigna Barberini*, and of its immediate surroundings, with reference to the images of temples depicted on both coins cited by Studniczka. A topographical approach to the question of whether that of Varius and that of Alexander depict the same temple precinct, and of where on the Palatine that precinct may be found, consists of asking, and seeking to answer, the following two questions:

1.) Where, on the Palatine, was there, in the Severan period, a flat space, not otherwise occupied, large enough to accommodate a temple, its surrounding precinct, and their enclosing structure, such as depicted on both these coins?

2.) Where, on the Palatine hill, is there a vantage point from which such a structure, precinct, and temple could have been observed and depicted, at the angles of view implied by each of these coins?

Any attempt to answer the first question leads to the *Vigna Barberini*. No other Palatine site combines its flatness, size, and availability. Its flatness and size are visible and measurable.[30] As for availability, it should be noted that assignations of other structures to this site are conjectural, as is suggested by the wealth of names, often qualified with signs of doubt, with which it is shown on maps.[31] While the site's deep stratigraphy allows for multiple designation, only the topmost, Severan layer is relevant to answering this question.

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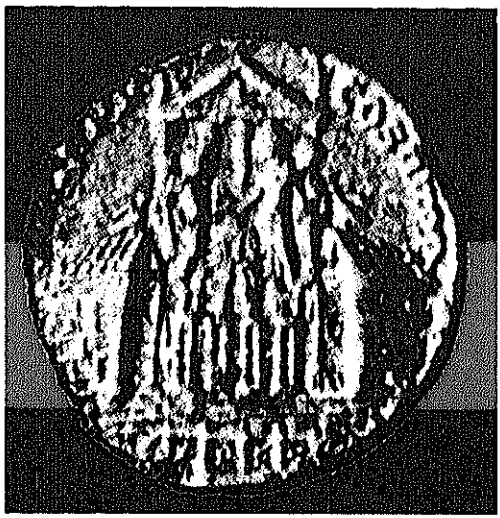
[28] For reference to the current state of archaeological opinion regarding the Vigna Barberini, see the *Bibliographical Appendix* to this article.

[29] Conversation in Rome, January 2003.

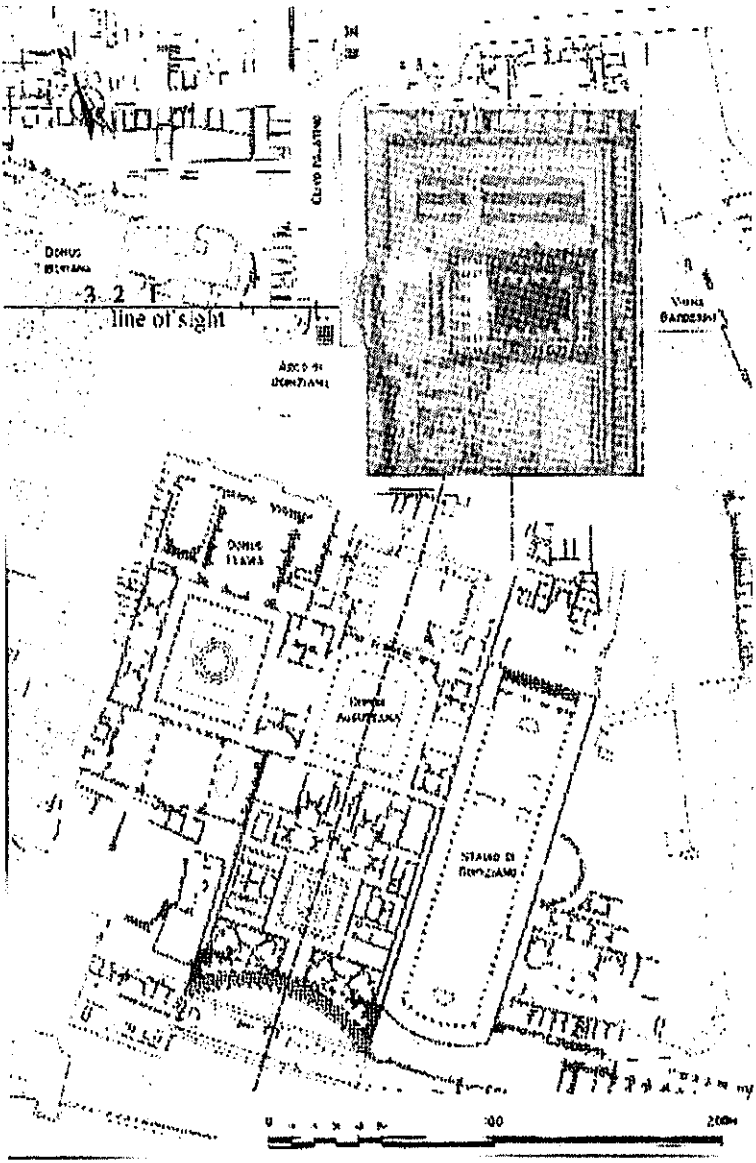
[30] Communication from Françoise Villedieu: "Voici les dimensions que vous me demandez: largeur 113 m, longueur 160 m, et hauteur (conservée) 18 m dans l'angle nord-est de la terrasse."

[31] The map ***Der Palatin*** attached to Otto Richter's ***Topographie der Stadt Rom,*** 1901, designates it, together with the adjacent *Villa Mills* (part of the *Domus Augustana*) as *"Tempel des Apollo."* A single cartographer, Giuseppe Lugli, calls it by at least three different names, on different maps. On Tav.I of ***Monumenti Minori del Foro Romano,*** 1947, it is merely designated as *"Palatium."* On Tav. VIII of ***Roma Antica, Il Centro Monumentale,*** 1946, the entrance (Nr.38) is designated *"Pentapylum Elagabali?"* and the rectangular structure abutting the mediaeval church

As for the second question, if asked with respect to Varius' coin, different parts of its reverse image could have been drawn from different vantage points. To understand this, one must first understand the coin itself. It is divided into three distinct horizontal bands, corresponding to foreground, middle distance, and background. The lowest and narrowest, that corresponding to foreground, depicts a relatively deep space, with what may be steps, leading up to the middle band, which is broader, occupying most of the coin's lower half. This depicts the façade of a tripartite structure, including the columned entrance to a temple precinct, flanked by twin naves with frontal tympana, but lacking columns. These flanking structures' outer walls, and steeply sloping outer roofs, fill out the coin's middle band. Above this, its topmost band occupies most of its upper half. Broad at its base and narrowing along the curve of the rim to the zenith, it corresponds to the background of the sky, into which the temple proper thrusts. Human figures stand before it, presumably inside the temple precinct, implied by the monumental entrance of the middle band.



of *San Sebastiano* in its midst (Nr. 39) is called "*Aedes Caesarum.*" On the map entitled ***Forma Urbis Romae Imperatorum Temporibus, Iosephus Lugli delineavit MCMXXXIX-XVII,*** where it is Nr. 45, it is labelled "*Adonaea, t. Heliogabali.*" Ernest Nash's ***Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome,*** 1968, devotes an entry to it under the name "*Iuppiter Ultor.*" B. Brizzi's undated ***Roma Imperatoris Constantini Aetate CCCVI-CCCXXXVII,*** based on a photograph of the plastic model in the *Museo del Popolo Romano,* designates it under Nr. 74 as "*Templum Caesarum (?).*" The same cartographer, in his equally undated ***Forma Urbis Imperatoris Constantini Aetate CCCVI-CCCXXXVII,*** a flat map, numbers it as 86, and calls it "*Templum Heliogabali,* " reflecting current archaeological opinion.



Map of the Palatine showing the line of sight referred to in this discussion. [32]

[32] Composed from two maps in ***Il Giardino dei Cesari***, scanned and edited by the author.

The first relevant vantage point, in answer to the second question, is that from which the foreground at the bottom of the coin, as well as the façade of the tripartite structure in its middle band, could have been drawn. On the map of the Palatine reproduced here, it is designated as 1. This point, plotted on a line of sight coinciding with an imaginary extension of the longitudinal axis of the temple foundations, corresponds to a spot on the west slope of the *Clivus Palatinus*.

Standing there, an artist facing the *Vigna Barberini* would find his own line of sight across the *Clivus Palatinus* coming to land at a point coinciding with the threshold of the entrance to that site. That threshold corresponds to the line dividing the lower and middle bands of the coin. Now it may be objected that, from this vantage point, it is unlikely that an observer could have seen much of the temple within the precinct, which, on the coin, thrusts up above the middle band. Indeed this is so. The monumental entrance, and the outer walls of the structures to either side of it, would have obstructed his view. But this poses no insurmountable problem for the temple's depiction on the coin.

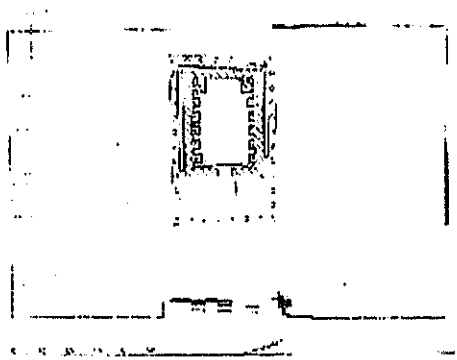
To gain a better view of the temple itself, the artist need only climb, along the original line of sight, to a point somewhat higher up the west slope of the *Clivus Palatinus*, designated on the map as 2. From here he could see the temple and some of its forecourt. The Varian coin combines both this view, and that from point 1, below, each corresponding to different bands of the coin: lower to bottom and middle, higher to upper. Such a combination of two different angles of perspective in a single image is perfectly in keeping with ancient iconographic conventions in depicting distance, as is apparent not only from coins, but from Roman mosaics and wall paintings of this period.

Even so, the view of the temple presumably gained thereby is not exactly that depicted on the coin. For this shows the temple, and a group of figures standing before it, possibly performing a sacrifice, as much larger than they would in fact appear from the second vantage point, all the way across the *Clivus Palatinus*. This reflects the importance of the sacrificial scene. The artist could have shown the performance of a ceremony in the temple forecourt, not as it would have actually appeared from the second vantage point, but rather as it might from much closer up. This would augment the temple's size, and that of the figures standing before it, in accordance with the ritual's greater importance, relative to that of other, merely architectural elements depicted on the coin. Roman iconographic conven-

tions, in particular those governing coins, often grant primacy to their symbolic message, over merely technical considerations such as perspective or proportion.

If the second question is asked about the coin of Severus Alexander, the requisite vantage point is to be found yet further along an extension of that same line of sight, on or above the level of the summit of the west slope of the *Clivus Palatinus*, now a terrace, planted with trees and flower beds, and occupied by a modern structure known as the *aviarium*. This vantage point, designated as 3 on the map, would, in antiquity, have coincided with a structure labelled on the map as *Domus Tiberiana*.

The view across the *Clivus Palatinus*, from the balustrade of the terrace overlaying the foundations of the *Domus Tiberiana*, presents one with the west side of the church of *San Sebastiano* (the building designated with a cross on the plan below). It sits on the base of the *temenos*, or porch of the temple, at a right angle to its longitudinal axis. The church therefore obstructs one's view of the temple's exposed foundations. The wall surrounding the *Vigna Barberini* coincides with, and, in places, incorporates the ancient outer walls of the temple's surrounding structures, including the remains of its monumental entrance. Together with trees, it obstructs one's view of the temple precinct.



Plan of the Vigna Barberini showing the church of San Sebastiano[33]

From a point at the same elevation, but further southwest along the balustrade of that same terrace, one can see into the grounds of the *Vigna Barberini*. In the photograph, the remains of the monumental entrance pro-

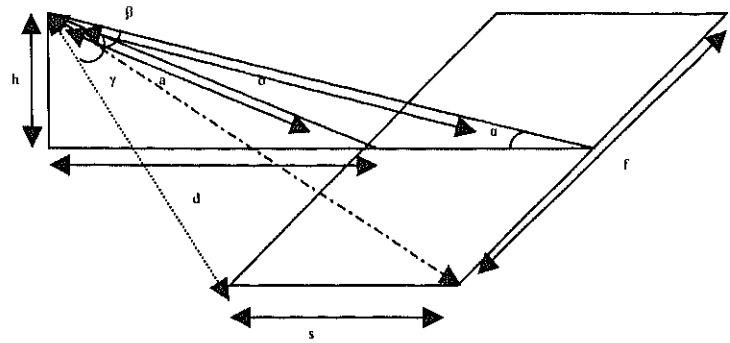
[33] Castagnoli, F., ***Su alcuni problemi topografici del Palatino,*** Atti *della (Reale) Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rendiconti, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche,* 34, 1979, 331 ss.

trude above the rest of the wall, looking almost like a standing sculpture. To their right, through trees, one can just make out the temple precinct.

View across the Clivus Palatinus from point 3: the west side of San Sebastiano

View across the Clivus Palatinus from a point along the terrace balustrade, SW of point 3: the monumental entrance and part of the precinct.

I asked my collaborator in this article, Dr Raúl de la Fuente Marcos, to calculate the angle of view implied by the coin of Severus Alexander. These are his results:



f = south-east wall length (~ 145 m), s = south-west wall length (~ 100 m), d = unknown, it coincides with point 1 in our line of sight diagram

From the figure:

$h^2 + d^2 = a^2$ (I)
$h^2 + (s + d)^2 = b^2$ (II)
$h = (s + d) \tan \alpha$ (III)

On the other hand:

$\tan \gamma / \tan \beta = b / a$ (IV)

from the Severan coin $\tan \beta / \tan \gamma \approx 0.52$ and $\alpha \approx 15.6^\circ$

substituting (IV) into (I) we obtain

$h^2 + d^2 = b^2 \tan^2 \beta / \tan^2 \gamma$ (V)

dividing (V) by (II) we obtain

$h^2 + d^2 = (h^2 + s^2 + d^2 + 2\, s\, d) \tan^2 \beta / \tan^2 \gamma$

substituting (III) into (IV) and after some algebra we obtain a second order equation of the form $a\, x^2 + b\, x + c = 0$ for the unknown d,

$0.79\, d^2 - 42\, d - 2100 = 0$

The solution with physical meaning is $d = 84 \pm 5$ m with $h = 52 \pm 5$ m. The errors have been estimated from the maps analyzed previously. These results are consistent with our previous topographical analysis.

Returning to point 3, it thus becomes clear that in antiquity, before there was any church of *San Sebastiano* to obstruct the view, an artist, looking out from point 3, but from a higher elevation, perhaps from a window, or gazing down from the roof of the *Domus Tiberiana*, could have drawn a bird's eye view of the temple facing him across the *Clivus Palatinus*: one which would closely coincide with that depicted on the coin of Severus Alexander. The slight discrepancies between this putative view and the coin's representation of the temple and its precinct, in terms of the angle of the columns of the portico, and of the size of the temple, relative to that of the portico, are again likely due to the use of multiple angles of view, and to the exercise of artistic license.

Varius

Severus Alexander

So, too, is the difference in the number of columns on the temple depicted by the two relevant coins: six on that of Severus Alexander, apparently five on that of Varius, though most of these cannot be seen. Parting the columns to show an idol inside a temple, as on the coin of Severus Alexander, is a form of artistic license observable on many Roman coins.[34]

In the case of the coin of Varius, the depiction of the columns is determined by the presence, in the foreground before them, of human figures, perhaps performing a sacrifice, obstructing the view of most of the temple façade. The only clearly visible column is placed in the centre, thus creating an architectural anomaly, since the number of columns on a façade is usually even. The reason for allowing this anomaly is clearly that the centre of the pediment is the only spot on the temple façade where a gap between the (far more important) human figures in the foreground leaves room to depict a column.

[34] Including that of Marcus Aurelius from a Syrian mint, showing the baetyl of Elagabal in its Emesene temple, depicted at the outset of this article.

It remains to account for the difference in the respective depictions of the monumental entrance on the coin of Severus Alexander and that of Varius. They seem to differ in the number of columns, or of spaces between them. Before addressing this difference, however, it is advisable first to eliminate consideration of the number five, embodied in the use of the term *pentapylum* to designate this entrance. Such designation has been habitual since Nibby and Lanciani, in the nineteenth century, both assumed that this name, found in fourth century regionaries describing the Palatine, properly applied to the monumental ruins at the entrance to the *Vigna Barberini*. Chausson has since demonstrated that the regionaries' *pentapylum*, probably not a monumental entrance at all, but possibly a series of successive gates along a stairway, is more likely to have been situated on the southwest slope of the Palatine, somewhere between the *Domus Augustana* and the *Domus Tiberiana*.[35]

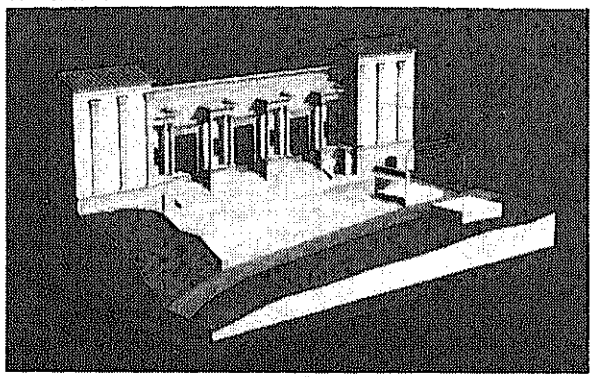


Fig. 84 - Restituzione della porta monumentale del complesso di età severiana (D.T.)

Now it is clear, from the virtual reconstruction here reproduced of the monumental entrance to the precinct of the *Vigna Barberini*, [36] effected on the basis of the excavations recently conducted there by *L'École Française de Rome*, that it had three fairly wide rectangular apertures, flanked or separated by four similar widths of wall, constituting niches, surmounted by pediments, and fronted by pairs of columns. The relevant numbers are thus three (apertures), four (niches), seven (niche or aperture quadrangles) and eight (fronting columns). The difference between the two coins, assuming they represent the same structure, thus becomes clear: the coin of Varius focuses on the four niches, while that of Severus Alexander focuses on the three apertures.

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[35] Chausson, François, ***Vel Iovi Vel Soli, Quatre Études autour de la Vigna Barberini (191-354)***, MEFRA, 107-2, 1995, p. 661-765, esp. p. 743-756, ***Pentapylum.***

[36] From ***Il Giardino dei Cesari,*** cited above.

Direct topographical investigation, in combination with related techniques of interpretation, thus provides an answer to each of the questions asked above, regarding the availability of sites, and the vantage points from which the views, respectively depicted on each of these two coins, may be seen. These answers tend to support the current archaeological opinion that the site of the Varian Temple of Elagabal in Rome was that of the *Vigna Barberini*.

To show how this is so, let me briefly summarise the steps in my argument:

If there was a VTER at all, and it was, as claimed by the ***Historia Augusta***, located on the Palatine, next to the imperial palace (not in itself an implausible assumption, independently of whether it is claimed or not, and by whom), it would have had to be situated on the site of the *Vigna Barberini*, in view of considerations of availability, flatness, and space. (The only other conceivable Palatine site, in terms of flatness and space, that situated next to and northwest of the *Domus Augustana*, atop the cliff facing the *Circus Maximus*, is now fairly certainly assigned to the Palatine Temple of Apollo.) [37]

It is probable that the coin of Varius and that of Alexander depict the same structure, albeit perhaps under different names, on the basis of the marked similarity, despite slight differences, attributable to artistic license, between the structures depicted on each.

It can be shown, by direct topographical examination of the relevant terrain, conducted as explained above, that the differences in angle of depiction between the two coins correspond to differences in elevation and distance along a single line of sight, extending over the contours of the west slope of the *Clivus Palatinus*, all the way up to its summit, the site of the modern *aviarium*, once that of the *Domus Tiberiana*. If drawings of the temple across the *Clivus Palatinus*, in what is now the *Vigna Barberini*, were made from points 1 and 2 along this line of sight, the resulting views would correspond to the two different angles of view perceptible within the coin of Varius. A drawing made from point 3, perhaps from the roof of the *Domus Tiberiana*, would correspond to that of the bird's eye view shown on the coin of Severus Alexander.

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[37] ***Royo, Manuel, Topographie ancienne et fouilles sur la Vigna Barberini (XIXe siècle-début XXe siècle), MEFRA***, 98-2, 1986, p. 706-766.

Since this is possible, since two different images of what may be the same structure thus so neatly correspond to views along a line of sight extending over the contours of that particular terrain, there is a strong case for arguing that the two coins depict the same structure, and that it is situated on the site of the *Vigna Barberini*. If this is so, and the previous hypothesis regarding the probability of the VTER being situated there is also correct, then the structure depicted on the coins would very like be the VTER.

This argument does not yet constitute proof of the thesis that the VTER was situated on the *Vigna Barberini*, but it does suggest a very high degree of probability that this was so. Proof satisfactory to this study's methodology and epistemology could only come from the discovery of some artefact, say an inscription or piece of sculpture, found on the site itself, linking it to Elagabal, or, say, a coin depicting that same temple, with a legend including the name of Elagabal. So far, neither of these sorts of evidence has emerged.

Were this thesis finally to be proven, what would the consequences be, for Varian studies, of its firm establishment?

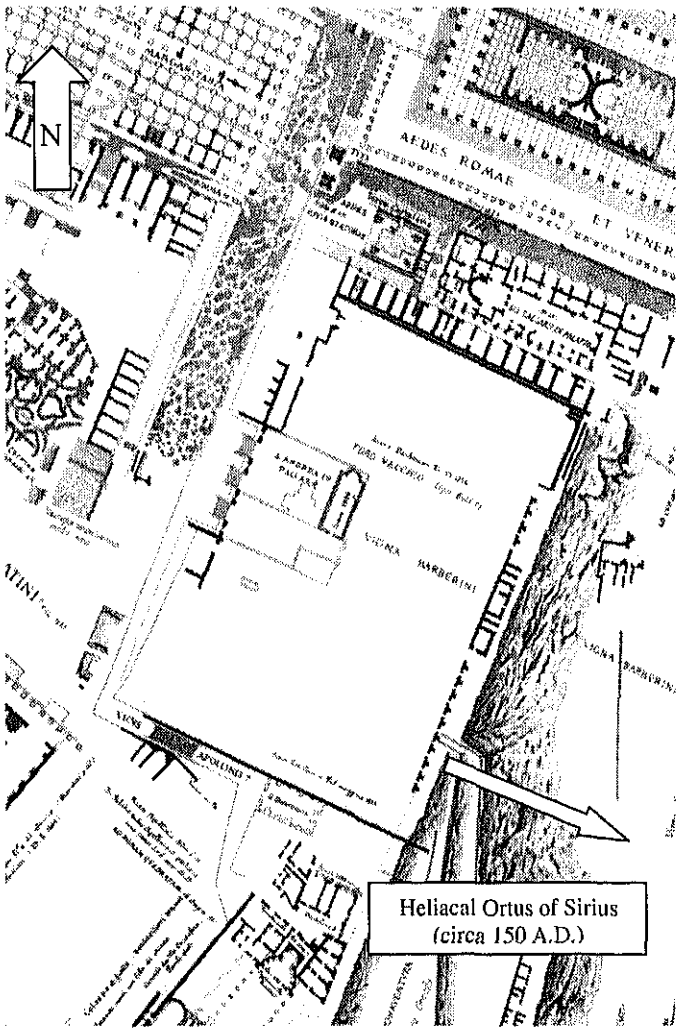
At very least, definitive location on this site of the Varian Temple of Elagabal in Rome would allow one imaginatively to reconstruct, with reference to its size and orientation, the scenes of sacrifice by Varius to that god mentioned by Dio,[38] and described at much greater length by Herodian.[39] The *Vigna Barberini*'s ample dimensions easily allow for the hecatombs of victims in Herodian's account. Moreover, by virtue of its situation atop an elevated platform forming the easternmost promontory of the Palatine, this site is particularly well adapted to the morning worship of the sun, or of a solar deity. From its eastern balustrade, one can observe the sun rise over the Apennines. On a clear day, its rays would have illuminated the east front of the temple.

This observation immediately raises the question of whether the precise orientation of that temple, as defined by its longitudinal axis, bears any specific relationship to the Sun's *ortus*, or point at which it breaches the horizon, on any given day of the year. The temple's southeast orientation leads one to suspect that it might align with the rising of the Sun in midwinter, perhaps at the solstice. This is a conjecture that can only be tested by an astronomer, using techniques and instruments which allow one to reconstruct the appearance of the heavens, as seen from a given place on Earth, at specific moments of time in the past (or indeed in the future). That being the case, I asked an astronomer, Dr Raúl de la Fuente Marcos, of the Universi-

[38] ***Dio,*** 80.11.
[39] ***Herodian,*** 5.5.8–10.

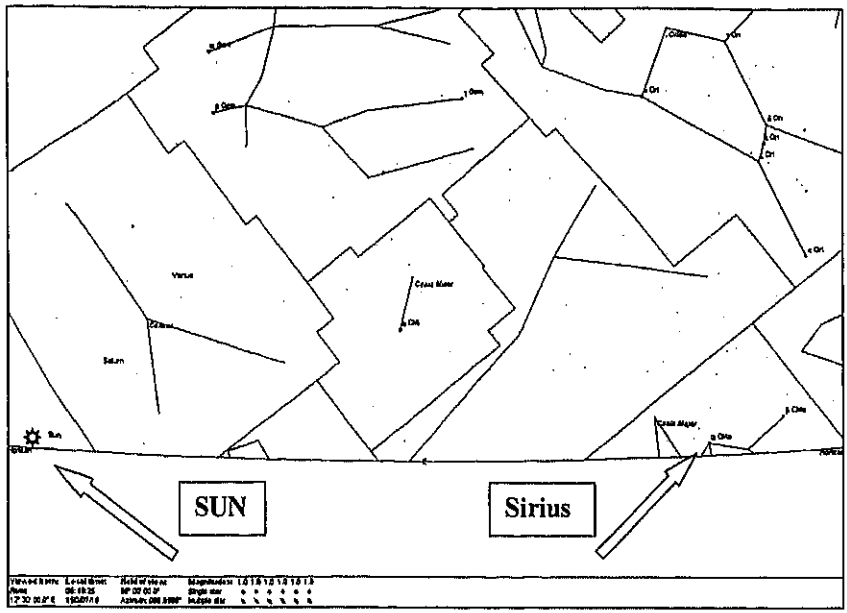
dad Complutense de Madrid, and of Cambridge University, to investigate the matter. What follows are the results of his investigation.

III: An astronomical approach to the question: investigation and calculations, by Dr Raúl de la Fuente Marcos.



Map of the Vigna Barberini (based on FUR 29-1) indicating the alignment of the south-eastern wall. The axis perpendicular to this wall, or central axis of the temple, points almost exactly to the azimuth of Sirius on the day of its heliacal ortus (around July 19th in the time span A.D.1-250) The alignment is too accurate (113° vs. 111°) to be mere coincidence.

In this section we study, from an astronomical perspective, the orientation of the Roman archeological site known as the Vigna Barberini. In particular, we focus on the alignment of an imaginary axis, corresponding to the central axis of the temple. The longitudinal axis of the temple has an azimuth of about $23 \pm 1^{\circ}$; therefore none of its walls is aligned east. It crosses perpendicular to the main gate of the temple, and to the south-eastern wall of the site, facing the Caelian hill.



Heliacal ortus of Sirius for Rome, July 19 th, 150 A.D. (Gregorian calendar system) Map produced on SkyChart III.

Using SkyChart III (Southern Star Systems, Saratoga, CA, 2003, http: // www.southernstars.com) we have thoroughly scanned the night sky in AD 1 –250, looking for celestial objects that may have been worshipped in the temple. This requires us to take into account the ever changing pattern of the sky. The positions of celestial objects change mainly due to precession. The Earth's axis changes its direction over the course of time in the same way a spinning top rotates rapidly on its own axis, while that axis slowly revolves about a vertical direction. This effect results from forces affecting Earth, due to the gravitational pulls of the Moon and the Sun. A complete cycle of precession lasts about 26,000 years. After taking into account the ef-

fects of precession, the main candidate for a celestial body worshipped from this site appears to be the star Sirius, which is the brightest star in the sky, after the Sun. Located at a distance of 2.64 pc or 8.6 light years, it has an apparent brightness exceeding by a factor of 2 that of the next brightest star, Canopus.

In several Mediterranean cultures, the heliacal ortus, or earliest predawn sighting of Sirius (when Sirius again rises into visibility after being hidden by the Sun's light for about 70 days) was thought to have astrological significance. It was therefore subject to systematic observation and intense interest. For the Egyptians, Sirius (named Sept) was the symbol of Isis in the heavens. Sirius' heliacal ortus marked the beginning of the Egyptian year, and roughly coincided with the flooding of the Nile. For the Romans, Sirius was known as the "dog star" as it is situated in the mouth of the Greater Dog or Canis Major constellation. The Romans called the period from early July to mid-August "dies caniculae" or "Dog Days" of summer. During this time, Sirius rises and sets with the Sun.

We compiled the relevant astronomical data for the heliacal ortus of Sirius in the time span 0–250 AD. During that time span, it falls between 18th and 20th July. Currently, it falls on August 8th. Therefore, the date has drifted by about 20 days, due to precession. The azimuth angle of Sirius, when rising on the heliacal ortus day circa 150 AD, is about 111°.

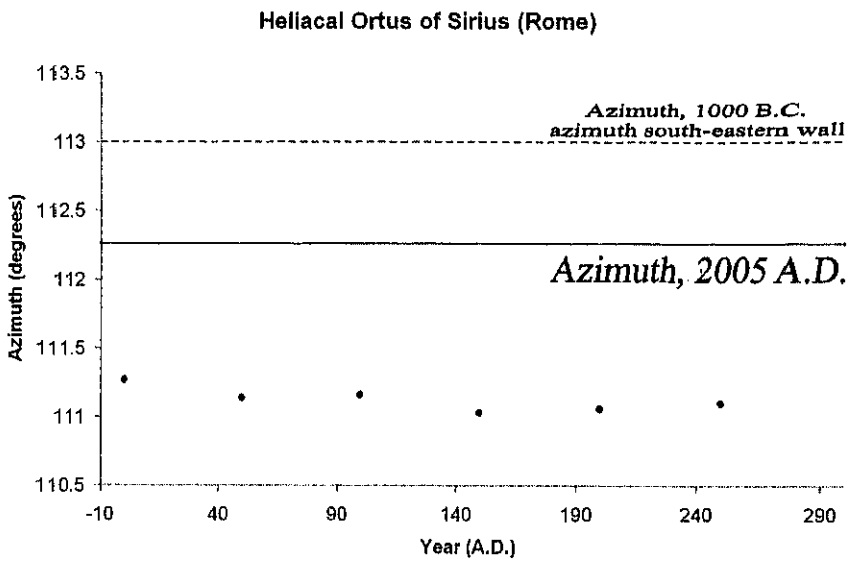
Year	Heliacal Ortus	Julian Date	Azimuth	Time (A.M.)
0 AD	July 18	1721258	111.27	5:40:05
50 AD	July 18	1739520	111.14	5:42:37
100 AD	July 19	1757783	111.16	5:41:13
150 AD	July 19	1776045	111.03	5:43:45
200 AD	July 20	1794308	111.06	5:42:23
250 AD	July 20	1812570	111.10	5:44:57
2005 AD	August 8	2453586	112.26	6:03:25
1000 BC	July 11	1356008	112.96	5:31:09

Heliacal ortus of Sirius for Rome, on 0 to 250 AD. Data obtained with SkyChart III. The heliacal ortus day has been calculated in the Gregorian calendar system. Times are expressed in local time. Heliacal orti for years 2005 AD and 1000 BC are included for reference.

The column labelled Julian Date does not refer to the Julian calendar used by the Romans, which was named after Caius Julius Caesar, the Dicta-

tor, uncle of Augustus. It refers to the astronomical calendar named after Julius Caesar Scaliger, the sixteenth century astronomer behind the Gregorian calendar reform.

In calculating dates, we have used the Gregorian calendar system. It replaced the Roman Julian system in the 16th century. When the Gregorian system was adopted, the calendar was readjusted by 11 days, but this did not affect past dates, only those after its adoption. The program SkyChart III used to plot the relative positions of the stars in the past does not refer to them by projecting Gregorian dates backward, Rather, it gives their dates as they would have been denominated by the Julian calendar. [40]



Evolution of the azimuth of the dawn of Sirius on the heliacal ortus day from 0 to 250 AD. The azimuth of the axis parallel to the entrance of the temple is about 113°. It coincides with the azimuth of the rising Sirius on the heliacal ortus day for the year 1000 B.C.

[40] See Resolution B 1 on the use of Julian Dates by the XXIIIrd International Astronomical Union General Assembly, Appendix, Proposed definitions.
http: //www.iers.org / iers / earth / resolutions / UAI_b 1.html

The azimuth of the temple wall oriented south-east is about 113°. This coincides with the azimuth angle of the heliacal ortus of Sirius for the year 1000 BC although for the time span 0-250 AD the error is less than 2%. That seems to be small, but is in fact rather large, taking into account that, for example, the western and eastern sides of the Khufu (Cheops) pyramid deviate from true north by an average of three arc minutes. Ancient texts are silent on the methods used to align the bases of certain monuments of religious/astronomical significance as, for example, the Egyptian pyramids at Giza. For monuments aligned north, a few arc minutes precision is the highest value found, with 20–30 arc minutes on average (O. Gingerich, Nature, 2000, vol. 408, pp. 297, 298; K. Spence, Nature, 2000, vol. 408, pp. 320–324).

For the alignment object of this study, such a level of accuracy is technologically unattainable for pre-telescopic observers. The heliacal raising of Sirius is a once in a year event, and the exact determination of its direction implies very precise observations under almost ideal conditions (open horizon and clear sky). But problems with observing objects near the horizon (because of interference from the Earth's atmosphere), and with having a perfectly level south-east view, make this calculation very unreliable. A precise determination of the ortus' azimuth depends severely on what is on the horizon (hills, clouds, haze,...) because about 10 minutes after the ortus, the azimuth of Sirius is about 113–114° (for 0–250 AD).

Being realistic and taking into consideration the topographical conditions surrounding the location of the temple analyzed in previous sections, a 1–2 degree precision is expected. This is exactly what we found, in fact and from Table I the higher the assumed precision, the older its construction can be dated. For the ideal case of 1–2 arc minutes precision it implies that the platform was built around 1000 BC, long before the foundation of Rome itself, that is very unlikely. In any case, our analysis suggests that the alignment is too accurate (113° vs. 111°) to be mere coincidence, and that the platform was very probably erected before Varius reign. Based on the above astronomical modeling evidence, it appears very likely that the foundations of the temple where erected following the heliacal ortus of Sirius.

IV: An astronomical approach to the question: historical interpretations.

Now let us consider the results of Dr de la Fuente Marcos' investigation into the astronomical relationships of the temple in the *Vigna Barberini*, in terms of their possible historical significance, and in particular of their im-

plications for enquiry into the matter of the VTER.

The most important of his findings, for our purposes, is that the alignment of the longitudinal axis of the temple on the site of the *Vigna Barberini*, does not, as one may originally have supposed, correspond to the ortus of the Sun at its winter solstice, as seen from that site during the reign of Varius. Rather, it corresponds to the heliacal ortus of Sirius, as seen from that site some hundred or more years before, as well as during Varius' reign, and for some long time thereafter. An important corollary of this finding is that, according to Dr de la Fuente Marcos' calculations, the heliacal ortus of Sirius took place, during the time span here in question (between A.D. 1 and A.D. 250) on the 19 th of July of every year.

An important consideration properly for understanding the meaning of these findings is that they not only affect the temple, but the whole of the *Vigna Barberini*. Indeed, one should really consider the significance of this result primarily in terms of the site as a whole, and only secondarily, by implication, with regard to the temple. For, as suggested by common sense, and shown by recent archaeological excavation of the site by *L'École Franç aise de Rome*, the platform existed before the temple. This means that the platform's orientation is likely to determine the temple's, rather than vice versa.

That likelihood is supported by the following argument. Recent excavations establish that the eastern wall of the *Vigna Barberini* was built in Flavian times, and that, although later reinforced, that same Flavian wall is substantially that which now constitutes the eastern boundary of the site.[41] The temple's longitudinal axis lies precisely at a right angle to the line of that wall. Such geometrical precision is very unlikely to be due to chance. It is therefore very likely that the orientation of the temple, irrespective of when it was built, is determined by a decision taken in Flavian times. This means, in turn, that any significance deriving from that decision, assuming it was consciously and deliberately taken, must be interpreted, first in the context of the site as a whole in the Flavian period, and only afterwards in terms of successive periods, including that of the VTER.

Let us now consider some possible implications of Dr de la Fuente Marcos' findings. Sirius, and its heliacal ortus, are accorded an important place in Graeco-Roman mythology, corresponding to the star *Canis Major* in the

[41] ***Palatino, Vigna Barberini, Scavi e Scoperte,*** *Estratto dal "Bollettino di Archeologia" del Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali 23-24 - Settembre-Dicembre 1993.* p. 157-160: Henri Broise & Yvon Thébert, ***Le Secteur D.***

constellation of Orion. *Canis Major* is given literary significance by Horace, in one of his Odes.[42] Its place in classical culture and religion has been studied by early modern antiquarians;[43] its role in certain modern "primitive" cults, with reference to data from the ancient world, by anthropologists, and even by students of occult or paranormal phenomena.[44]

Possibly, however, most directly relevant to this enquiry is that the heliacal ortus of Sirius was especially important for the ancient Egyptians, marking the start of the flooding of the Nile: "*The ancient Egyptians believed that the flooding of the River Nile was caused by the "power" of the star Sirius. The Egyptian records show that the rising of Sirius at dawn was used by the astronomer-priests at least as early as 3000 B.C. The day on which Sirius was first seen to rise at dawn became New Year's Day for the Egyptians, and they called Sirius "Mistress of the Year." In honor of Sirius, the Egyptians oriented temples so that they faced that point on the horizon where Sirius was first seen to rise at dawn. One such temple was built as early as 2700 B. C.*" [45] Egypt had, of course, been incorporated into the Roman empire since Caesarean times, and certain of its cults had, at various moments, been popular in Rome itself, even being practiced or adopted by certain of the emperors.[46]

The corollary to Dr de la Fuente Marcos' principal finding, that the heliacal ortus of Sirius took place on the 19th of July, brings into play yet another possible relationship, of considerable potential significance for the study of this site. For that date corresponds to the celebration of the *Adonaea*, or festivals of Adonis, in Syrian religion, as practiced in the Roman empire.[47]

Thus the orientation of the *Vigna Barberini* towards the heliacal ortus of Sirius implies possible relationships both with Egyptian and Syrian religions. How are these implications to be related to the dedication and disposition of the site? Obviously, this question must be asked in the context of successive periods: the Flavian, when the platform was built; the Hadrianic and Antonine, for which there is evidence of building activity there; and the Sev-

[42] Gilleland, M. ***Horace Ode 3.13***, http: //www.merriampark.com / horcarm 313.htm.
[43] Sir Thomas Browne (1646; 6 th ed., 1672) ***Pseudodoxia Epidemica*** IV:xiii, http: //penelope.uchicago.edu / pseudodoxia / pseudo 413.html .
[44] Clark, Jerome, *The Sirius Mystery*, ***Encyclopedia of Strange and Unexplained Phenomena*** **http: //www.dreamscape.com / morgana / thalass 2.htm .**
[45] The Constellation Canis Major, Mythology and History, LMS Planetarium, http: //www.coldwater.k 12.mi.us / lms / planetarium / myth / canismajor.html
[46] Malaise, M., ***Les Conditions de Pénétration et de Diffusion des Cultes Égyptiens en Italie,*** *EPRO,* 22, 1972.
[47] Cumont, Franz, ***Les Syriens en Espagne et les Adonies à Séville,*** Syria, 8, 1927, p.330-341.

eran, which provides the base and foundations of a temple on that site, believed to correspond to the VTER.

With regard to the creation of the platform in the Flavian period, one must ask whether its orientation is deliberate, or merely the product of chance. Relevant to answering that question is the fact, demonstrated by the recent excavation of the site, that its southeastward orientation differs significantly from the northeastward orientation of the Julio-Claudian ruins over which it is built.[48] Thus the platform's orientation seems to be the product of deliberate choice, rather than of merely following a pre-existing pattern. Whether that choice was made in the light of astronomical considerations is not, however, a question relative to which we have any direct, documentary evidence. What we do have is a series of hypotheses built on diverse bases.

We have already seen, above, how this site has been identified by some with the fragment of the *FUR* thought to depict a garden labelled ADONAEA. (That identification has, however, repeatedly been challenged, in terms of perceived weaknesses in its own arguments, and also, more recently, by an alternative theory, concerning the *FUR*'s correspondence to the *Vigna Barberini*, which we shall presently consider.) The linkage of the *Vigna Barberini* to the ADONAEA fragment, originally proposed by Nibby, [49] has always been connected by its proponents to the mention, by Philostratus, in his ***Life of Apollonius of Tyana***, of a visit by that Anatolian sage to Domitian, in a garden, inside the palace compound, dedicated to Adonis.[50] The recent excavations have established that the structure erected on that platform in Flavian times was indeed a garden, surrounded by a portico, and that its vegetation was planted inside rows of amphorae, decapitated for that purpose.[51] These findings may also be linked to the potted indoor gardens, associated, in Syrian religion, to the cult of Adonis.[52] The newly established fact of the site's orientation towards the heliacal ortus of Sirius may thus be thought to provide yet a further possible link to the cult of Adonis.

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[48] Morel, J.-P., ***Stratigraphie et Histoire sur le Palatin: la zone centrale de la Vigna Barberini, CRAIBL,*** Janvier-Mars 1996, p. 173–206.

[49] Nibby, Antonio, op. cit.

[50] Philostratus, ***Apollonius*** VII.32: ὁ βασιλεὺς ἄρτι μὲν τῇ Ἀθηνᾷ τεθυκὼς ἐτύγχανεν ἐν αὐλῇ Ἀδώνιδος, ἡ δὲ αὐλὴ ἀνθέων ἐτεθήλει κήποις, οὓς Ἀδώνιδι Ἀσσύριοι ποιοῦνται ὑπὲρ ὀργίων, ὁμωροφίους αὐτοὺς φυτεύοντες.

[51] Morel, op. cit.

[52] Lanciani, Rodolfo, ***The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome,*** 1897, p. 165–168: XX: ***The Gardens of Adonis (Horti Adonaea-Vigna Barberini).***

Another hypothesis potentially affected by this finding is one concerning the *Vigna Barberini*'s alleged Egyptian associations. For it has been proposed that its remodelling in Hadrianic times, detected by the recent excavations, may have been due to the Flavian garden's adaptation to a new use, as the principal site for celebration of the cult of Antinoüs. This would have involved the erection on that spot of an obelisk, inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphics, in honour of Hadrian's deified beloved, whose tomb may also have been placed there.[53] It will be remembered that, although himself a Bithynian, Antinoüs died in Egypt, and that the cult instituted to his memory by Hadrian had marked Egyptian features.

It did not, however, last very long as an official imperial cult. Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius, let it lapse, and, although remaining popular for a time in various parts of the empire, its celebration ceased to be a part of the emperor's official duties. Assuming, for the sake of argument (though it is merely an hypothesis) that the cult of Antinoüs was indeed celebrated at this site, one must explain how the obelisk in question turns up in *the Circus Varianus*, in the *Horti Variani*, the Ultraesquiline site, belonging to Varius' mother's husband's family, where some have situated the suburban temple of Elagabal, mentioned at the outset of this article.

A further hypothesis to which this finding may be relevant relates to the existence, in the *Vigna Barberini*, of possible evidence for an Antonine construction, in the form of brick stamps with the name of Annia Faustina, the wife of Marcus Aurelius.[54] It has been disputed that they constitute such evidence, because they were found at the Severan level. So a theory has been spawned whereby they were kept in storage and used after Faustina's death, by whichever Severan emperor built the temple on that site.[55]

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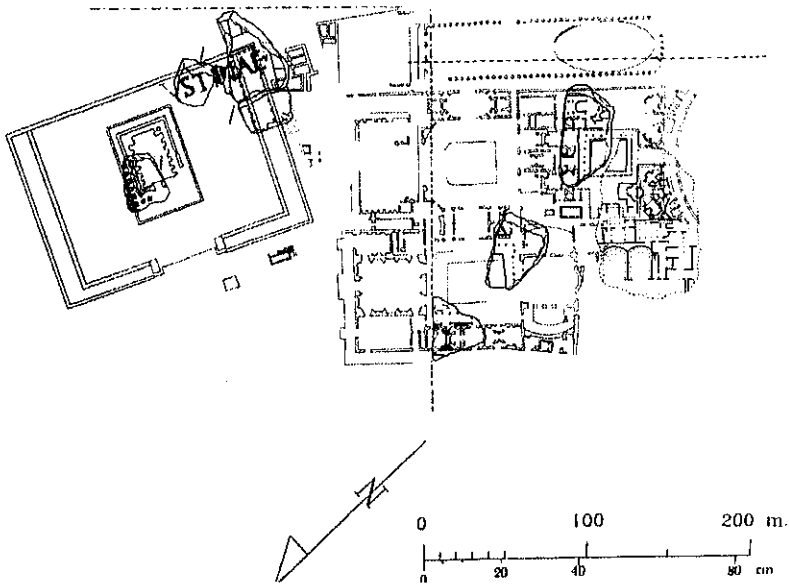
[53] Coarelli, F., ***Porticus Adonaea, Aedes Heliogabali, Aedes Jovis Ultoris-La Tomba di Antinoo?***, *MEFRA*, 98, 1986, p. 230–253.

[54] ***Palatino, Vigna Barberini, Scavi e Scoperte,*** *Estratto dal "Bollettino di Archeologia" del Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali 23–24 – Settembre-Dicembre 1993.* p. 133–147; Françoise Villedieu, ***Les secteurs A 1–7.***

[55] Thébert, Y., ***Transport à grande distance et magasinage de briques dans l'Empire romain: quelques remarques sur les relation entre production et consommation,*** in Boucheron, P., Broise, H., Thébert, Y., (ed.) ***La brique antique et médiévale, Production et commercialisation d'un matériau, Actes du colloque international de Saint-Cloud, 16–18 Nov., 1995,*** CEFR, 2000.

The site of the Varian Temple of Elagabal in Rome:



Cecamore's hypothetical placement of Faustinae (?) fragments of FUR in the Vigna Barberini

While this is possible, yet another theory has been fielded, to the effect that some building or remodelling was actually undertaken on the site, either during Faustina's lifetime, or shortly after her death, by Marcus Aurelius, and that a subsequent, Severan building project somehow churned up the brick stamps in question, disturbing the site's stratigraphy.[56] If an Antonine construction took place after Faustina's death, and was a temple in her honour, it might explain a curious passage in the ***Historia Augusta***, which maintains that Varius commandeered a temple in Faustinopolis, near the border of Cilicia and Cappadocia, originally dedicated, by Marcus, to the deified Faustina, and rededicated it instead to Elagabal. The Faustinian theory maintains that this story originally related to a temple of Faustina, not in Anatolia, but in Rome. It reinterprets the ***HA's*** Aedes Orci as Aedes Marci, referring to Marcus Aurelius. If so, the temple erected on its site would, by this theory, be the VTER. Another element of this theory is its matching of quite different fragments of the FUR to the Vigna Barberini.

[56] Morel, op. cit., first suggests this. It is developed into a fully argued hypothesis by Cecamore, C., ***"Faustinae aedemque decernerent" (SHA, Marcus, 26), les fragments 69-70 de la "Forma Urbis" et la première dédicace du temple de la Vigna Barberini,*** *MEFRA,* 111-1, 1999, p. 311-349.

Part of the argument put forward for this hypothesis involves Faustina's identification with the moon, and the coincidence of lunar symbols on the pediments of some representations of the Temple of Elagabal in Emesa. The discovery that the *Vigna Barberini* is oriented towards the heliacal ortus of Sirius might well affect this argument.

Leaving such speculations as open questions, and returning to the question of the *Vigna Barberini* in the Severan period, it would seem possible that, for diverse sets of reasons, this site was associated, at least since Flavian times, with Oriental deities and cults; an hypothesis perhaps not unrelated to its position as the easternmost promontory of the Palatine hill. That possibility may in turn, be relevant to one's consideration of the question of this site's hypothetical relation to the VTER. There are at least two possible aspects pertinent to such a relationship.

One concerns the plan of the site as a whole, and the place of the temple within it: that of a temple set inside a large, walled rectangular precinct. This disposition corresponds, not to any Greek or Roman model, but to one often found in Roman Syria.[57] While this disposition dates to the Severan, not to the Flavian period, one wonders whether any pre-existing Syrian associations of the site played any role in leading to its disposition according to this pattern.

The other pertinent aspect concerns a question often asked about the VTER: Did Varius build it from the ground up, or did he adapt an existing structure, perhaps the temple of another deity, for this purpose? On the one hand, there are various sets of reasons for arguing in favour of a rededication, no doubt with some remodelling, rather than for an original construction.[58] On the other hand, certain finds in recent excavations have led some archaeologists conducting them to propose that the temple on this site, including its deep, solid foundation, may well have been built entirely by Varius.[59] One of the principal objections to this view is the brevity of Varius'

[57] Zschietzschmann, W., ***Die Antike Kunst, Die Hellenistische und Römische Kunst,*** 1939, p. 94-97: ***Römische Tempel in Syrien***; Eissfeldt, Otto, ***Tempel und Kulte syrischer Städte in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit,*** Der Alte Orient, 40, 1941, p. 73-79: ***Der Bel-Tempel***; Gros, Pierre & Torelli, Mario, ***Storia dell'Urbanistica, Il Mondo Romano,*** 1988, p.167-208, esp. p. 206-208: ***La dinastia dei Severi e l'ultima urbanistica dell'Alto Impero***; p.373-426, esp. p. 420-426: ***Esaltazione plastica della vita urbana e limiti dell'architettura scenografica: le "plateae" di Gerasa, Bostra e Palmira.***

[58] Morel, J.-P., op. cit.

[59] Broise, Henri & Thébert, Yvon, ***Élagabal et le complexe religieux de la Vigna Barberini,*** *MEFRA,* 111, 1999-2, pp. 729-747.

reign, and the gigantic scale of the building work involved. It is in any case established, by the recent excavations, that the temple and its foundation are of Severan date. What is therefore in question is whether it is of early (Septimian), middle (Caracallan) or late (Varian or Alexandrine) Severan date.

That question must be addressed in the light (forgive the pun) of the great fire of A.D. 192,[60] which probably affected this site, possibly destroying any previous construction. If so, it is unlikely that Septimius Severus, so prolific a builder elsewhere in his realm, would have left such a prime piece of imperial real estate, next door to his residence, untouched. His reign, A.D. 193–210, and that of his son, Caracalla, A.D. 210–217, together give ample time for the conception, erection, and completion even of a very large temple such as that whose foundations occupy the topmost level of the site, and whose foundations reach all the way down to its bedrock of tufa.

In this context, it must be remembered that by virtue of constructing, if either did, a temple on the platform of the *Vigna Barberini*, Severus or Caracalla would be building on a site whose astronomical orientation was already determined. Since Severus was himself, according to the historiographical sources,[61] keenly interested at least in the astrological aspects of astronomy, and so also was Caracalla,[62] it seems unlikely that either would have been unaware of that site's orientation to the heliacal ortus of Sirius. This unlikelihood then leads one to wonder, given their probable knowledge of that fact concerning the *Vigna Barberini*, considered as a prospective building site, to what deity a temple erected upon it either by Severus or by Caracalla is likely to have been dedicated. While such speculation could go on indefinitely, it seems appropriate at this point to call it to a halt. One may, however continue to wonder what role, if any, may have been played, in considering what to do with this site, by Severus' wife and Caracalla's mother, the empress Julia Domna, daughter of Bassianus, the last recorded high priest, before Varius, of the sun god Elagabal.

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[60] Chausson, François, ***Le site de la Vigna Barberini de 191 à 455,*** in *La Vigna Barberini I, Histoire d'un site: étude des sources et de la topographie, I - Les Sources Antiques: L'état des lieux et les hypothèses, Roma Antica,* 3, 1997, p. 31–85.
[61] ***Dio,*** 77.11.1.
[62] ***Dio,*** 79.2.

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