

# THE DATE OF DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE OF MARS ULTOR\*

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For many years now scholars have considered the date of dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus as a matter beyond dispute. This date, 1 August 2 B.C., is based principally on the evidence supplied by Augustus, Velleius Paterculus and Dio, and has been accepted as an established historical fact at least from the time of Th. Mommsen's discussion in 1893.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, certain problems arise from an acceptance of this date; problems, that is, which have a direct bearing on the use of the *Res Gestae* of Augustus and the *Fasti* of Ovid as valid historical sources.

The year in which the temple was dedicated in the Forum of Augustus has been established beyond all doubt. Velleius Paterculus (II, 100, 2) states that the temple was dedicated during the consulship of Augustus and L. Caninius Gallus, who, as we know from other sources, was suffect consul in 2 B.C.<sup>2</sup> Also Augustus assigns to this year—his thirteenth consulship—the first celebration of Ludi Martiales at Rome.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it may be accepted that Ludi Martiales were produced in subsequent years on the anniversary of the dedication of this temple.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, however, there is a problem of chronology associated with the first production of these Circensian games at Rome. According to Dio's account of the early years of Claudius' reign (LX, 5, 3), Ludi Martiales were produced on 1 August A.D. 41, and commemorated the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, according to the evidence of certain ancient calendars (the *Feriale Cumanum*, the *Fasti Maffeiani*, Philocalus, the *Feriale Duranum*), such games were produced on 12 May.<sup>6</sup> Also Ovid, most likely an eyewitness to the events of 2 B.C., gives this earlier date, i.e. 12 May, not only as the date for the celebration of these Circensian games but also for the dedication of the temple itself. In that section of the *Fasti* which deals with the events of 12 May (*Fasti* v, 545–98), the poet mentions clearly and without any sense of ambiguity the dedication of the temple in the Forum of Augustus (v, 550–68), its *raison d'être* (v, 569–96), and the games which occurred at the time of the temple's dedication (v, 597–8).<sup>7</sup> Thus, if all the games referred to in our ancient sources are to be associated with the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor in 2 B.C., it is at once apparent that we are presented with two mutually incompatible dates for that event, namely 1 August and 12 May.

In order to resolve this conflict, therefore, Mommsen proposed that the games which occurred on 12 May commemorated an earlier event; namely the dedication of a smaller temple to Mars Ultor on the Capitol which, according to Dio LIV, 8, 3, was decreed by Augustus after the recovery of the lost legionary standards from Parthia in 20 B.C.<sup>8</sup> The existence of such an *aedicula* of Mars Ultor on the Capitol has been accepted as certain. Coins exist, minted in Spain and at Ephesus c. 19–18 B.C., which bear on the reverse the representations of a small temple in which were placed *signa* and a small figure, presumably

\* An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of Canada in June 1976. I am grateful for comments received at that time and am also much indebted to the Editorial Committee and to Professors A. M. Small and D. Fishwick of the University of Alberta for their helpful suggestions and criticism.

<sup>1</sup> *CIL* I, <sup>2</sup> p. 318.

<sup>2</sup> See *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 390; cf. A. Degrassi, *I Fasti Consolari dell'Impero Romano* (1952), p. 5, where the date of the consulship of L. Caninius Gallus is evidently based on the accepted date for the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor in 2 B.C.

<sup>3</sup> *Res Gestae* 22, 2 (see below p. 92.).

<sup>4</sup> cf. Dio LV, 10; LX, 5, 3. Also Regner, *RE* Supp. VII, 1643 f. and above n. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Dio LX, 5, 3: ἐν γὰρ δὴ τῇ τοῦ Αὐγούστου νομημῖα, ἠγωνίζοντο μὲν ἵπποι, . . . ὁ τοῦ Ἄρεως ναὸς ἐν ταύτῃ καθιέρωτο καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐτησίαις ἀγῶσιν ἐτετίμητο.

<sup>6</sup> *Fer. Cum.*: *CIL* I<sup>2</sup>, p. 229; *F. Maff.*: *CIL* I<sup>2</sup>, p. 224; Philocalus: *CIL* I<sup>2</sup>, p. 263. These sources are collected, conveniently enough, in V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, *Documents illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*<sup>3</sup> (1955), 48: *Cum.* '[eo die aedes Martis dedicatast. supplicatio Molibus Martis]. *Maf.* 'lud. Mart. in circ. *Phil. Martialici*'. For the *Feriale Duranum*, see R. O. Fink, A. S. Hoey and W. F. Snyder, 'The *Feriale Duranum*', *YCS* VII (1940), 120 f.: 'iiii idus maias ob circenses ma[r]tiales] marti pa[tri ult]ori t[ra]n[sc]r[um]'; also *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report V, Part I: The Parchments and Papyri* (1959), 199.

<sup>7</sup> See especially *Fasti* v, 550–2, (below p. 92).

<sup>8</sup> Dio LIV, 8, 3: ἀμέλει καὶ θυσίας ἐπ' αὐτοῖς καὶ νεῶν Ἄρεως Τιμωροῦ ἐν τῷ Καπιτωλίῳ, κατὰ τὸ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Φερετριῶν ζήλωμα, πρὸς τὴν τῶν σημείων ἀνάθεσιν καὶ ψηφισθῆναι ἐκέλευσε καὶ ἐποίησε . . . See Mommsen, loc. cit. (n. 1).

of Mars, and the legend MAR VLT, or some such permutation of nomenclature.<sup>9</sup> The temples on these coins bear no resemblance to the grand edifice in the Forum of Augustus and, as a result, have been thought to commemorate the dedication about 20 B.C. of a small temple to Mars Ultor on the Capitol.<sup>10</sup> The games, therefore, celebrated at Rome on 12 May are now thought to have commemorated the dedication of the *aedicula* on the Capitol, while those which were produced on 1 August presumably took place on the anniversary of the dedication of the temple in the Forum of Augustus.

Mommsen's solution is attractive and has been accepted by many historians.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to raise more problems than it solves. Firstly, Augustus's statement: '[c]onsul XIII ludos / Mar[tia]les pr[imus] feci, quos p[ost] i[d] tempus deinceps ins[eq]uen[ti]-[bus] / annis [s.c. et lege] fecerunt [co]n[su]les' (*Res Gestae* 22, 2), can only be considered to be inaccurate, for, according to the standard belief, Ludi Martiales had been produced at Rome since 19–18 B.C.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, we must believe that Ovid was mistaken when he assigned the dedication of the temple in the Forum of Augustus to 12 May: 'Mars venit et veniens bellica signa dedit. / Ultor ad ipse suos caelo descendit honores / templaque in Augusto conspicienda foro' (*Fasti* v, 550–2).<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, while we must accept the existence of two temples dedicated to Mars Ultor at Rome and the celebration of two distinct Ludi Martiales, we must account for the complete lack of mention in the surviving *Fasti* of the Julio-Claudian era of both the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor on 1 August and the Ludi Martiales produced on that day—even though such games were evidently prescribed 's.c. et lege' (*Res Gestae* 22, 2).<sup>14</sup> Fourthly, we are required to believe that the earlier *aedicula* on the Capitol was intended primarily as a temporary resting place for the newly recovered *signa* until such time as the temple in the Forum of Augustus was ready for occupation.<sup>15</sup> And that is not all. If we accept Mommsen's suggestion, we must also explain why another contemporary poet, Horace, wrote in a poem whose *terminus post quem* is probably 13 B.C. that the standards were returned not to Mars but to Jupiter: 'et signa nostro restituit Iovi / derepta Parthorum superbis / postibus' (*Car.* iv, 15, 6 ff.).<sup>16</sup> Even if, as some suppose,<sup>17</sup> the standards were deposited in a temple of Jupiter on the Capitol until their 'temporary' residence was ready, this cannot explain Horace's evident mistake only a few years after that *aedicula* must have been completed. Surely Horace had some knowledge of contemporary events? Furthermore, if religious scruples allowed the deposition of the newly recovered standards in a temple of Jupiter c. 20 B.C., why should not these same scruples have permitted the standards to remain there until 2 B.C.?

The problems raised by Mommsen's conjecture are now made obvious: Augustus, Ovid and Horace are guilty of gross historical inaccuracy. But our only textual support for the existence of an *aedicula* dedicated to Mars Ultor on the Capitol is that supplied by Dio (LIV, 8, 3). Dio, it must be noted, does not state that the small temple on the Capitol was dedicated c. 19–18 B.C., but merely that Augustus  $\psi\eta\phi\iota\sigma\theta\eta\nu\alpha\iota \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\epsilon$ .<sup>18</sup> Our only evidence, therefore, for the year in which such an *aedicula* was dedicated are the coins which

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, H. Mattingly, *BMC* 1, *Augustus to Vitellius* (1923), p. 58, 65 f., 114.

<sup>10</sup> cf., for example, Marbach, *RE* xiv, 1924 f.

<sup>11</sup> cf., for example, A. Degraffi, *Inscr. Ital.* xiii, 2, 456 f., 490; Marbach, loc. cit. (n. 10); H. Heinen, *Klio* xi (1911), 139, 169, n. 1; S. B. Platner and T. Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (1927), 329 f.; Fink, *et al.*, loc. cit. (n. 6); U. W. Scholz, *Studien zum altitalischen und altrömischen Marskult und Marsmythos* (1970), 23; P. Zanker, *Forum Augustum. Das Bildprogramm* (1968), 22 f. V. Gardthausen, *Augustus und seine Zeit* II, 2 (1896), 476 f., suggested that the games produced on 12 May commemorated the actual return to Rome of the lost *signa*; cf., most recently, T. D. Barnes, *JRS* lxxiv (1974), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Ehrenberg and Jones, op. cit. (n. 6), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Having accepted Mommsen's suggestion, two of the most authoritative writers on Roman religion have decided that Ovid was confused. See G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*<sup>2</sup> (1912), 146,

n. 8 and K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (1960), 302 f., n. 7. Cf. also J. G. Frazer, *Ovid's Fasti*, (Loeb, 1931), 300; G. B. Pighi, 'Le "dee invite" del tempio Marte Ultore,' *Att. Acad. Sc. Ist. Bologna* lix (1970–1), 39 f., especially 45, n. 10.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Degraffi, *Inscr. Ital.* xiii, 2, 490: 'Miramur nec dedicationem templi nec ludos in ullis fastis adnotata esse.'

<sup>15</sup> cf., for example, H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *RIC* 1, *Augustus to Vitellius* (1923), 46; Platner and Ashby, loc. cit. (n. 11).

<sup>16</sup> For the date of this poem see C. Franke, *Fasti Horatiani* (1839), 223 f., cited by E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (1957), 449, n. 1. Cf. also Horace, *Car.* III, 5 and Propertius III, 4, 6: 'assuescunt Latio Partha tropaea Iovi.'

<sup>17</sup> For example, Mattingly, op. cit. (n. 9), cxi.

<sup>18</sup> The dedication took place at a later date, Dio LIV, 8, 4. The words used by Dio (LIV, 8, 3) suggest the formal decision to build a temple; cf., for example, *Mon. Ancyr.* XII, 2.

were struck c. 19–18 B.C. and which bear the legend MAR VLT. But do these coins really commemorate the dedication of that temple on the Capitol?

In 44 B.C. P. Sepullius Macer issued a coin on which there is a temple and the legend CLEMENTIA CAESARIS.<sup>19</sup> In the previous year the Senate had decreed a temple to Caesar and to Clementia. Nevertheless, it is certain that the temple was never built.<sup>20</sup> In 36 B.C. Augustus caused to be issued coins showing a temple and bearing the legend DIVO IVL.<sup>21</sup> That temple was dedicated on 18 August 29 B.C.<sup>22</sup> In both these cases, therefore, it is apparent that it is the decision to build a temple which is commemorated, and not the fact of the temple's dedication. Furthermore, modern scholarship has supported the possibility that even as late as 19 B.C. the anniversary of the *constitution* of such a monument, i.e. the formal decision to build, was of greater significance than that of the monument's dedication.<sup>23</sup> There is every likelihood, then, that the coins MAR VLT c. 19 B.C. commemorate the constitution of a temple of Mars Ultor and not the dedication of such a temple. Given the possibility, therefore, these coins may well be associated with the decision to build a temple of Mars Ultor not on the Capitol but in the Forum of Augustus—a temple which, as we know from Macrobius, *Sat.* II, 4, 9, took an unusually long time to complete.<sup>24</sup>

Mommsen's conjecture, therefore, rests solely on the unsupported testimony of Dio that a temple of Mars Ultor was to be erected on the Capitol to accommodate the newly recovered standards from Parthia. Given the weight of evidence, however, which is drawn from contemporary documentary sources, it now seems very likely that Dio confused the temporary resting place of the *signa* (i.e. a temple of Jupiter on the Capitol) with the formal decision to build a temple of Mars Ultor in a new Forum Augustum in which these *signa* were eventually to be housed.<sup>25</sup>

If this suggestion is accepted, namely that Dio very probably misplaced the location of the new temple of Mars Ultor, it is at once apparent that we are still left with two conflicting dates for the dedication of that temple in 2 B.C. and for the first celebration of the Ludi Martiales at Rome, i.e. 12 May (Ovid) and 1 August (Dio LX, 5, 3). Is it conceivable, then, that Dio has also confused (LX, 5, 3) the production of Ludi Martiales with some other games that occurred on 1 August A.D. 41?

Dio himself supplies the answer. The historian states that Circensian games were produced on 1 August because that day was the anniversary of the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor, and not because it was Claudius's birthday. Here, perhaps, the historian has been less than candid, for his purpose was to show how, at the beginning of his reign, Claudius moderated the extravagances of his predecessor.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, ever since the time of Augustus's death, when it was decreed that games ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς Ἀρείοις should be produced on the anniversary of Augustus's birth (Dio LVI, 46, 4), similar games had also occurred on the birthdays of other members of the imperial family.<sup>27</sup> From Dio's own account (LX, 5, 1–2) it is apparent that Claudius followed this custom, which had been

<sup>19</sup> M. H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* (1974), I, p. 495; II, Pl. LVII, 13.

<sup>20</sup> S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (1971), 241 f., cf. *JRS* LI (1961), 215.

<sup>21</sup> Crawford, op. cit. (n. 18), II, 744 and Pl. LXIV, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ehrenberg and Jones, op. cit. (n. 6), 50.

<sup>23</sup> cf., for example, the case of the *Ara Fortunae Reducis* whose constitution is recorded in the *Fasti Amitermini*: *CIL* I<sup>2</sup>, p. 245. See K. Hanell, 'Das Opfer des Augustus an der Ara Pacis', *Opuscula Romana* II (1960), 65 f., where it is argued that the date of constitution was the more significant anniversary; cf. D. Fishwick, *Britannia* III (1972), 176 f.

<sup>24</sup> Th. Kraus, *Festschrift Eugen v. Mercklin* (1964), 66 f., showed that the figure of Mars represented on the coins of c. 19 B.C. should not be understood 'als Abbild einer wirklichen Statue' but 'nur als Marsdarstellung' (71), and that there is no numismatic evidence for a cult statue of Mars Ultor associated with any temple prior to the dedication of the temple in the Forum of Augustus. Also there is the slight possibility that Dio's statement (LIV, 8, 3)

reflects the formal constitution of that temple dedicated in 2 B.C. See n. 18, above, and Fishwick, op. cit. (n. 23), 177, n. 81.

<sup>25</sup> At least one other attempt has been made to remove the *aedicula* of Mars Ultor from the Capitol. H. R. W. Smith, *Univ. Cal. Publ. Class. Arch.* II, 4, (1951), 194 f., suggested that Dio misunderstood the evidence supplied by the calendars and by the coinage. This suggestion, although favoured by Volkmann, *Gnomon* XXIV (1952), 361, was not thought to be convincing by Grant, *CR N.S.* 5 (1955), 187, or by Weinstock, *JRS* LI (1961), 215. There is, on the other hand, no evidence to show that Dio himself believed that there was a temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus. Dio LV, 10 is taken from the index to LV, 1, 7 and may well represent the knowledge of the compiler of the index. Perhaps the temple of Jupiter which Dio confused with Mars Ultor was that erected a short while earlier to Jupiter Tonans.

<sup>26</sup> Dio LX, 5, 4: ἐν τε οὖν τούτοις ἡμετέρας.

<sup>27</sup> cf. Mommsen, *CIL* I, p. 302 f.; Fink, *et al.*, op. cit. (n. 6), 124; Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, 210 f.

adopted also by his immediate predecessor, Gaius.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, not only may we assume that traditional offerings marked the anniversary of Claudius's birth,<sup>29</sup> but we are also told that the new emperor was particularly averse to the celebration of two different festivals on the same day.<sup>30</sup> Thus, given the indisputable fact that 1 August was Claudius's birthday, it is, surely, more probable than not that any production of Circensian games on that day early in Claudius's reign celebrated *not* the dedication of a temple some four decades earlier but the anniversary of his birth. Dio's testimony (LX, 5, 3) is clearly suspect and, at any rate, should not be preferred to the evidence supplied by the calendars and by Ovid. Ovid, after all, was a contemporary of the events he described in *Fasti* v, 545 ff.

To sum up: on the evidence reviewed above it is very probable that the first celebration of Ludi Martiales occurred in 2 B.C.—the year of Augustus's thirteenth consulship—on the occasion of the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus. The date of dedication was undoubtedly that which is supplied by Ovid, i.e. 12 May. This proposition has the merit of removing from the Capitol a 'temporary' temple of Mars Ultor, of reducing the number of Ludi Martiales produced at Rome prior to Augustus's death to only one a year—the number actually recorded in the calendars—and, most beneficial, of rehabilitating the contemporary accounts of Augustus, Horace and Ovid.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> cf. Suet., *Claud.* 11, 2. For Gaius's celebration of the birthdays of Tiberius and Drusilla see Dio LIX, 24, 7.

<sup>29</sup> See Henzen, *AFA* (1874), 57.

<sup>30</sup> Dio LX, 5, 1.

<sup>31</sup> If the suggestion made in this paper is accepted,

namely that the temple of Mars Ultor was dedicated in the Forum of Augustus on 12 May, we are surely presented with a much clearer context for the dedication of the column in the Forum Traiani—perhaps to this same deity—on 12 May (cf. Fink, *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 6), 123, nn. 508–12).