

First there is the space devoted to the public, a section of the palace sometimes separately named the Domus Flavia, although this designation is modern; the customary ancient name for the whole palace was the Domus August(i)ana. After the entrance hall connected to the street (A in Fig. 32), one comes upon a large courtyard (B) with a pool (schematically, like an atrium with the impluvium in a traditional *domus*). On the left, towards the Forum, the emperor and his officials conducted business in three rooms; the room in the corner (C) is sometimes called the “basilica” because of its architecture. Plutarch refers to a splendid “basilica” in the palace (65.1), but that may refer instead to the huge central audience hall next to it (D), which would have formed another prominent and more official component to the complex, with its own entrance towards the Forum. On the opposite side of the courtyard, towards the Circus, the emperor held public if still exclusive dinners, such as the one in AD 94 that elicited Statius’s description [65.4] of the great banquet-hall (E).

Past this layer of public space are the more private quarters of the palace, a multi-layered warren of rooms (F) between and around two further courtyards (G, H). Beyond this more residential zone (partially excavated, and partially reconstructed in the 1930s), in place of the traditional peristyle, a long two-storied peristyle garden (I) stretches across the “back” of the house. Although it looks like a race-track (much like the one Domitian built in Piazza Navona area), it probably was not used for sports, although in late antiquity someone had a small amphitheater installed at the Circus-end of it (J). The palace continued beyond this garden with services such as baths and perhaps some of the quarters for servants, concubines, etc. (K). Subsequent emperors greatly expanded the palace in this direction (towards the Caelian hill), especially Septimius Severus, who built the towering substructions (L) that artificially extended the hill towards the Septizonium, and apparently contemplated another monumental entrance to the palace from this direction [65.6]. Also on the southeastern side of the hill is a large section of an aqueduct extension by Domitian (M), which supplied the new palace with the copious supply of water that the ponds, fountains, baths, and staffing demanded.

SOURCES

65.1 Anyone who is amazed at the expense of Domitian’s restoration of the Temple of Jupiter should see just one colonnade in the Palace of Domitian, or its basilica, its bath, or the quarters there for the concubines. ... Then he would be moved to tell Domitian, “You are not pious, or even ambitious: this obsession to build is a sickness. Like King Midas, you want everything you touch to turn to gold or marble.”

Plutarch, *Publicola* 15.5



Fig. 33 Entablature Carving at the Palace of Domitian

65.2 Rabirius: you piously brought the stars and heaven to earth
When your genius built Domitian’s palace on Evander’s turf.

Martial, *Epigrams* 7.56.1-2

65.3 The ceilings of the palace rest on columns that cannot be counted
And the cross-beams glitter brightly, coated in Dalmatian gold.
Coolness drops from the shade where ancient trees arrest
The heat, and sparkling fountains jump in marble ponds
Here Nature obeys no seasons; the Dog-Star chills,
Winter warms, and the house conforms the year to its wishes.

Statius, *Occasional Poems* 1.2.152-157

65.4 [Virgil and Homer have each described great banquets of heroes,]
But how shall I, whom Caesar has granted the novel delights
Of dining with divinity at the imperial table,
Tune my lyre to match my sense of debt and tender
Adequate gratitude?

[AD 94]

The hall is sublime and vast: no hundred columns merely,
But enough to hold the gods and heaven above the earth,
Should Atlas retire. Jupiter in his temple gapes
At your home in awe, Domitian, and the gods rejoice
In your equal footing. No need for you to hasten to heaven;

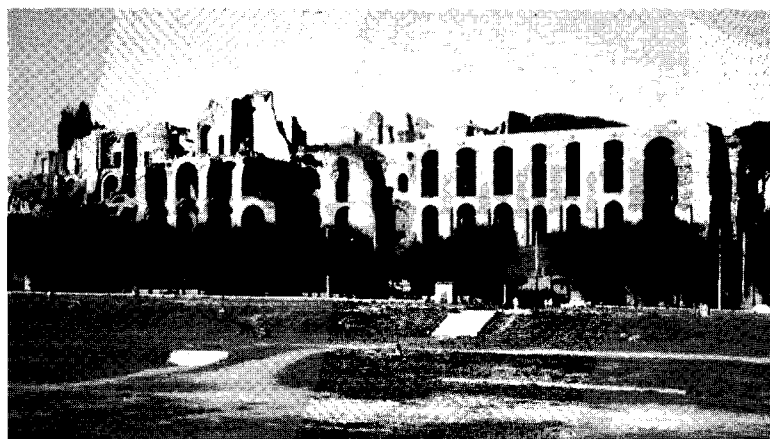


Fig. 34 Severan Substructions of Palace, seen across Circus Maximus

That structure spreads immense, and the reach of its giant hall,
 More open than a field and holding in its embrace
 More space than the sky, is only outdone by its lord: he fills
 The happy home with his mighty spirit. Here stone competes
 With stone, Numidian yellow rivaled by Phrygian purple,
 Granite from Egypt, blushing marbles, and sea-green stone;
 White slabs of Luna are relegated to the bases of columns
 The ceiling is a distant view, and the eyes must strain to reach
 Its summit, to glimpse, it seems, the gilded panels of heaven.
 Such was the setting where Caesar commanded the senators
 Of Rome to sup together with knights at a thousand tables

Statius, Occasional Poems 4.2.5-8; 18-33

65.5 Feared and hated by all, Domitian was finally overthrown [in AD 96] by a conspiracy composed of his friends, intimate freedmen, and even his wife. For a long time he had had a premonition of the year and final day of his life As the time of suspected danger approached, he grew more anxious by the day and had the walls of the colonnades where he like to stroll covered with a veneer of moon-stone, so that he could see in its polish the reflections of whatever was happening behind his back.

On the day of his death, when Domitian asked the time, one of the conspirators told him it was the sixth hour, knowing that Domitian feared the fifth. Thinking the danger past, Domitian happily hurried off to exercise and bathe, but was stopped along the way by his chamberlain Parthenius, who said someone had to see him about some weighty matter or other that couldn't be put off. And so Domitian, having dismissed his attendants, entered his bedroom, where he was killed.

Suetonius, Domitian 14.1, 4; 16.2

65.6 When Septimius Severus constructed the Septizonium [in AD 203], he simply intended it as a monument to greet travelers arriving from Africa by the Appian Way. He is said, however, to have wanted an entrance to the Palatine (the imperial residence) from that quarter of the hill, but was thwarted when a Prefect of Rome put up a statue of Severus in the middle of the monument when Severus was out of town. Alexander Severus was planning to create an approach to the palace from there as well, but was prohibited by the soothsayers.

Imperial Lives, Severus 24.3

65.7 In honor of the spirits of the dead, Tiberius Claudius Thallus, in charge of the awnings of the Domus Augustiana, made this tomb for himself and his children.

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65.8 While we were waiting in the Palatine Square [area] to pay our respects to Caesar, the philosopher Favorinus spotted Caecilius, the great law-scholar, and approached him.

Gellius, Attic Nights 20.1.2