

A BRIEF HISTORY

THE CITY

Located in the province of Naples in the region of Campania, the city of Pozzuoli was founded by Greek settlers in 529 B.C. Although its original name, Dicearchia or 'fair government', is known, scant information survives regarding this particular period of its history. In 194 B.C. the Romans colonized the city and renamed it 'Puteoli', or 'small wells', after the many thermal springs which dot the surrounding territory. The city's acropolis, which presently is occupied by a district known as Rione Terra, stood on a massive tufa block, which rises sharply out of the sea.

Puteoli became the commercial harbor of Rome and remained one of the most important cities of the empire, even after the Romans completed a new harbor to the north in the city of Ostia. From the promontory of the Rione Terra the city spread out into lower laying coastal areas and inland towards the hill of the Solfatara.

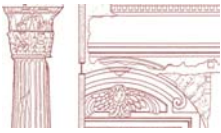
In Puteoli the Romans sought to recreate the classic castrum, the square grid plan dissected by two perpendicular axes, but the hilly nature of the terrain severely affected the final urban layout. The principal axis, or decumanus maximus, ran right behind the main Temple and now lies well beneath what is now the modern Via Duomo. The second axis, or cardo maximus, lead directly to the Temple and is now the Via del Vescovato.

By the late 5th and early 6th century, decimated by the barbarians and with the coastal areas sinking slowly, the surviving population of Puteoli abandoned the lower laying mainland and sought refuge at the top of the Rione Terra. The promontory was walled in to create a smaller, safer 'Castrum Puteolanum' and a phase of fervent building activity started, as is described in documentation dating from the later Middle Ages. Not much is left of this period as well. Much was destroyed during the frequent earthquakes which hit the region, and during the building campaigns of the 16th and 17th century, aimed at expanding the main cathedral, or Duomo, and at creating the De Fraja Palace as well as the square known as the Sedile dei Nobili.

Prior the earthquake of 1980, information and findings on Pozzuoli's past were scarce and limited to single events such as the excavations at the square of San Liborio and the Temple of Augustus. In 1971, a dig in San Liborio, promoted by the Department of Arts and Monuments, recovered a ceramic shard from a wine jug (oinochoe) similar to artifacts of the Cumani and Pithecusani, populations who lived in the area prior to the Romans. To this day the only clues that confirm the hypothesis of the Greek origins of Pozzuoli are the oinochoe shard plus an ionic cup fragment and the remains of a wall alternating vertical tufa bricks in a manner common in the city of Capua during its Sannitic period.

MONUMENT'S HISTORY

The podium on which the marble Temple was erected was previously thought to be of Sannitic origin. Now it is believed to be the ancient crossing between the two main axes of the Roman castrum, which met in front of the façade of the building. The main street



of the Rione Terra, the Via Duomo, coincides perfectly with the decumanus maximus of the Roman colony and faces south in a similar manner to the Capitolium in Ostia. When the baroque cathedral was built, the Temple was incorporated within the new structure and virtually disappeared. Although its presence had been known since the 15th century and documented in the drawings of Giuliano da Sangallo, it did not resurface again until 1964 when a fire destroyed the cathedral exposing the underlying building.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TEMPLE OF AUGUSTUS

Built during the era of Augustus, the Temple has a rectangular plan measuring 15 meters in width and 23.50 meters in length and is oriented on a north/south axis with the main entrance facing south. When it was incorporated in the baroque cathedral, its façade was destroyed and the level of its pavement was lowered by approximately 80 centimeters. The Roman building represents one of the finest examples of Augustan classicism, a pseudoperipteral structure with a square cella measuring 13 by 13 meters, a six columned pronaos and 9 engaged columns on each lateral side. The columns all have Corinthian capitals carved in the style traditional of late Hellenistic Asia, while the stone blocks forming the walls present a slight rustication. Two lateral sets of stairs gave access to the pronaos.

The signature of the architect, L. Cocceio, engraved on the back wall, further confirms the period of origin of the Temple. However, the dedication to Augustus based on an inscription present on the Temple's façade until the 16th century, has been recently questioned. Further studies have confirmed the date as that of the reconstruction in Augustus' era not of a Sannitic Temple, but of a structure built in 194 B.C. at the time of the founding of Puteoli, representing the capitolium later incorporated in the baroque cathedral.

The Temple was surrounded on its west, north and east sides by an enclosure that was porticoed on the outside. On the south side, a few remains support the hypothesis that marble slabs laid at regular intervals paved a large area in front of the entrance.