

PROVIDENCE ATHENAEUM – Wheaton College student essay, spring 2016

Unknown artist, *Temple of Vespasian* (architectural model). Marble, H, 10” (25 cm), W, 10” (25 cm). Donated by Dr. Alexis Caswell in 1861.

One of the many wonders of the Athenaeum’s art collection includes marble architectural models from Rome. The Temple of Vespasian, one of the more beautiful ruins nestled within the Roman Forum in Italy is displayed in miniature proportion, giving viewers the ability to look at the detailed structure from all angles. Each of the three replicas from the Roman Forum holds individual significance but compliments the others incredibly.

While in excellent condition overall, the sculpture bears some scuffs and white spots on the left side of the base. There is also a series of brown spots on the right side of the base. The original Temple of Vespasian was in the corinthian order with a narrow, six-column-wide portico that measured 33 meters long and 22 wide as there was limited space in the chosen location. Its miniature is proportionate to the original and is an excellent replica that gives viewers a detailed idea of what the Roman ruin looks like in reality. The artist responsible for the creation of this architectural model is unknown, though it is assumed that the work was sculpted in the first half of the nineteenth-century as it was donated to the Athenaeum in 1861.

The construction temple of Vespasian was finished by his son, Domitian, in honor of his father and brother, Titus, who initially began building the temple. Construction on the original building took place in 79 C.E. and was finished in approximately 87 C.E. It is located at the western end of the Roman Forum between the Temple of Concordia and the Temple of Saturn. The period of which Vespasian (9-79 C.E.), Titus (39-81 C.E.), and Domitian (51-96 C.E.) ruled over Rome is referred to as the Flavian Dynasty. The importance of family name and lineage throughout

Roman history resulted in the erection of hundreds of monuments and public buildings like temples. These buildings and structures served as visual reminders to the citizens of Rome of the powerful families that helped build the magnificent city.

The temple was significantly damaged during the medieval period and suffered demolition to each side of the structure. Today, only three fluted columns from the south-east corner stand adjacent to the core of the podium with remaining fragments of its travertine wall. These ruins are the model in which the Athenaeum's miniature marble replica is created after. The letters "estituer" stand at the lower edge of the frieze, indicating that there was another line above.

The Athenaeum acquired the sculpture through a donation by Dr. Alexis Caswell (1799-1877), who served as the president of Brown from 1868-1872. Caswell was also a director of the Athenaeum for eight years and a vice president for eight more. Architecture was one of Caswell's greatest passions and was a primary reason for his presidency at Brown, as the faculty hoped that his term would inspire "correct architectural taste among us."^[2] Upon donating the architectural models (of which the Temple of Vespasian is only one of three), Caswell spoke of the replicas and their place in the Athenaeum:

"Every visitor in Rome makes it almost his first business to hasten to the Forum, to see them in their grandeur and their desolation. When I was here during the last winter, as I gazed again and again upon them, it occurred to me that I could not render a better service to the Providence Athenaeum, than by placing accurate copies of these much admired remains of ancient art in its halls. I hoped, also, that they would interest and gratify the public, and would be especially welcomed by the lovers of art; and minister, in some degree, to the growth of a correct architectural taste among us." – Rev. Dr. Alexis Caswell (1799-1877)

The architectural model serves an educational and aesthetic purpose within the Athenaeum. The columns, sitting alongside the other Roman architectural models, ties together studies of history and architecture while fitting in well with the abundance of neoclassical works on display in the library.

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[1]Jane Lancaster, *Inquire Within: A Social History of the Providence Athenaeum since 1753* (Providence: The Providence Athenaeum, 2003), 125.

[2]*Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Providence Athenaeum to the Corporation*, submitted September 23, 1861. 14.