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VIII – *The Site of Dramatic Performances at Rome in the Times of Plautus and Terence*

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In attempting to reconstruct a performance of one of the plays of Plautus or Terence we are met at the outset by the difficulty of determining where such performances took place. On this point the comedies themselves throw hardly any light, and those ancient writers, like Donatus, who speak with such positiveness on many dramatic matters, are here extraordinarily silent.

The question is but briefly touched even by Oehmichen in his *Das Bühnenwesen der Griechen u. Römer*,<sup>1</sup> but he adds that the matter deserves a thorough investigation, for the work of Hahn,<sup>2</sup> though correct as far as it goes, is not exhaustive.<sup>3</sup> The general principle laid down by Hahn is that the place varied with the festival, being regularly near the temple of the god of the *ludi*, or, at least, in a place commonly regarded as the seat of the festival; also, that the plays which formed a part of funeral games were performed in the forum. A brief, and not very convincing, treatment of the question appears in the introduction to the Dziasko-Hauler *Phormio* of 1897 (pp. 30-31); this is revised and slightly amplified in the edition of 1913 (pp. 34-35). Though a little study convinces one that the positive results of such an investigation are bound to be few, it is, nevertheless, worth while to summarize the little that is known and to examine the resulting inferences.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Müller's *Handbuch* (1890), v, 3, B, 214-215.

<sup>2</sup> *Scaenicae Quaestiones Plantinae* (1867), 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> As his entire discussion occupies only two pages, its lack of detailed treatment is evident. His few brief arguments will be mentioned in the course of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> The recent work of Michaut (*Sur les Tréteaux latins*, 1912) I was unable to consult for some weeks after completing this paper. His views concerning the site of dramatic performances are stated briefly but definitely and agree substantially with those commonly received.

In the absence of direct evidence we may follow two main clues in the study of our problem. First, since dramatic performances in Republican times were regularly associated with *ludi*, we may ask where the various *ludi* were celebrated; and, secondly, in the recorded attempts to build theatres at Rome, we may seek to learn what principle, if any, determined the location of these theatres.

In the language of Roman ceremonial, the term *ludi*<sup>5</sup> was originally used to denote games consisting of races, held in honor of Mars and Consus, the tutelary divinities of horses and draught animals, though gymnastic contests were also included from very early times. In Varro's *de Lingua Latina* we read that Ecurria, which was the festival in honor of Mars, derived its name *ab equorum cursu*<sup>6</sup> and that the races of that day<sup>7</sup> were held in the Campus Martius, while Festus is authority for the statement that, when the Campus Martius was overflowed by the Tiber, the races were held in the Campus Martialis on the Caelian hill.<sup>8</sup> From Varro,<sup>9</sup> again we know that the Consualia was celebrated in the Circus, near the altar of Consus, *i. e.* in the place which afterwards became the Circus Maximus. Those two *ludi*, which extend back into the legendary times, are the only regularly recurring *ludi* in the oldest calendar,<sup>10</sup> and it is doubtless significant that each was celebrated in the place especially associated with the god whom it was intended to honor.

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<sup>5</sup> In the following account of the history of Roman *ludi* I have used freely the works of well-known writers on the subject, notably Mommsen, "Die Ludi Mangi u. Romani," *Rb. Mus.* xiv, 79ff. (*Röm. Forsch.* II, 42 ff.), and Friedländer, "Die Spiele," Marquardt's *Röm. Staatsverw.* III<sup>2</sup>, 482 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Ecurria ab equorum cursu; eo die enim ludis currunt in Martio campo.—Varro, *L. L.* VI, 13 (Goetz-Schoell, 1910). Cf. Paulus ex Festo., s. v. *Equirria*.

<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, there were two days, Feb. 27 and March 14. See Fowler's *Roman Festivals*, 330-331.

<sup>8</sup> Martialis Campus in Caelio monte dicitur, quod in eo Equirria solebant fieri, si quando aquae Tiberis campum Martium occupassent.—s. v. *Martialis campus*, Paulus ex Festo, p. 99, Thewrewk de Ponor (1889).

<sup>9</sup> Consualia dicta a Conso, quod tum feriae publicae ei deo et in circo ad aram eius ab sacerdotibus

<sup>10</sup> Mommsen, *Rb. Mus.* XIV, 79.

Because of their religious character such races came to be vowed for occasions of national thanksgiving, especially in praise of Jupiter, as guardian of the Roman state. Gradually, out of these occasional *ludi* there arose the great annual *ludi Romani* or *ludi maximi*.<sup>11</sup> Mommsen<sup>12</sup> places this change in 366 B.C., when the curule aedileship was instituted, though the earliest mention of the *ludi Romani* is some forty years later (322 B.C.)<sup>13</sup> The festival seems early to have included an *epulum Iovis*<sup>14</sup> at the Capitoline temple, a *pompa* from the temple to the Circus and races and athletic contests in the Circus.

In 364 B.C. came the innovation of *ludi scaenici*. It is generally assumed that this occurred at the *ludi Romani*,<sup>15</sup> though a casual reader of Livy's account (VII, 2, 1-3) would get the impression that it was rather at a special festival, by which the gods were being entreated to put an end to the great pestilence that raged for months at Rome. The objection to this interpretation is that it is Livy's custom to speak of special *ludi* as *ludi votivi* or *ludi magni*.<sup>16</sup> But, on the other hand, it is not his custom to shorten *ludi Romani* to *ludi*, unless their identity is made clear by the context,<sup>17</sup> which is not the case in the passage under discussion.

Again, the place where these first *ludi scaenici* were performed is not certain, though the inference is reasonable that it was in the Circus Maximus, for Livy speaks of the terror which the people felt at the interruption of these *ludi*, when the Tiber overflowed the Circus.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Livy I, 35, 9; Wissowa, *Religion u. Cultus der Römer* (1912), Müller's *Handbuch*, V, 4, 453; Friedländer, *op. cit.*, 483.

<sup>12</sup> *Rb. Mus.* SIV, 86; *C.I.L.* I<sup>2</sup>, 328.

<sup>13</sup> Livy, VIII, 40 (cf. X, 47).

<sup>14</sup> In *Rb. Mus.* XIV, 81, Mommsen rejects the *epulum Iovis* for the *ludi Romani*, but in *C.I.L.* I, 40 he accepts it, as does Fowler, *op. cit.*, 217.

<sup>15</sup> See Schanz, *Röm. Literaturgesch.* (1907), 21 (Müller's *Handbuch*, VIII, I, D).

<sup>16</sup> Ritschl, *Parerega*, I, 290; Mommsen, *Röm. Forsch.* II, 51 f.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Livy, XLV, I, 2, and 6.

<sup>18</sup> Livy, VII, 3, 2. Ritschl (*Parerega* I, 287 n.) considers this insufficient evidence. He regards Livy's statement as applying to the *ludi* as a whole, not necessarily to the new portion, the *ludi scaenici*.

It is a long step from the institution of a public *scaena* in 364 to 240 B.C., when Livius Andronicus introduced the legitimate drama at Rome. Even if we did not know it from Cassiodorus,<sup>19</sup> we might conjecture that the occasion for so great an innovation was the *ludi Romani* of that year, when Rome was celebrating the happy ending of the First Punic War. No one states where Livy's plays were performed. In view of the tendency which we have already noticed to choose a locality associated with the god of the *ludi*, it is natural to suppose that these first plays were given nearer the Capitoline temple (*e.g.*, in the forum) or in a place already employed for this festival, like the Circus Maximus.<sup>20</sup>

As early as 220 B.C. were established the *ludi plebei*, which were celebrated that year and probably ever after in the newly built Circus Flaminius (221 B.C.).<sup>21</sup> The laying out of this circus had doubtless been influenced by the early Ecurria in the Campus Martius, and it was natural enough that this festival of the people should be celebrated in their great playground, the Campus Martius. Hauler<sup>22</sup> thinks that the dramatic part of the *ludi* often took place in the Circus Flaminius, which is probable enough, though the passages<sup>23</sup> which he cites as evidence prove nothing. Hahn<sup>24</sup> believes that the *scaena* was placed "*ad Capitolium*" loosely for *in foro*. It is perhaps natural for him to wish to place scenic events

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<sup>19</sup> *Chron. Ad ann.* 515 (*Chron. Min.* II, 218 Mommsen), his cons. ludis Romanis primum tragoedia et comoedia a L. Livio ad scaenam data.

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion of the Circus as a possible site for *ludi scaenici* see p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> Friedländer, *op. cit.*, 499.

<sup>22</sup> Dziatzko-Hauler *Phormio* (1913), p. 34, A. 2.

<sup>23</sup> (1) *Iamst ant aedis circus ubi sunt ludi faciundi mihi*, *Mil. Gl.* 991. Even if the use of *circus* in this passage were literal and not purely figurative, why should it mean Circus Flaminius more than Circus Maximus?

(2) *Dictum in Cornicula militis adventu, quem circumeunt ludentes: Quid cessamus ludos facere? circus noster adest.*—Varro, *L. L.* v, 153. This fragment from the *Cornicula* is absolutely without context. At best, it is of no more value than the first passage.

<sup>24</sup> *Scaenicae Quaestiones Plautinae*, 4.

of the *ludi Romani* near Jupiter's temple, but is not apparent why we should make the *ludi plebei* centre there, unless because it included an *epulum Iovis*. The establishment of this festival is practically coincident with the beginning of the long period of Plautus' activity; soon all the principal *ludi* of Republican times were instituted and included scenic as well as circensian features. It was at the *ludi plebei* of 200 B.C. that the *Stilchus* was first given.

With the *ludi Apollinares* occurring as early as 217 B.C., we come upon an interesting variation, from what has been at least a strongly marked tendency hitherto. Though there had long been a temple of Apollo near the site of the Circus Flaminius, the first *ludi Apollinares* were not celebrated in that circus, but in the Circus Maximus.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, that this was not an exceptional instance appears from Livy, XXX, 38, 10; here it is related that in the year 202 B.C., the circus was so flooded by the Tiber that the *ludi Apollinares* were prepared *extra portam Collinam ad aedem Erucinae Veneris*, but that the weather cleared on the very day of the *ludi* and, so, the *pompa*, which had started to the Colline gate, was recalled and led to the circus. However, in 179 the censors contracted for the building of a *theatrum et pronscaenium ad Apollinis*<sup>26</sup> and this was probably used, as long as it existed,<sup>27</sup> for plays at the *ludi Apollinares*, which was from the first a scenic festival.<sup>28</sup> Cicero<sup>29</sup> tells us that Ennius' *Thyestes* was given at the *ludi Apollinares* of 170 B.C.

The *ludi Megalenses* were first celebrated on the Palatine, when the goddess was brought to Rome in 204 B.C.<sup>30</sup> In 191 her temple was dedicated here with ceremonies which included the performance of Plautus' *Pseudolus*<sup>31</sup> while the *Trinum-*

<sup>25</sup> Livy, XXV, 12, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Id. XL, 51, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ritschl (*Parerga*, I, 227) thinks its existence must have been brief. Fabia ("Les Théâtres de Rome," *Revue de Philologie*, XXI, 17-18) believes that the contract was never carried out.

<sup>28</sup> Festus, p. 482, Thewrewk de Ponor (= p. 326 M.). Cf. Ritschl, *Parerga*, I, praef. xxii ff.

<sup>29</sup> *Brutus* 78.

<sup>30</sup> Livy, XXIX, 14, 13. Cf. Marquardt, *Statverm.* III<sup>3</sup>, 367.

<sup>31</sup> Ritschl, *op. cit.*, I, 276, 295; Teuffel-Warr, *Hist. of Rom. Lit.* I, 138 (1891).

*mus*<sup>32</sup> followed somewhere near 190. Four of Terence's six plays were first presented at the *ludi Megalenses*, the *Andria* (166), the *Hecyra* without prologue (165), the *Hauton Timorumenos* with the first prologue (163), and the *Eunuchus* with prologue (161). That all these performances were given in the open space before the temple of the Magna Mater is Huelsen's<sup>33</sup> belief, based no doubt, on the words of Cicero in *de Haruspicum Responso*, 24, where he speaks of "de illis ludis, quos in Palatio nostri maiores ante templum in ipso Matris magnae conspectu Megalesibus fieri celebrarique voluerunt." The epoch-making stone theatre which was begun by the censors in 155, but destroyed at the order of P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica, Velleius<sup>34</sup> places on the Palatine, a *Lupercali in Palatium versus*. Ribbeck<sup>35</sup> associates it with the temple of Magna Mater and by inference with the Megalesia.

In 174 the censors contracted for a *scaena* to be used by aediles and praetor.<sup>36</sup> We do not know its site, but the fact that it was to be available for *ludi* under the care of all these officials—the *ludi Romani*, *plebei*, *Megalenses*, *Apollinares* — shows that proximity to the shrine of the god of the *ludi* was not an absolute requirement, at any rate in 174 B.C.<sup>37</sup>

That the three great permanent theatres of Rome were all not far from the Circus Flaminius probably means nothing more than that they naturally belonged in the Campus Martius, the great recreation place of the people, the abode of strange gods and customs, and that they were part of the general scheme of using and adorning the Campus Martius. Pompey added a temple of Venus Victrix to his theatre,<sup>38</sup> at the top of the *cavea*, and three other temples to Honos, Virtus, and Felicitas<sup>39</sup> were placed in the theatre; but here the

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<sup>32</sup> Ritschl, *op. cit.*, I, 339.      <sup>33</sup> *Röm. Mitteil.* X (1895), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Cassius Censor, a Lupercali in Palatium versus, theatrum facere instituit, cui in eo moliendo eximia civitatis severitas et consul Scipio restitere; Velleius, I, 15, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Röm. Trag.* 649, II.      <sup>36</sup> Livy, XLI, 27, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Michaut, *op. cit.*, 372-376, is not inclined to give much weight to this inference, on the ground that it is not certain that the *scaena* was of stone, and, therefore, permanent. Cf. above, n. 27.

<sup>38</sup> Tertullian, *de Spect.* 10; Gell. X, I, 6-10.

<sup>39</sup> *Hemerol. Amitem.*, Aug. 12; *C.I.L.* I<sup>2</sup>, 324.

temples follow the theatre, not the theatre the temples. Furthermore, neither the temples nor the gods are definitely related to *ludi scaenici*. Tertullian<sup>40</sup> indignantly relates how Pompey claimed that the seats of his theatre were really but steps leading up to the temple of Venus.

In 240 or 238 B.C. the *ludi Florales* were celebrated for the first time, in honor of the dedication of the temple of Flora, by the Circus Maximus. It becomes an established festival considerably later, in 173. Stage performances formed the greater part of these *ludi*, but they seem to have been exclusively mimes. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that St. Augustine<sup>41</sup> mentions a theatre before the temple of goddess for use at the Floralia.

Like all the regular *ludi* which we have been considering, the *ludi funebres* included both circensian and scenic features, though the latter were secondary. The *munera gladiatoria* were introduced at Rome in 264 as memorial celebrations for the dead. They often accompany *ludi funebres* but are not always included under that form.<sup>42</sup> The first *munus gladiatorium* was given in the forum Boarium,<sup>43</sup> but after this the forum Romanum<sup>44</sup> is the normal place in Republican times. With the building of amphitheatres a new scene is provided for *munera*, and by the time of Augustus the number of possible sites is still further increased. Suetonius says of Augustus (43): *munera non in foro modo nec in amphitheatro sed in circo et in septis . . . edidit.*

Where the scenic part of *ludi funebres* was given, is a question of which some light is shed by the second prologue of Terence's *Hecyra*, as Hahn<sup>45</sup> has already indicated. The Prologus says (vss. 39-42) that at the second performance (*i.e.*, at the funeral games of L. Aemilius Paulus) the play was going well "quom interea rumor venit | datum ire gladiatores, populus convolat, | tumultuantur clamant pugnant de

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<sup>40</sup> *De spect.* 10.

<sup>41</sup> *De civ. Dei*, II, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Carlo Pascal, "I Ludi Romani," *Accademia die Lincei, Rendiconti*, ser. 5, III, 291-302.

<sup>43</sup> Livy, Per. 16; Val. Max. II, 4, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Livy, XXIII, 30; Cic. *pro Sestio*, 124.

<sup>45</sup> *op. cit.*, 3.

loco; | ego interea meum non potui tutari locum.”<sup>46</sup> From this it seems evident that the places where the play was given and where the gladiatores were to perform were essentially the same, so that it is reasonable to assume that the forum was the scene of this play,<sup>47</sup> as of the *Adelphi*, which was first performed at the same *ludi funebres*. Festus *s.v. Maeniana*<sup>48</sup> describes the galleries which were first built by Maenius, the censor (318 B.C.), over the shops of the forum, that from them the spectacles of the market-place might be witnessed.

We may, then, feel fairly sure that the site of dramatic performances was the forum for the *ludi funebres* and the Palatine for the Megalesia. For the *ludi Apollinares*, after 179, the site was the *theatrum et proscaenium ad Apollinis*,<sup>49</sup> as long as it stood. Where the *scaena* was placed for *ludi Romani* and *ludi plebei*, is a matter of pure conjecture. In the latter case it was very probably in the Circus Flaminius. Opinions differ regarding the site of the *ludi Romani*. Hahn<sup>50</sup> says “ad Capitolium”; he offers no authority for his statement and he does not attempt to define “ad Capitolium.” Hauler<sup>51</sup> says “in the forum,” but presents no better proof than the following fragment from Lucilius (146 M.): Romanis ludis forus olim ornatus lucernis; though he immediately adds that probably various parts of the celebration were held in various places.<sup>52</sup> A better piece of evidence seems to me

<sup>46</sup> Donatus ad *Hec.* Prolog. I, I and 4.

<sup>47</sup> Hauler, *op. cit.* p. 34, A.2, places the gladiatorial of this prologue in the Circus Maximus, which could have hardly been the case at so early a date.

<sup>48</sup> *Maeniana* aedificia appellata sunt a Maenio censore, qui primus foro ultra columnas tigna proiecit, quo ampliarentur superiora spectacula. Cf. Jordan, *Topog. der Stadt Rom* (1885), I, 2, 381-383, n. 94; also n. 43, p. 345.

<sup>49</sup> This temple was situated outside the *Porta Carmentalis*, on the way to the Campus Martius. See Livy, III, 63; IV, 25 and 29. Cf. Platner, *Ancient Rome* (1911), 344, and Jordan-Huelsen, *Topog. der Stadt Rom* (1907), I, 3, 543 ff.

<sup>50</sup> *op. cit.*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 34, A. I. With this view Michaut agrees (*op. cit.*, 371).

<sup>52</sup> The date of this fragment Marx (*Lucilius*, I, Proleg. xlviii) places between 119 and 117 (116? see p. 12). He believes that it refers to an illumination at night (see his note on the verse); his chief authority of the presentation of plays at night is from the *Acta Ludorum Saecularium* (*Ephem. Epig.* VIII, 231, 268). For nocturnal spectacles at the Floria, Saecularia, and Saturnalia cf. Mayor's note on Cic. *de Nat. Deor.* I, 22. Though the evidence is meagre, the general

to be found in Livy XXVII, 36, 8-9: eo anno (208 B.C.) primum, ex quo Hannibal in Italiam venisset, comitium tectum esse memoriae proditum est, et ludos Romanos semel instauratos ab aedilibus curulibus Q. Metello et C. Servilio. The implication here is that the covering of the *comitium* had a connection with the *ludi Romani*. Since the forum seems to have been used for plays at *ludi funebres*,<sup>53</sup> it is not improbable that it was used for this purpose at the *ludi Romani* and that, as Huelsen<sup>54</sup> suggests, favored persons witnessed the performances, "seated on wooden tribunes or standing on the roofs of the booths, of from the Comitium, which was not at a higher level than the Forum, while the common people had to content themselves with standing in the market-place."

I have already referred to the Circus Maximus as a possible site for the *ludi scaenici* at this festival and as the probable site of the first *ludi scaenici* in 364 B.C.<sup>55</sup> Ritschl<sup>56</sup> is very scornful of such an assumption and calls to witness the frequent contrast between *ludi scaenici* and *ludi circenses*. Though he does not cite definite instances, he doubtless has in mind the following passage:—

(a) Cicero *de Leg.* II, 38:—

Iam ludi publici quoniam sunt *cavea circoque* divisi . . . .

Here the contrast is not necessarily one of place; it is, conceivably, only a contrast in kinds of entertainment. More decisive are

(b) Three passages from Livy:—

(1) *Ludi Romani . . . in circo scaenaque* ab aedilibus curulibus . . . facti . . . .—XXXIII, 25, 1.

(2) ludosque *scaenicos* triduum post dedicationem templi Iunonis, biduum post Dianae, et singulos dies fecit *in circo*.—XL, 52, 3.

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belief of scholars is that in Republican times the plays which were presented at the great, annual *ludi* were given in the morning. See Oehmichen, *op. cit.*, 216; Friedlander, *op. cit.*, 494; Dziatzko-Hauler, *Phormio* (1913), p. 37, A. 3, 4, 5.

<sup>53</sup> See p. 94.

<sup>54</sup> *The Roman Forum* (1909); 5. Cf. Jordan, *op. cit.* 1, 2, 318 ff. For cases of covering the forum with awnings cf. Plin. *N.H.* XIX, 23.

<sup>55</sup> See p. 89.

<sup>56</sup> *Op. cit.* I, 287, n.

(3) *scaenicos ludos per quadriduum, unum diem in circo fecit.*—  
XLII, 10, 5.

I think we must admit that these passages possibly do point to a contrast in the places of celebration, and not merely to a difference in the kinds of *ludi*. But we should not fail to notice that the earliest of the instances cited from Livy is for the year 197, *i.e.*, one hundred and sixty-seven years after the first *ludi scaenici* and forty-three years after the coming of the legitimate drama at Rome. The second reference belongs in 179, the very year in which the censor who gives the games has already contracted for the *theatrum et proscaenium ad Apollinis*.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, his games are in honor of the dedication of two temples in the Circus Flaminius, near which this theatre was located. That he might have used the theatre for his *ludi* is not impossible, for it is only five years later that we find recorded, with no indication that it was exceptional, the contract for that *scaena* which as to be used jointly by aediles and praetor.<sup>58</sup> The third of the Livy passages refers to *ludi votivi* in 173, the next year after this joint *scaena* was projected. Again, the censor who gives the *ludi* is one of those who had contracted for the *scaena*.<sup>59</sup> Whether he had the right to use this stage for his *ludi* is uncertain; but the very fact that we have reached a period when the construction of *scaenae* by public officials begins to be recorded is reason enough for this marked distinction between *ludi in scaena* and *ludi in circo*. It by no means follows that in earlier times the circus was never a site for dramatic performances.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Livy, XL, 51, 3.

<sup>58</sup> See p. 92.

<sup>59</sup> Livy, XLI, 27, 5-6.

<sup>60</sup> In his paper on *Dramatic Satira* presented by Prof. B. L. Ullman at the last meeting of the American Philological Association and since published in *Classical Philology*, IX (1914), 1-23, the writer suggests an additional argument for the Circus Maximus as a site for *ludi scaenici*. This argument consists in the fact that Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his famous description of a Roman *pompa* of early date includes the procession bands of actors, who burlesqued and ridiculed the dancers (VII, 72, 10-11). "Surely," says Professor Ullman (p.15), "their part was not ended with the disbanding of the procession. Evidently the real performance began in the Circus, and their evolution and antics during the parade were merely by way of anticipation." Though probably not susceptible of actual proof, the suggestion is interesting and plausible.

One must conclude, then, that it is dangerous to dogmatize on this subject, as on most others connected with the early Roman stage. Our evidence is too slight and the period of time involved is too long for us to believe that it was marked by a perfectly uniform practice. There was, unquestionably, a prejudice in favor of a site near the shrine of the god of the *ludi*, but some places were better suited for plays than others, and audiences must have varied for different *ludi* and for different periods.

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Suggestions for Further Reading:

- (1) Taylor, L. R., "Opportunities for Dramatic Performances in the Time of Plautus and Terence," *TAPA* 68 (1937) 284-304.
- (2) Wiseman, T.P., "Circus Flaminius," *PBSR* 42 (1974) 3-26.

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