Augusta Harvardiana

**Use your imaginations and think of our campus as Augusta Harvardiana, a (very) distant Roman colony that has survived for two millennia. As a living example of an imperial urban space, it provides you an opportunity to move through a built environment that has many points of similarity to other Roman cities we discussed in class.**

**Use a map of Harvard’s campus and your daily experience navigating the campus to write a thoughtful essay that views the University space as a miniature Roman city and discusses how the campus can be seen to reflect many Roman urban planning principles.**

**Points to consider may include the following:**

* **the planning aspect -- what type of arrangement(s) or general principles does the campus demonstrate?**
* **armatures – identify and discuss several, i.e. how they are connecting paths**
* **campus as forum? – consider the central yard as a Roman forum and discuss the correspondences that you see**
* **activity spaces – discuss the location of several activity spaces (i.e. ritual, spectacle, administrative) around Harvard’s campus and compare them to those often seen in Roman cities**
* **commemorative or ideological elements – are any of these woven into the campus? Discuss whether any such elements (using modern ideological notions) are woven into the fabric of the campus and how they relate to Roman urban ideologies.**

During the Roman Empire’s extensive territorial expansion, various cities modeled after those in the Roman Empire were built across the European and African continent. Although distant from these lands, the small city of Augusta Harvardiana shares many similarities with traditional Roman cities, from its planning and active spaces to its commemorative and ideological elements.

The central yard of Augusta Harvardiana is a square, like in most Roman colonies, which were usually planned before they were built, and followed a grid pattern of similarly sized blocks around a central area.

When Augusta was initially founded, not many facilities were needed, and only a few buildings were built within the yard. At the time, a library, a church, and a small number of class buildings were constructed. The size and grandeur of these buildings reflect the relative importance at the time.

Like the Romans, who invested heavily in their deities by building temples, the founders of Boston, Cambridge, and Harvard believed religion was important. Thus, the church and the main academic building do not differ significantly in size.

A difference worth noting, is that while there is only one church within the yard, in honor of one god, Romans honored many gods. But even though Christianity and the ancient Roman gods have very little in common, the architectural style of the buildings shares some resemblance. The inside columns of the Memorial Church are of Corinthian style, like the “Round Temple” on the Tiber, and the outside columns are Dorian style, like many of the temples on the Largo Argentina.

Not all the temples in the Largo Argentina celebrated deities: some of them instead commemorated military victories and honored the generals who led them. Similar to Roman culture, American culture also celebrates the strong people that led them. Within the walls of the yard there is a statue in honor of John Harvard, the founder of the school, and right outside, in the Cambridge Common, there is a bigger monument honoring the bravery of the Founding Fathers. This can be thought of as the Capitolium of Augusta Harvardiana. One of the gods of the Capitoline Triad was Jupiter, who was associated with the founding of Rome, since he supposedly sent Romulus his blessing of protection before the city was founded.

When Harvard was originally established, it only had a couple of buildings, similarly to a small town, and nobody expected it to become a massive institution. That is why around the first edifications a wall was built, similar to how the Roman colonies used to build a wall around the forum and other important buildings in the center of the city.

The transitable paths within these confines form a hierarchical grid, with some main avenues, some wider paths, and some thinner ones. Not unlike fortifications in Roman settlements, the wall only has openings that connect to the main axial roads, with intermittent Securitas posts (which interestingly means security in Latin).

Unlike imperial settlements however, the rest of Augusta Harvardiana experienced organic growth, similar to that of Rome’s. Outside the walls the blocks differ in size and the main roads project outwards radially from the center, instead of having a consistent grid.

Regardless, many comparisons can still be drawn with Roman settlements. The most striking similarity, which is apparent when visiting Harvard Square, is that commercial storefronts are interspersed between residential and academic buildings. Many modern cities have clearly demarcated zones with different uses: industrial, commercial and residential. And for each category, there is a gamut of price ranges. In Cambridge, as it was in Rome, residential and commercial are scattered throughout, very new and expensive buildings sit next to older ones.

Among these buildings outside the wall we can find the Annenberg Dining Hall and Sander’s Theater. While not inside the city center of Augusta Harvardiana, they are still central to everyday life. As students, we do not go to a market to purchase food, but we do frequent dining halls. They not only serve as places to eat, but also as places to socialize, like they did Ancient Rome.

Particular to Harvard’s dining halls is the fact that they host only certain classes. As a sophomore, one cannot go to Annenberg, unless it is for breakfast. Naturally, this draws a clear distinction between freshmen and upperclassmen.

Where this does not happen is classes. As a senior one can be sitting next to a freshman in lecture. In a class like CS50 a senior can be sitting next to a freshman. This occurs usually in larger classes, which are given in Sanders theater.

The theater, like Roman theaters, blur the social lines and allow everyone to spend time together. Most classes at the big spaces like Sanders tend to have this in common. And it is not only its use that is Roman-like. Its construction is too. It was able to be built thanks to the invention of concrete and bricks and sports big round arches.

Roman civilization has had an incredible influence in our daily lives. In this essay I talked mainly about ideological and architectural similarities between Harvard and Rome, but with more time there are many aspects that one can delve into. Politics would be a good example, given that our student government is run like a democracy.

To conclude, not everything at Harvard looks Roman, and while Augusta Harvardiana is an invention, Harvard, Cambridge and many of the cities and countries across America do draw heavily from Roman culture, language and planning, all despite being far away from Rome. How our culture is built on top of previous ones, and how our knowledge builds on top of many generations of thinkers, is something that we should learn to appreciate. If anything, this essay should leave you with a thirst for knowledge, and curious about the many ancient cultures that have so much influence in our daily lives.