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Preferred panel: 13. Urban Spaces

### **The Date of Foundation of Diocletian's Palace at Split**

The centre of Diocletian's palace in Split – the Mausoleum, the temples, the Peristyle, symbolically its most important place, was marked by its Egyptian material. Twelve sphinxes, and a few hundred columns made of red, rose-coloured or gray granite, porphyry, white marble, cipolin, and of limestone, must have created a truly Egyptian atmosphere in the centre of the Palace.

Perhaps this Egyptian material can help us to get some of the important questions about the date of its founding away from their current impasse. We could determine more accurately the date of transport of the sphinxes, columns and other decorative material to the Emperor's Adriatic Palace from further analysis of Diocletian's well-known military campaign between the autumn of 297 and summer 298. (Diocletian had to remove the pretenders to the throne in Egypt, who had emerged during the unrest caused by the introduction of the new taxes.) In the autumn of the same 298, foundations were laid for Diocletian's *thermae* on the Esquiline in Rome, the largest architectural complex of similar purpose in the whole Empire. All the marble material was sent in by ship from Egypt. The Palace in Split, in short, could have been a peer of the famous *thermae* of Rome.

The hypothesis would move the date of commencement of construction of the Palace by several years. Instead of 293 or 295, as has most often been assumed, though without any historical support - we arrive very likely at the year 298 as the year in which construction started. Adopting this revised date for the start of construction "shortens" the time up to the date of its completion and thus certainly provides better reasons for the known discrepancies and incompleteness, both in the detail of the work and in the complex of the Emperor's residence as a whole.