



## Arch of Titus, Roman Forum (81-82 CE)\_Architecture

### Western façade of the triumphal arch of Titus

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**Patron/Sponsor:** Domitian

**Original Location/Place:**  
Roman Forum

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):**

In loco. Restored by Raffaele Stern in 1817 and by Giuseppe Valadier in 1821.

**Original Inscription/Graffito:** *CIL VI, 945*

SENATVS  
POPVLVSQVE ROMANVS  
DIVO TITO DIVI VESPASIANI F  
VESPASIANO AVGVSTO

Senatus / populusque Romanus / divo Tito divi Vespasiani f(ilio) / Vespasiano Augusto

“The Senate and People of Roman (dedicate this) to the divine Titus Vespasianus Augustus, son of the divine Vespasian.

**Date:** 81 CE to 82 CE

**Material:**  
Pentelic Marble

**Measurements:** Width: 13.50m  
Height: 15.40m  
Depth: 4.75m

**Literary reference:**  
Martial, *De Spectaculis* 2.

**Building Typology:**  
Public Building / Triumphal Arch

**Description:**

The Triumphal Arch of Titus is located on the Velia, namely on the eastern edge of the Roman forum, which it enclosed when the building was erected. The monument, which follows the scheme of the traditional Roman



triumphal arch, is characterised by the presence of two great piers joined by an archway, which is crowned with a flat entablature, the attic. Each façade is framed by an engaged and fluted Corinthian column, standing on a square pedestal. The capitals of these columns are the earliest examples of the composite style. The upper attic is framed by four piers on the corners. The surviving inscription, “The Senate and the People of Roman (dedicate this arch) to the divine Titus Vespasianus Augustus, son of the divine Vespasian,” is set on the western attic. The lower part of the attic is decorated with a frieze, which depicts the triumphal procession. On the inner jambs of the arch are the two famous reliefs. The southern panel depicts the spoils from the Jerusalem Temple. The northern panel depicts Titus riding on the *quadriga*, during his triumph, passing through a triumphal arch. Winged Victories are framed in the spandrels, whereas on the keystones stand representations of Roma, or *Virtus*, towards the Colosseum, and the *Genius populi Romani*, or possibly *Bonus Eventus* or *Honos*, towards the Forum. In the centre of the ceiling of the archway, which is finished in soffits (*lacunaria*), one sees a relief depicting the apotheosis of Titus, representing him (or rather his bust) as being carried up to heaven by an eagle (Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, p. 185-187).

**Commentary:** The Arch of Titus, which still stands – much restored – on the edge of the Roman Forum was completed following the emperor’s death in 81 CE. It stood close to the other monumental contributions made by the Flavians in the centre of Rome: the Triumphal Arch of Titus in the Circus Maximus, the Flavian Amphitheatre (80 CE), and the Temple of Peace, consecrated in 75 CE, all of which laid emphasis on the new Flavian dynasty, their legitimacy, and in particular the successful outcome of their Jewish War (Millar, “Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome,” p. 101-128). The choice of the location of the Arch of Titus was intentional: located on the Velia, the arch not only stood near the above buildings, planned by Vespasian and Titus, and completed by Domitian, but in fact also stood on the area of Nero’s Domus Aurea. The public nature of the buildings erected by the Flavians reflected their will to hand back to the Roman people, huge tracts of land expropriated by Nero (Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, p. 183). The triumphal arch of Titus on the Velia may have been the work of Rabirius, the architect who designed the *Domus Augustana*, Domitian’s palace on the Palatine. The arch was finished in 82 CE, during the reign of Domitian, even if the work had probably begun sometimes before, during the rule of his brother Titus. The fact that Titus had already died by the time the arch was completed is made clear by the depiction of the apotheosis depicted on the ceiling of the archway and by the inscription set on the western attic. In the seventh book of his *Jewish War*, Josephus describes the triumphal ceremony of Titus (Josephus, *War* VII.119-162). The ceremony was celebrated in 71 CE, following their return to Rome; Titus is described as riding in a *quadriga*, together with his father Vespasian, while his younger brother rode on a horse. During the triumph, moving stages were produced which depicted the various sieges and battles, as well as models of ships, and the spoils of the war, amongst which were objects taken from the Temple of Jerusalem. Josephus describes the golden Table of Shewbread and the seven-branched Menorah, which are indeed depicted on the reliefs, as well as a Scroll of the Law, which is not (*Jewish War*, 7.139-147). Josephus states at the beginning of the passage that the purpose of all these trappings was to emphasise the majesty of the Roman Empire and the invincibility of Rome (*Jewish War*, 7.132). The success of Vespasian and Titus in the Jewish War was a crucial factor in legitimising the Flavian dynasty’s claim to power; Vespasian’s acclamation as emperor had come at the end of the most turbulent period in Rome’s history since the civil wars that led to the fall of the Republic; the armed conflict between the different contenders for the principate had even affected the city of Rome, with Vitellius’s attack on the Capitol considered the worst event to have affected the Roman state since its foundation (Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.72; Noreña “Medium and Message,” p. 31). For Vespasian, it was crucial not only to establish peace, but to assert his right to rule outside of the context of such disorder. By externalising the revolt in Judea as a ‘foreign war,’ the Flavians replaced the unsavoury memories of the civil war in which they had been involved with the unifying success of their victory against the Jews. Much in the same way that Augustus presented his victory against Mark Anthony and Cleopatra as a ‘war’ with Egypt rather than as an internal conflict with a member of the Roman senate, the destruction of Jerusalem was presented as an external conquest, won with the support of the Roman gods and in the name of the Roman people; the victory in Judaea was a victory for Rome, not just the emerging Flavian dynasty (Tuck, “Imperial Image Making,” p. 111-112). To further emphasise the ‘foreign’ nature of the war, and in a further echo of Augustus, Vespasian ordered the doors of the Temple of Janus in Rome to be closed, indicating the *pax* that he had brought to the empire and the complete transformation of how 69 CE was to be remembered: the erection of a triumphal arch in their honour was a fitting commemoration of their victory.

However, Diane Kleiner emphasizes that in contrast with the arch built in the Circus Maximus, which was a true ‘Triumphal Arch’, the main purpose of the structure on the Velia was not just to celebrate the achievements of Titus, but also to celebrate him as *divus*. This is made evident by the depiction of his apotheosis. There Titus is not depicted as a victorious war leader, but as a god, as stated on the inscription (Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, p. 189). The Arch in the Roman Forum was completed as an act of memorial, rather than celebration, and yet its iconic relief decoration has ensured that it remains amongst the most important monuments that celebrated the victory against Judea and the collective might of Rome, whilst also emphasizing the collective and individual achievements



of the Flavian emperors.

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Inscription

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**Realized by:**

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