



[Imperial dedication of the Flavian amphitheatre \(CIL VI, 40454a\) \[1\]](#)

Reconstruction of the inscription produced for the inauguration of the Flavian amphitheatre under Vespasian and then under Titus.

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):

Honorific dedication

Original Location/Place: Coliseum, one of the four main entrances inside the amphitheatre.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Coliseum

Date: 78 CE to 80 CE

Physical Characteristics:

Marble architrave, now partially preserved in two fragments.

Material:

marble

Measurements:

Estimated dimensions for the whole block: 118 cm in height, 430 cm in width, 82 to 85 cm thick; for the letters, 20 to 18 cm in height.

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications:

Alföldy, Géza, "Eine Bauinschrift aus dem Colosseum," in *ZPE* 109, 1995, p. 195-226.

CIL VI, 40454a; *AE*, 1995, 111b; *EAOR* VI, 1a.

Commentary:

According to the reconstructions of the text proposed by Géza Alföldy, and based on the layout of the peg-holes on the block, the inscription may have been dedicated first to Vespasian, here mentioned through a simple and reduced title. The fact that it was not the entire title of the emperor shows that the inscription was not the real official dedicatory inscription of the monument. It was thus probably not exposed on the podium all around the arena, but rather above one of the four main gates inside the arena. The building operations of the Flavian amphitheatre started under Vespasian's reign, after his triumph in 71 CE. However, due to his death on 23rd June 79 CE, Vespasian could not attend the inauguration of the amphitheatre. These operations were undertaken by his son Titus in 80 CE (for a global survey of the Coliseum, see La Regina, *Sanguis et arena*). This historical context, the presence of some non-used peg-holes, and the near absence of space between the words *imp(erator)* and *Caes(ar)* led Géza Alföldy to conclude that the inscription may have been modified after Vespasian's death, with the insertion of the letter T for the *praenomen* Titus (Alföldy, "Eine Bauinschrift," p. 210; this reading is accepted in Millar, "Last Year," p. 118-119).

According to Silvia Orlandi, Géza Alföldy's reconstruction of the words *amphitheatru[m nouum]* seems totally justified. In his *Life of Vespasian* IX.1, Suetonius uses himself the expression *nova opera* to refer to Vespasianus's operations, not only to convey that this monument was new, but also to insist on the fact that it was built with new building techniques (Alföldy, "Eine Bauinschrift," p. 216; Orlandi, *Epigrafia*, p. 40-41). However, Silvia Orlandi has some doubt over the last words proposed in Alföldy's reconstruction of *fieri iussit*, "ordered...to be constructed." Actually, even if this formulation fits well in the free space of the block, it is rarely used in imperial dedications for the construction of a public monument. According to Orlandi, the inscription may have ended with the verb *dedicavit*, "dedicated" (Orlandi, *Epigrafia*, p. 41).

The more interesting element of this reconstructed inscription is the reference to the fact that the emperor ordered the construction of this monument *[ex] manubis*, "out of the spoils of war." As Géza Alföldy rightly recalls, the *manubiae* may refer to the fact that the Flavian amphitheatre was built thanks to the spoils hoarded at the end of the Jewish war, after the taking of Jerusalem in 70 CE. The practice of using spoils amassed during foreign wars



for funding the construction of temples or other public monuments, or for giving generous gifts to the Roman people, was a common practice under the Republic and the principate. The explicit connection of the construction of a public monument with the *manubiae* from a foreign war can be compared with the temple of Mars Ultor and the Forum of Augustus built *[ex ma]n[i]biis* by Augustus (*Res Gestae* XXI). It reminds also of a later dedication, mentioned by Aulus Gellius in *Attic Nights* XIII, 25, 26-29. In this dedicatory inscription of the Forum of Trajan, the spoils (*manubiae*) amassed during the Dacian wars were presented as the main funding source for the construction of the forum (Alföldy, "Eine Bauinschrift," p. 220; Orlandi, *Epigrafia*, p. 41). Coming back to the case of the Flavian amphitheatre, Kathleen Coleman rightly recalls that in Martial, *Liber Spectaculorum* II.2.10, the poet presents the Flavian constructions which replaced former Neronian buildings. Among these new constructions there was the amphitheatre. To conclude his epigram, Martial writes that Rome has been restored to herself and he adds: *deliciae populi, quae fuerant domini*, "what used to be the pleasure of a master (i.e. Nero), is now the pleasure of the people." According to Kathleen Coleman, Martial's last sentence could be perceived as "very consonant with the triumphant general's obligation to spend his share of the booty in the public interest" (Coleman, *M. Valerii*, p. lxvi).

If the reconstruction of *[ex] manubis* in this imperial dedication is correct, this inscription would be the only one source which would explicitly link the funding of the building program of the Flavian amphitheatre with the booty amassed during the Jewish war. Actually, among the ancient authors or sources mentioning this construction, such as Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Eutropius, the *Chronicle* of Eusebius/Jerome, the *Chronography of 354*, none puts it in relation to the wealth brought back from Judea (Alföldy, "Eine Bauinschrift," p. 221). As Géza Alföldy has rightly recalled, Flavius Josephus gives an accurate depiction of all the wealth which was taken during the Judean war, especially during the taking of Jerusalem – see Josephus, *Jewish War* VI.387-391 (treasures in the temples); VII.15 (on gold, silver, precious clothes amassed); VI.420 (war prisoners) (Alföldy, "Eine Bauinschrift," p. 218). The [reliefs of the Arch of Titus](#) [2] in Rome give an idea of the booty which was brought back to Rome and exhibited during the triumph of 71 CE (triumph described in [Josephus, Jewish War VII.123-157](#) [3], for an interesting study of the triumph's route, see Millar, "Last Year," p. 103-106). The Flavian amphitheatre would thus become, in the framework of Vespasian's building program, the second major monument of Rome, along with the [Templum Pacis](#) [4], or Temple of Peace, probably dedicated in 75 CE ([Josephus, Jewish War VII.158](#) [3]), which would have been erected thanks to the spoils of the Jewish war, to commemorate this victory (Alföldy, "Eine Bauinschrift," p. 222). The Flavian amphitheatre would thus be part of all the building programmes led by Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian to plot the Roman topography of various monuments commemorating the Roman victory during the Jewish war – the *Templum Pacis*, the [arch dedicated to Titus in the Circus Maximus](#) [5] (completed in early 81 CE), and the other one which has survived until now on the Velia (completed at the end of 81 CE). According to Fergus Millar, Vespasian and his two sons established a real "memorialization" of the Jewish war in the Roman topography and tried to constantly use the messages associated with the building of these monuments as tools to justify the legitimacy and the strength of their dynasty (Millar, "Last Year," especially p. 102-103).

Keywords in the original language:

- [imperator](#) [6]
- [Titus](#) [7]
- [Vespasianus](#) [8]
- [Augustus](#) [9]
- [amphitheatrum](#) [10]
- [manubiae](#) [11]

Thematic keywords:

- [Flavians](#) [12]
- [Titus](#) [13]
- [Vespasian](#) [14]
- [Coliseum](#) [15]
- [Jewish war](#) [16]
- [spoils](#) [17]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [18]



- [commemoration](#) [19]
- [Flavian dynasty](#) [20]

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[“Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome”](#) [22]

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[“Eine Bauinschrift aus dem Colosseum”](#) [23]

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- [Read more about Arch of Titus, Roman Forum \(81-82 CE\) Reliefs](#) [26]

Inscription

[The Arch of Titus in the Circus Maximus](#) [5]

- [Read more about The Arch of Titus in the Circus Maximus](#) [5]

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- [26] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/arch-titus-roman-forum-81-82-cereliefs>
- [27] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/marie-roux>