



Sestertius depicting Titus on a sella curule and the Coliseum (80-81 CE)

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[1]

Denomination:

Sestertius

Date: 81 CE

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Material:

Brass (Æ)

Mint:

Rome

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):

British Museum, London. Inventory number: 1844,0425.712

Name of Ruler:

Titus

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Titus, sitting in a toga on a curule chair, holding in the right hand a branch and in the left hand a scroll; oval shield, a helmet, two shields and lances

Inscription: IMP T CAES VESP AVG PM TR P PP COS VIII - SC

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Image: Amphitheatrum Flavium and Meta Sudans

Weight (g): 23.36g

Commentary: (RIC II/1, Titus, no. 184, p. 210) (see also CM 1844.4-25.712; BMC Titus 190)

The obverse of this sestertius, minted between 80 and 81 CE, depicts the emperor Titus on a curule chair, and on the reverse a birds-eye view of the Flavian Amphitheatre, better known as the Colosseum. The inscription on the obverse refers to Titus as imperator, Caesar, Augustus, pontifex maximus, or high priest of Roman state religion, holder of the tribunicia potestas, pater patriae or father of the fatherland, and as consul for the eighth time. The words SC, or senatus consultum, probably refer to the decision of the senate to thank the emperor for the games, which were held to inaugurate the huge building. Titus is depicted on a curule chair, a symbol of power used by Roman magistrates, and which also epitomized the idea of maiestas. Behind Titus are depicted various weapons, probably collected on the battlefield and later set up as trophy to indicate a victory. In the case of Titus, these weapons denote his role in the Judean War, for which he had celebrated a triumph, together with his father, almost a decade earlier in 71 CE.

The importance of this victory is indicated by the image on the reverse of the coin, which depicts the enormous permanent monument to spectacle constructed and inaugurated by the Flavians in the capital city. Along with the Temple of Peace complex and the two monumental triumphal arches set up in the Circus Maximus and Roman Forum, the Colosseum formed part of the monumental language of the Flavian dynasty, which they employed to promote certain messages of imperial policy and propaganda. In the case of the Flavian Amphitheatre, the message was one of absolute conquest, of both the Jews and of the imperial memory of the emperor Nero. The dedicatory inscription of the amphitheatre, which has been carefully restored by Geza Alföldy, stated that the work was financed ex manubis, or "from spoils"; as no other war had been fought by the Flavians in the decade preceding the construction of the Colosseum, there can be no doubt that the "spoils" referred to the Temple



Treasures looted from Jerusalem during Titus's sacking of the city (see [Arch of Titus, Roman Forum \(81-82 CE\) Reliefs](#) [2]), which were later paraded through the city of Rome during his triumph before being permanently displayed in the Templum Pacis complex as part of Vespasian's "open-air" art gallery (see Alföldy, "Eine Bauinschrift aus dem Colosseum," p. 195-296; [Imperial Dedication of the Flavian Amphitheatre](#) [3]; [The Temple of Peace \(Rome\)](#) [4]). The amphitheatre had been situated on the site of an enormous lake, privately owned by Nero, which Vespasian had drained and symbolically returned to the people of Rome by building the colossal structure dedicated to public entertainment on top of it (Suetonius, Nero, 3; Vespasian, 22). The depiction of the huge building, erected by Vespasian, but inaugurated in 80 CE by Titus, epitomized the idea of the emperor's benevolence towards his subjects, which was further increased by the comparison that might be drawn between Vespasian and his predecessor.

A few months before this coin was minted, the inaugural games of the Flavian Amphitheatre were held. They are described in detail by Martial in his *On the Spectacles* and are chronicled by Suetonius in his *Life of Titus* and by Cassius Dio in his *Roman History*. In this display, which lasted for many days, the emperor reached an unrecorded level of popularity among the Roman plebs. Indeed, as the new emperor needed to gain cheap popularity and the approval of the public, he answered with the traditional policy of distribution of bread and circuses, *panem et circenses* (Juvenal, *Satires* IV.10.81).

The appearance of the curule chair and the image of the Colosseum on the same coin was clearly motivated at celebrating the inauguration of building with these games; the depiction of the building was an indication of its prestige and the associated glory and generosity that its construction brought to the Flavian dynasty, with the presentation of Titus on the curule chair symbolic of the honours paid to the gods as part of the inaugural games. As well as commemorating the Flavian victory that had led to the games and the new building in which they would be permanently hosted, this coin demonstrates how devotion to the gods was brought into the popular arena, through the figure of the emperor (Dansky, "The throne and curule chair types of Titus and Domitian," p. 59-70, esp. p. 64-66).

Keywords in the original language:

- [imperator](#) [5]
- [Caesar](#) [6]
- [Augustus](#) [7]
- [pontifex maximus](#) [8]
- [tribunicia potestas](#) [9]
- [pater patriae](#) [10]
- [consul](#) [11]
- [senatus consultum](#) [12]

Thematic keywords:

- [Titus](#) [13]
- [games](#) [14]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [15]
- [Coliseum](#) [16]
- [trophy](#) [17]
- [triumph](#) [18]
- [Roman benevolence](#) [19]
- [amphitheatre](#) [20]
- [gladiator](#) [21]
- [Vespasian](#) [22]
- [Flavian dynasty](#) [23]

Bibliographical references: Alföldy, Géza, "[Eine Bauinschrift aus dem Colosseum](#)" [24], *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 109 (1995) : 195-226

Dansky, Ben L., [The throne and curule chair types of Titus and Domitian](#) [25], *Rivista Svizzera di numismatica* 74 (1995) : 59-70

Foss, Clive, [Roman Historical Coins](#) [26] (London: Seaby, 1990)



Jones, Brian W., [The Emperor Titus](#) [27] (London: Routledge, 1984)

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- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/imperial-dedication-flavian-amphitheatre-cil-vi-40454a>
- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/temple-peace-rome>
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- [27] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/emperor-titus>