



The Temple of Peace (Rome)

Original Location/Place: Southeast side of the Argiletum, looking towards the Forum of Augustus.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Destroyed during the sack of Rome in 410 CE. Some traces remain *in situ*. Several rooms transformed into the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian.

Date: 75 CE

Material: Marble.

Measurements: 110m x 135m

Building Typology: Temple.

Description: Rectangular enclosure laid out along the same alignment as the Forum of Augustus, to which it faces but from which it was originally separated by the Argiletum. The back of the temple faced the Velian hill. The complex has largely disappeared, although its depiction in a surviving fragment of the Marble Plan (*forma urbis*) makes it possible to reconstruct the basic appearance: the large, open square of the enclosure dominated the space, surrounded by a *porticus* adjoined by five rooms that opened onto the south-eastern colonnade. The central, apsidal hall that opened into the back wall, almost as an exhedra, is identified as the 'temple' of Peace. A cult statue of Pax stood in the centre of its back wall. The front of the temple was made up of six columns that stood within the surrounding colonnade, but made distinct from the other columns from their larger proportions, and which were topped by a triangular pediment. An altar appears to have stood within the open square enclosure, in front of the entrance to the temple. The marble plan also reveals that there were six rows on each side, made up of four linked rectangles, that may have served as garden beds for a monumental botanical garden or as water canals connected to fountains. Excavations in 2005 revealed the original pink and white marble floor of the temple complex.

Commentary: The Temple of Peace was the first new building of the Flavian dynasty in the city of Rome. Having been vowed in 71 CE following Titus's successful campaign in Judea, which had resulted in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem a year earlier, it was built and subsequently inaugurated four years later (Josephus, *Jewish War*, VII.158; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 65.15.1). Although much detail concerning its function is still unclear, the Temple of Peace was a crucial element of early Flavian propaganda and was used to consolidate the dynastic and political messages of Vespasian's principate.

Although acclaimed emperor on the 22nd December 69 CE, Vespasian did not arrive in the capital city until October of the following year (Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.3). When he arrived, he found Rome physically and financially burdened by the memory of Nero and the uncertainty caused by the civil war; large swathes of public land had been seized by Nero in order to create his vast 'Golden House' and its associated parklands, including the artificial lake that became the site of the Colosseum (for Nero's building projects in Rome, see Philips, "Nero's new city", p. 300-307; Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, p. 17-33). As part of a campaign to systematically 'restore' public land to the Roman people, Vespasian began a lengthy building project that sought to permanently erase the physical remains of Nero's profligacy whilst also memorialising the presence and achievements of the new ruling dynasty. The Temple of Peace was a key part of this memorialisation (for general discussion of Flavian building in the city of Rome, see Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*; Packer, "*Plurima et Amplissima Opera*," p. 167-98).

The exact location, layout and appearance of the temple has been identified from its depiction on fragments 15a-c and 16a of the Severan Marble Plan. The temple complex was largely destroyed during the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410 CE, with the surviving apsidal hall built into the new church of St Cosmas and Damian, which was founded by Pope Felix in 527 CE (Claridge, *Rome*, p. 153). Although little more can be seen above the present ground level, the Marble Plan describes an enormous complex, measuring ten times the size of the precinct dedicated to Augustus's *Ara Pacis*. There were two main architectural elements: the largest part was given over to an open square, surrounded by a colonnaded portico on all four sides. The back wall of the *porticus*, which faced the Velian hill (and eventually the Colosseum), was dominated by the second major element: a series of rooms, including the central apsidal hall which was separated from the square by a porch of six columns, of larger size than those in the surrounding *porticus* (Noreña, "Medium and message...", p. 26-7; for detailed discussion of the complex, see *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*, IV.67-70). The cult statue of *Pax* was likely placed in the apse of this hall, with the altar situated within the square, before the porch (Coarelli, *Rome*, p. 125-6). The Marble Plan also depicts six rows of connected rectangular strips on either side of the altar which have been variously interpreted; Elizabeth Pollard, following the work of Robert Lloyd, has suggested that these rectangular structures were beds for a monumental imperial botanical garden, and that they may have been planted with flora that represented the entire



empire in “comparative examples of colonial botany” (Pollard, “Pliny’s Natural History and the Flavian Templum Pacis” p. 320). Eugenio La Rocca believed the linked rectangles to be water canals, which were originally connected to fountains (La Rocca, “La nuova immagine dei fori imperiali,” p. 195-6).

More is known, however, of the decoration of the temple complex, primarily from descriptions in Josephus and Pliny the Elder. Josephus relates that Vespasian:

... embellished it with ancient masterpieces of painting and sculpture; indeed into that shrine were accumulated and stored all objects for the sight of which men had once wandered over the whole world, eager to see them severally while they lay in various communities. Here too he laid up the vessels of gold from the temple of the Jews, on which he prided himself (*Jewish War*, VII.158-62).

The ‘masterpieces’ were works of Greek art, many of which had been taken by Nero from their places of origin in order to decorate the *Domus Aurea* (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* XXXIV.84). Vespasian removed them from the palace and organised them within the temple complex so that they would be accessible to public view, along with the rich booty seized from the Temple of Jerusalem by Titus in 71 CE. Although little is known of the cultic function of the temple or the use of the monumental space that stood before it, Carlos Noreña has rightly noted that the complex likely served an important cultural function; the artworks on display rendered it an “open-air museum”, where the population of Rome could engage with Greek culture “through the *liberalitas* (‘personal generosity’) and “cultural patronage” of the emperor (Noreña, “Medium and message” p. 27, n. 9 and 13. For a full discussion of the works displayed, see also Millar, “Last Year in Rome”, p. 101-128). Irrespective of its religious nature, the *Templum Pacis* made an important statement about the cultural interests of the Flavian dynasty, and their restoration of *paidea* (‘learning’) to the city of Rome.

The most important function of the *Templum Pacis* however was the political message that it communicated about the Flavian dynasty and their relationship to *pax*. There were two ways in which Flavian *pax* might be understood: firstly, as the *pax civilis* (civilian peace), which indicated domestic peace in the Roman world and the absence of civil war. Vespasian and his sons had established their dynasty through victory in a year-long civil war following Nero’s suicide, so it might well have been the case that this restoration of order and the end of civic discord was the motivation for Vespasian’s vow to build the Temple of Peace. However, Carlos Noreña has suggested that this was an unlikely intention as to do so “would only serve as a permanent reminder of the civil violence that had enabled his ascent to the throne” (“Medium and Message,” p. 35). Vespasian’s dedication of the temple complex may instead have been in accordance with the second incarnation of *pax* that existed in the Roman conscience: the military ‘peace’ that the Romans imposed upon conquered peoples. This was quite distinct from the domestic peace that indicated civic concord, and although it derived from the ‘pact’ made between two sides in the conclusion of a war, it had come to signify the subjugation of ‘foreign’ lands and communities and their total capitulation to Roman *virtus* (Noreña, “Medium and Message,” p. 34). This was almost certainly the kind of ‘peace’ to which Vespasian referred in his dedication of the temple; the conquered peoples over whom his armies had extended ‘peace’ were the people of Judea, and the destruction of Jerusalem was the particular military victory that the complex celebrated. If we consider Josephus’s statement that alongside the great works of art from the Greek world were displayed the “vessels of gold from the temple of the Jews” (*Jewish War*, VII.162), the spoils of war taken from the Jerusalem Temple and paraded in the triumph celebrated by Vespasian and Titus, it becomes clear that the *Templum Pacis* was conceived as a monumental celebration of the subjugation of a foreign people, and the “power of the Roman war machine under the guidance of the new Flavian dynasty” (Noreña, “Medium and Message,” p. 35; Millar, “Last Year in Rome”, p. 101-128).

The monumentalisation of this victory was an important step in securing the political message of the Flavians. It was no accident that much of Vespasian’s propaganda sought to align his rule with the governing principles of Augustus; just as Augustus dedicated an Altar of Peace, Vespasian dedicated a Temple to the same deity, reiterating the rhetoric of *imperium*, military power and resulting harmony that had characterised the reign of the first emperor. Like Augustus, Vespasian had closed the Gates of Janus following the victory in Judea, but unlike his predecessor – whose *Res Gestae* emphasised the benefits of expansion and conquest won through military conquest (*Res Gestae* chapter 13) – the victory had not added territory or brought new lands under Roman dominion. Judea had long been under Roman rule and the Flavian ‘conquest’ was rather the successful suppression of a local insurrection than a military invasion and forced ‘pacification’ of an enemy territory. In order to establish the necessary *auctoritas* (authority) to legitimate his claim to power, it was essential for Vespasian to convert his victory into political capital, which he sought to do through the employment of language, rhetoric and architectural schemes that were imbued with the rubric of success of the Julio-Claudian dynasty; this was not simply ‘a’ temple of Peace, but one in which the concept of *Pax Augusta* was implicitly interwoven.



Rashna Taraporewalla has suggested that in order to secure the new Flavian regime, Vespasian and Titus's military successes had to be "perpetuated through the construction of an enduring memory shared by the entire community" ("The Templum Pacis," p. 149). Although the siege of Jerusalem had required an enormous military commitment – four legions – the 'conquest' of a region already under Roman control may have had limited resonance for the people of Rome. The triumph celebrated by Vespasian and Titus certainly helped to communicate the scale of the victory, with the quantity of riches and Jewish slaves bringing the spectacle of war before the eyes of the inhabitants of the capital city (see Beard, "Triumph of Flavius Josephus," p. 548-553). However, the nature of this spectacle was transitory; for the Flavian dynasty to successfully retain power, it was necessary for the insurrection in Judea to be presented as a threat to the security of the entire Roman world, so that their victory there might be understood as a restitution of peace to the empire as a whole. The vow and dedication of the *Templum Pacis* provided the ideal opportunity and space within which Vespasian could construct a social memory of the peace of the empire through the conversion of military glory into political power and stability (Taraporewalla, "The Templum Pacis," p. 150). By decorating the complex with masterpieces of Greek art and the spoils of the Jerusalem temple, Vespasian acted against the negative memories of Nero's requisition of such works whilst also making a public statement that placed the Jewish War firmly in the context of the wider empire, advertising the peace won there as a peace for all Romans; the creation of a "commemorative locus" for the Flavian victory in the city of Rome transported the military memories associated with Judea from a foreign place to the imperial capital, "where their resonance would be more effective" (Taraporewalla, "The Templum Pacis," p. 153).

The *Templum Pacis* was a mnemonic space that made clear the imperialist and triumphant nature of Flavian victory, but it was only one of a number of examples that indicate the centrality of 'peace' to the governing ideology of the new ruling dynasty; *pax* appeared with some regularity on the coinage minted by Vespasian between 71-75 CE and epigraphic evidence attests to the reception of the Flavians as 'peace-bringers' in the provinces (for discussion of the coinage and inscriptions, see Noreña, "Medium and Message," p. 29-38). A colony in Thrace was even renamed the *colonia Flavia Pacis Deultensium*, in honour of the emperor's particular association with the personification of the deity. In the city of Rome, the Temple of Peace allowed Vespasian to demonstrate *pax* as the core ideal of his public persona and legitimacy as ruler, whilst also responding to the example set by Augustus, in whose image he carefully constructed his claim to power (Noreña, "Medium and Message," p. 28-9).

Thematic keywords:

- Vespasian
- civil war
- Jewish revolt
- Jewish war
- Flavian dynasty
- Judea
- Roman peace
- temple
- Rome (city)
- propaganda

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- Read more about Dedication to Vespasian and Titus for pax Augusta (CIL VI, 199)

Architecture

Ara Pacis (13-9 BCE)_Architecture

Reconstruction of the Ara Pacis



[Ara Pacis: frontal view](#) [1]



[Ara Pacis: side view](#) [2]



[Ara Pacis: side view](#) [3]



- [Read more about Ara Pacis \(13-9 BCE\) Architecture](#) [4]

Architecture

[Arch of Titus, Roman Forum \(81-82 CE\) Architecture](#) [5]

[Western façade of the triumphal arch of Titus](#) [6]



[Western façade of the triumphal arch of Titus \(2\)](#) [7]



[Inscription on the western façade of the triumphal arch of Titus](#) [8]



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Relief / Sculpture

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Numismatic item



[Sestertius depicting the head of Vespasian and Pax, the personification of peace \(71 CE\) \[10\]](#)

- [Read more about Sestertius depicting the head of Vespasian and Pax, the personification of peace \(71 CE\) \[10\]](#)

Inscription

[Res Gestae Divi Augusti, chapter 13 \[11\]](#)

See [Augustus, Res Gestae divi Augusti \(General Background\) \[12\]](#) for the historical context of the *Res Gestae*.

- [Read more about Res Gestae Divi Augusti, chapter 13 \[11\]](#)

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