BEYOND BUILT FORM: THE COLOSSEUM

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ABSTRACT

THE COLOSSEUM: BEYOND BUILT FORM

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This thesis investigates the Flavian Amphitheatre, better known as the Colosseum, in its relation to setting, symbolic meaning and its afterlife. Crucial to the discussion is the ancient art of memory, through which the Colosseum's ambivalent role as a means of Imperial power is elucidated. Equally important, the buildings' iconographic connotations are studied in terms of the architectural orders employed on the façade. The Colosseum's extended use and its later emblematic significance comprise the concluding discussion of the thesis.

Keywords: Site of memory, architectural connotation, afterlife.

ÖZ

COLOSSEUM: YAPILI FORM ÖTESİ

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Mimarlık Tarihi Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi : Prof. Dr. Suna Güven
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Bu tez Colosseum'u konumu, sembolik anlamı ve geç dönem tarihi üzerinden incelemektedir. Antik bellek sanatı, Colosseum'un emperyal gücü simgeleyen ikircikli rolünü aydınlatmak üzere önemli bir tartışmayı oluşturur. Binanın ikonografik yananlamları, cephede kullanılan mimari düzenler aracılığıyla işlenmiştir. Colosseum'un sonraki kullanımı ve simgeselliğine ilişkin değerlendirmeler tezi sonlandırmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Bellek, mimari yananlam.

To My Mother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Ancient Art of Memory

> "When I call back to mind some arch, turned beautifully and symmetrically, which, let us say, I saw at Carthage, a certain reality that had been made known to the mind through the eyes, and transferred to the memory, causes the imaginary view."
>
> (St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IX, 6, xi)

The question of memory is perhaps as abstruse as any enigma a sphinx might pose. Rather than search into 'what' it is (which endeavour would evidently infringe my scope of reference) I shall attempt a sketch in coarse outline of its construal in antiquity.

One might begin by applying to the good offices of Aristotle, who in his treatise on the subject defines memory as 'the state of having an image, taken as a representation of that which it is an image.' [1] To use an oft repeated metaphor, this epistemology envisages an object of perception sealing its stamp – as with a signet ring – onto the wax of the mind. Memory implies a time elapsed so that when one remembers, the relevant memory image is summoned as a copy of past experience, and one has that acute impression of having seen or sensed the selfsame image before.

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[1] Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, tr. David Bloch, Leiden, 2007. p. 47.

Yet Aristotle is hard put to counter the arising question: what is that obscure object of remembrance? Do we but remember the left-over trace or have we some (in)direct access to the article by which it was imprinted? The proposed solution is, again by analogy, that of a painted portrait which can be taken for a figure in its own right but also for a copy. The gist of the argument is that the image in us is both an object of contemplation as well as a token and reminder of something else.[2]

This two-fold significance of memory, at least as it was understood in antiquity, may be illustrated by the macabre story of the Greek poet Simonides, the alleged inventor of mnemonics. The legend relates that a Thessalian noble by the name of Scopas had returned victorious from a Grand Game and commissioned, but later refused to pay for a triumphal ode, in the composition of which the poet – having run short of ideas – had interpolated a digression in the honour of Castor and Pollux. Later, during a nocturnal banquet to which he had nevertheless been invited, Simonides was informed of the arrival of two young men awaiting him outside with urgent tidings. They were none other than the two honoured deities, and in his brief absence Simonides escaped certain death; for all the guests, including the host Scopas, crumbled in the ruins of the banqueting hall, whose roof had suddenly fallen in. Such was the state of laceration that the uncovered corpses would have remained unidentifiable had it not been for the poet, who was

[2] See Janet Coleman, *Ancient & Medieval Memories*, Cambridge, 2005.

able to remember the places where the guests had been seated, and hence could assist the relatives of the victims in the reclamation of their dead[3].

Approximately five centuries later the story is re-cited by Cicero in his *De oratore*, under the head of memory and as an instantiation thereof, with the appended remark that Simonides had,

> "... inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it."
>
> (Cicero, *De oratore*, II, lxxxvi)

Mnemonics, or the art of memory, pertained to rhetoric as a vital technical supplement, by the aid of which the orator would improve his memory and declaim extended speeches with impeccable precision.[4] After Aristotle's definition, the first step was to impress on the memory a series of loci or places. The prevalent (though not exclusive) type of mnemonic place system was based on that of the architectural trope, succinctly described by the first century Roman rhetorician Quintilian: a building was to be chosen, one as ample and variegated as possible; the atrium, bedchambers, the parlour and withal, not to mention

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[3] Marguerite Yourcenar, 'Simonide', *La Couronne et la Lyre, Anthologie de la poésie grecque ancienne*, Gallimard, 2010. p. 149.

[4] Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 2.

ornamentary paraphernalia like statues and other such trappings.[5] Parts of the speech were then to be imaginatively grafted on and associated with particular places memorised in the building. To revive or trigger a train of thought, one had but to conjure the relevant locus in which it had been niched, allowing the speaker to declaim in smooth succession, because the argument would be modelled directly upon architectural seriality. The art of memory was, in a literal sense, self-reflective composition where architectural ' images [were] like letters, the arrangement and disposition of the images like the script, and the delivery [was] like the reading.' [6]

The visual and sensory intensity of the scheme is hard to overlook, and Quintilian lays special stress on the sense of sight as a mnemonic spur, ' (…) For when we return to a place after a considerable absence, we not merely recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before' (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI, ii, 17). Thus of note as regards the ancient art of memory, is the fact that it offers a tentative introduction to an aspect of ancient responses to architecture. What it would have been like to roam the streets of ancient Rome is a question left to the imagination; but that orators, with no paper at their disposal, would rather opt to remember their lines by availing

[5] The method was not restricted to houses but could also be done in public buildings, and even going through a city.

[6] Yates, p. 6.

themselves of columns, entablatures, and beautifully turned arches, suggests a different kind of configuration between the beholder and the built environment.

So much for architecture as a means to recall; what of a possible inversion: if it had served to reminisce, could architecture also have been employed to forget? For does not recollection, by virtue of its very selectivity, hint at some lost residue from which it has been salvaged? In short, can architecture be the arbiter of a contending past? These provisional questions and their import on the Flavian amphitheatre will be broached in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

FROM PLEASURE VILLA TO A MONUMENT FOR ALL

2.1. The Flavian Amphitheatre and Nero's Domus Aurea

Having finally suppressed the Judaean Revolt in the year 77 A.D. – the eighth of his consulship – Titus Flavius Vespasianus undertook a bold design. The example of Augustus, who had conceived, but was unable to bring to fruition the idea of building a permanent amphitheatre of stone now stood before him. The premeditated site of the first *princeps* – nestled at the conflux of the Palatine, Esquiline and the Caelian hills – and which had since been reduced by Nero to an artificial lake, all but suggested itself.[7] The fountainhead was now deflected to public use, hence the drainage of the body of water, a thick base of concrete being laid in its stead.[8]

In barely two years the amphitheatre fanned out to its third travertine gradus, but the question as to the workforce that facilitated such rapidity of construction remains obscure. One hypothesis has it that slaves brought from Judaea were put to work and that they numbered in the thousands.[9] At all events, central Rome became scene to a flurry of architectural activity which was to transform the city irrevocably in little less than a decade.

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[7] P. Colagrossi, *L'Anfiteatro Flavio nei suoi venti secoli di storia*, Firenze, 1913, p. 32.
[8] Gabucci (ed.), *The Colosseum*, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 104.
[9] Colagrossi, p. 32.

A temporal trajectory leading from Tiberius and Claudius up until the roughshod reign of Nero would be marked by similar junctures beyond recall and recovery. The order of succession was one such divisive head. Augustus had hazarded a system of heredity to little avail, so that by the last quarter of the century (69 A.D. the year of the four emperors) the consolidation of power resembled, time and again, a tight-rope balancing act.

The Flavians inherited a city that had long been devastated, first by the fire of 64, then by resurging intestine conflict; a plight further exacerbated with the ultimate battle against the alliance of Vitellius. Rome, or what was left of it, would be the detritus on which a new beginning would take shape, and Vespasian's tenure was to impart a sheen of Republican solidarity.[10] Tellingly, the most important edifice to be dedicated under his patronage was the Temple of Peace.[11]

It is difficult to discern the extent to which Neronian structures were subject to the vicissitudes of fortune, for they had largely been constructed after the infamous fire, and so remained for the most part incomplete at Vespasian's accession; one eminent instance being the Domus Aurea (fig. 2.1, 2.2). A lavishly ornate villa complex landscaped into the very heart of Rome, the palace's repute rested as much on its architectural abandon as on its unprecedented position.[12] Alluding to

[10] For an account of Flavian Rome see Paul McKendrick, *The Mutes Stones Speak*, Saint Sartins' Press 1960, pp. 224-250.

[11] Gabucci (ed.), *The Colosseum*, p. 228.

[12] Katherine E. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheater: from its origins to the Colosseum*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. p. 151. Also see Mckendrick.

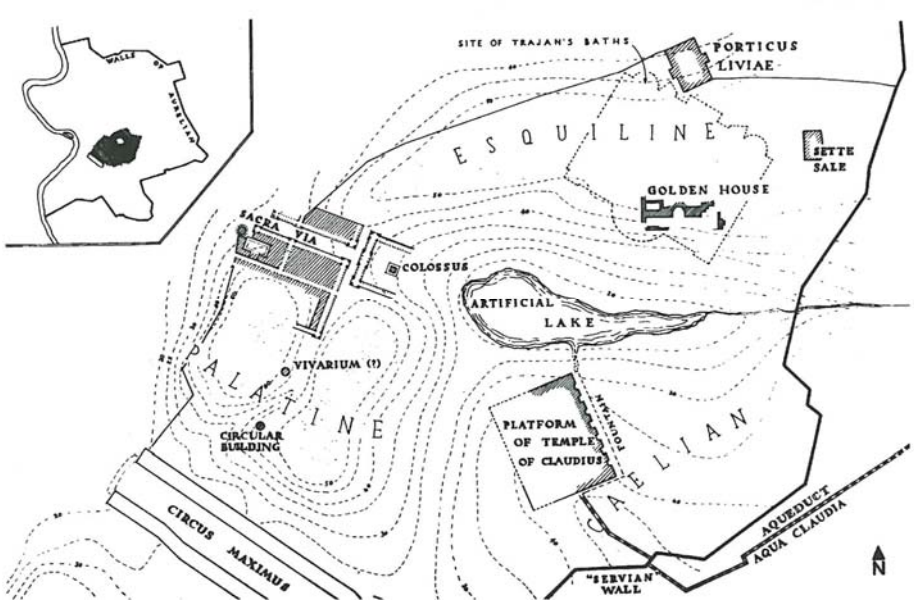

Fig. 0.1 Rome, Nero's Golden House, sketch-plan of the probable extent of the park, showing the known structures.

Source: J.B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture*, Harmondsworth, 1981, fig. 26, p. 60

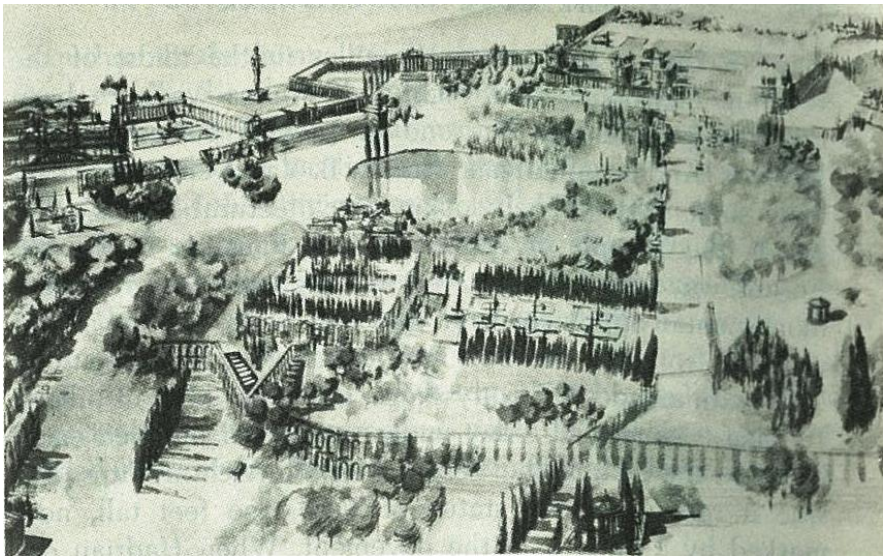

Fig. 2.2 Rome, Golden House, reconstruction drawing of the whole area.

Source: P. Mackendrick, *The Mute Stones Speak: The Story of Archaeology in Italy.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1960

the villa's escarped situation over and across the slopes of the Palatine and the Velian hills, Martial decries it as "[A] haughty tract of land that robbed the poor of their dwellings".[13] Neither does Tacitus have anything complaisant to report, claiming that the real gravamen of the charge against the Domus Aurea lay in its scale and location, rather than its unwarranted luxury; a predilection in Roman architecture ever since the late Republic (*Annals*, 15.42). Yet historiographical testimony regarding the deeds of Nero seem bent on tendentious effusion when not given to downright bigotry, and in the pursuance of Rome across this watershed, a wary nod to the literary device of the "unreliable narrator" would, I believe, stand one in good stead.

Both Otho and Vitellius seem to have taken up residence in, and worked on the completion of the palace, therefore its representation as an accursed consummation of hubris might well be contemporary with the Flavians' stratagem to address the memory of Nero.[14] With its bright glades, sequestered strips of woodland, and glimpses of scintillating water, the afterglow of the Domus Aurea was probably still as radiant enough for it to pose a threat to the pretending rulers. Nor did it find favourable reception among the elites, having displaced them from their traditional houses in the political centre of the city. Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that the formal palace had only occupied the Palatine and the

[13] Martial, "On the Spectacles" in *Epigrams* vol.1, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993. p.2.

[14] For a chronological list of emperors from Augustus to Domitian see Appendix A (p. 85)

Oppian: the remaining grounds were most probably open to the Roman public at large.[15]

In effect, the immense space it covered would preclude its being entirely segregated from the city, and excavations have unearthed porticoes containing rows of single rooms around the *Stagnum Neronis* that hint at a mercantile function, not to mention a series of skirting terraces which are thought to have commanded sweeping vistas of the immediate environs.[16] The lake itself had probably been scene to banquets, where Nero feasted and entertained the Roman people on rafts. It has thus been suggested that, contrary to what the relevant literary evidence would have us believe, Nero did not strictly expropriate the lands of the plebs to build his private residence, but rather used sought-after property to establish a series of recreational spaces that offered to the commoner amenities which had theretofore been at the discretion of the elite.[17]

Such a scheme well complements the image of a ruler who, at least in the eyes of his detractors, did not always observe the time-honoured decorum of his post. Ever solicitous for public attention, there is ample reason to believe that towards the end of his reign Nero began to see Rome as a large stage on which he could act his preferred role as actor-cum-poet. He led a 'propitious' reign in the sense that his vision for Rome was one which afforded direct links between himself and

[15] See Mckendrick, p. 189-194.

[16] Harriet I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting, Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture*, North Carolina Press, 2006, p. 232.

[17] Welch p. 157.

the commoner, frequently to the disregard or lurid exclusion of every social stratum in between. No less a personage than Pliny, in his *Natural History*, lets drop the remark that he had attended an art opening at a theatre within Nero's private gardens, and that to his great disappointment the invitations had been extended to the plebs (*Natural History*, 37.18-20).

Be that as it may, we do know that the infamous palace on the Oppian with the circular dining room *(La Lacœnatio Rotunda*) and revolving ceiling was intact up until the superimposition of the Baths of Trajan, a complex that would only be dedicated in A.D. 109.[18] Hence the most brazen section of the palace, the one to have suffered the severest scrutiny and critical defamation, was left unscathed and perhaps even open to visit well into the reign of Trajan. Not to mention Nero's popular bath complex on the Campus Martius which is also known to have remained in use until the third century.

Though the ultimate plan of the Domus Aurea remains obscure, and even though we do not know whether or not it had reached completion, that the final years of Neronian Rome were associated, at least to some extent, with the imperial complex seems manifest. The immediate reconsecration by Vespasian of Nero's giant bronze statue (which had guarded the entrance court of the palace) as a statue of the sun god Sol is another case in point.[19] Thus in that protracted spell of

[18] Flower, p. 248.

[19] J. C. Anderson (jr), *The Historical Topography of the Imperial Fora*. Brussels, 1984. p. 93.

transition the surface of Rome resembled a chequered patchwork, however strained at the seams, of the late and the sprawling new.

This hasty transformation of the cityscape, in all likelihood, was not lost upon the collective consciousness of its inhabitants.[20] In the wake of the fire of 64 which had laid waste the better part of Rome, Tacitus observes the sombre fact that'(...) though surrounded by the great beauty of the city as it grew again, older people still remember many things that could not be replaced.'[21] Such a vast topographic disturbance as was caused by the construction of the Flavian amphitheatre –the din of mass stone slabs quarried at Tivoli, flustering in file towards the rising edifice– must have had repercussions of considerable consequence; an almost synaesthetic experience, where the tactile segued into the audile, which in turn was to be set off against the visual.

2.2. Damnatio Memoriae

The massacre is said to have lasted a hundred days. Wild beasts were culled from the provinces; cranes were plucked of their plumes, bulls goaded by burning brands, elephants put to death, convicts decimated, while women and men alike drew each others' blood: the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheatre struck a decidedly sanguine note. (Dio. 1. XVI, 25) All the relentless savagery notwithstanding, there was more to the opening games than mere bloodletting

[20] A. Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, (tr. D. Ghirardo and J. Ockman) Cambridge, MIT Press, 1982, p. 13.

[21] Tacitus, *The Annals*, (tr. J. C. Yardley), Oxford, 2008, p. 358.

pageantry. A metanarrative encroached upon it: an untold story which, I would like to think was every bit as insidious as any expression of absolute power.

"Where rises before our eyes the august pile of the Amphitheatre, was once Nero's lake (...)", or so Martial hails the new edifice. It was truly of massive dimensions: an elliptical building 188 metres long, 156 metres wide, replete with a façade of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian architectural orders and statuary, once capable of accommodating (accounts vary) more than 50,000 pugnacious spectators.[22] (Fig. 2.3) Aside from its physical grandeur, what Martial sycophantly underlines for his readers is the surprising precipitance of the whole enterprise, lauding the triumphant contrast the amphitheatre came to pose with the immediate past.

Yet one need not necessarily marvel at the short eight years in which the magnificent theatre rose before the eyes of all and sundry;[23] such expedience of action, especially when directed against or built upon the remnants of perceived public enemies, was not exceptional in Roman society. From the reign of Tiberius onwards *damnatio memoriae*, or memory sanctions, could be passed literally at the whim of a moment by the senate upon 'traitors' and conspirators, or whoever was thought to bring discredit to the Roman State, often with dire consequences. Taken literally, the process consisted of the damnation of memory; that is, a sweeping denunciation of the condemned person's deeds and past actions, as

[22] Welch, p. 131.

[23] Keith Hopkins, Mary Beard, *The Colosseum,* Harvard University Press. 2005. p. 2.

Fig. 1.3 A general view of the Flavian Amphitheatre's north façade.

Source: Gabucci (ed.), *The Colosseum*, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 206

though he/she had never existed. These legislative measures were put to effect through the express erasure of all traces bearing even the slightest tangential relation to the accused. Statues would be razed, any inscription or dedication bearing the interdicted name mutilated, while all pertaining property would duly suffer confiscation. It goes without saying that in a society which prized above all the communal and the collective, and where identity was firmly rooted within the bonds of citizenry, this was tantamount to a nominal excommunication.[24]

Regardless of their severity, it is difficult to overlook the equivocal tenor of such *ex post facto* penal measures: the *damnatio memoriae* was understood by Roman critics like Tacitus as a confirmation of memory, not a destruction of it.[25] When, for instance, one stands before the dedicatory inscription of a statue for Nero by one C. Licinius Mucianus, who apparently went on to become a close ally of Vespasian, one is taken aback by the erasure and conspicuous absence of Nero's name rather than any other content the commemoration might have conveyed (fig.2.4).

Indeed, although his memory was never formally banned, Nero received the 'singular honour' of being the first emperor to be officially declared a *hostis* (public enemy) by the senate *during* his rule. A coup d'état was mounted at the behest of the senators, who did not, or perhaps dared not, appoint an immediate

[24] See Harriet I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting, Disgrace and oblivion in Roman Political Culture*, North Carolina Press, 2006.
[25] Ibid, p. 221.

Fig. 1.4 Dedication of a statue or other object for Nero by C. Licinius Mucianus, later a close ally of Vespasian, Bubon, Turkey, Neronian. Erasure of Nero's name in lines 1-3 and line 7.

Source: Harriet I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting, Disgrace and oblivion in Roman Political Culture*, North Carolina Press, 2006. fig. 54, p. 218

successor. The resulting confusion not only loosened Nero's hold on power (leading to his despondent demise), but was also decisive in the consequent hesitation over his image.

In this context, one is reminded of the disclamatory preamble of Tacitus on the very first page of the *Annals*: "The histories of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were distorted because of fear while they reigned, and, when they were gone, were composed with animosities still fresh." [26] What begs attention, however, is how that posthumous animosity, as evidenced in the writings of Pliny, Suetonius, Martial et. al., seems to have been starkly at variance with the general disposition of the Roman populace, for which Nero's funeral provides another appropriate instance. When he first made a bid for the throne, Galba did not shrink from parading the portraits of Nero's erstwhile victims, and yet he was circumspect enough to see to it that Nero was accorded regal rites, in keeping with his status as the last heir of the Julio-Claudians.[27]

This act of respect may not, at first glance, come across as altogether congruous with Nero's status as *hostis*. What one sees, however, over the next century, be it in the registers of historians, or through the actions of contentious factions, is this same lopsided perusal of Nero's memory. Had he really suffered incontestable disrepute, it would have been difficult to account for all the representations and

[26] Tacitus, p. 3.
[27] Flower, p. 200.

ambiguous invocations Nero inspired. Yet his memory was cast and recast for display and spectacle, often to serve contrasting ends.

Vespasian chose to adopt Nero's euergetism while taking care to stand aloof from his histrionic indulgences. It is noteworthy that the age-old tradition of gladiatorial combats and other sporting events were revived and monumentalized at the expense of Greek theatre (which perhaps smacked too much of Neronian philhellenism): all within the bounds of a magnificent edifice which came to represent one of the handful architectural forms regarded truly 'Roman'.

If we are to construe, as I wish to do, the Flavian Amphitheatre as a mnemonic gloss over Nero and his legacy, the amphitheatre becomes to the Domus Aurea what memory sanctions were to the 'damned', and at this juncture, it would be fitting to briefly consider how Romans responded to places as repositories for memory.

2.3. Memory and Oblivion

A character in the fifth book of Cicero's *De finibus* by the name of Piso, thus ruminates over his visit to Plato's Academy:

> "Then Piso said: 'Are we prompted, I wonder, by nature or by fantasy when, on seeing places known to have been the favourite haunts of distinguished men, we are more moved than when we hear of their deeds or read something that they have written? Such is the emotion I now feel. For Plato comes before my mind – tradition says it was here he used to debate …'"
>
> (*De finibus*, 5.2)

This emotive response is further stressed when, after having described other exalting sites (in Rome as well as in Greece), Piso makes a revealing deduction: 'Places have such a great power of suggestion that the technical art of memory is with good reason based upon them.' [28] Once again, we confront the mnemonic system of the architectural trope. In this particular case however, spatial perception is translated into temporal experience, and time literally takes on shape, hauling a distant past within an all-inclusive present.[29]

Roman men of letters were quick to observe and appropriate this aspect of spatiality; the fact that it could act as a portal, as it were, between the past and the present. Virgil is but one major exponent. Book 8 of the *Aeneid* relates Aeneas' excursion to the sites which in later centuries would become Rome. The Arcadian Evander, an obliging native, conducts him atop a venerable hill:

> Hence to the Tarpeian citadel he leads him and the Capitol,
> golden now, then rough with woodland thickets.
>
> (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8. 347 – 8)

The friction between the 'then and now' thus becomes a recurring theme for which mnemonically charged sites – architecturally defined, more often than not – offer the cherished heirloom. One of the other memory-laden six sites, the Palatine hill was where Augustus chose to take up residence, and not without warrant or rustic precedent. His glorious complex consisted of his own house, the temple of Apollo

[28] Cited in Catherine Edwards, *Writing Rome, Textual approaches to the city*, Cambridge, 1996. p. 29.
[29] Ibid, p. 28.

and a library, all of which were curiously counterpoised by a close at hand hut of the utmost austerity:

> The royal residence is called the Palatium, not because it was ever decided that this was to be its name, but because Caesar lived on the Palatine and had his military headquarters there, though his residence gained a certain degree of fame from the hill itself too, because Romulus had once lived there.
>
> (Dio, 53. 16. 5)

It is not difficult to imagine how much public favour and influence Augustus would have gained from this juxtaposition. It is also a fitting example for something I would like to stress; that such an intuitive and essentially temporal experience of the built environment could not have been part and parcel of the historians and poets. Nor would it have been necessary to be well versed in literature to appreciate the contrast the past, however remote and mythical, could pose with the present. In a society by and large illiterate, Rome was a city where 'visual imagery functioned as a literal text legible to all.' [30]

Octavian enjoyed a truly distinguished position in that he possessed the will, the resources and longevity of rule to script a sustained text out of the cityscape of Rome.[31] With an immense fortune at his beck and call, he found Rome 'built of mudbrick and left it in marble.' A circumstantial account of his architectural

[30] Diane Favro, 'Reading the Augustan City', *Narrative and event in Ancient Art*, (ed. Peter, J. Holliday), Cambridge, 1993. p. 231. See also D. Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*, Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[31] Ibid, p. 235.

exploits would be redundant for the argument at hand, but nevertheless, as Diane Favro so convincingly demonstrates, his example and role as 'urban author' was to have wide ranging effects.

Augustus literally choreographed Rome with stately structures, not merely as lasting memorials to his achievements, but as clauses of a recognizable and unambiguous narrative structure which would ingrain his own place in the collective memory of the Roman people.[32] This 'text' was accessible to all classes, though his primary 'readers' were the educated elite, who had the required skill and knowledge to follow the account with ease. Notably, most members of the patrician class were trained in the architectural mnemotechniques of rhetoric.[33]

The anonymous author of *Ad Herennium*, the oldest surviving Latin textbook on rhetoric, advises orators to associate ideas with memorable images of architectural forms, for " (...) the striking and the novel stay longer in the mind" (*Ad Herennium*, 3.22.35.). Augustus certainly seems to have acted in accordance with this prescription. Under his rule Rome abounded in memorable images/ideas: "The Mausoleum was magnificent in scale, the Ara Pacis exquisite in execution, [and] the Horologium marvellous in its scientific precision." [34] Though they may not have been able to fully translate the implications of the text, 'uneducated'

[32] Suna Güven, 'Displaying the Res Gestae of Augustus: A Monument of Imperial Image for All', *JSAH* 57, 1998, pp. 30-45.
[33] Ibid, p.248.
[34] Ibid, p. 249.

plebeians strolling through Rome could similarly identify the import of these landmarks, and take account of their connotations.

Yet in spite of such meticulous craftsmanship, the urban text of the *princeps*, or the integrity thereof, proved volatile. Projects of increasing scale and pretension obstructed the Augustan line of argument, so that by the end of the first century the golden age 'prose' had given way to an overwrought scrawl that was scarcely legible. In want of a conclusive right to office, successive emperors did their utmost to equal, if not eclipse their predecessors by writing their own urban narratives over the inherited text. Yet the machinations involved were more specious than the simple denigration and/or erasure of the previous ruler. Once firmly established, the new emperor was bound to style himself as a meet substitute, especially with reference to areas in which his predecessor(s) had been deemed to excel.[35] After Augustus, the addition of opulent structures were more like addenda to an original text, ever amplified to meet the expectations of an audience long sated by magnificence. Thus by pandering to the sensibilities of the past, the often precarious claimant would also try to assert his own role in writing or rewriting the image of that same past.

For instance, much later, when a Roman citizen would enter the piazza of the Pantheon, he/she would not only stand before the Pantheon of Hadrian, but would also likely acknowledge the memory of the original edifice(s) of Agrippa (or

[35] Flower, p. 199.

perhaps vice versa). Much as with the Ship of Theseus, this seems to pose a logical paradox, yet it is perfectly sound. For just as the vessel in which the founder-king of Athens returned from Crete was preserved thanks to the tireless industry of the Athenians, old planks being replaced as they decayed with new and stronger timber, it was through Hadrian's diligence that Agrippa's name was salvaged from oblivion, though with brick, mortar and marble.

Yet the metaphysical question of whether an object which has had all its component parts replaced will remain fundamentally the same object or not, stands valid. If I may qualify the dilemma within an architectural context, Aristotle's solution promulgating a 'final cause' seems to deserve honourable mention. According to this view, the intended purpose of a thing takes precedence over any material contingency. The ship of Theseus will always represent the same ideal, namely, that of the craft(iness) of Theseus, and shall retain its symbolic status as an aide-mémoire of his triumphal exploits; whence the salvation and welfare of Athens. Whether the original mast has tottered and been replaced is of no real consequence. The idea is perpetuated, the formal symbol passed on:

> "…[T]hey [Romulus and Remus] lived … mainly on the mountains in huts which they built … out of sticks and reeds. One of these, known as the hut of Romulus, remained even to my day on the slope of the Palatine Hill which faces towards the Circus, and it is preserved as holy by those who are responsible for such matters; they add no ornaments to it but if any part of it is injured, either by storms or by the passage of time, they repair the damage and restore the hut as nearly as possible to its former condition."

(Plutarch, *Romulus*, 20.4)

It was this almost abstract essence of topographic memory –the immediacy of the past as experienced through space and form– which could be used to ingeniously amend, edit, write and rewrite urban narratives of Rome so as to lend them retroactive coherence and conjure an overarching authority.[36]

The Flavian amphitheatre was memorable, in the sense that as an urban construct it had the power to evoke an immediate connotative response.[37] On the other hand, if construed as an architectural supplement to the Domus Aurea, it did not define a narrative, but served to obfuscate a preexisting one. Nero's palatial aspirations were possibly part of the last consistent endeavour to construct a sequential mnemonic model for and of Rome.

In contrast to rhetoricians who used imaginary *loci* as receptacles of ideas and words, Nero relied on his *horti* and statues to form one grand narrative. The effort was duly foiled, but turned out cogent enough to resist easy evasion or open disdain.

Vespasian, unable to reply in kind, was reduced to raise a disjointed, sporadic answer. The *Stagnum Neronis* thus became a lacuna which was filled up by the

[36] Especially when compared to the rebuilding of the Pantheon, Vespasian's headlong decision to rear the world's largest amphitheatre 'over the ashes' of Nero may be found to lack in the Stoic virtues of subtlety and reserve. But was Hadrian all that self-effacing? It would be too harsh to denounce it as false modesty, but the move was evidently a calculated one to vaunt his piety while underscoring a self-proclaimed line of descent from the Julio-Claudians.

[37] Favro, p. 257, note 64.

amphitheatre. I would like to think that Roman theatre-goers were well acquainted with ellipsis as a narrative device, and silence as a dramatic tool, for the omission caused by the amphitheatre in Nero's story should not have hindered readers from completing the lost narration; this 'deletion' could even be said to have had a certain encouraging influence to remember.

Recollection, as obsequious poets like Martial were all too aware, does not cease when there are no longer any traces of what is to be remembered, but rather draws its force from this very absence. What is essential, at least for the ancient art of memory, is that places form a sequence and are remembered in their specific order, so that one may start from any locus in the series and move either backwards or forwards accordingly.[38] When there is a missing link in the chain of ideas or images, the orator/reader need not fear, for he will know the *flow* of the sequence, and may still repeat orally/mentally what has been committed to the *loci*.

It is curious to note that the words amnesia and amnesty share the same Greek root; oblivion, not remembering.[39] A pair of rather arcane Roman portraits (one housed in the Cleveland Museum of Art, the other in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore) seem to vouch for this etymological nicety (fig. 2.5, 2.6). They are, at

[38] Yates, p. 7.

[39] Jean Blain, 'Paul Ricoeur'le Söyleşi: Bellek, Tarih, Unutuş' (tr. Orçun Türkay) in *Cogito* 50 / Spring 2007, pp. 141-155.

Fig. 1.5 Munich Glyptothek, inv. 321, portrait head of Nero, right profile.

Source: John Pollini, 'Damnatio Memoriae in Stone: Two Portraits of Nero Recut to Vespasian in American Museums', *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Oct., 1984), plate 73, fig. 8

Fig. 1.6 Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, inv. 23. 119, portrait head of Vespasian.

Source: John Pollini, 'Damnatio Memoriae in Stone: Two Portraits of Nero Recut to Vespasian in American Museums', *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Oct., 1984), plate 73, fig. 10.

least nominally, effigies of Vespasian.[40] According to John Pollini however, comparative iconography suggests that both portraits were in fact reworked from likenesses of Nero.[41] By means of delicate retouches and emendations, the features of the one metamorphosed into those of the other; Nero's straight, callow eyebrows being carved into a more arched contour, while his high cheekbones were so recut as to delineate the slight pouches under the deep-set eyes of the septuagenarian.

In truth, alterations and reconsecrations in Roman portraiture are not uncommon.[42] The aberrancy with these particular specimens are the odd marks of distinction, such as the thick neck and the upturned chin, which were apparently left untouched as mnemonic aids for Nero. I would suggest this was deliberate and not at all the finish of a slapdash chisel. An absolute transmutation was not sought. Instead, one would meet a mute gaze of dual referents. A cross-bred image that was disconcertingly synchronous, and almost grotesque in ambition, as was the Flavian's public stance, at once dissociating and assimilative.

[40] Donald Strong, *Roman Imperial Sculpture: An Introduction to the Commemorative and Decorative Sculpture of the Roman Empire down to the Death of Constantine*, London: Alec Tiranti, 1961, 'The Flavian Style' pp. 31-41.

[41] John Pollini, 'Damnatio Memoriae in Stone: Two Portraits of Nero Recut to Vespasian in American Museums', A*merican Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Oct., 1984), pp. 547-555.

[42] For an extensive account see Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

CHAPTER 3

THE FLAVIAN AMPHITHEATRE

3.1. Form and Meaning

Of the representations the Flavian Amphitheater inspired in antiquity, the earliest to have survived is arguably one of the richest in descriptive detail. The obverse side of a bronze sesterce forged in the senatorial mint during the eighth consulship of Titus (circa A.D. 80) depicts the monuments of the valley after the alterations made by the Flavian dynasty (fig. 3.1). The soaring amphitheater is flanked on the left by the Meta Sudans – the ruins of which are still visible – and a two-level portico to the right. The southern façade and a slice of the opposite interior are illustrated with precision, the external three levels being denoted in five arches which, by means of foreshortening, neatly negotiate the sinuous sweep of the edifice. The arches of the second and third levels frame statues and the attic wall is divided between seven rectangular recesses that contain, in alternate sequence, windows and large bronze shields. Inside, a lofty colonnaded portico supports spectators within ten balconies, while below, a pronounced wall separates two mezzanines, the nether of which is rendered schematically as a wide band in three sections. Artistic license enables the emperor's spacious loggia to occupy the very

Fig. 1.2 Emperor Titus' Coin, A.D. 80.

Source: Gabucci (ed.) *The Colosseum*, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 168

centre of this seating arrangement rather than the *ima cavea* where it stood in real life.[43]

One may ask whether it was the trace of a long lost artistic creed that demanded the diametrical opposition/juxtaposition of the interior to the exterior. Where a two dimensional rendering would have sufficed, subsequent numismatic evidence lay unremitting stress on the perspectival depth of the amphitheatre, often affording bloodshot glimpses of what transpired inside. Which seems only too fair in the case of the aforementioned *sesterce*, as a three dimensional depiction of the adjacent portico would have been superfluous. And yet, judging from the skewed vantage point, it is as though the exterior of the edifice is important only in so far as its reciprocal relation to the interior, and that to grasp the significance of what came to pass within, one should take stock of the implications without.[44]

In this regard, the novel use of architectural orders is of special note. The three storeys of superimposed half columns feature Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian capitals in ascending order, with a crowning ridge of Corinthian pilasters. (fig. 3.2) The seeming 'apotheosis' of the capital has generally been regarded as canonical, and was copied and imitated as such ever since the Renaissance. Yet it appears that this exact configuration was probably otherwise unattested in Rome; the only approximate instance to be found came from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in

[43] Rossella Rea, "Le antiche raffigurazione dell'Anfiteatro," in *Anfiteatro Flavio. Immagine, testimonianze, spettacoli*, Rome, 1988, pp. 23-46, cited in Coarelli, p. 168.

[44] For a numismatic account of the Flavian Amphitheatre see T. L. Donaldson, *Ancient Architecture on Greek and Roman Coins and Medals*, Chicago, 1965, p. 294.

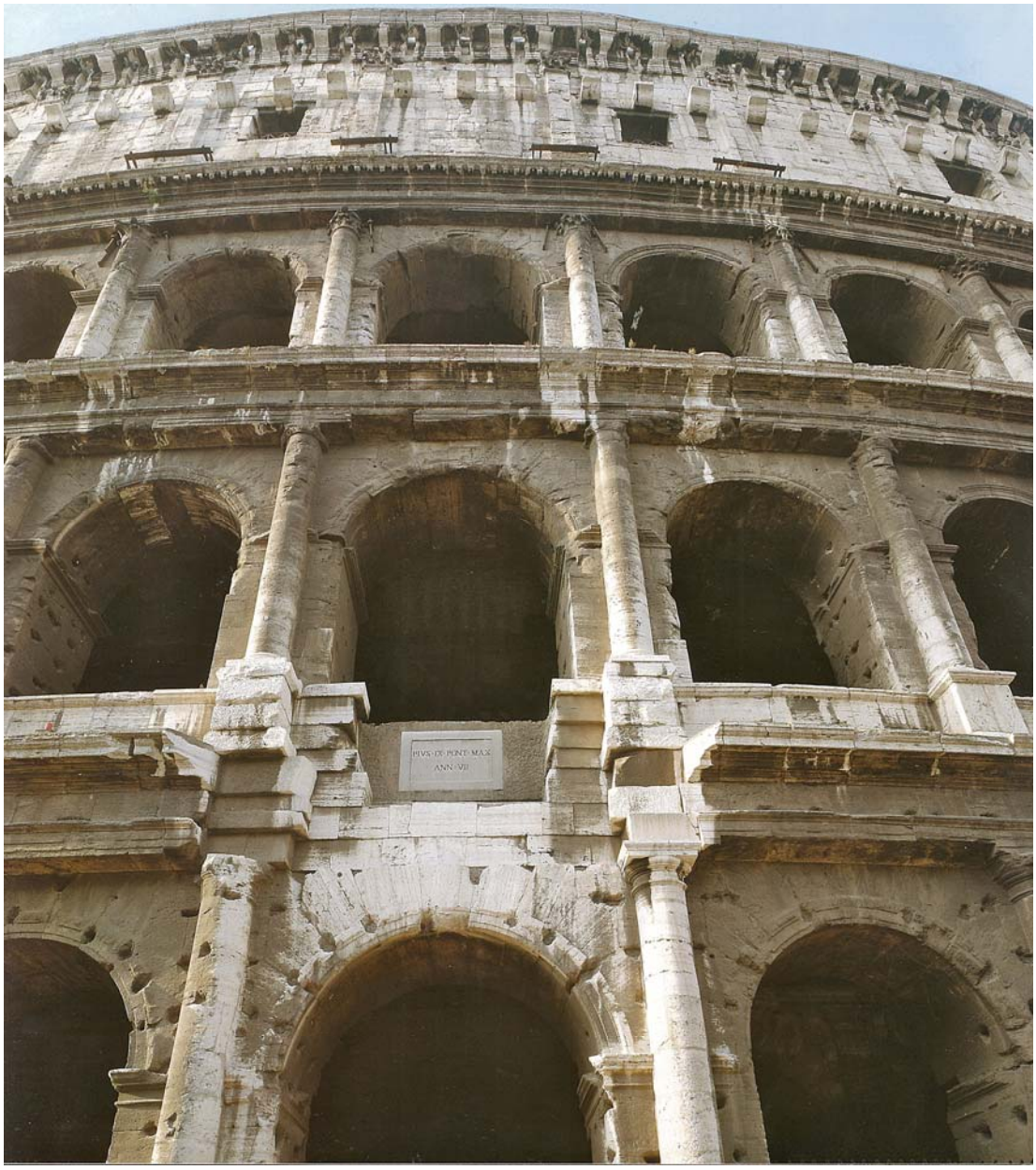

Fig. 1.3 The centre arch of the north entrance.

Source: Gabucci (ed.) *The Colosseum*, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 8

Asia Minor.[45] Itself a memorial of Roman imperial sway, the Caesareum was decked with reliefs depicting Claudius' exploits in Britain, brazenly affirming his laurelled world dominion.

This overt message was in turn borne upon three architectural orders of ingenious subtlety, the mythopoeic extraction of which was discussed by Vitruvius in his *De architectura libri decem*. According to legend, Dorus, King of the Peloponnese dedicated a temple to Juno in a form which would be called Doric, a name first coined by the Ionians when they built a temple to Apollo 'after the manner of Dorus'. Later, in devoting a temple to the goddess Diana, the Ionians sought to model their columns on the graceful female body instead; the shafts were fluted after matronly garments, even as the waft of their robes, and for capitals, volutes were cast of cascading hair. Although greatly refined and made taller in time, this order came to be called Ionic. The birth of the Corinthian on the other hand, was a rather lachrymose affair. An architect by the name of Callimachus lit upon the tomb of a bride who had died just before her nuptials. Faithful unto death, her nurse had arrayed the sepulchre with a basket containing the cherished belongings of the girl, amongst which were her prized collection of goblets. Unbeknown to the good handmaid, the tile, which she had carefully placed to secure all the articles in place, also checked the growth of an acanthus leaf secreted within the

[45] John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning, The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Princeton, 1990, p. 46.

basket, curling its yearning tendrils. This *memento mori* was transformed by Callimachus into the Corinthian.

Hence in Ancient Greece, architectural forms had regional, racial and even corporeal associations.[46] If we concur with George Hersey that such associations could have been further predicated by tropes, similes and metaphors, some long effaced by time, others now scarcely visible, then perhaps we can inch closer to an understanding of their use in the Flavian Amphitheatre.

A trope, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is a kind of verbal game in which "a word or phrase is used in a different sense from that which is proper to it".[47] Often etymologically suspect, it plays on the poetic vein of expression, assuming that phonetic similarity between words should entail a deeper semantic correspondence. The prevalence of such an ethos accords emphasis on the rhythmic and aural aspect of language over stern scriptum. Hersey maintains that this was unquestionably how Vitruvius and his contemporaries conceptualised language, and that by a careful exegesis of terms and passages from *De architectura* one can uncover their lost architectural sensibility.

"In every connotative relationship the first sense does not disappear in order to produce the second one; on the contrary, the second sense must be understood on the grounds of the first one." (Eco, 42) Indeed, there is no well-defined distinction

[46] At least according to a certain coterie of Graeco-Roman authorities on the subject.

[47] George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Architecture, Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi*, MIT, 1989, p. 4.

between literal and figurative meaning, and not less so when it comes to architectural semiotics. Yet one need not have to choose between the two extremes: either assuming a discernible intent of the 'author/architect' and hence an objective 'essence', or taking the ineffable descent into the maelström of infinite interpretation.[48]

3.2. The Expansionist Doric and/or The Proud Tuscan

If a mean can be approximated, the results often make for revelatory reading, such as when one finds that the Greek words 'Dorus' and 'Dorian' are tropes of violence, evoking visions of flayed skin, spears and scepters, with oblique references to dark sentinels and incarceration. Such belligerent imagery is of course not alien to the so-called Dorian peoples, who with northern raids were said to have overwhelmed the Greek peninsula and displaced its native tribes. Neither should it come as a surprise that the Doric column was modelled on the proportions of ' a man's body, its strength and grace.' (Vitruvius, 4.1.6) Indeed, notwithstanding the obscurity of their origins, the very first temples the Dorians erected (such as those to Hera and Poseidon at Paestum) were as artefacts of their colonialist exploits, flanked by stout soldiers, dauntless in expedient.[49]

Much later, a similar tale was re-enacted on the Arch of Titus. A scene from inside the barrel vault depicts a triumphal procession proclaiming the end of the

[48] See 'Two Models of Interpretation' in Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Indiana University Press, 1994.

[49] Hersey, p. 59. Also see Onians.

Jewish rebellion and with it the protracted civil war. Stolen items of faith – a solid gold table, the sacrosanct seven-branched Menorah – are paraded, probably to cheering crowds (Fig. 3.3).[50] Where does this cortège lead? Who will be enriched in its wake? A relatively recent discovery points to the Flavian Amphitheatre as a potential recipient.

In 1995, a nondescript block of inscribed stone that lay in the arena was re-examined by archeologists. The main text dated from an extensive restoration of the amphitheatre in the 5th century, but on closer inspection, dowel holes known to have been used to fasten bronze letters were discovered underneath. When imaginatively retraced, these seemingly haphazard notches dictate a very different, earlier inscription:

> "VESPASIAN ORDERED THIS NEW AMPHITHEATRE
> TO BE CONSTRUCTED FROM THE BOOTY..."

The text breaks off mid-sentence, but the meaning is clear enough.[51] The amphitheatre was the Temple of Jerusalem torn down and built anew for popular pleasure and pageantry. And it seems all the more appropriate that an edifice raised expressly to mount scenes of violence, and which was disbursed by the ransack of war, would rise upon Doric columns; the shoulders, as it were, of men

[50] Hopkins, Beard, p. 28. In ten years, perhaps a similar ovation would hail gladiators clad in armour as they marched into the arena, brandishing their weapons for imperial inspection.

[51] Silvia Orlandi, *The Bronze-Letttered Inscription of Vespasian and Titus*, in Coarelli (2001), p. 165.

Fig. 1.4 Parade of booty from the sack of Jerusalem in the triumphal procession of A.D. 71, detail from the sculptured panel on the Arch of Titus.

Source: Keith Hopkins, Mary Beard, *The Colosseum*, Harvard University Press. 2005. fig. 6, p. 29

in arms.[52] Yet the Flavian Amphitheatre stood as a triumph in a still more fundamental sense. As a manubial monument, it was the direct descendant of the amphitheatre of Statilius Taurus. An important infantry commander of Augustus, and a leading figure of the age, his was the very first free-standing amphitheatre with a stone façade and applied architectural orders in Rome, where the amphitheatre made its appearance as a *bona fide* civic building type. More important, it too was financed by the proceeds of war. In fact, from the very outset, amphitheatres had been closely linked to Roman military practice, colonisation, and by devolution, gladiatorial combat.

The origins of the practice of showing gladiators are ambiguous. One hypothesis holds that, as with many other august Roman institutions such as augury and the triumph, it was bequeathed by the Etruscans; in support of which conjecture, although decidedly inconclusive, there is literary and archaeological evidence. Nicolaus of Damascus for one, writing in the late first century B.C. explicitly states that the Romans " (...) borrow[ed] the custom from the Etruscans", while a fragment attributed to Suetonius points to an Etruscan king as the instigator: "Earlier Tarquinius Priscus exhibited to the Romans two pairs of gladiators which he had matched together for a period of twenty-seven years."

Certain wall paintings in southern Italy – illustrating men armed with helmet and shield, ever prone to flaunt a cuirass – likewise seem to be in favour of an

[52] This would also explain the presence of shields on the façade

Etruscan affiliation. But the figures in question are not stalled in mid-action, and could also pass for a narrative account of an athletic game or a funeral rite. Another depiction found in the *Tomba delle Bighe* shows seated spectators on wooden stands, rapt in the boxing game they are witnessing. Again, this is no proof that gladiatorial games were first mounted at Etruria.

Yet conclusive evidence is perhaps redundant. By the Augustan period, we know that at least some Romans believed in an Etruscan origin, and it seems this ambivalence towards earlier, venerable civilizations has something to do with Rome's tireless search for cultural credence.

In the 8th century BC, the Italian peninsula was a motley of tongues and cultures, shared by disparate Italic peoples such as the Sabines and Umbrians, as well as other ethnic groups like the Etruscans to the north and the Greek colonists of the south. The mutual strife between these realms long thwarted the ascension of the Latins, who for a considerable time were but one pretender among many; such that it was not until the 5th century that they could shake off the Etruscan yoke and regain independence. Indeed, in terms of political and cultural import, the Etruscans exerted an influence second only to the Greeks. But whatever the relics of their language, their religions or their institutions, the Etruscans were

eventually absorbed by and assimilated within Rome.[53] Yet in annexing these venerable civilizations, Rome was simultaneously brought into their fold:

> "Once conquered, Greece captured her savage victorious
> and brought the arts to loutish Latium" [54]

Although not as tersely worded as Horace's epistle, whose addressee was none other than Augustus, the contemporaneous *Aeneid* registers this relationship and its undertone of cultural inferiority by means of infinitely eloquent poetry. It is interesting to note that while a nationalistic epic was being composed for the edification of the Augustan regime, a similar quest for mythic roots, and a concurrent urge to emulate and contest the past was informing Roman Imperial architecture.

Indeed, the early Empire saw a reappraisal of the so-called Tuscan, the sole 'Italic' architectural order. In earlier times it had been used, as would be expected, in Etruscan temples while during the third and second centuries BC it supported pediments throughout Rome's southern colonies. By the late Republic however, it had fallen out of favour, steadily being replaced in lavish civic projects by Doric, Ionic, and above all, Corinthian.

The reappraisal of Tuscan coincided with another development, that of the canonization of the monumental oval amphitheatre. At Rome, gladiatorial games

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[53] M. I. Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity, Discoveries and Controversies,* Pelican, 1977. p. 112. See also S. Kostof*, A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 1995.

[54] Graecia capta, ferum victorem cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio. Horace, *Epistles*, II. i. 156

were initially held in the Forum Romanum, ringed by temporary seating constructs, and it was these stands, as with Etruscan temples of old, that eventually served as models for the future buildings in stone. Until Imperial times, the amphitheatre was to occupy a lesser rank in the gamut of building types, and led a decidedly transient existence, much resembling makeshift props, often constructed of wood, as that of Nero in the Campus Martius which turned to ash in the infamous fire. What with the recognition of its 'genealogy', that it was of genuine 'Italian stock', and in a period when there was a need to edit and construct Rome's history, amphitheatres gained importance and their façades seemed ready to be graced by architectural orders.[55]

The most important monument of ashlar masonry which instanced the column Vitruvius would have called Tuscan was the Flavian Amphitheatre.[56] Yet as an order, it is not entirely clear how Tuscan was actually distinguished from Doric in antiquity, let alone in modern textbooks, which seem to be at an equal loss. Yet this very equivocality may be somewhat indicative of the times. The capital of the lowermost order of the Flavian amphitheatre is seemingly Doric, but the bases, by their very existence, rule out the possibility. The triglyph and metope frieze, the

[55] Along with Golden Age historians such as Livy (Ab Urbe Condita begins with Aeneas disembarking in Italy) the foundations of Rome, and Etruscan history and legend became of great interest (see Welch, p. 106)

[56] Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column, On Order in Architecture*, MIT Press, 1996. p. 362.

sine qua non of Doric, have vanished, tipping the scale towards Tuscan, were it not for the entablature of Ionic influence.[57]

It would then seem more suitable to speak of a mixed, hybrid order. In fact, there was (as there has always been) a certain discrepancy between architectural theory and practice. It is certainly difficult to maintain that Vitruvius' prescriptions and rules were readily adopted. For instance, his principle of *decorum*, of matching orders to their proper temples and deities, seems to have struck a hollow note for Augustus who supervised the erection of a major temple to Mars Ultor in exquisite Corinthian / Composite, rather than Doric, as would have been appropriate.[58]

Hence it is perhaps better to think of imperial architectural practice in Rome as one defined by ever changing contingencies. Apart from its simplicity and its economy of embellishment, the nationalistic and military overtones of Tuscan would have recommended its use in the Flavian Amphitheatre, especially with reference to the alleged origins of gladiatorial combat. The Flavian dynasty thus took a building type of patented Roman origin, one which had always occupied a lesser rank, yet was of no Greek architectural precedent, and elevated it into majestic proportions, so that the rustic heritage of Rome could come to its own,

[57] Mark Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture*, Yale, 2000, p. 110.

[58] See Hanno Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory from Vitruvius to the Present*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1994. The Vitruvian principle of *decorum* itself seems to have derived from Rhetoric. Ancient treatises on oratory provided a means to bridge the gap between style and content: it was a fundamental tenet of ancient rhetoric that there should be a correspondence between the sound and delivery of a statement, and its signification (see below).

not excluding all the expansionist pride and opulence that defined Doric. As such, the Flavian Amphitheatre became part of the marvels adorning Rome, but it was also a stage in and of itself.

3.3. The Belligerent Ionian

> But you really are still more religious in the amphitheatre, where over human blood, over the polluting stain of capital punishment, your gods dance, supplying plots and themes for criminals - unless it is that criminals often adopt the roles of your deities. We have seen at one time or another Attis, that god from Pessinus, being castrated, and a man who was being burnt alive had taken on the role of Hercules.
>
> (Tertullian, *Apologeticum*. I5. 4-5)

Behind her winning air and easy charm, Ionic breathes a fiery spirit. The famous temple of Artemis at Ephesus was the first Ionic temple dedicated to the goddess.[59] Often shown as a huntress with bow and quiver, Diana, if we may salute her by her Roman cognomen, was ferocious by nature. Spelled 'Artamis' in Doric, her name tropes with murderer and butcher, with intimations of binding and hanging, not to mention the act of shredding to pieces. In a play of Aristophanes, the Greeks plead to her for victory over the Persians.[60] While in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the goddess will withhold favourable winds only until her anger is appeased by the slaughter of an innocent.

[59] At least according to Vitruvius (7, Pref., 16)

[60] Hersey, p. 63.

Whether innocent or not, mass slaughter of victims, as has already been hinted, marked the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheatre. Yet besides the standard arena repertoire of gladiatorial combat and wild beast shows, Titus introduced, in grand fashion, a new type of entertainment. During the notorious hundred day festival, a whole series of grotesque executions seem to have taken place. They consisted in 'adaptations' of certain Greek dramas, where the protagonists – who were condemned criminals – would find themselves in injurious situations, entailing their brutal death more often than not.[61]

These punishments were mounted by means of elaborate stage sets in which convicts were forced to dress up and perform as characters from Greek mythology. Martial's de Spectaculis is once again our primary source, and we now find the poet maliciously quipping with a convict in the guise of Daedalus: '(...) when you are being thus torn by a Lucanian bear, how you wish you now had wings!' (*Epigrams*, 10, 8) Or again at a hapless minstrel: ' Earth through a sudden opening sent a she-bear to attack Orpheus. She came from Eurydice!' (*Epigrams*, 25, 21b)

This detached, even callous account and re-enactment of mythic events in the arena may be said to have had its literary forbear in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The native gods of Italy had few tales of their own, and were often inborn spirits of nature; either personifications of the elements like Aurora and Robigo (Mildew),

[61] On torture and executions in the amphitheatre, see K. M. Coleman, 'Fatal Charades: Roman Executions staged as Mythological Enactments', *Journal of Roman Studies* 80, 1990, pp. 44-73.

or 'virtues' such as Fortuna and Mens Bona. Hence the mythology the Romans adopted from the Greeks had always been somewhat derivative; but with the flippant and unapologetic way in which they treat their subject matter, Ovid, Martial, and perhaps Titus truly stand apart.

The Greeks themselves did not shy away from slighting their gods; one need only think of the infantine ramblings of Homeric deities. None the less, the Olympians still had the interventionist power to decide battles or extend grace. To use Richard Jenkyns' simile, theirs was rather a comedy of manners, at times mundane and trivial, yet always of cosmic and sacred import.

Published in A.D. 8, the *Metamorphoses* on the other hand, is an unfeigned poetic exercise in mythology as entertainment. In truth, it does contain heart-rending pathos (*Cephalus and Procris*, one of the most moving and tragic episodes in ancient poetry, springs to mind) yet such moments stand few and far between, and are immediately tempered by a 'dance macabre'. Ovid extracted from Greek myth the grim and the morbid, stringing them into a thread of narratives in which the arbitrary fates of his human and divine characters would often end in mortal demise or transmutation.

The implications were profound: A stock of mythic characters were divested of their sanctity and could be freely used and adopted in ever devious contexts.[62] For instance, under the reigns of Claudius and Nero, decking funerary monuments

[62] See Richard Jenkyns, 'The Legacy of Rome' in *The Legacy of Rome, A New Appraisal* (ed. Richard Jenkyns), Oxford University Press, 1992.

with scenes in which the deceased would be portrayed in the semblance of deities and mythic characters had become common practice among slaves and freedmen. But the full significance of such identification was irrelevant or perhaps wilfully overlooked, such as when a faithful wife would be portrayed as Alcestis, turning a blind eye to her suicide.[63]

To return to the Flavian Amphitheatre, three epigrams in Martial's *de Spectaculis* describe fatal enactments of Greek myth within the arena. The longest relates the execution of 'Orpheus' (*Epigrams*, 21):

> Whatever Rhodope is said to have seen on the Orphic stage, Caesar, the amphitheatre has displayed to you. Cliffs crept and a marvellous wood ran forwards such as was believed to be the grove of the Hesperides. Every kind of wild beast was there, mixed with the flock, and above the minstrel hovered many birds; but the minstrel fell, torn apart by an ungrateful bear. Only this one thing happened contrary to the story.

What is revealing in this vignette is how Martial describes what took place through the ironic and bemused gaze of the audience, who presumably revel in the unforeseen twist in plot. The pleasure of the reenactment and the true appeal of the performance lie precisely in the subversion of the plot; an ingrate carnivore, that bizarre denouement.

An almost mannerist relish for the unexpected is countered by the increasing interest in authenticity. The props and mechanisms that enabled 'cliffs to creep' give an inkling of the degree of sophistication attained, while it is safe to assume

[63] Coleman, p. 67.

that only under a very competent stage direction could animals have flocked around 'Orpheus' at the right time.

But it is Caesar himself who receives the highest accolade, for it is he who has amassed the wealth to raise the building; at whose behest wild beasts have been tamed (fig. 3.4); and it is he who proudly presides over the games, subjugating myth and nature itself for the benefit and amusement of Roman citizenry. The ability to discipline and manipulate nature was indeed one of the defining traits of Rome's success: Roman engineering is almost proverbial. Aqueducts that channeled water from mountain spring to city bath were but another expression of their civilization; the quest for the refinement of nature.

The pairing of aqueducts and amphitheatres may seem ponderous, yet the similarity goes much beyond their mere utilitarian function, e.g. the fact that they 'domesticated', as it were, what was hitherto feral. In fact, along with sewers and the (again, proverbial) road system, aqueducts were seen as one of the handful of public structures not derived from Greek precedent. Writing in the time of Nerva, Frontinus, who was officially administering the many aqueducts of Rome, is quite fervent in his praise:

Fig. 1.5 Animals being boarded on a ship at the centre of the Mosaic of the Great Hunt, dating from the first half of the fourth century A.D. Piazza Armerina, Villa del Casale, Italy.

Source: Gabucci (ed.) *The Colosseum*, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 64

> 'With such an array of indispensable structures carrying so many waters, compare, if you will, the idle pyramids or the useless, though famous, works of the Greeks!'[64]

Onians suggests that such amenities (and we may safely attach the Flavian Amphitheatre to the list) served as frontiers, dividing the visitor/spectator/citizens' perception of the crude reality from which they would enter, from the elegant and orderly world in which they would find themselves. In effect, the contrast was omnipresent in Rome, and could even be said to have found expression in the immense popularity of unfinished masonry throughout the first century of the principate.

A famous instance is the Forum of Augustus, whose intricate marble revetments and fair Composite capitals were inclosed by an unpolished, rough wall. (fig. 3.5) Walls demarcate and keep the elements at bay (during the the great fire of 64, the forum was left partially intact thanks to them), yet they also function as markers, like milestones which indicate that one is on the verge of another set of signifiers.

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64 Frontinus, *De aquaeductu*, I. 16. He plainly seeks to ingratiate himself, yet the sentiment of complacency as regards public amenities seems to have been shared by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the Elder Pliny. See Edwards, p. 106.

Fig. 1.6 Arch into the Forum of Augustus with temple of Mars Ultor, Rome, late first century B.C.

Source: John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning, The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Princeton, 1990, fig. 27, p. 49

In this particular case, they may have accentuated the difference between the Rome Octavian had found of brick, and the present Augustan city of marble.[65] By rusticating the enclosure of the precinct, this 'semiotic' change of state was set in stone, rendering permanent the process itself. Augustus' civilizing mission could thus be experienced again and again, simply in passing a threshold.

The Renaissance architect Sebastiano Serlio, who wrote an influential book on the *Regole generali di Architettura*, provides further, albeit indirect evidence of the use of rustication, and the semiotic significance of the orders in antiquity. A manuscript housed in Munich, which was based on Book IV of Polybius' lost treatise on the encampments of Rome, describes the doorway of a Roman camp in Dacia: 'This is the main doorway of the encampment. It is composed of the Corinthian order mixed with the rustic to demonstrate metaphorically the tenderness and the pleasantness of the Emperor Trajan in forgiving and his robustness and severity in punishing.' From the same manuscript: 'The encampment had two gateways of extreme difference in workmanship. The one in the rustic side was on the side where the barbarians were more ferocious … and the other of Corinthian workmanship was on the side of Italy.' [66]

According to Gombrich these observations are surely influenced by the theory of rhetoric, just as Vitruvius had derived his architectural principles from the axioms

[65] Onians, p. 49.

[66] Ernst Gombrich, 'Architecture and Rhetoric in Guilio Romano's Palazo del Tè', in *The Essential Gombrich, Selected Writings on Art and Culture*, Phaidon, London, pp. 401-410.

of treatises on oratory. Indeed, both seem to have drawn on Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek historian and teacher of rhetoric, who flourished during the reign of Augustus, and whose *De collocatione verborum* was recovered and printed in Venice in 1508. In it, Dionysius speaks of the effect of the strength and intensity one can achieve through the use of harsh sounds, comparing the resulting effect to the roughness of ancient buildings. Austerity in style calls for the abrupt and syncopated use of words, 'not unlike those ancient buildings made of uncut square blocks, not even arranged at right angles, which give the impression of an improvised piling-up of rough stones'.[67]

Another text, to which we have had recourse above, further elaborates the correspondence between Vitruvian architectural theory and ancient rhetoric. In his *De oratore*, Cicero distinguishes between three types of speech, beginning with the character of the 'humble or austere style'.[68] It is marked by its unassuming allure, discarding euphony and rhythm in favour of fortuitous phonetic dissonance. Such calculated negligence in style, he claims, can leave an agreeable impression. (*De oratore,* XXIII. 77, 78.) Cicero's may be a dilettantish taste for sophistication, but it proves that subtleties in execution were taken into account, and that form and content, in rhetoric as well as in architecture, were anything but mutually exclusive.

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[67] Ibid, p. 405.

[68] Cf. Quintilian, X, 16, 'Attic, originating in cultivated Athens, is compressed and coherent; Asiatic also matched its audience, being inflated and empty; the third, Rhodian, is intermediate, consisting of a mixture of the two.'

Which is why it is all the more interesting to observe that, apart from the rusticated amphitheatres at Verona and Pola, perhaps the most famous example of (a possibly) intentional lack of finish in Roman architecture was the Flavian Amphitheatre. While I admit the need to reduce expenditure may have had a say, it is remarkable how the refined spiral of Ionic volutes is reduced to its bare essentials, carved in plain discs. Nor are the Corinthian capitals treated to refined articulation, being left to sprout all but barren leaves.[69] Just as the sculptors who reworked the bust of Nero into Vespasian, the anonymous architects of the amphitheatre may have made a virtue of necessity.

3.4. From Corinthian to Composite: The Synthesis

To grasp the lateness of the Corinthian order, and its sense of culmination, it may be expedient to retrace the context in which it made its appearance. In the temple of Apollo Epikurios at Bassae, overlooking the Gulf of Kyparissia, the first known instance of the Corinthian capital stood atop a single column at the end of the cella, flanked at either side by two Ionian colonnades, while the *peripteron* was Doric. On looking at a perspective reconstruction, it is as if the older columns attend the momentary rebirth of the defunct virgin in solemn pose (fig. 3.6).[70]

Corinthian did in fact incorporate elements from Doric and Ionic, and it is therefore not entirely preposterous to greet it as the lost daughter of its male and

[69] Onians, p. 51.
[70] Rykwert, p. 328.

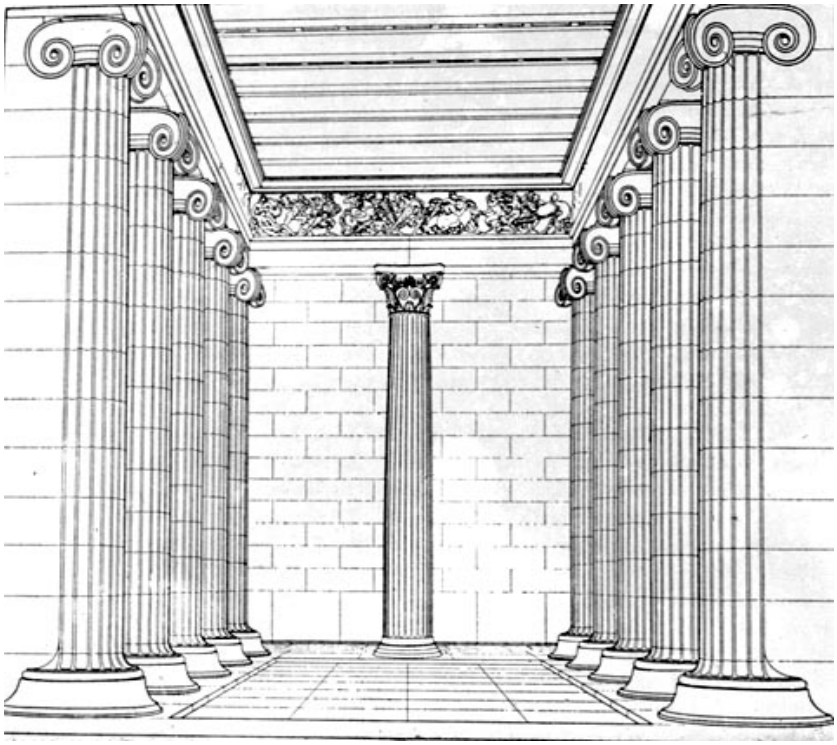

Fig. 1.7 Temple of Apollo at Bassae, Peloponnese, Greece (ca. 450 B.C.) Perspective reconstruction showing the first known Corinthian column at the end of the cella.

Source: Mark Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture*, Yale, 2000, fig. 7.3, p. 136

female antecedents.[71] This interpretation is somewhat corroborated by Vitruvius in relation to the way in which the Corinthian capital may be matched with Doric or Ionic entablatures: 'And so out of the two genera is created [*procreatum*] a third by the introduction of a new capital.' (Vitruvius, VII)

Another overarching theme between the three is the fact that Corinthians' birth myth is actually a myth of death. But whereas Doric and Ionic commemorated mass acts of aggression and physical onslaught, Corinthian solemnizes a specific event, paying tribute to a bittersweet strain of individual sacrifice. Rykwert [p. 321] cites contemporary vase paintings as evidence for the use of the acanthus leaf as a plant associated with tombs and cycles of life and death, as are most of the structures connected with the order (amongst which, the above-mentioned temple at Bassae, and tholoi at Delphi and Epidarius are worthy of mention). Which may be one of the reasons why it eventually gained so much currency: its rejuvenating individuality was perfectly conducive to creativity.

In truth, despite their symbolic importance for both civilizations, the way Romans deployed architectural orders fundamentally differed from the Greeks. In Greece, Corinthian was, together with the 'effete' Ionic, relegated almost exclusively to interiors. Starting with Augustus, Corinthian readily found reception among emperors in Rome, and was sooner employed for propagandistic purposes, being

[71] Hersey, p. 67.

accommodated with surprising urgency in official monuments throughout the empire.[72]

There may have been many reasons for this headlong transformation. First of all, Corinthian was Hellenistic enough to evoke the classical past, but retained none of the racial undercurrents of Doric-Dorian and Ionic-Ionian; it was a question of geographic innuendo at most.[73] Nor was the acanthus leaf overborne with deific associations, allowing room for a new, Romanised set of signifiers. Indeed, the motif was eventually invested with meaning, as the lower register of the Ara Pacis would bear elegant witness.[74]

The acanthus leaf seems to have been the ideal foil for Augustus' purposes on yet another level. Its association with rebirth and rejuvenation complemented the first *princeps'* programme, in which his role was that of a latter day Romulus who had risen from the dead to finally close the gates of Janus. In this sense, it is of special note that the *exedrae* behind the Corinthian portico of the Temple of Mars Ultor were used as niches for statues of the great men of the past, and that in the centre of each exedra was placed one of the two mythic ancestors who presaged the greatness of Augustan Rome; Aeneas and Romulus, the implication being that

[72] E. Strong, 'Some Observations on Early Roman Corinthian', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 53, 1963, pp. 73-84.

[73] Onians, p. 20.

[74] Wilson Jones, p. 139.

Augustus had come to fulfil the *pietas* of the former, and reclaim the *virtus*, courage and moral integrity of the latter.[75]

The meanings clustered around Corinthian (or the meanings it was wont to encrust) ensured its popularity during the Augustan regime, but it was to enjoy a still wider range of repercussion: it came to be thought of as an authoritative example of regal architectural decorum. The use of the Corinthian order became a would-be act of fealty to the first *princeps* and to the ideals he represented: an affirmation of imperial order.[76]

> 'He [Augustus] corrected and reorganised the extremely confusing and dissolute way in which people attended the games (…) he decreed that at every public show the first row of seats should be reserved for senators. In addition, he prohibited the ambassadors of free peoples from sitting in the orchestra in Rome, when he discovered that some libertines had been sent. He separated the military from the people (…) He did not allow anyone who was not wearing a toga to sit in the centre of the *cavea*. The women were now allowed to sit only in the highest seats, while before they had been in the habit of sitting anywhere they liked. Only the Vestal Virgins were assigned a place in the theatre, set apart from the others in front of the box of the praetor."
>
> (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, ch. 44)

Thus the reorganisation of public entertainment was part of the many reforms Augustus had put into effect for the amelioration of Roman society, and it is difficult to imagine the Flavians remaining oblivious to this law while they built their own amphitheatre. The strict separation of the Flavian Amphitheatre's

[75] Nancy H. Ramage & Andrew Ramage, *Roman Art, Romulus to Constantine*, Cambridge, 1995. p 104.

[76] Wilson Jones, Ibid. p.139.

seating into vertical zones, and the many steps on which are inscribed the places reserved for the elite and the affluent (apparently engraved in the same year the amphitheatre was inaugurated) imply that such rigid seating regulations were the rule, not the exception.

It can therefore be safely surmised that senators, priests, foreign delegates and ambassadors would have taken pride of place at the very border of the arena. Above them in the *ima cavea* one would see the knights, while higher still, Roman citizens would occupy the *media cavea*. The *summa cavea* was the uppermost ring in which one can envisage jostling throngs of slaves and nondescript foreigners struggling to get a good view.

Not only were the seats compartmentalised, but the plan of the building was such that in entering, spectators could easily be regulated and classified into their respective rows.[77] (fig. 3.7) Four main entrances corresponded to the major and minor axes of the arena, and were treated with added flourish. The main axis entrances provided direct access to the arena, whereas the minor axis entrances seem to have admitted only the select into exclusive, reserved boxes. As such, the northern minor axis deserves our closer attention, in that a) It was as a meridian, in reference to which the outer bays of the façade were numbered. b) According to numismatic evidence, in front of its entrance stood a distyle columnar porch

[77] Corridors and stairways were calculated to conduct each spectator to a certain section of the *cavea*; to the extent that, the seat(ing) for which a name or a social group was reserved, along with the distance in Roman feet needed to get there, was carved on the rise of the steps. See Silvia Orlandi, 'Amphitheatre Seating Inscriptions", in Gabucci (ed.), *The Colosseum*, p. 105.

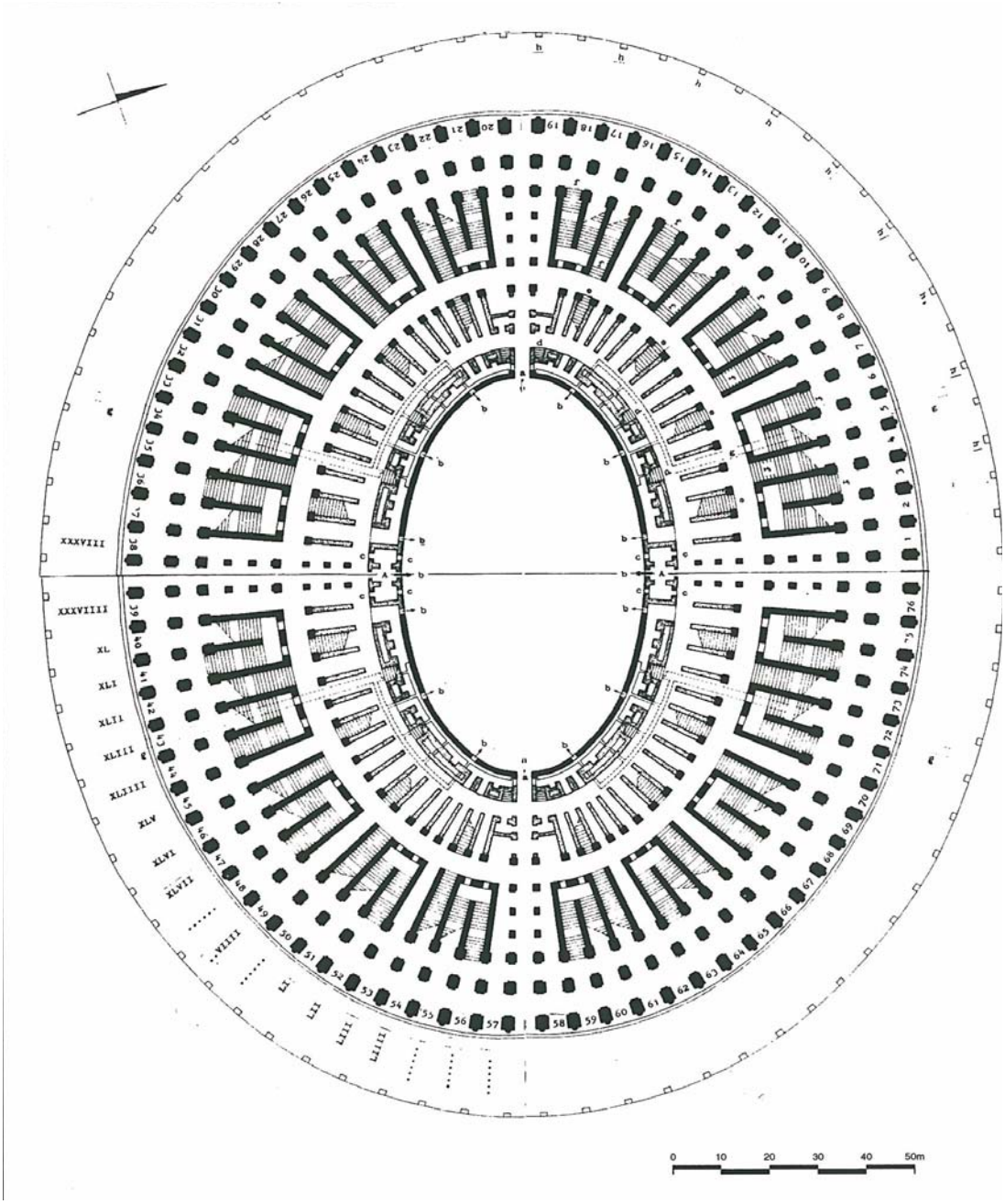

Fig. 1.8 Architectural plan of the Flavian Amphitheatre.

Source: D. L. Bombgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, London, 2000, fig. 1.6, p. 11

decked with a four-horse chariot rising upon Composite columns (of which more below).[78]

These and other aspects support the idea that the lodge on the northern side of the arena was at the disposition of the emperor and his immediate retinue, e.g. male members of the family, foreign dignitaries, etc. In direct contrast, the empress, her courtiers and the Vestal Virgins most probably occupied the box geometrically opposite.

Judging from this layout, the Flavian Amphitheatre could be said to have served in two capacities: it was first a true feat of organisational skill; controlling spectators while ensuring their efficient circulation. Secondly, and by inference, it was a building where the Roman citizenry would confront itself in all its structured, multi-layered, and hierarchic collectivity.[79] To behold an amphitheatre at full capacity would probably have left one in awe and wonder, and the lavish spectacle of the spectators was indubitably an important part of the attraction. Goethe, as regards the arena at Verona, writes: 'For actually an amphitheatre like this is designed to impress people with themselves.'

And impressed they probably were. The emperor himself was seated at a salient position in his private lodge, architecturally accentuated and visible to all. Yet most notably, his quarters were on a par with the first and lowest Doric/Tuscan

[78] D. L. Bombgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*,London, 2000, p. 9.

[79] See Paul Zanker, 'By the Emperor, for the People: "Popular" Architecture in Rome' *in The Emperor and Rome, Space, Representation, and Ritua*l, (ed. Björn C. Ewald, Carlos, F. Noreña), Cambridge, 2010.

level of the façade. However fortuitous, this interesting correspondence seems characteristic of the tenor of the *principate*.

After Augustus, emperors abided by a specific form of policy that bound them to present (and re-present) a public persona more akin to elected magistrates and generals of the Republic than as kings or self-righteous monarchs. The disposition of public space within Rome reflects this endeavour. As compared to the austere and humble residences on the Palatine hill, the bath-buildings and lavish forums of Rome, not to mention the Circus Maximus, and of course the Flavian Amphitheatre all manifest the largesse of the *princeps*, demonstrating to what ends emperors chose to direct their power.

Marcus Antonius is said to have declared that the grandeur of Rome could only be measured by that which it offered, rather than by that which it took. (Plutarch, Marcus Antonius, VIII) A proclivity for 'popular' buildings and projects was seen as an indispensable mark of the emperor's might and the solidarity he enjoyed with the people. Tiberius for instance was reprimanded by Suetonius for disdaining the plebs' taste for gore. Trajan's 'dialogue' with the Roman people on the other hand was a faintly veiled exercise in euphemistic public munificence, as when he had a portion of the Quirinal Hill removed for the construction of his

forum. The senate and the people went on to 'laud' him for the deed with an honorary column, as a token of their infinite gratitude.[80]

Then what better way to intimate the concord of the empire – to position the emperor amongst 'the people' – than to place his logia at level with the austere Doric/Tuscan? Bearing in mind that the outer bays of the façade were numbered in reference to his triumphal arch at the entrance of the north axis, such a correspondence could only have further underscored Titus' role as victorious commander and magistrate of the people.[81]

As mentioned above, the triumphal arch was surmounted by a *quadriga* rising on Composite capitals. The all too hazy distinction between Doric and Tuscan has already been discussed, and Corinthian had also spawned its alternatives. Evidence suggests a Composite capital, e.g. variations on the themes of Ionic and Corinthian forms, had established itself by the end of the first century AD.[82] In a word, it was a standard Corinthian capital with the upper section replaced by an assortment of echinus and corner volutes, the most celebrated examples of which were those on another building associated with Vespasian's heir, the Arch of

[80] See Lynne Lancaster, 'Building Trajan's Column', *American Journal of Archaeology* vol. 103, no. 3 (Jul., 1999), pp. 419-439. A similar theme was discussed, albeit from a different angle, in the first chapter.

[81] I thank Prof. Güven for pointing this out.

[82] William L. Macdonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, An Urban Appraisal, Yale University Press, 1986. p. 189.

Titus. Nearly all subsequent commemorations of Roman victory were furnished by the order, endorsing its association with the dominance of Rome.[83]

The term Composite itself was coined during the Renaissance, and alludes to its mixed extraction. In a sense, it was a consummation of the Roman flair for synthesis and 'orchestration', selecting the best of each influence, be it Greek or Italic, to form an order of truly imperial pretensions. Indeed, the way it was used in the Flavian Amphitheatre brings us back to our first image: three storeys of half columns rising one above the other, only to be crowned triumphant by Composite capitals.[84]

This grouping, on second glance, may have stood for more than the sum of its parts. (fig. 3.8) In Augustan literature, through the verbal semblance of *urbs*, and *orbis*, Rome functioned as a nominal substitute for the world itself.[85] The capital of the empire as well as its namesake, Rome was where the riches of the world were hoarded and went on display: obelisks brought back from Egypt, eastern architectural *spolia*, and wild beasts 'culled from the provinces' all impressed as reminders of the full sway of Rome and its omnipotence.[86] The Flavian Amphitheatre was where this all-encompassing power and the possibility of its

[83] Onians, p. 44.

[84] Other miscellaneous Composite capitals which probably graced the highest tier of the amphitheatre suggest that the imperial order was not the prerogative of the emperor, but was seen fit for the populace.

[85] Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem. [The extent of the Roman city and the world are the same] (Ovid, *Fasti*, 2, 684)

[86] Edwards, p. 100.

experience became visible, where one could see and be seen under a thinly veiled guise of republican values.

Through the lapse of time, just as Rome had once punned with the world, the 'Colosseum' would trope Rome, or rather its passing majesty:

> "So long as the Colossus stands, Rome shall stand; when the Colossus falls, Rome too shall fall; and when Rome falls, so falls the world."
>
> Pseudo-Bede (P.L. 94.543)

Yet this much quoted pronouncement, wrongly attributed to the eighth century scholar Bede, is tantalizingly ambiguous. It is still open to conjecture whether the word Colossus ('Colisaeus' in the original text) refers to the Amphitheatre or to the colossal statue which would eventually rise next to it.

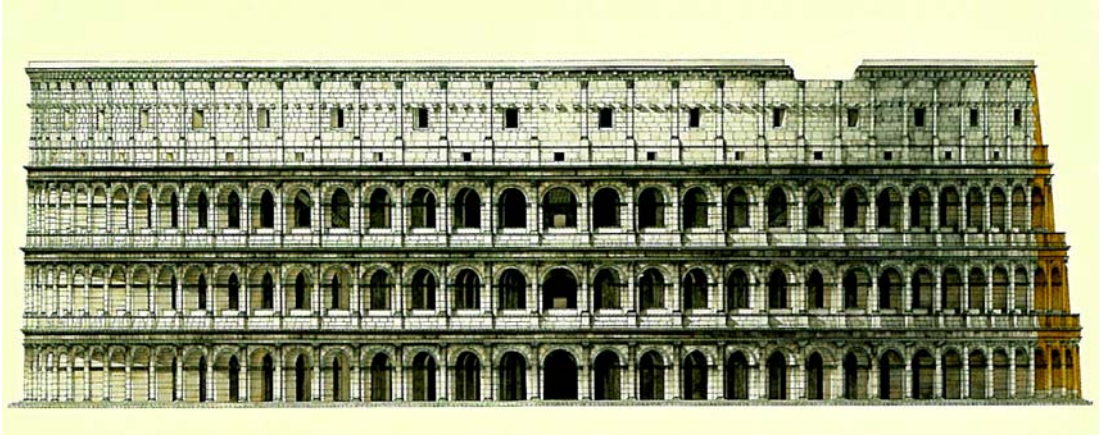

Fig. 1.9 General view, by Susanne Mocka

Source: Edition Lidiarte D-10623

CHAPTER 4

THE 'COLOSSEUM'

4.1. Use from A.D 80 to the Sixth Century

Generations succeed each other and pass
As leaves in forests

Homer[87]

Imperial biographies, such as those compiled by Suetonius (*De vita Caesarum*) and Dio (*Historiae Romane*) as well as passages from the *Historia Augusta* (from the reigns of Hadrian to Numerianus, 117-284 A.D.) form the chief sources of information on the amphitheatre after the Flavian dynasty. From then on, the historical record is somewhat abridged, and accounts are at best indirect, in the main archaeological rather than literary.[88]

Historia Augusta recounts how, beside his eminent role as patron of the arts, the emperor Hadrian championed gladiatorial combat; sponsoring shows, even descending into the arena to participate in them as a display of his military prowess. He is also known to have used the edifice as a scene for punishment, but it was his decision in 135 A.D. to dedicate a temple to Venus and Roma which would have the most momentous consequences. The complex was to occupy the

[87] Yourcenar, p. 49.

[88] The following is a collation of the related passages in Gabucci (ed.) [2000] and Colagrossi (1913).

southern slopes of the Velia hill, where the Domus Aurea was presumably in a state of semi-disrepair. To make room, the Colossus of Nero, which still stood guard in the vestibule of the palace, was reconsecrated to the sun god Apollo and hauled by the aid of twenty-four elephants to an intersecting point between the new temple, the Meta Sudans, and the amphitheatre (*Scriptore Historiae Augustae*, Hadrian, xix.12-13).

Over the years, the latter suffered its own share of depredations. Its many wooden fittings, lifts, stage props, beams, landings, etc. rendered it susceptible to conflagration. Recurrent fires not only consumed the woodwork, but spread to and devastated the structures' marble revetments and even cleft its travertine blocks.[89]

On August 23, A.D. 217, the amphitheatre was caught in a thunderstorm, resulting in a fire which ravaged the valley and reduced the edifice to ruins. The first spark broke out in the upper portico, and as the metal clamps which anchored the columns gave way, the whole *summa cavea* came crumbling down in a torrent of travertine into the *cavea*, and from there into the arena. Fuelled by the wood in the underground chambers, the amphitheatre became a gargantuan furnace, leaving it in disuse for the next five years.

This fire, and others that swept the valley during the reign of Macrinus (A.D. 217-218) were considered ominous by the credulous, for the emperor had dared to put an end to the horse races in honour of Vulcan. The revenge of the god of thunder

[89] Gabucci (ed.), *The Colosseum*, p. 171.

seems to have been aptly instantaneous (the Vulcunalia was celebrated annually on August 23). Macrinus would be murdered the next year.

By A.D. 222, the Flavian Amphitheatre was once again entrusted to the protection of the gods with the accustomary ceremony, this time under the aegis of Alexander Severus. It was a decisive turn for the edifice as only its supporting framework had been left standing, and the monument we

In effect, restorations were only completed twenty years later under Gordian III (A.D. 238-244) and a coin was minted to mark the occasion (fig. 4.1). At the focal point we again see the amphitheatre, this time minus the *quadriga*, but ever from the awkward bird's eye view. The portico on the right seems to have been redesigned, whereas to the left, a new presence looms behind the Meta Sudans. This is the first instance the Colossus is depicted, and it is in the guise of Hercules, holding a club, the addition of Commodus (A.D. 180-192) who had also removed, according to Dio, the head of the statue to replace it with a new one in his own features. (73.22.3)

With the dedication of the Arch of Constantine (A.D. 312) a century later the valley was to take its definitive shape. The triumphal arch commemorated, by Senatorial decree, the emperor's victory over Maxentius.[90] Indeed, despite Constantine's proselytizing architectural efforts, throughout the fourth century Rome was as yet a city of pagan, secular and classical buildings which continued

[90] Ibid, p. 179.

Fig. 4.10 Coin issued during the reign of Gordian III (A.D. 238-244)

Source: Gabucci (ed.) *The Colosseum*, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 176

to elicit the profound admiration of its visitors.[91] Writing at the end of the century, Ammianus Marcellinus chronicles the visit of Constantine's heir Constantius II to Rome in A.D. 357. As emperor of the East, it was his first excursion and we find him dazzled ' by the array of marvels' he saw in the ancient capital: the Capitol and the Temple of Jupiter; the Flavian Amphitheatre; the Pantheon, ' like a city district in scale' ; triumphal columns; the Temple of Venus and Roma, the Theatre of Pompey and Trajan's Forum. The amphitheatre was one of the monuments he admired the most, ' a building so tall, human vision can scarcely make out the top', which might be an indication that it was again in pristine condition. (Ammianus Marcellinus, 16:10:14)

But this happy spell proved all too ephemeral. During the fifth century violent earthquakes and implacable barbarian sieges overwhelmed the city. The first onslaught, launched by the Visigoth leader Alaricus, lasted from A.D. 408 until the disastrous sack of Rome two years later. The Vandals executed another attack in A.D. 455, and the ultimate plunder was perpetrated by the barbarian troop commander Ricimerus in A.D. 472.

Continued threats led to forced migration, and the population of Rome is estimated to have dropped from five hundred thousand to about half that number in the first half of the century.[92] Nor did the earthquakes of A.D. 429 and 443

[91] See Richard Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City, 312-1308*, Princeton University Press, 2000.
[92] For a recent and rather traditional account of the decline of Rome, see B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, Oxford, 2005.

discourage fleeing denizens who, in this general state of disarray, understandably lost their erstwhile taste for civic distractions, not to mention gladiatorial shows. While *Venationes* – wild beast hunts – continued to attract spectators at least until the reign of Theodoric (A.D. 474-526), after the abortive attempts of Constantine and Honorius, Valentinian III finally abolished gladiatorial combat for good in A.D. 438.

These factors, coupled with the empire's steady economic decline, led Romans to seek materials of quality in the antique buildings that were still at their disposition, and during the reign of Theodoric the amphitheatre became a treasure mine: whole blocks of immaculate travertine could be crumbled into quicklime or reemployed for construction. Marble revetments (such as were still left intact), balustrades and the latticework that adorned, and the bricks that made up the edifice were duly dismantled and reappropriated.

The sixth century was one of further decay for the amphitheatre, and the valley in which it stood gradually sunk under the debris of neglect. The building and its costly maintenance were simply beyond the means of a community long beleaguered by politic instability and the populace[93] must have found the building insufferably out of place. And it began to function out of context indeed. While its every nook and cranny was being looted, other parts of the building were being taken over for domestic and commercial use. Its innumerable spaces were used for

[93] According to Procopius, it was reduced to 500 people when Totila set foot in Rome, though this number should be taken with a grain of salt, as many may have fled the victorious general. See Beard, Hopkins, p. 154.

storage, or as permanent shelters for animals, or simply as commodious throughways; it was the shortest way across the valley. Recent excavations conducted inside the structure, which have unearthed various artefacts of ceramic and glass dating from the end of the sixth until ninth century, bear witness bear witness to continued human presence.[94]

4.2. The Afterlife of the Amphitheatre

> "Yet despite these elements, Homer remains the supreme father of all sublime poets." [95]
>
> (Giambattista Vico, *Discovery of the True Homer*)

By the late middle ages, its original purpose long forgotten, the 'Colosseum' as it was now called, was shrouded in medieval mystique.[96] Of the countless superstitions it aroused, the one concerning Virgil has all the ludicrous yet delightful inconsequence of an Italian fable:

A man versed in all matters pagan, Virgil supposedly dabbled in witchcraft at Naples and Rome before predicting the coming of Christ. Meanwhile, his architectural pursuits led him to build the Colosseum of Rome, where he earnestly devoted himself to the study of necromancy; with the aid of which art he exacted

[94] Gabucci (ed.) *The Colosseum*, p. 195.

[95] Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, (translated by David Marsh), Penguin, London, 2001. p. 370.

[96] For the following, and the symbolic afterlife of the amphitheatre, see M. Di Macco, *Il Colosseo. Funzione simbolica, storica, urbana*, Rome, 1971.

revenge from women of such fiendish disposition as would put the devil himself to shame.

Less cantankerous, at least by our anachronistic standards, is the legend on the indestructible power of the Colosseum, and hence Rome. In ancient times, whenever a province revolted, a bell in the hand of a statue would purportedly toll so as to alert the unsuspecting populace. The statue either stood in the Campidoglio, the Pantheon, or the Colosseum, affirming the latter's status of obscure but numinous authority.

Indeed, the amphitheatre was believed to be invested with diabolic power. Written after A.D. 1000, the *Mirabilia Urbis Romane*, which was a medieval equivalent of the modern travel guide, but intended for pilgrims, describes the building as a round temple topped by a large cupola of bronze, dedicated to the sun. Standing in the middle was a giant statue of Apollo holding a sphere in one hand, and the image was meant to represent Rome bearing the world aloft. (Fig. 4.2)

The Colosseum continued to symbolise paganism – or rather a pagan pantheon of sorts – well into the thirteenth century.[97] According to another myth, a column dedicated to Jove, the king of the gods, stood in the centre of the arena, around which pilgrims from all over the world would kneel and pray, then repair to one of the many crevice-cum-chapels of the structure. After three days of fasting, they would proceed to the upper floors to perform their ritual sacrifice.

[97] Coarelli, p. 205.

It is truly impossible to follow the thread of thought in popular imagination that led from the amphitheatre to a temple overrun with demons, a citadel for the art of

Fig. 4.11 M. Van Heemskreck, *Ancient Arena, from the sixteenth century*. Lille, France, Palais des Beaux-Arts.

Source: Gabucci (ed.) *The Colosseum*, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 205

necromancy, and a shrine of paganism. As can be surmised from the legends cited, there seems to have been a prevailing confusion in distinguishing the Colossus from the amphitheatre. There are no further references to the former, other than the information that Commodan alterations were removed after the emperor's demise and *damnatio*.[98] What later became of it, and for how long it actually remained standing is unknown, although according to the plinth on which it once rose, it was intact in the fourth century.[99] This pedestal too was intact up until the intervention of Mussolini in the 1930s, who razed it to the ground to make room for his *Via dei Fori Imperiali*.

As for the Flavian Amphitheatre, there are basically two explanations of how it came to be called the Colosseum, and I will suggest they are not mutually exclusive, at least not of necessity.[100] The first view sees the relationship in terms of metonymy, in which the name of the colossus was used to denote the amphitheatre. The interface between them was characterised as much by their contiguity as by their similarity: the urban 'armature' linking the two structures may well have resulted in an association of their respective ideas.[101]

There is in fact one other literary reference to the Colossus. In his treatise *'On the Sublime'*, Longinus confronts the claim, urged by an anonymous writer, that 'we should not prefer the huge disproportioned Colossus to the Doryphoros of

[98] Varner, p. 66.

[99] J. C. Anderson (jr), p.98.

[100] Thoroughly discussed in Colagrossi, p. 136.

[101] 'I am off to the amphitheatre' may have easily become 'Meet me at the Colossus'.

Polycletus'.[102] The somewhat obscure rejoinder of Longinus is based on the difference between the artifice of life-likeness and the transcendence of nature and, by implication, great literature. In art (here synonymous with statuary) we appreciate the artists' faithful representation of reality, whereas what leaves us spellbound in nature is its nameless magnificence. (xxxvi. 4) Thus in its sheer size and bulk, and exactly because of its laboured technique, a colossus (which is, strictly speaking, not a mere statue) is rather like a force of nature than any work of art. As such it is suggestive of the superhuman dimension which sublime literature seeks to attain.[103]

The second view concerning the etymology of the Colosseum, namely that it was an attributive appellation stressing the building's magnitude, does not necessarily contradict the foregoing, for it would seem that the two out-scaled monuments, in their apposition, could only have complemented the impression of sublimity, and what we see as a denominative confusion between the two was but an aspect of their prolonged conceptual consolidation.

Of course the irony lies precisely in that they were welded and unified in popular imagination. Without a well-defined distinction between myth and history, the connotative leap from the statue to the building must have ceased to be a misnomer. The ever revenant Nero, having suffered countless alterations through

[102] Longinus, *On the Sublime*, (translated by by H. L. Havell), Macmillan and Co., London, 1890, p. 235.

[103] See James I. Porter, 'Ideals and Ruins', in *Pausanias, Travel and Memory in Roman Greece* (ed. Susan E. Alcock, John F. Cherry, Jaś Elsner), Oxford University Press, New York, 2001.

the centuries, and more or less appropriated by every shifting imperial regime, could now be safely associated with the very structure that was meant to obliterate his memory.[104]

In light of this ironic turn of events, what of the initial question regarding architecture and forgetting? If we no longer see buildings in isolation, interpreting them to be as much defined by the urban continuum of which they are part,[105] as by questions regarding function, patronage and iconography, what would be the implications of an urban armature defined in temporal terms? In other words, were a map to be drawn, one which represented the city of Rome through the ages, would the palimpsestic outcome still be legible?

These rhetorical questions have already been posed in the context of Roman imperial architecture.[106] Likewise, inquiry into the survival of antiquity in art and architecture has yielded a trove of treasures that has fundamentally altered the way we perceive the pastness of the past.[107]

And even the last question can find an equally conjectural answer. Piranesi's plan of Rome (fig. 4.3) offers a cartographic image of the city, encompassed by

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[104] Even in twentieth century, the monument was thought by some to be Neronian, see Cecil B. Demille's 1932 film *The Sign of the Cross*.

[105] One need only think of Macdonald's seminal book on the architecture of Rome: at the very outset, the title is qualified as 'an urban appraisal'.

[106] For one instance, see Elizabeth Marlowe, 'Liberator urbis suae, Constantine and the ghost of Maxentius' in *The Emperor and Rome*, pp. 199-219.

[107] See the magisterial work of Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity, Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance* (translation by David Britt), Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles, 1999.

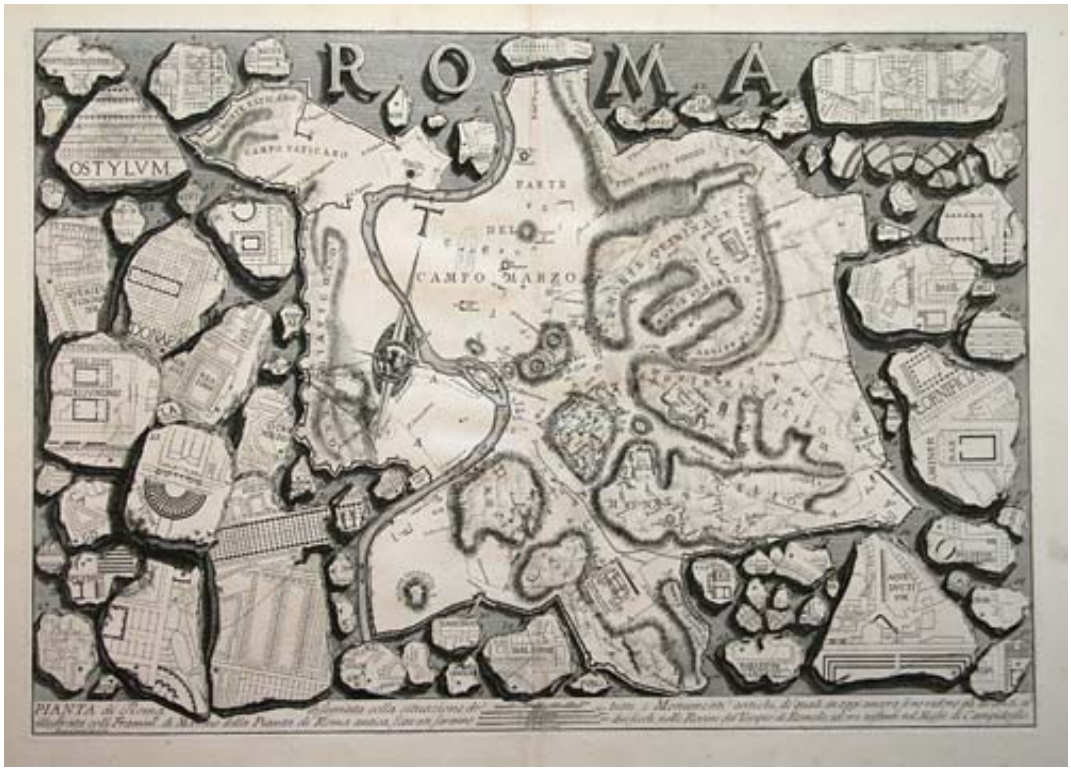

Fig. 4.12 Plan of Rome from *Antichità Romane de' Tempi della Republica e de' Primi Imperatori*, G. B. Piranesi, 1748.

Source: Catherine Edwards, *Writing Rome, Textual approaches to the City*, Cambridge, 1996. Plate 3, p. 29

fragments from the Severan marble plan known as the *Forma Urbis Romae*. The composition seems on the brink of collapse: the various topographic snippets do not fit the puzzle, for although they are of the same city, each belongs to a different section of time. Thus the Baths of Diocletian are shown in outline but can find no correspondence on the map, itself constructed a century before the complex was ever built.[108] Hence, Piranesi's piecemeal map disowns a teleologic historiography/topography of Roman architecture, choosing to place emphasis on its ramified and infinitely mutable essence.

Yet monuments may fit such a convoluted map in many ways.[109] There are commemorative edifices, such as the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, whose claim to permanence, like the Colosseum, eventually becomes an epithet or a conducive metaphor. By the same token, the connotations some constructs accrue over time can be at variance with their initial function, e.g. the church of St. Sophia. Then there is, in distinction to the memory of presence, the seemingly paradoxical 'commemoration of absence'. This kind of memory, illustrated in the monumental case of the Colosseum, is not only the artefact of effacement, but rather the symbol of the gesture of forgetting, the crystallization of the effacing act itself; that something or someone is and was meant to be collectively and perpetually forgotten. This iconoclastic process is equivocal and by definition, public;

[108] Edwards, p. 26.

[109] See Jaś Elsner, 'Iconoclasm and the Preservation of Memory', *in Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, (eds. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin), University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 209-231.

exemplified by the fact that although the Colosseum's initial function was obscured in time, the original referent of the Colossus never really lost its place in popular imagination.[110]

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> 'It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October, 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed fryars were singing Vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.'[111]

Edward Gibbon's momentous epiphany not only concludes his magnum opus, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, but also functions as a kind of re-commencement. His work is cyclical in the sense that it closes upon its very conception. At the end of the final chapter, it is while brooding among the ruins of the Capitol – the setting aptly autumnal, holy chants within earshot – that Gibbon *desires* to write, and his project unfolds before him.[112]

This desire seems to be sparked by a poignant sense of absence and irony. Absence, in that the world he seeks to reconstruct is long obsolete. Ironic, because the friars sing, not in the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli as is their custom, but in the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, which Gibbon erroneously believed to have stood on the very same spot.

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[110] Ibid, p. 216

[111] Edward Gibbon, *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, (ed. J.B. Bury), London, 1897, cited in Edwards, p. 69.

[112] Or so he would have us believe.

Hence, although an ecclesiastic building has taken its place long before he ever set foot in Rome, for Gibbon the site may still be wrapped in the aura of a pagan temple. Place and architectural presence (or in this case absence) triggers memory.[113] Lost dimensions of the urban palimpsest are as lit from within, and these in turn point toward a narrative waiting to be remembered and retold.

Such moments of inspiration are not unrelated to, I would suggest, what Quintilian had seen as attributes of the built environment in relation to the ancient art of memory. The sensory suggestiveness of architecture, and its role as mnemonic spur is what prompts Gibbon to attempt his grand narrative of the decline of Rome. This time however, it is the historian rather than the orator who recognizes places, remembers 'things that were done there', and recalls the cavalcade of characters who had strutted their hour upon the stage.

It is a testimony to the complexity of the architectural heritage of Rome, and the temporal density of its urban fabric, that these moments can occur, and I believe the story of the Colosseum sketched above defines only one such resounding interstice of time.

[113] Edwards, p. 73.

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APPENDIX A

List of Roman Emperors from Augustus to Domitian

a) The Julio-Claudians

Augustus (*Gaius Julius Caesar*) 27 BC – 14 AD

Tiberius (*Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus*) 14 – 37 AD

Caligula (*Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*) 37 – 41 AD

Claudius I (*Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*) 41 – 54 AD

Nero (*Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*) 54 – 68 AD

b) The Year of the Four Emperors (69 AD)

Galba (*Servius Sulpicius Galba Augustus*)

Otho (*Marcus Salvius Otho Caesar Augustus*)

Vitellius (*Aulus Vitellius Germanicus Augustus)*

c) The Flavians

Vespasian (*Titus Flavius Caesar Vespasianus Augustus*) 69 – 79 AD

Titus (*Titus Flavius Caesar Vespasianus Augustus*) 79 – 81 AD

Domitian (*Titus Flavius Caesar Domitianus Augustus*) 81 – 96 AD