

Rome: City of an Empire

Part III: The Arch of Titus

Titus

- Born in 39 A.D. to a noble family, his father was named Titus Flavius Vespasian. He was the eldest of three, his sister Domitilla and his younger brother Domitian.
- He would have been brought up in the imperial court and would have been acquainted with the son of Emperor Claudius, Britannicus.
- He would have been educated in Greek and Latin and military training.
- From 57-59 A.D. Titus served the military in Germania and Britannia. He then commanded the 15th legion under his father in the Jewish War. This war broke out in 66 A.D. because the Jews were being abused by the local Roman governors and ambushed one of their legions. Vespasian and his son were tasked with crushing the rebellion.
- In 68 B.C., the emperor Nero (who had killed his wives, step-brother, mother, teacher, and many others) fled Rome after the army under Galba rebelled. He committed suicide without an heir and threw the empire into chaos. In turn, Galba (a general from Spain), Otho (Galba lieutenant), and Vitellus (a general from Germania) claimed the throne. Eventually, Vespasian, with the help of the armies in the east and Dalmatia (the Balkans) ceased Italy and was proclaimed Emperor.
- In 70 A.D., Titus, now left in command of the Jews campaign, captured, destroyed, and looted Jerusalem – burning and looting the temple that had been built by the Jewish King, Herod the Great. This devastated the Jewish people and would lead to many being exiled from their homeland and outcasts in the Empire. About 1.1 million were enslaved.
- He returned to Rome and his achievements were celebrated by a triumph. Prisoners would and loot from the campaign would be marched through the streets, the soldiers would parade, and the heroes wearing laurel wreaths, and the victorious general (Titus) was in a four horsed chariot with a slave by his side holding a golden laurel wreath above his head and whispering in his ear “Remember you are not a god.”
- Titus and his brother received the titles of Caesar. He held the consulship several times during his father’s reign. He was also proclaimed the commander of the Praetorian Guard and was accused of executing traitors on superficial evidence.
- In 79 A.D. he ascended the throne after his father’s death. During his reign he faced challenges such as the eruption of Vesuvius and plague. He saw the completion of the Flavian Amphitheatre (Colosseum) and other building projects. The Arch of Titus was probably completed in the reign of his brother, Domitian.
- He is famous for his love affair with Berenice, a Jewish queen. He married Maria Furnilla but divorced her after she was involved in a conspiracy. He had one daughter Julia Flavia.
- He died in 81 A.D. He was deified by his brother Domitian.

The image contains two architectural drawings of the Arch of Titus in Rome. The top drawing is a plan view, showing the arch's footprint. It features a central semi-circular archway flanked by two smaller rectangular niches. The central arch has a width of 17' 9" and a depth of 43' 8". The overall width of the structure is 47' 4". Above the arch is a rectangular panel with Latin inscriptions: "SENATVS POPVLVS QVE ROMANVS DIVO TITO DIVI VESPASIANI VESPASIANO AVGVSTO". The bottom drawing is a section B elevation, showing the arch's profile. It includes a large central archway and two smaller side niches. The arch is topped by a pediment containing a relief of the apotheosis of Titus, with figures of Mars and Venus. The same Latin inscriptions are visible on the panel above the arch. The drawing is signed "GreatBuildings.com" at the bottom right.



- The Arch of Titus is a Roman Triumphal Arch which was erected by Domitian in 81 A.D. at the foot of the Palatine hill on the Via Sacra in the Roman Forum, Rome. It commemorates the victories of his father Vespasian and brother Titus in the Jewish War in Judaea (66-71 A.D.) when the great city of Jerusalem was sacked and the vast riches of its temple plundered. The arch is also a political and religious statement expressing the divinity of the late emperor Titus.



- The arch was constructed using Pentelic marble, with the attic part (upper storey) in Luna marble. The original inscription on the east side of the arch is still *in situ*, although originally the letters would have been inlaid with gilded bronze. It reads:

SENATUS
POPULUS QUE ROMANUS
DIVO TITO DIVI VESPASIANI F
VISPASIANO AUGUSTO

(The Senate and People of Rome, to Divus Titus, son of Divus Vespasian,
Vespasian Augustus).

The use of 'Divo' for Titus indicates that the arch was erected after the death of the emperor in 81 A.D. The inscription on the west side describes the refurbishment of the monument by Pope Pius VII in 1821 CE.

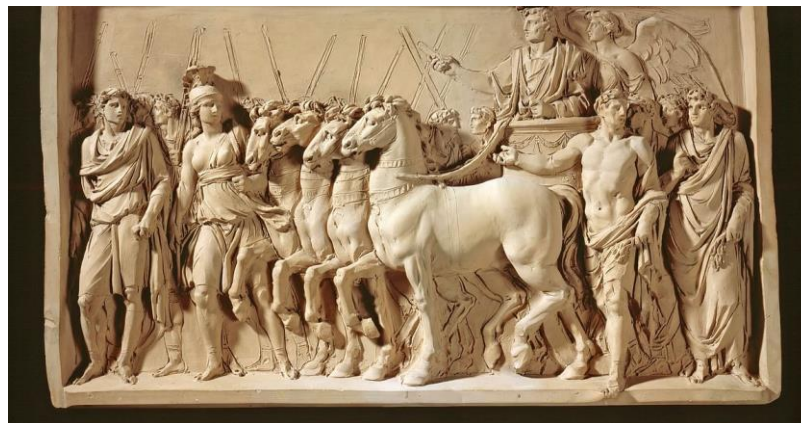


Sculptural Decoration



- With only a single opening, the arch is smaller and more modest in its decoration than other surviving arches such as those of Constantine and Septimius Severus. Also, the decorative sculpture has not survived the ravages of time very well. Nevertheless, one can still see the significance of some of the sculpture scenes, notably, the side panels. These marble reliefs are set either side of the inner arch and measure 2.04 m high by 3.85 m long. One panel shows the start of Titus' 71 CE victory triumph procession as it passes through the Porta Triumphalis (Triumphal

Gate) to the Forum Boarium with the participants carrying booty from the Temple of Jerusalem after the sacking of the city. The booty includes a seven-branched candelabra (menorah), silver trumpets, and perhaps even the Ark of the Covenant. Some figures carry placards which would have probably indicated the names of the conquered cities and peoples. Temporary wooden archways would often be erected as part of the triumph – particularly in other Roman cities. Then later these might be erected in stone as a monument to the triumph.



- The other relief panel is carved in three-quarter view and has Titus riding a four-horse chariot (*quadriga*) and shows him being crowned by a personification of Victory. The goddess Roma stands in front, holding the bridle of one of the horses. The two figures to the right of the chariot are personifications of the people of Rome (naked torso) and the Senate (wearing a toga). The two relief panels are significant in the history and development of Roman art, as they are the first full attempt by Roman sculptors to create the illusion of space. This is successfully achieved in several ways; the figures are portrayed in three-quarter view, the background figures are so rendered that they recede gradually into the distance, the central figures are carved in higher relief than those on the edges, and the whole panel is curved slightly inwards.



- Running around the whole arch is a small frieze of relief sculptures which depicts the whole triumphal procession, and above the archway itself are winged victories each standing on a globe and holding banners, trophies, laurel wreaths, and palm fronds. Set in the centre of each side of the archway is a keystone representing Roma and the Genius of the Roman People. The interior vault is coffered with a central representation of the deified Titus (apotheosis) being carried to the heavens by an eagle. Originally, the whole arch was finished off in customary style with a huge bronze *quadriga* which would have stood on top of the arch.



Other Images



