
CLCIV [course]

November 15, 2012

The reign of Augustus set precedence for expansion, domination and control over the Roman Empire. His supremacy established internal peace and allowed for significant domestic developments for future populations both east and west of the empire. However, after the death of Augustus in 14 AD, a series of imperial civil wars ensued. During the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, the Roman Empire was unstable due to poor leadership and quarrels over the imperial throne. When Nero was driven from the throne in 68 AD, there was a shift in control as the system of emperors was changed drastically. No longer was there a desire to return to the days before the emperor, but rather in 69 AD and on, emperors were confirmed to office through grants of power by traditional assemblies of the Republican period. The shifts in imperial control from the time of Augustus to Julio-Claudian Dynasty to sequential years, proved to be of historical significance as these political forces fostered social improvements and building projects—more specifically the engineering of the Colosseum—bringing stability and peace to the Empire and its surrounding territories.

Following the collapse of the Roman Republic and the rise of Augustus, new orders were set in place. Roman cultural morals and values were also revolutionized. Augustus' reign was marked by his investment in entertainment and spectacles. He devoted much time to building projects and refining the games to keep the Roman people interested and amused. Augustus' rule demonstrated that much of the Roman life revolved around leisure and spectacle. (Potter, 2009, p.165-180). At the death of Augustus' in 14 AD, the Roman Empire population was flourishing; internal peace was evident and spreading to surrounding territories. However upon Augustus'

death, a period of instability, both politically and economically, followed due to the lack of administrative leadership among his successors. A series of civil wars over the imperial throne, known as the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, proved to be detrimental to the Empire. Under emperor Nero, Vespasian and his eldest son Titus were sent to put down the Jewish revolt that began in 66AD. Vespasian and Titus' involvement in the squelching of the revolt led to the introduction of Flavian influence into the Empire. When Nero committed suicide in 68 AD, chaos followed (Potter, 2009, p.187-194).

An era known as the Year of the Four Emperors—Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian--began in 69 AD (Potter, 2009, p.190). However though the fight for control was disordered, there was hope on the horizon for Rome. Due to Vespasian's ability to delegate authority, and in addition to his military prowess, he proved to the Roman people and the Senate that he was qualified to rule the Empire. His participation in the successful invasion of Britain and his response to the Jewish revolt in 67 AD furthered the people's confidence in him as emperor (Potter, 2009, p.198-200). Vespasian is responsible for the founding of the Flavian Dynasty, which ruled the Roman Empire for a quarter of a century. The Flavian Dynasty—Vespasian, Titus and Domitian—is historically, politically and economically significant. These rulers undertook the responsibilities of reforming the Empire amidst times of turmoil, fighting and persecution.

During his rule, Vespasian made it a priority to distinguish himself from Nero and his immediate predecessors. He aimed to launch a new Empire in which the people maintained a healthy relationship with one another and the imperial throne. The most obvious sign of reform that Vespasian and his successors offered came in the form of building projects. He aimed to make improvements that would ultimately benefit the Roman people, which led to the

progressive rededication of Nero's Golden House. Through this, Vespasian demonstrated that the Roman world was now to be for the benefit of people of the capital rather than for the emperor. This was in stark contrast to Nero's public statement to the people. Vespasian tore down many structures that Nero had built. He opened up the parks and baths within Nero's Golden House and made them for public use (Potter, 2009, p. 201-202).

Perhaps the most striking reconstruction was the draining and replacement of Nero's artificial lake with a massive amphitheater. The official name of this building was the "Flavian Amphitheater" but would later be known as the Colosseum. The Colosseum was funded by the spoils from the Judean war and served to commemorate the capture of Jerusalem (Potter, 2009, p. 202). The construction of the Colosseum was a crowing achievement and served to be an example for future amphitheatres and building projects. Holding 50,000 to 80,000 spectators, this architecturally sound and marveling building created a particular atmosphere that cultivated the ultimate fan experience. The Colosseum stood in grandeur as a symbol to the Roman people that "where before the cosmos served the emperor, now the emperor deployed the massive resources of the Roman world to serve the pleasure of the people" (Futrell, 2007, p.63). The emperors of the Flavian Dynasty marked history changing the social relations between the people of the capital and their emperor.

Though the amphitheater was not completed during Vespasian's reign, his eldest son Titus witnessed the project come to fruition in 80 AD. Upon completion, it was clear that the Colosseum was sophisticated and safe, which helped create the ultimate fan experience. Spectators were each branded with a *tessera*, *maenianum* and *ordo* that directed them through the entrance archways to their *loci* (seats) (Futrell, 2007, p.65-66). Titus was responsible for hosting the inaugural games. However, audiences did not always come to the games to be

consumed by the spectacles in the arena, rather “spectators took the opportunity to interact with one another in interesting and inventive ways...The heightened emotions provided initiative for personal pursuits, be they romantic or intellectual” (Futrell, 2007, p.105). The Colosseum fostered social and cultural interactions among the people.

Following the reign of Augustus, shifts in imperial control from the Julio-Claudians to the Flavian Dynasty proved to be of historical significance as these political forces fostered social improvements and building projects—more specifically the engineering of the Colosseum—bringing stability and peace to the Empire and its surrounding territories. After periods of political and economic instability due to a series of civil wars, poor leadership and insurrections, Rome was left to chaos. The rule of the Flavians brought about peace and stability. Subsequently, the Romans experienced a social shift to a society that revolved around the pleasure of the people, rather than that of the emperor. The culmination of these matters was placed into the construction and completion of the Colosseum in 80 AD.

Works Cited:

Futrell, A. (2007). *The Roman Games*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Potter, D. (2009). *Ancient Rome: A new history*. New York: Thames and Hudson.