

All the rest of the decoration was carved by Constantinian workmen and is keyed in Fig. 134 by letters. Their most ambitious contributions were the roundels on the short sides (G), and the panel frieze which runs below (B, C, H). In the roundels Sol and Luna appear respectively driving chariots, symbols of the eternity of Rome and the Empire which Constantine had just saved. The panel frieze starts on the short west (Palatine) side with Constantine and his army setting out from Milan. On the south side the left-hand scene (B) shows his army besieging Verona, on the right (C) is the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. On the east end, Constantine makes his triumphant entry into Rome, and on the north side left (B) he addresses the Roman people from the rostra on the Forum (Fig. 25, p. 85) and on the right (C) hands out gifts of money. The figure style and proportions are those favoured by contemporary sarcophagus makers, some of whom may have been among the workforce for lack of other local expertise. The pedestal bases (F) had a winged Victory with palm frond on front, Roman soldiers and barbarian prisoners on the sides. More Victories fill the spandrels of the central archway (D) and pairs of disgruntled-looking river-gods recline in the spandrels of the lateral archways (E).

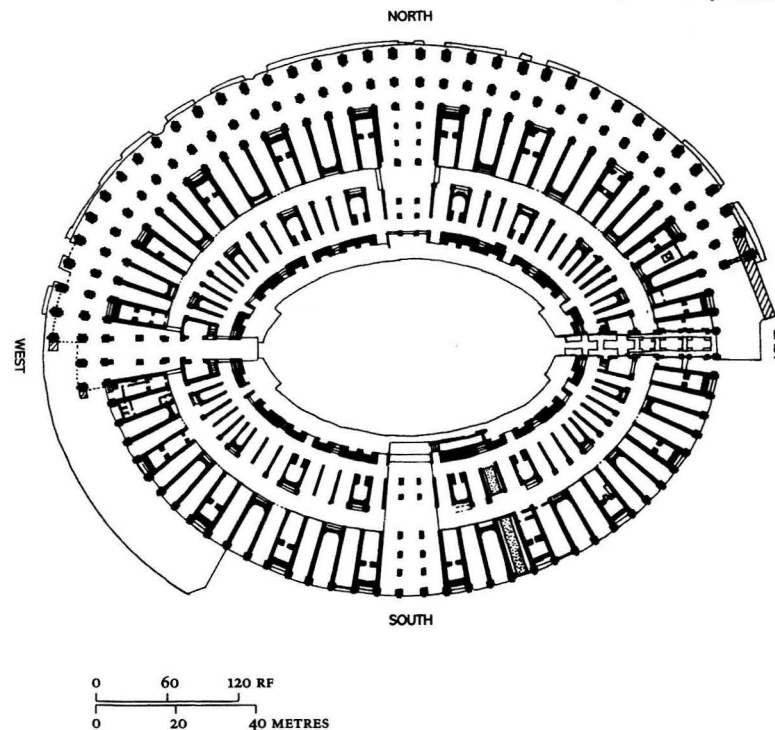
Colosseum (*Amphitheatrum*)

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State (*ground level (free); *upper level (ticket))

Begun in AD 70 by Vespasian and completed up to the third storey before his death in AD 79, the top level was finished off by his son Titus and the whole building inaugurated in AD 80. It is by a considerable margin the largest amphitheatre in the Roman world, 189 m (640 RF) long, 156 m (528 RF) wide, and 48 m (163 RF) high. When intact the outer perimeter measured 545 m (1,835 RF), and is estimated to have required 100,000 cubic metres of travertine, with 300 tons of iron clamps holding the blocks together. Equally vast amounts of tufa and brick-faced concrete were employed in the radial ribs and vaults which supported the seating. Although never matched in scale nor in the refinements of its architectural style the basic design was emulated by many amphitheatre builders throughout the Empire.

A major fire caused by lightning strikes in AD 217 gutted the uppermost level of seating and the arena (both largely constructed of wood) and also scorched many parts of the north-west sector so badly that their vaults had to be replaced (recognizable by brick-linings), together with seven bays of the travertine façade from the ground up (those immediately to the right of the north entrance). The amphitheatre was not fully operational again until about AD 240. Further repairs are mentioned in 250 or 252 and in 320, after which come those under Theodosius and Valentinian (recorded in a lengthy inscription, see below), probably as



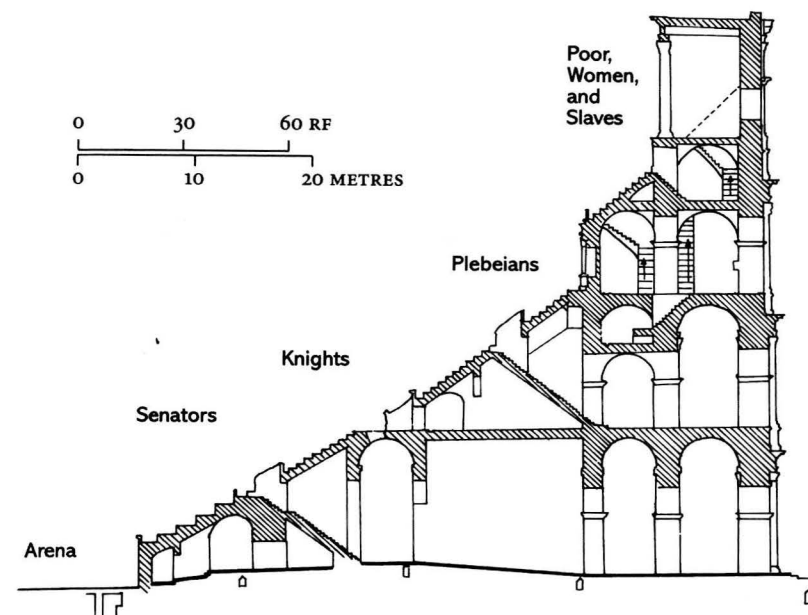
▲ Fig. 136. Colosseum. Ground plan, actual state

the result of a serious earthquake in AD 443; more followed in 484 and 508. Gladiatorial contests are last mentioned in 434/5 but animal hunts went on until at least AD 523. By the later C6, however, a small church had been installed, using the arena as a cemetery, and the multiplicity of vaulted spaces were being taken over as housing and workshops; they were still being rented out in the C12. About 1200 the Frangipane family took over the whole pile and for about a century it was strongly fortified (some traces survive in the NE sector). By 1362 (perhaps in the earthquake of 1349) the outer south side had collapsed in great heaps of stone which went in the next four hundred years to building numerous palaces, churches, hospitals, and repairing bridges, roads, and the Tiber wharves. From the mid-C14 until the early C19 the northern third belonged to a religious order and continued to be inhabited. By the end of the C18 the stone-robbing stopped and efforts turned instead to preservation; the great triangular wedge reinforcing the tail end of the façade on the SE side was built in 1807; a similar intervention on the NW side dates from 1827. Reinforcements were made to the interior in 1831 and 1846 and in the 1930s, at which time the arena substructures (already partly excavated in 1810–14 and 1874) were fully exposed.

However, long-term conservation and maintenance of both sub- and superstructures is now an increasing challenge.

Entering by the **main entrance** (on the west), note first the large marble block lying on the ground on the right-hand side of the passageway. It bears a long inscription referring to the restoration of various parts of the amphitheatre in the reign of Theodosius II and Valentinian III (AD 425–50) but is riddled with holes from the inlaid bronze letters of a previous inscription, which can be reconstructed as having read: IMP · CAES · VESPASIANUS · AUG | AMPHITHEATRUM · NOVUM | EX · MANU · BIIS ... FIERI · IUSSIT (The emperor Vespasian ordered this new amphitheatre to be erected from his general's share of the booty...). It was not the principal dedicatory inscription, which will have run round the parapet of the arena, but a shorthand version which was probably repeated at various other significant points around the building. The block was found in 1813 at the arena end of the eastern entrance, where it could have formed the lintel of the doorway. The new reading not only confirms that the amphitheatre was essentially Vespasian's project, but adds the information that he built it as a triumphal monument in the Roman tradition, from his spoils of war (presumably the Jewish triumph of AD 70, which brought some 50,000 kg of gold and silver from the Temple at Jerusalem).

The **interior** of the Colosseum is a world unto itself, with its own microclimate; enthusiastic botanists in the C19 counted some 420 different species of flowers and other plant-life (all eradicated in 1871 as a threat to the masonry, vegetation still thrives wherever it gets a chance). In antiquity it was a theatre of ritual death, witnessed by the emperor, Vestal Virgins, and senators, in company with a segregated microcosm of the rest of male Roman society. According to the Calendar of AD 354 the **seating** could hold 87,000 people, though modern estimates prefer to reduce the figure to 50,000 (still double the capacity of any of Rome's theatres, yet only a fifth of the Circus Maximus). As in the theatre, the spectators were dressed and seated in accordance with their status and profession. The emperor and the Vestal Virgins sat together in one of the special boxes on the central short axis (where the Christian crosses have been placed), probably that on the north, while images of the major gods and goddesses occupied the other. Ranged around at the same level, on broad platforms to which they brought their own chairs (*bisellia*) sat the senatorial class, all in white togas with red borders. Above the senators came the knights (*equites*), above them the ordinary Roman citizens (the *plebs*), all in their togas too. Boys who were not yet of age sat with their tutors in a specific sector, as did serving soldiers on leave, scribes, heralds, foreign dignitaries, public slaves, some of the colleges and priesthoods, and probably a whole range of other categories (some were banned, notably gravediggers, actors, and anyone who had fought as a gladiator). The middle three zones had built-in stone seating, some of which was



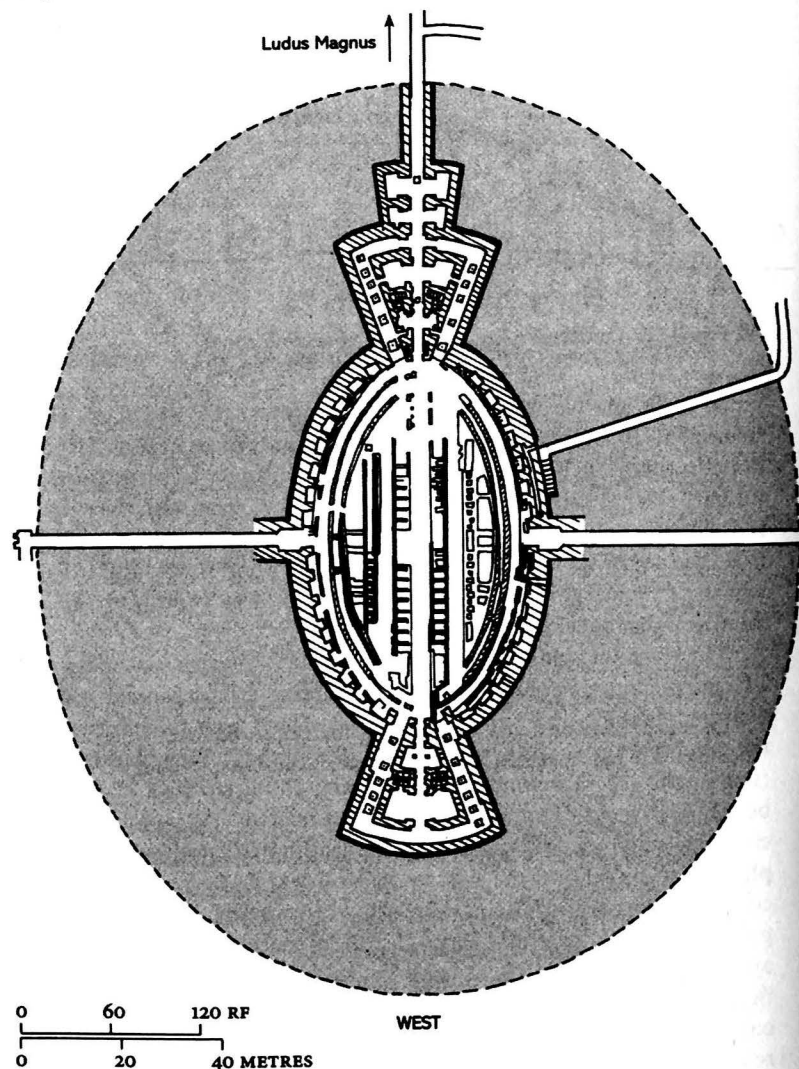
▲ Fig. 137. Colosseum. Reconstruction of seating zones

replaced in marble in late antiquity (however, the wedge of marble seating low down at the east end is an erroneous piece of reconstruction done in the 1930s). Inscriptions specified the length of seating reserved for particular groups (in the C5 some seats were carved with the names of individual senators). At the very top, 40 m above and almost 50 m away from the arena, was a gallery for the common poor, slaves, and whatever women dared to join them. There it was standing room only, or very steep wooden benches.

The **parallel walls** which fill the centre of the scene nowadays were, of course, not normally visible in antiquity, being capped off with wooden planking and covered with sand. The **arena** thus formed, like the amphitheatre around it, was the largest in the Roman world, an oval (not an ellipse) 83 m long and 48 m wide (280 × 163 RF). It must have been able to handle enormous numbers of animals and men, in the most elaborate stagings, and to judge by the fact that at least twelve different phases can be seen in the substructures, ideas and arrangements were constantly changing. The system of eighty vertical shafts in the four parallel walls dates from about AD 300, with repairs in the C5; it apparently raised animals in cages to just below the arena floor, where they were released through trap doors. What the initial installations consisted of is not at all clear; accounts of Titus' first games in AD 80 refer to the arena suddenly being filled with water for a display of horses

and bulls (who had been trained to swim), and the re-enactment of a famous sea battle between Corcyreans (of Corfu) and Corinthians (mainland Greeks). The supply of sufficient water is no problem, since an aqueduct had previously filled a great lake on the site (see p. 303 and Fig. 133) and there is evidence for major hydraulic lifting mechanisms at either end of the subterranean network (see Fig. 138). But no one can see how the present arena could be made watertight nor how there could be enough space for warships to move around. Either the reports have the

▼ Fig. 138. Colosseum. Plan of subterranean levels

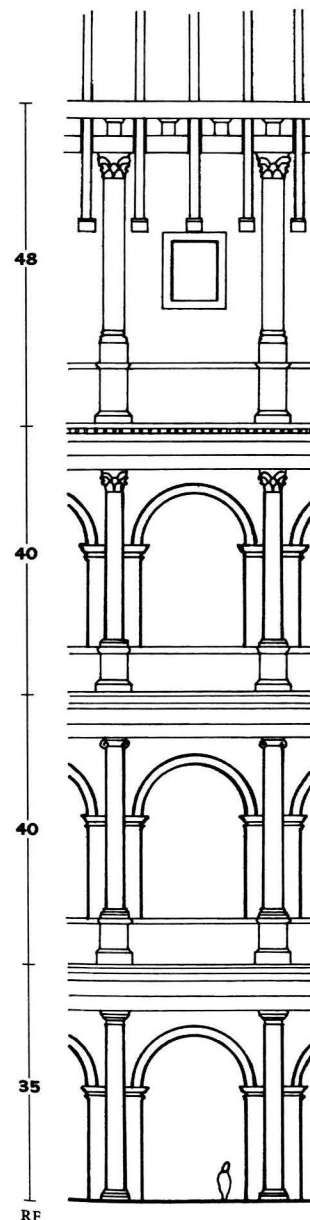


wrong location or the design of the original arena was much simpler (perhaps a single—and rather wider—channel down the longer axis).

Tunnels beneath the main entrances on the short axis allowed the animals and other performers to be brought in directly underground; one at the eastern end connected with the main gladiators' barracks, the **Ludus Magnus**, to the east (Map, Fig. 132: 6) and also has a branch on its south side, which may join up with a passage, decorated with stuccowork, which descends from the special box on the south side.

From the ***upper level** (up the stairs to the left of the main entrance) you gain first an excellent view outwards over the **Temple of Roma and Venus** (see p. 120 and Fig. 47) and can then explore more of the amphitheatre interior and its system of stairs and corridors. The miscellany of blocks and column drums visible on the inner face of the wall round the top of the cavea represent repairs, probably after the fire of AD 217.

The **outer elevation**, well preserved all along the north side, is a very elegant example of Roman trabeated arcading (Fig. 139). It consists of three superimposed arcades, each archway framed by semi-columns supporting horizontal entablatures, and a fourth, attic storey where the arcades become small windows and the semi-columns are reduced to flat pilasters. The lowest order is a sturdy Tuscan, which was evidently considered more appropriate for an amphitheatre than the Doric; the next (unusually) is Ionic; the top two are both a simplified Corinthian; the shafts have almost no taper, and the width of the piers and archways is constant from bottom to top. The manner in which the architect married the façade design to the internal complexities of the building and its circulation systems is extraordinarily skilful.



▲ Fig. 139. Colosseum. Exterior elevation with reconstruction of uppermost level. Heights of levels are in Roman feet

Gladiatorial shows were called *munera* (dutiful gifts) and were always given by individuals, not by the State. By the time the Colosseum was built they were being held as a regular public event, in December, as part of the New Year ritual, coinciding with the yearly political cycle, when they would be paid for by the incoming magistrates. At other times they could accompany the funerary rites for major public figures, or could be held on the anniversaries of past deaths. They were also staged in celebration of military triumphs. Such was their popularity that from the reign of Domitian it was decreed that in Rome they could only be given by the emperor; and elsewhere they required his sanction. The daily programme was usually divided into three parts: wild animal hunts (*venationes*) in the morning, public executions at midday, and gladiatorial contests in the afternoon; shows could run for many days depending on the available number of animals and gladiators. Trajan is said to have celebrated his Dacian triumph in AD 107 with 11,000 animals and 10,000 gladiators in the course of 123 days. Gladiators were a mixture of condemned criminals and prisoners of war (who were generally expendable), and career professionals (slaves, freedmen, or free volunteers), mostly men but occasionally women, specialized in different types of armour and weaponry: the heavily armed *Myrmillo* (named after the fish on his helmet) and the Samnite both had large oblong shields and swords; the more lightly armed Thracian, a round shield and curved scimitar; the *Retiarius* only a net and a trident. Others fought from chariots (*essedarii*), or on horseback. The fights were often staged in elaborate sets, with movable trees and buildings; the executions might involve complicated machinery and torture; some acted out particularly gruesome episodes from Greek or Roman mythology. Animals for the *venationes* came mainly from Africa and might include rhinoceros, hippos, elephants, and giraffes, as well as lions, panthers, leopards, crocodiles, and ostriches.

At ground-floor level all the eighty archways on the outside were public entrances giving access to different sectors of the seating and seventy-six of them were numbered (those surviving run from XXIII to LIV), so that spectators could be directed to use a particular entrance to reach their designated sector. The numbering started from the first arch to the right of the axial entrance on the south (Caelian hill) side. All four axial entrances were richly decorated with painted stucco reliefs (several fragments survive in the north entrance, dating from its restoration after the fire of AD 217).

The stone brackets above the windows on the top storey, with corresponding sockets through the upper cornices, held wooden masts which projected above the outer wall at regular intervals, 240 of them in total. They supported the rigging whereby sailors from the Imperial fleet were able to manoeuvre the 'sails' or awnings which cast shadows to prevent the spectators, especially those on the lower terraces, boiling in the sun of a hot day (though cold was more likely to be the problem during the annual games, which took place in the middle of winter).

A series of **tall stone bollards** was set around the perimeter, at a distance of 18 m from the main building, five of which are in place on the east side (Map, Fig. 132: 5). They either formed a religious boundary, or an outer barrier where tickets were checked, or functioned as anchors for the rigging apparatus (perhaps they could serve all three purposes at once).

Ludus Magnus. Map, Fig. 132: 6

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Via di S. Giovanni in Laterano. †Comune

Found in building operations in 1937 but not fully excavated until 1957–61, the visible remains represent slightly less than one half of the practice arena and its enclosing barracks; the rest lies under the street and buildings on the other side. The **Magnus**, as its name implies, was the principal of the four gladiatorial schools set up by Domitian in the AD 80s (the others were called the **Dacian**, the **Gallic**, and the **Matutinus** or **Morning School**, which presumably trained combatants for the animal-hunting shows). The barracks around the outside of the building were probably on three floors; the central courtyard had a Tuscan colonnade on all four sides, and fountains at each corner, but its open space was almost entirely filled by the arena. At 63 m long by 42 m wide (210 × 140 RF), the arena is 25 per cent smaller than the Colosseum's but quite normal for amphitheatres outside Rome, where the gladiators would do a lot of their fighting. Most of the surviving structure is a rebuilding under Trajan, in the early C2, when the ground level and the seating was raised, though the arena remained at its initial level. Watching the gladiators train was a popular pastime; the seating provided for about 3,000 spectators. On show days the gladiators could transfer directly to the Colosseum by an underground passage.

The building naturally lost its function as soon as gladiators were no longer needed and by the C6 was being used for burials. Soundings under the arena found (at a depth of 2 m) the floor level of an elegant house of the C1 BC; the east wing overlies a modest commercial building of the early C1 AD. Further structures now hidden under the adjacent bank building have been tentatively identified as the **Armamentarium**, the gladiatorial armoury.

S. Clemente. Map, Fig. 132: 7

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Via di S. Giovanni in Laterano. *Lower levels

The Irish Dominicans, who have owned the church and its monastery since 1677, started investigating the archaeology of the site in the mid-C19 and the work continues as and when funds are available. The present church dates from AD 1108 (with a remarkable mosaic in the apse and many other original features) but the marble panels forming

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