

# Colosseum



The Colosseum is an elliptical amphitheatre in the centre of the city of Rome, Italy, just east of the Roman Forum. It is the largest ancient amphitheatre ever built, and is still the largest standing amphitheatre in the world, despite its age. Construction began under the emperor Vespasian (r. 69–79 AD) in 72[1] and was completed in AD 80 under his successor and heir, Titus (r. 79–81).[2] Further modifications were made during the reign of Domitian (r. 81–96).[3] The three emperors who were patrons of the work are known as the Flavian dynasty, and the amphitheatre was named the Flavian Amphitheatre (Latin: Amphitheatrum Flavium; Italian: Anfiteatro Flavio [amfite'a:tro 'fla:vjo]) by later classicists and archaeologists for its association with their family name (Flavius).

The Colosseum is built of travertine limestone, tuff (volcanic rock), and brick-faced concrete. It could hold an estimated 50,000 to 80,000 spectators at various points in its history,[4][5] having an average audience of some 65,000;[6] it was used for gladiatorial contests and public spectacles including animal hunts, executions, re-enactments of famous battles, and dramas based on Roman mythology, and briefly mock sea battles.

## CONSTRUCTION, INAUGURATION, AND ROMAN RENOVATIONS

### History

The site chosen was a flat area on the floor of a low valley between the Caelian, Esquiline The site chosen was a flat area on the floor of a low valley between the Caelian, Esquiline and Palatine Hills, through which a canalised stream ran as well as an artificial lake/marsh.[21] By the 2nd century BC the area was densely inhabited. It was devastated by the Great Fire of Rome

in 64 AD, following which Nero seized much of the area to add to his personal domain. He built the grandiose Domus Aurea on the site, in front of which he created an artificial lake surrounded by pavilions, gardens and porticoes. The existing Aqua Claudia aqueduct was extended to supply water to the area and the gigantic bronze Colossus of Nero was set up nearby at the entrance to the Domus Aurea.[20] and Palatine Hills, through which a canalised stream ran as well as an artificial lake/marsh.[21] By the 2nd century AD the area was densely inhabited. It was devastated by the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD, following which Nero seized much of the area to add to his personal domain. He built the grandiose Domus Aurea on the site, in front of which he created an artificial lake surrounded by pavilions, gardens and porticoes. The existing Aqua Claudia aqueduct was extended to supply water to the area and the gigantic bronze Colossus of Nero was set up nearby at the entrance to the Domus Aurea.[20]

Although the Colossus was preserved, much of the Domus Aurea was torn down. The lake was filled in and the land reused as the location for the new Flavian Amphitheatre. Gladiatorial schools and other support buildings were constructed nearby within the former grounds of the Domus Aurea. Vespasian's decision to build the Colosseum on the site of Nero's lake can be seen as a populist gesture of returning to the people an area of the city which Nero had appropriated for his own use. In contrast to many other amphitheatres, which were on the outskirts of a city, the Colosseum was constructed in the city centre, in effect, placing it both symbolically and geographically at the heart of Rome.

## Medieval

The Colosseum underwent several radical changes of use. By the late 6th century a small chapel had been built into the structure of the amphitheater, though this apparently did not confer any particular religious significance on the building as a whole. The arena was converted into a cemetery. The numerous vaulted spaces in the arcades under the seating were converted into housing and workshops, and are recorded as still being rented out as late as the 12th century. Around 1200 the Frangipani family took over the Colosseum and fortified it, apparently using it as a castle. In the early to mid 14th century, the Pope's relocation to Avignon caused a population decline in Rome that left the region insecure. The Colosseum was largely abandoned by the public and became a popular den for bandits.[28]

Severe damage was inflicted on the Colosseum by the great earthquake in 1349, causing the outer south side, lying on a less stable alluvial terrain, to collapse. Much of the tumbled stone was reused to build palaces, churches, hospitals and other buildings elsewhere in Rome. In 1377, after the Pope's return to Rome, the Colosseum was restored by a religious order called Arciconfraternita del SS. Salvatore ad Sancta Sanctorum, who then inhabited a northern portion of it until as late as the early 19th century.[29][30] The interior of the amphitheater was extensively stripped of stone, which was reused elsewhere, or (in the case of the marble façade)

was burned to make quicklime.[20] The iron clamps[20] which held the stonework together were pried or hacked out of the walls, leaving numerous pockmarks which still scar the building today.

## DURING THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURY

### Modern

During the 16th and 17th century, Church officials sought a productive role for the Colosseum. Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590) planned to turn the building into a wool factory to provide employment for Rome's prostitutes, though this proposal fell through with his premature death.[31] In 1671 Cardinal Altieri authorized its use for bullfights; a public outcry caused the idea to be hastily abandoned.

In 1749, Pope Benedict XIV endorsed the view that the Colosseum was a sacred site where early Christians had been martyred. He forbade the use of the Colosseum as a quarry and consecrated the building to the Passion of Christ and installed Stations of the Cross, declaring it sanctified by the blood of the Christian martyrs who perished there (see Significance in Christianity). However, there is no historical evidence to support Benedict's claim, nor is there even any evidence that anyone before the 16th century suggested this might be the case; the Catholic Encyclopedia concludes that there are no historical grounds for the supposition, other than the reasonably plausible conjecture that some of the many martyrs may well have been.[32]

In 2011 Diego Della Valle, head of the shoe firm Tod's, entered into an agreement with local officials to sponsor a €25 million restoration of the Colosseum. Work was planned to begin at the end of 2011, taking up to two and a half years.[45] Due to the controversial nature of using a public–private partnership to fund the restoration, work was delayed and began in 2013. The restoration is the first full cleaning and repair in the Colosseum's history.[46] The first stage is to clean and restore the Colosseum's arcaded façade and replace the metal enclosures that block the ground-level arches. After three years, the work was completed on 1 July 2016, when the Italian minister of culture, Dario Franceschini, also announced that the funds have been committed to replace the floors by the end of 2018. These will provide a stage that Franceschini says will be used for "cultural events of the highest level." [47] The project also includes creating a services center and restoring the galleries and underground spaces inside the Colosseum.[48] Since 1 November 2017, the top two levels have been opened for guided visits. The fourth level held the marketplace, and the top fifth tier is where the poorest citizens, the plebeians, gathered and watched the show, bringing picnics for the day-long event.[49]

## RESTORATION IN 2011

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