6. **PLURIMA ET AMPLISSIMA OPERA:**
PARSING FLAVIAN ROME

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The Rome that greeted Vespasian and his supporters on their arrival in late summer or early fall of 70 CE, exhibited both large-scale burned over areas and the architectural excesses of Nero’s last years. The great fire of 64 CE had largely destroyed ten of the fourteen regions into which Augustus had divided the city (Tac. *Ann.* 15.40) and, although many neighbourhoods had been or were being rebuilt, many important buildings had perished and had not yet been reconstructed. Among these were the two wooden amphitheatres in the fashionable Campus Martius, the older smaller one of Statilius Taurus and the splendidly decorated, more modern structure of Nero near the Saepta Iulia. Thus only the Circus Maximus served as a major venue for gladiatorial games in the capital.

A second smaller fire, which had had broken out on the slopes of the Capitoline Hill during the recent clashes between the supporters of the Flavians and the forces of Vitellius, had even destroyed the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Tac. *Hist.* 3.71). As the empire’s most prestigious shrine, this was the place a successful general traditionally offered the sacrifices that ended his triumphal procession. Its blackened ruins thus not only disgraced the symbolic heart of the Roman world but also visually symbolised the temporary collapse of the imperial system. And, of the architectural projects under way at the end of Nero’s reign, only the Macellum (the

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1 Bengtson (1979) 63.
2 The title of this chapter (*plurima et amplissima opera*, ‘[He restored] many splendid public buildings’) is a phrase from Suet. *Dom.* 5.1. Darwall-Smith (1996) lists and discusses all the Flavians’ identifiable buildings in Rome. This essay concentrates instead on their most significant architectural projects.
4 With its increasingly monumental character, the Roman Forum was no longer a suitable location for the temporary wooden amphitheatres that had housed earlier gladiatorial *munera*: Beacham (1999) 106 fig. 16.
5 *LTUR* 3.150–1 (additional ancient references).
city market just east of the Forum) and Circus Maximus were complete.\(^7\) Nero’s Golden House, now the major imperial residence, was still unfinished.\(^8\) Yet, since the latter—a vast suburban villa built atypically in town—had expropriated what had been, before the fire of 64 CE, whole formerly densely populated neighbourhoods in the valley between and on the slopes of the Palatine, the Caelian and the Esquiline hills,\(^9\) its construction had much tarnished the reputation of the imperial government.

Since the new Flavian regime had not only to administer the capital successfully, it had to be seen to doing so by Rome’s inhabitants, Vespasian and his advisers acted quickly. To emphasise the restoration of religious and civil order, work began almost at once on the reconstruction of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. By June of 70 CE, even before Vespasian returned Rome, an elaborate ceremony had reconsecrated the site, and shortly after his arrival in September,\(^10\) Vespasian personally began its preparing for construction. Setting a basket of rubble on his own head (Suet. Vesp. 8.5), he formally urged leading citizens to help him clear away the debris. During the next six years, imperial funds insured the completion of the project.\(^11\)

Meanwhile, the emperor took up residence in the Gardens of Sallust (Cass. Dio 65.10.4) between the Quirinal and Pincian Hills\(^12\) and began to dismember the Golden House. For the time being, he left in place on the Velia (the spur between the Quirinal and Palatine Hills), the 120-foot-high gilded bronze colossus with the face of Nero (Suet. Nero 31.1), that novel adornment of the colonnaded vestibule through which visitors had entered the Golden House from the Roman Forum and the Via Sacra.\(^13\) But he threw open the palace vestibule (Cass. Dio 65.15.1) and returned to public use the valley

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\(^8\) *LTUR* 2.49, 61.


\(^10\) Bengtson (1979) 63.

\(^11\) Wace (1907) 229–49, pls 20, 24–5 (Trajanic relief showing temple facade); Colini (1925) 181–91 (pediment); Townend (1987) (restoration ritual); *LTUR* 3.151.

\(^12\) *LTUR* 3.79–80.

\(^13\) Lega (1989–90) 347–8 estimates the height at 35 m. (about 119 Roman feet). Additional ancient references in Bergmann (1993) 7–8 suggest a statue only 100 feet high (with or without its base); see Bergmann (1993) fig. 10 for her reconstruction sketch.