Destroying The Bet HaMiqdash to Build A Roman Circus

The *Bet haMiqdash*, the Great Temple of Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Roman army led by Titus, the son of Vespasian, on the 9th of Ab in the year 68 of the common era. Once in Rome, Titus was received as a great hero by his father, Emperor Vespasian. Together, they organized a victory procession to celebrate the defeat of such a bold and valiant enemy as the Jewish people, renowned for their intelligence, perseverance, and bravery in war.

Emperor Vespasian arranged a grand parade where the Jewish prisoners were publicly humiliated, and some of the treasures from the *Bet haMiqdash* were exhibited on display. Records show that the Romans displayed the *shulchan hapanim*, a ritual table made of pure gold, the *Mizbach haQetoret*, the incense altar, along with other artifacts made of pure gold. The crowning jewel was the menorah, the seven-branched oil lampstand, also made of pure gold.

The victory against the Jews was of immense significance for Rome. As such, it was celebrated in a highly distinctive manner. It is worth noting that during that time, the Romans also triumphed over the Greeks, the Macedonians, the Gauls, the Britons, and the Germans. They also conquered Spain, Sicily, and Carthage. Yet, only one victory was commemorated in a truly exceptional way: the defeat of the Jews. To immortalize this epic event, the Romans erected a monument that still stands to this day: the famous Arch of Titus on the Via Sacra. This arch depicts 12 Roman soldiers carrying the looted Menorah from the *Bet haMiqdash*. It was designed to humiliate the Jewish captives brought from Jerusalem, making them march underneath it as a symbol of their defeat.

Why was the fall of Jerusalem such a momentous milestone for

Rome?

Because Jerusalem was not merely destroyed: it was plundered! The Romans greatly multiplied their wealth by seizing the enormous treasures of Judea and the *Bet haMiqdash*.

These are a few examples to understand the extent of the wealth found at the *Bet haMiqdash*:

1. **Herod**
   We know that inside the temple there were hundreds of artifacts and thousands of decorations made of gold or silver. What is less known is what the 1st-century Jewish historian Josephus Flavius says about the exterior of the Temple that had recently been renovated by Herod. “There was nothing missing that could surprise either the soul or the eyes.” The exterior of the Temple “was completely covered by huge gold plates” and “when the sun came up, the walls radiated a blaze so fiery that people trying to look at it were forced to turn away from the sun, because the abundant gold reflected the solar rays.”

2. **Machatsit haSheqel**
   Every year a tax was collected which was dedicated to the maintenance and operation of the *Bet haMiqdash*. This was the *machatsit haSheqel*, the half sheqel silver coin, each worth the equivalent of approximately 5 dollars today. Keep in mind that back then, according to Feldman, there were between 4 and 8 million Jews living in Israel.

3. **Donations**
   Many Jews, as the Mishna in *Sheqalim* says, also donated houses and fields, or their proceeds, to the *Bet haMiqdash*.
   Donations did not come only from the Jews living in Israel. The Temple was the main (or the only) recipient

> of donations from all the Jews in the world. Although the majority of the Jews lived in Israel, in the first half of the 1st century, there were also important Jewish communities in Alexandria (Egypt), Rome, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and North Africa. Many of these communities were very prosperous, and the Jews who resided there used to send gifts and offerings permanently for the maintenance and prosperity of the *Bet haMiqdash*. An illustration: Cicero relates that in the days of Flacus, a transport was seized carrying 220 pounds of gold that was sent by the Jews from four cities in Asia Minor to the Temple of Jerusalem.

Flavius Josephus, who lived during that time, wrote that when the Romans entered the Temple, they discovered "countless sums of silver and gold, innumerable quantities of finely woven fabrics with embedded jewels, and other precious metals"… as the Temple was a repository of many riches donated by Jews from all over the Middle East.

To grasp the economic impact the looting of the *Bet haMiqdash* had on the Roman Empire, it's worth mentioning that after the *Bet haMiqdash* was plundered, there was so much wealth in the region "that the value of gold fell by half."

Vespasian inherited an empire in bankruptcy due to the extravagances of his predecessor, the unpredictable and deranged Emperor Nero (who died in 67). However, after plundering Jerusalem, Rome experienced two decades of unprecedented abundance and prosperity thanks to the gold taken from Jerusalem.

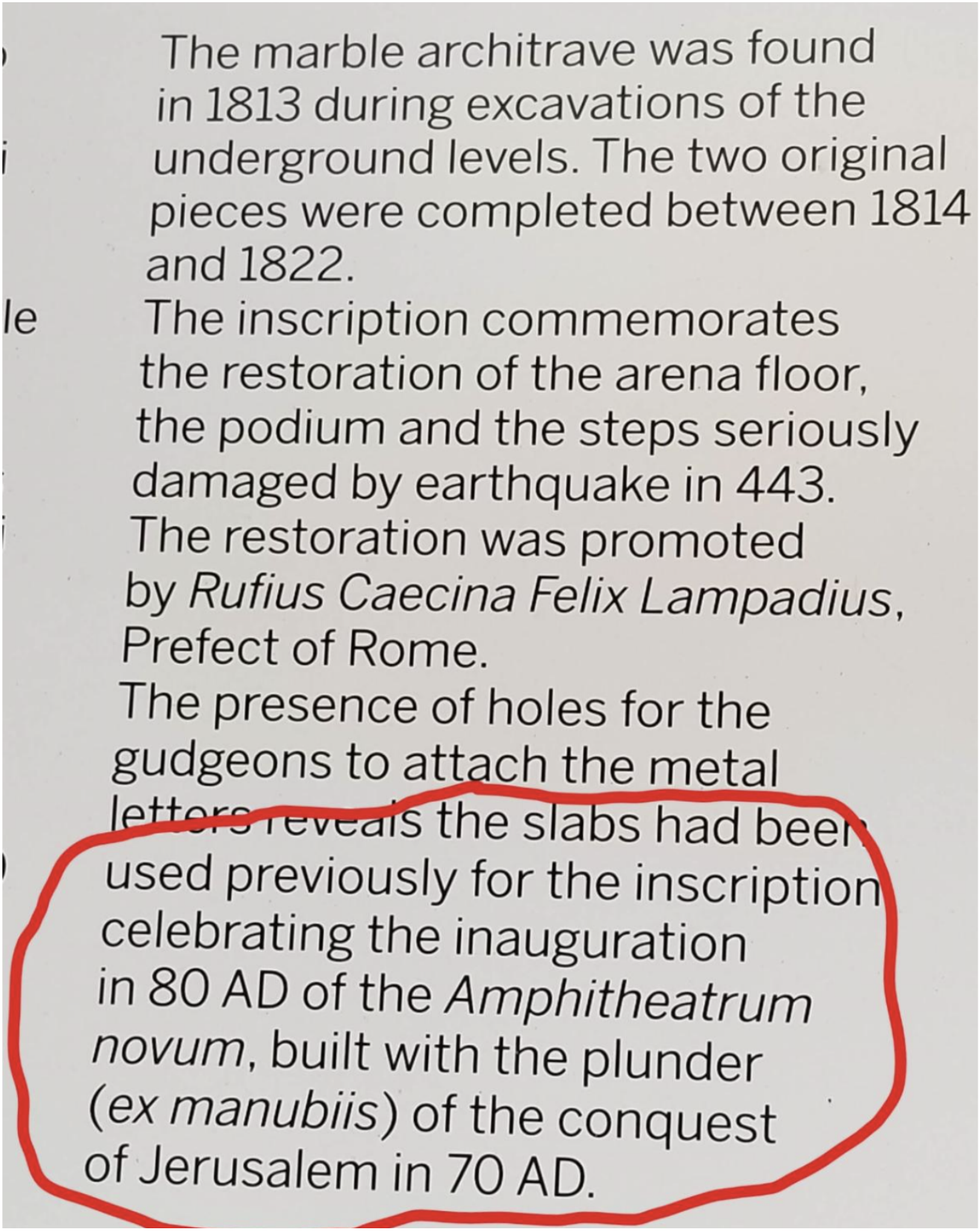
What else did the Romans do with the spoils of the *Bet haMiqdash*?

A few years ago (2001), a Latin text was discovered stating that Vespasian financed the construction of the Colosseum in Rome with the treasures stolen from Jerusalem and the *Bet*

haMiqdash.

How was it described that the Colosseum was funded with the spoils of the *Bet haMiqdash*? Professor Géza Alföldy from the University of Heidelberg, Germany, discovered an ancient inscription attributed to Titus, hidden behind a 5th-century marble block inscription that described certain repairs made to the Colosseum. In the past, it was not uncommon to write a new text on recycled stone or leather parchment. Parchments containing a new text written over an old "erased" text are known as "palimpsests." In this case, the 5th-century inscription concealed an inscription written in honor of the dedication of the Colosseum in 80 AD (construction began in 72). The inscription indicated that the funds to build the world's largest amphitheater came from the spoils of war. The key words were "ex manubiis," meaning "from spoils of war." The complete text said, "Emperor Titus Caesar Vespasian Augustus ordered the construction of the new amphitheater with what was obtained from the spoils of war."

Today, there is an inscription in one of the entrances of the Colosseum that mentions this discovery:



Professor Louis Feldman z”l, an expert in classical history and languages from Yeshiva University in New York, demonstrated that this loot could not be anything other than what was obtained in the conquest of Jerusalem, specifically, the stolen treasures from the Temple of Jerusalem (for more

details you can see his article here and or here).

The Romans not only used the money of the Jews to build the Colosseum but also spilled Jewish blood in its arena. Flavius Josephus reports that a total of 1,100,000 Jews were killed during the fall of Jerusalem in the years 66 to 68 of the Common Era.

Spanish journalist Manuel Villatoro calls this massacre "The Forgotten Holocaust of Emperor Vespasian" (See this).

Villatoro writes about the fate of the survivors and their terrible end. Titus captured 97,000 Jewish prisoners and took them to Rome. Adult men were forced into labor, while women and children under 17 were taken as prisoners and sold as slaves.

Slaves in Rome were traded like animals in the market. However, the Romans knew that Jewish slaves had a much higher value in the market. Why? Because free Jews living in Rome, Turkey, or Egypt would pay any price to free a fellow Jew from slavery. One of the most important commandments in the *Tora*, which takes precedence over any other precept, is "pidyon shebuyim," the redemption of Jewish prisoners. The Sages recount dozens of stories about Jewish slaves in Rome. One of the most chilling is that of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Chananiah. During one of his diplomatic visits to Rome, he heard that there was a Jewish boy who had been captured by the Romans. Rabbi Ishmael approached the poor captives waiting to be sold and recited the first part of a verse from Isaiah (42:24) that says: "Who allowed [the Jewish people] to be oppressed and humiliated…?". Then he heard a boy from inside the prison completing the verse: "It was the Lord, against whom we sinned, and whose laws we did not follow." At that moment, Rabbi Yehoshua said, "I am sure this boy will become a great sage among the Jewish people." And he made the decision to "pay whatever necessary to rescue him." And so it happened. Rabbi Yehoshua paid a fortune to the Romans to liberate this

boy, who eventually became one of the greatest Sages of Israel: Rabbi Yishma'el ben Elisha. And this, which happened to him, probably occurred thousands of times with other Jewish slaves.

Feldman explains that the proceeds from the sale of Jewish slaves were also essential to finance the construction of the Colosseum. Villatoro adds another crucial fact to this point: the Roman Colosseum was not only built with "Jewish funds," but also with Jewish blood!

Villatoro explains: the Jews that could not be sold as slaves were used for the "games" in the Roman circus. In these bloody spectacles, the miserable Jewish prisoners were brought to the arena and had to fight each other to the death or face wild animals that the Romans had starved for several days. The nobles enjoyed the spectacle of watching elderly Jews, Jewish women, and Jewish children trying to run for their lives desperately, fighting against the wild beasts in a battle they always inevitably lost. The death of the poor victims did not come quickly. The "refined" Romans witnessed in the Colosseum arena the spectacle of the Jewish victims devoured alive by the wild beasts… this was the delight of some 80,000 monstrous spectators.

According to the Spanish journalist:

"… 12,000 Jewish prisoners (or 20,000 according to other sources) were sent to Rome to finish building the Colosseum with their labor. This is confirmed, among others, by the Spanish researcher José María Zavala in his work *The Secret Pages of History*: 'Vespasian began building the Colosseum in the year 69 of our era, and Titus finished it twelve years later. In reality, it was four years of intense work with the help of twelve thousand captive Jews brought to Rome by Titus after the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem.'"

Villatoro describes the final horror like this:

“And how did Titus reward the Jewish slaves who built the Colosseum? He used them for the circus, surely for the inauguration of the Colosseum, where the poor Jewish slaves perished in the arena devoured by the beasts in public games. This is how Caesar paid his [Jewish] slaves.”