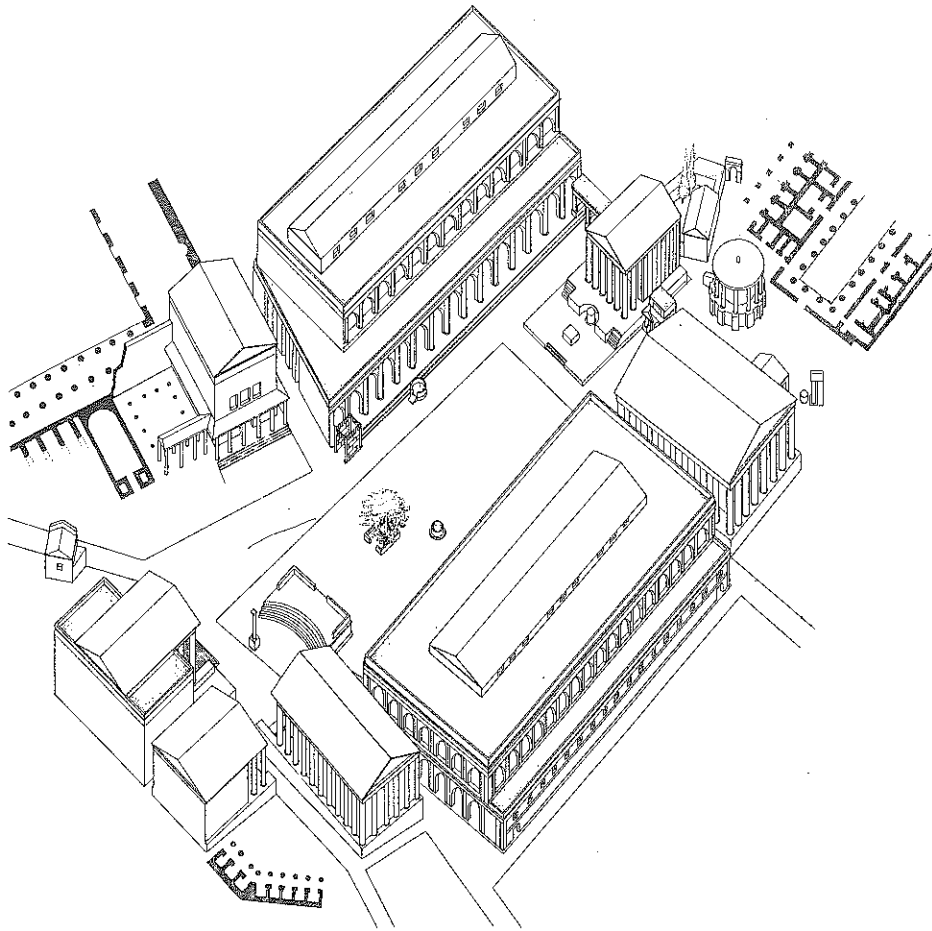


Urbs ut scaena: Dramatic Space in the Historiae of Tacitus



Early Imperial Forum from John Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City*, (Johns Hopkins, 1988) pg. 115.

1. The Announcement of Piso as Galba's Successor (*Hist.* 1.17.2, 19.1)¹

consultatum inde, **pro rostris an in senatu an in castris** adoptio nuncuparetur. **iri in castra placuit**: honorificum id militibus fore, quorum favorem ut largitione et ambitu male adquiri, ita per bonas artes haud sperandum. . . .

inde **apud senatum** non comptior Galbae, non longior quam apud militem sermo

It was then discussed whether the adoption should be announced before the Rostra or in the Senate or in the camp. It pleased him to go to the camp: it would be an honor for the soldiers, whose support, bad to acquire through donatives and canvassing, should not be turned down if acquired through rhetoric. . . .

Then, in the Senate the speech of Galba was not more elegant, nor longer than among the soldiers.

¹ For Tacitus' Latin, I use H. Heubner's 1978 Teubner text. Translations, unless noted, are my own.

2. Death of Galba (*Hist.* 1.40.1-3, 41.2-3)

agebatur huc illuc Galba vario turbae fluctuantis impulsu, completis undique basilicis ac templis, lugubri prospectu. neque populi aut plebis ulla vox, sed attoniti voltus et conversae ad omnia aures; non tumultus, non quies, quale magni metus et magnae irae silentium est. Othoni tamen armari plebem nuntiabatur: ire praecipites et occupare pericula iubet. igitur milites Romani, **quasi Vologaesum aut Pacorum avito Arsacidarum solio depulsuri ac non imperatorem suum inermem et senem trucidare pergerent, disiecta plebe, proculcato senatu**, truces armis, rapidi equis forum inrumpunt. nec illos **Capitolii adspectus et imminentium templorum religio et priores et futuri principes** terruere, quo minus facerent scelus, cuius ultor est quisquis successit. ...

iuxta Curtii lacum trepidatione ferentium Galba proiectus e sella ac provolutus est. extremam eius vocem, ut cuique odium aut admiratio fuit, varie prodidit. alii suppliciter interrogasse, quid mali meruisset, paucos dies exsolvendo donativo deprecatum; plures obtulisse ultro percussoribus iugulum: agerent ac ferirent, si ita e re publica videretur. **non interfuit occidentium quid diceret**. de percussore non satis constat: quidam Terentium evocatum, alii Laecanium, crebrior fama tradidit Camurium quintae decimae legionis militem impresso gladio iugulum eius hausisse. ceteri crura brachiaque (nam pectus tegebatur) foede laniavere; pleraque vulnera feritate et saevitia **trunco iam corpori** adiecta.

Galba was driven here and there by the changing push of the wavering crowd, all around the basilicas and temples were filled, the sight mournful. There was no sound either from the people or the mob, but thunderstruck faces and ears turned towards everything; not an uproar, not quiet – there was a silence such as from great fear or great anger. It was announced to Otho that they were arming the mob; [Otho] ordered his troops to rush headlong and preempt the danger. Therefore, Roman soldiers, as if they were rushing to drive a Vologaeses or Pacorus from the ancestral throne of the Arsacidae and not to slaughter their own unarmed and aged emperor, burst into the Forum, pushing aside the mob, trampling the Senate, savage in arms, swift on horseback. The sight of the Capitolium and the awe of looming temples and earlier and later emperors did not terrify them from committing a crime whose avenger was whoever succeeded to the throne. ...

Near the Pool of Curtius, Galba was thrown from his seat and fell because of the fear of his bearers. People recall his last words variously, based on each one's hatred or admiration. Some say that he begged humbly what wrong he deserved, and asked a few days to pay the soldier's donative; more have said that he offered his throat to those striking him and said that they should go ahead and strike, if it was beneficial for the Republic. It made no difference to his killers what he said. Concerning the murderer there is no consensus: some name him Terentius, one of Galba's bodyguard, others Laecanius; a more common story goes that Camurius, a soldier of the 15th legion drew off his throat by pressing his sword. The rest of the soldiers foully mangled his legs and arms (for his chest was protected); in their bestiality and savagery many wounds were inflicted on the beheaded body.

3. The *Devotio* of Marcus Curtius (*Livy* 7.6.1-5)

eodem anno, seu motu terrae seu qua vi alia, forum medium ferme specu vasto conlapsum in immensam altitudinem dicitur; neque eam voraginem coniectu terrae, cum pro se quisque gereret, expleri potuisse, priusquam deum monitu quaeri coeptum, quo plurimum populus Romanus posset: id enim illi loco dicandum vates canebant, si rem publicam Romanam perpetuam esse vellent. tum M. Curtium, iuvenem bello egregium, castigasse ferunt dubitantes, an ullum magis Romanum bonum quam arma virtusque esset, et **silentio facto templa deorum immortalium, quae foro inminent, Capitoliumque intuentem** et manus nunc in caelum, nunc in patentes terrae hiatus ad deos manes porrigentem se devovisse; equoque deinde quam poterat maxime exornato insidentem armatum se in specum inmisisse.

That same year, as the result of an earthquake or some other violent upheaval, it is said that the middle of the Forum or thereabouts collapsed, leaving a huge chasm of enormous depth. The abyss could not be filled by throwing in the earth which everyone brought, until a warning from the gods started

people wondering what was 'the chief strength of the Roman people': for that was what the soothsayers declared must be offered up to the place, if they wished the Roman republic to endure for ever. At this (the story goes) Marcus Curtius, a young man of great military distinction, rebuked those who doubted whether Rome had any greater asset than her arms and valor. In the silence which followed, he looked up to the temples of the immortal gods which tower above the Forum and the Capitolium, and stretching out his hands now to the heavens, now the yawning gulf in the ground and the gods of the Underworld, he devoted himself to death. He then mounted a horse caparisoned with all possible splendor, and plunged fully armed into the chasm. (tr. by Betty Radice)

4. Destruction of Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (*Hist.* 3.71.2-3, 71.4-72.1)

faces in prominentem porticum iecere et sequebantur ignem ambustasque Capitolii fores penetrassent, ni Sabinus revolsas undique **statuas, decora maiorum**, in ipso aditu vice muri obiecisset. tum diversos Capitolii aditus invadunt, iuxta **lucum asyli** et qua **Tarpeia rupes** centum gradibus aditur. ... inde lapsus ignis in porticus adpositas aedibus; mox sustinentes fastigium aquilae vetere ligno traxerunt flammam alueruntque. sic Capitolium clausis foribus indefensum et indireptum conflagravit.

Id facinus post conditam urbem luctuosissimum foedissimumque rei publicae populi Romani accidit, **nullo externo hoste, propitiis, si per mores nostros liceret, deis**, sedem Iovis Optimi Maximi, auspicato a maioribus pignus imperii conditam, quam non Porsenna dedita urbe neque Galli capta temerare potuissent, **furore principum** excindi.

They threw torches onto the projecting porticus and they followed fire and would have penetrated the burnt gates of the Capitolium, if Sabinus had not thrown statues, the glory of our ancestors, rolled down from everywhere, in the way of this approach as a wall. Then they went up the different entrances to the Capitolium, next to the grove of the Asylum and where the Tarpeian Rock is approached by one hundred steps. ... From there the fire slipped into the porticoes next to the temples; soon the eagles, made of old wood and supporting the pediment, caught and fed the fire. Thus, the Capitolium with closed gates, undefended and unplundered, burned to the ground.

This deed was the most mournful and foul that happened for the republic of the Roman people since the founding of the city, with no external enemy, with the gods (if our character had allowed) propitious, the seat of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, founded by our ancestors after taking the auspices and as a pledge of empire, which neither Lars Porsenna when the city was surrendered, nor the Gauls when it had been captured had been able to defile, had been utterly destroyed by the madness of the emperors.

5. Civil War as Spectacle (*Hist.* 3.83)

aderat pugnantibus **spectator populus utque in ludicro certamine**, hos, rursus illos clamore et plausu fovebat. quotiens pars altera inclinasset, abditos in tabernis aut si quam in domum perfugerant, erui iugularique expostulantes parte maiore praedae potiebantur: nam milite ad sanguinem et caedes obverso spolia in volgus cedebant. saeva ac deformis urbe tota facies: alibi **proelia et volnera**, alibi **balineae popinaeque**; simul **crur et strues corporum**, iuxta **scorta et scortis similes**; **quantum in luxurioso otio libidinum, quidquid in acerbissima captivitate scelerum**, prorsus ut eandem civitatem et furere crederes et lascivire. conflixerant et ante armati exercitus in urbe, bis Lucio Sulla, semel Cinna victoribus, nec tunc minus crudelitatis: nunc **inhumana securitas et ne minimo quidem temporis voluptates intermissae**: velut **festis diebus id quoque gaudium accederet**, exsultabant fruebantur nulla partium cura, malis publicis laeti.

The people were present as spectators for the fighters, and, as in a mock battle, now these, now those they favored by shouting and applause. Whenever one group had fallen back, they shouted that those hidden in shops or fled into a house ought to be rooted out and slaughtered, and the mob seized the greater part of the plunder: for, with the soldiers turned to blood and massacre, the spoils fell to the mob. Savage and ugly sights through the whole city: here battles and wounds, there baths and fast-food; in the

same place gore and piles of bodies, next to prostitutes and men like them; there was as much lust in luxurious free-time and whatever crimes there are in the harshest capture of a city, in a word, that you would believe this same state had run both mad and wild. Even before this armed troops had fought in the city, twice with Lucius Sulla, once with Cinna as victors, and there was not less cruelty then; but now there was an inhuman nonchalance and pleasures not interrupted for even one second: as if this “joy” also was added to the holidays, they reveled and delighted in it, with no care for political party, elated by public evils.

6. The Death of Vitellius (*Hist.* 3.84.4-85)

Vitellius capta urbe per aversam Palatii partem Aventinum in domum uxoris sellula defertur, ut, si diem latebra vitavisset, Tarracinam ad cohortes fratremque perfugeret. dein mobilitate ingenii et, quae natura pavoris est, cum omnia metuenti praesentia maxime displicerent, in Palatium regreditur vastum desertumque, dilapsis etiam infimis servitiorum aut occursum eius declinantibus. terret solitudo et tacentes loci; temptat clausa, inhorrescit vacuis; fessusque misero errore et pudenda latebra semet occultans ab Iulio Placido tribuno cohortis protrahitur. vinctae pone tergum manus; laniata veste, **foedum spectaculum**, ducebatur, multis increpantibus, nullo inlacrimante: deformitas exitus misericordiam abstulerat. ...

Vitellium infestis mucronibus coactum modo erigere os et offerre contumeliis, nunc **cadentes statuas suas, plerumque rostra aut Galbae occisi locum contueri, postremo ad Gemonias, ubi corpus Flavii Sabini iacuerat**, propulere. una vox non degeneris animi excepta, cum tribuno insultanti se tamen imperatorem eius fuisse respondit; ac deinde ingestis vulneribus concidit. et volgus eadem pravitate insectabatur interfectum, qua foverat viventem.

Vitellius, after the city was captured, was carried in a sedan-chair through the back side of the Palace to the Aventine to the house of his wife, as if he had avoided the day by a retreat, he fled to Tarracina to the cohorts and his brother. Then, because of his changeable character, which was fearful by nature, when all things, especially the current ones, displease someone frightened, he returned to the huge and deserted Palace, where even the lowliest of slaves had escaped or were avoiding his approach. The emptiness and silent places terrified; he tried the closed rooms, he was horrified at the empty ones; exhausted by wretched wandering and hiding himself in a shameful hole, he was dragged forth by Julius Placidus, tribune of the cohort. His hands chained behind his back, his clothes torn, a filthy spectacle, he was led with many shouting abuse, none crying; the ugliness of his death had taken away pity. ...

They forced Vitellius, compelled by hostile swords, now to lift his face and offer it to abuse, now to watch his own statues falling, and many times the Rostra or the place where Galba was murdered, afterwards they drove him to the Gemonians, where the body of Flavius Sabinus had lain. One sound of his not wholly degenerate spirit was heard, when he responded to the tribune taunting him “However, I was your emperor;” and then he fell in a heap of wounds. And the mob lacerated him dead with the same depravity with which they had favored him alive.

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