



## Dedication of the amphitheatre at Pompeii (CIL X, 852)

### 01\_dedication\_of\_amphitheatre.jpg



[1]

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Dedication

**Original Location/Place:** Two copies of the inscription were originally placed over each of the East and West entrances to the amphitheatre.

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** In situ.

**Date:** 70 BCE

**Physical Characteristics:**

Inscribed marble plaque. Two copies were excavated, one close to each of the East and West entrances to the amphitheatre.

**Material:** Marble.

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Publications:** *CIL X, 852 (ILS 5627)*

**Commentary:** This important inscription records the construction and dedication of the earliest surviving amphitheatre in the Roman world, in the town of Pompeii. It also attests to a significant phase of interaction between the Roman state and the Italian peoples, shortly after the conclusion of the Social War. The Social War (91– 88 BCE) had been fought against Rome by her former Italian allies in central and southern Italy, who demanded the equality of rights and privileges that Roman citizenship brought. Pompeii, with its strong fortifications and city walls, became a centre of resistance against Rome, until it came under the siege of the general, and later dictator, Lucius Cornelius Sulla Felix, who defeated the local Samnite population in 89 BCE (Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 40). Although the outcome of the Social War extended citizenship to all of the towns that had remained allies, those that had resisted Roman control received these rights more slowly, and with certain conditions. Rather than being awarded the status of *municipium*, with full citizenship and rights, including the right to vote in public assembly, nine years after the end of the war Pompeii was given the status of *colonia*, under the control of the nephew of the dictator Sulla, and was forced to accept the settlement of retired Sullan veterans (for the early administrative organisation of Pompeii, see Cástren, *Ordo populusque*, p. 49-82). The establishment of colonies of veterans was a long-standing practice of the Roman Republic, serving to provide land and employment for retired soldiers and ensuring tightly organised and loyal pockets of support for Rome in newly subjugated areas. These colonies were, however, usually established on unsettled sites, not in those with pre-existing communities and infrastructure such as at Pompeii (Ling, *Pompeii*, p. 52). An estimated 2000-5000 soldiers were installed in the town, which was renamed the *colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeiana*, commemorating the *gens Cornelia* from which Sulla came, and his own personal devotion to the goddess Venus (Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 40).

A process of 'Romanization' therefore began also within Italy, and it is to be expected that it was not without its own tensions. Land was confiscated and redistributed from the Samnite inhabitants of the town to the colonists, and although now all citizens of Rome, the early political life of the colony was dominated by the new settlers. The two men named in the inscription from the amphitheatre, Caius Quinctius Valgus and Marcus Porcius, had been significantly rewarded for their loyalty to Sulla (Zanker, *Pompeii*, p. 66). It is likely that Marcus Porcius had acquired land in the region before Pompeii was named a colony; his name appears in stamps on a large number of wine amphorae excavated between Narbonne and Bordeaux, suggesting an investment in the viticulture of Campania (Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 41). However, it is possible that Quinctius Valgus



amongst those sent by the Sullan administration to supervise troublesome areas of central Italy (Wisemen, *New Men in the Roman Senate*, p. 46); he is attested as the *patronus municipii* in the city of Aeclanum immediately after the Social War (CIL IX, 1140) and also as the chief magistrate with censorial power, *quinquennalis*, near Abellinum (CIL I, 3191), and is known to have owned vast estates in Hirpinia (Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 41). Porcius and Valgus likely became the political leaders of the colony, the *duumviri*, in the mid 70s BCE, when a further inscription attests to their construction of the Covered Theatre (CIL X, 844), but their donation of the amphitheatre is their most significant contribution to Pompeii, and represents the power held by these Roman newcomers.

The inscription states that Quinctius Valgus and Marcus Porcius paid for the amphitheatre whilst holding the highest magistracy, the duovirate with censorial powers. This role, election for which was held every five years, gave Porcius and Valgus the authority to revise the citizen rolls of Pompeii, as well as the membership of the town council, the *ordo decurionum*. The power of granting citizenship therefore represented a political opportunity, with both men able to issue, or indeed remove, it as means to garner and reward supporters and neutralise local opposition. It is clear from the text of the inscription that little interest was paid to conciliating this local population; the amphitheatre was built *coloniae honoris*

*causa*, and the area in which it was built they gave *colonis locum in perpetuum*. Both the monument and the land were given to the colonists, and permanently. Although in a legal sense there was no difference between the citizenship of the colonists and the inhabitants of Pompeii, there can be little misunderstanding that on a social level, the amphitheatre was for the use and enjoyment of the Roman colonists first and foremost (Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 41; Zanker, *Pompeii*, p. 70). The inscription gives the title of the building as *spectacula*, rather than the Greek ??????????, *amphitheatron*, which was a clear statement of the Roman nature of the entertainment that it would stage: the wild beast hunts and gladiatorial combats that had developed in central Italy, and which celebrated bloodshed, rather than the popular entertainment of Greek theatre which had its place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE Large Theatre on the southern edge of the town (Ling, *Pompeii's Public Landscape*, p. 120).

The structure of the amphitheatre was also a visibly Roman innovation; although gladiatorial games had taken place in Pompeii for many years before, as in other Italian cities these spectacles had taken place in temporary enclosures within the Forum. The size and permanence of the building was, as Zanker has stated, "out of proportion in every respect for a medium-sized country town," and although Puteoli and Cumae were soon to follow suit with stone amphitheatres of their own, the size of the building in Pompeii was unprecedented. Capable of holding 20,000 spectators, it is clear that visitors from outside of Pompeii were to be regularly expected, perhaps other Sullan veterans from nearby settlements such as Nuceria and Abellinum (Zanker, *Pompeii*, p. 69). The arrangement of the seating also reinforced the rigid social hierarchy of Rome; the best seats, closest to the arena, were undoubtedly reserved for the most important Roman citizens of the colony, the chief magistrates, the *decuriones* (councillors), *patroni* (honorary members of the local senate) and those holding the chief priesthoods of the town. The rest of the Roman colonists would have occupied the *ima cava*, on account of their superior Roman citizenship, with the *media cava* reserved for the newly enfranchised inhabitants of Pompeii, who although citizens in a legal sense, were not considered as of the same equal status as the colonists (Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, p. 41). The arrangements of the amphitheatre therefore acted as a continual reminder of the new social order of the town and the dominance of the Roman colonists. This dramatic change to the urban fabric of Pompeii communicated the power of the Roman administration and the honour bestowed upon the town through the presence of the colonists. The amphitheatre was a prestige monument, and together with the inscription stressed the good fortune that Roman rule had brought to the town. It symbolised the cultural interests of the colonists and, as Bomgardner has stated, was "designed to flaunt the *Romanitas* of the new colony" (*The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre* p. 41).

Keywords in the original language:

- [colonia](#) [2]
- [Valgus Porcius](#) [3]
- [honor](#) [4]
- [spectacula](#) [5]
- [pecunia](#) [6]
- [duumvir](#) [7]
- [quinquennalis](#) [8]

Thematic keywords:



- [Pompeii](#) [9]
- [Italy](#) [10]
- [spectacle](#) [11]
- [Roman colony](#) [12]
- [colonists](#) [13]
- [Sulla](#) [14]
- [Social War](#) [15]
- [magistrate](#) [16]
- [censor](#) [17]
- [Roman citizenship](#) [18]
- [Romanization](#) [19]

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