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2. The construction and phases of development of the wooden arena flooring of the Colosseum

Heinz-Jürgen Beste

Following a kind invitation by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, in 1996 the German Archaeological Institute in Rome began an investigation of the construction details of the arena and the basement of the Colosseum. The Colosseum is one of the well-preserved monuments of antiquity whose state of preservation is inversely proportional to our knowledge of its history.¹ Notwithstanding a great deal of work already done on the building, and particularly the contributions of J.-C. Golvin and C. Landes,² there remain many important unsolved problems, especially with respect to the technical presentation of the games. Aside from evaluating the ancient sources, such questions can only be clarified by interpreting the findings of the excavations, and this requires recording all the relevant details in the most accurate manner possible. It may come as a surprise to find that the most complex installations of the Colosseum — the arena with its two-storey structure (the so-called *ipogei*³) — has not yet been properly investigated. But this is easily explained by the multitude of its component structures, at first sight terrifyingly confusing, and the difficulties which they therefore present for any attempt to record the findings.

Our ultimate goal is to distinguish the multitude of building phases which followed one another over the five centuries during which Rome's largest amphitheatre was in use. We are attempting to base a reconstruction of the design on a thorough cataloguing of the details and history of the building. The Soprintendenza also expects a proposal for using the basement area as a museum, as well as a reconstruction of the arena floor. Our investigations, in short, are not concerned with the gladiators themselves but rather attempt to ascertain how the games were organized and run on a practical level (fig. 1).

This article will discuss only the current state of our work on the main construction and the stages of development of the arena floor.⁴ At present the phasing is only relative, not absolute. Archaeological studies to determine the absolute dating of sections of the construction are under way, and older findings will be discussed. Certain crucial questions, such as the existence of installations to put on *naumachiae*,⁵ as the sources refer to them,⁶ will not be treated here.

The present condition of the podium and the arena edge dates back to the excavations of 1938-39 when the whole basement area was freed from its mass of earth.⁷ That excavation was closely linked to measures of consolidating and restoring⁸ the edge of the arena; the same was true for the excavations of 1874-75,⁹ but we know little about that work and can only reconstruct it from some photographs, whereas the restoration of 1938-39 is very well documented.¹⁰ The director of the work then was G. Cozzo, an engineer who had already explained his deep knowledge of the building in *Ingegneria romana*.¹¹ However, it is not always clear why his good ob-

1 On the information uncertainty with "big monument" architecture see Phillip and Koenigs 1997, 696 ff.

2 Landes 1987; Golvin 1988; Golvin and Landes 1990.

3 On the meaning of the term *ipogei/hypogea* in the basement, cf. Colagrossi 1913, 234; Müller 1996, 70 f.

4 On the individual phases in the basement, see the Appendix, where the results so far are briefly summarized. Cf. Beste 1998, 106 ff., Piraino 1998, 119 ff., and Beste 1999, 249 ff.

5 Colagrossi 1913, 245 ff.; Coleman 1993, 58 ff.

6 Mart., *De Spect.* 24-26 and 30; Suet., *Dom.* 4.

7 Cf. Luciani 1993, 231 ff.; Rea 1996, 55 ff. and 1998, 71 ff.

8 On the restorations of the Colosseum generally see Mocchegiani Carpano and Luciani 1981.

9 Schingo and Rea 1993, 75 ff.

10 Schingo and Rea 1993, 90 ff.

11 Cozzo 1927.