

*Senatus populusq(ue) Romanus / imp(eratori) Tito Caesari divi Vespasiani f. Vespasian[o] Augusto / pontif(ici) max(imo) trib(unicia) pot(estate) X imp(eratori) XVII [c]o(n)s(uli) VIII p(atri) p(atriciae) principi suo / quod praeceptis patri[s] consiliisq(ue) et auspiciis gentem / Iudaeorum domuit et urbem Hierusolymam omnibus ante / se ducibus regibus gentibus aut / frustra petitam aut omnino intem[p]tatam delevit.*

The precise significance of the monumental inscription (*CIL.* 6.944 = *ILS.* 264) that once graced the triumphal Arch erected in honour of Titus in the Circus Maximus at Rome has been the subject of much scholarly debate and deserves a full reconsideration. In it we read that the Senate and the Roman People extolled Vespasian's first-born because, following the precepts and advice and under the auspices of his father, he had subdued the Jewish People and had been able to destroy the city of Jerusalem, which all commanders, kings, and peoples before him had either assailed in vain or left completely unattacked. In a brief article published in 1948 (*Philologus* 97, 370-371), H.U. Instinsky examined this text in detail and argued in favour of its historical reliability, thus opposing the accusations of base sycophancy made by the vast majority of scholars from Mommsen onwards. According to Instinsky, the epigraph is not at all panegyric, eulogistic or deceitful: the heart of the matter, he insists, lies in the fact that the expression *ante se* refers simply to the period of the Jewish war (66-70 C.E.), and not to the entire history of the city of Jerusalem, while *gentes* indicates the auxiliary units of the "client states" sent in support of the Roman army by their respective *reges*.

In this paper we argue that Instinsky's explanation is not convincing because of the shaky balance of circumstances that it presupposes. Special attention will be paid to the meaning of the key terms *duces* and *reges* (l. 6). We conclude that *CIL.* 6.944 consciously ignores the previous captures of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Pompey, showing an intentional disregard for the historical truth, and fits coherently into the climate of strong celebration of Titus' exploits in Judaea that pervaded Rome in the period after 70 C.E. The honorific Arch that the Senate and the Roman People dedicated to their *princeps* while he was still alive was part of a meticulous and all-embracing "theology of victory" (to use the expression of S. De Maria, *Gli archi onorari di Roma e dell'Italia romana*, 1988, 119). In the final section of the paper we discuss the possible chronology of the Arch (a problem which has been strangely neglected in scholarship to date), suggesting that it was inaugurated in June 81 C.E. to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Jewish triumph of Vespasian and Titus.