



## **Power and people in ancient Rome**

### *Glorifying Rome*

Individuals of enormous wealth paid to provide Rome and its people with permanent entertainment venues.

These benefactions brought these individuals into the public eye and provided them with lasting memorials. It was in the factional politics of the late Republic that the trend was set.

The Circus Maximus was associated with several deities and Pompey's rival, Julius Caesar, could be seen to be honouring these when in 46 BCE he enlarged the Circus, extending the stands so that three sides of the arena were enclosed by a continuous ring of seating. This wooden seating does not survive, although it would later be re-built in stone.

Under Augustus further developments were made to the Circus including the addition of an Egyptian obelisk along the central barrier, and the embellishment of a special platform, the pulvinar, a space reserved for statues of the gods.

Augustus made many gifts to the city of Rome. He grasped the importance of becoming the ultimate benefactor. Entertaining the inhabitants of Rome and linking his name to the entertainment venues was key.

Augustus's alterations to the Circus Maximus and some restoration of the theatre of Pompey meant that he was able to appropriate these existing structures and associate them with the new regime. He was also responsible for completing the theatre of Marcellus, which outstripped Pompey's theatre in seating capacity.

Similar principles guided the Flavian emperors. After the self-indulgent reign of Nero they were eager to restore Rome to the people. Nero was famed for his shows, but it was his successors who built the ultimate venue.

The Colosseum was begun by Vespasian and completed by his son Titus. It was built on the site of a large lake associated with Nero's vast and egocentric palace known as the Golden House.

The Colosseum symbolised the power and might of the new ruling dynasty, making a dramatic mark on the city-scape and symbolising the restoration of Rome to sound government.