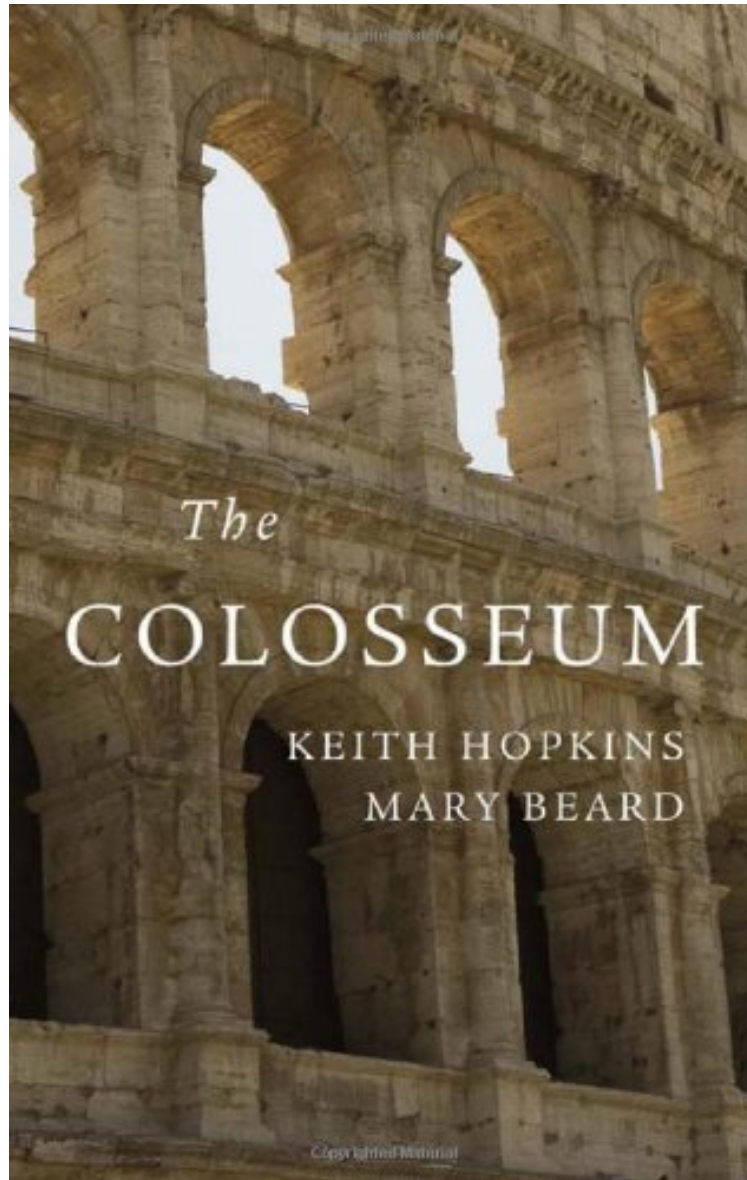


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## The Colosseum (Wonders of the World)

*Keith Hopkins, Mary Beard*

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**Keith Hopkins, Mary Beard : The Colosseum (Wonders of the World)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Colosseum (Wonders of the World):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Eternal Colosseum. By Jan Dierckx In a very easy to understand English that doesn't require an intellectual education, Keith Hopkins and Mary Beard write a history of the Colosseum in Rome ( buildings of this kind were found all over the Roman Empire ). The colosseum was built around 50 AD.

Hopkins and Beard discuss the use of the colosseum from its origin until today. They explain ( among other things ) the way that different social classes were seated. The senators were seated in the front row, alongside the Emperor, behind them were the other aristocrats, Roman citizens and finally slaves and foreigners on the wooden seats instead of marble seats. An interesting question is what kind of games were performed. There were not only Gladiator fights but also animal hunting ( as exotic as elephants, giraffes, and tigers among other ferocious beasts ). An other problem Hopkins/Beard discuss, is how many Gladiators died in a season and if it's true that Christians were meat for tigers, lions, jaguars, bears, and such, all of this because they remained loyal to their religion. It's not easy to understand why the Romans did this. In Imperial Rome there were a lot of religions (Jewish, Egyptian - Isis cult - and several cults of the East.). All their followers lived in peace while staying loyal to their religion. So why the Christians? Veterans and talented Gladiators were worth a lot of money ( moreover their training was expensive and time consuming ). This leads to the idea that on more than one occasion Gladiators fought with wooden weapons and performed a sort of choreography, a bit like stuntmen in modern movies. It was very close to real fighting and made the public sit on the edge of their seat. Hopkins and Beard found no evidence that Christians were thrown in the arena to be devoured by wild animals. It's significant that Christians themselves didn't mention the Colosseum as a place of martyrdom like many other places were. In later centuries the colosseum was used as a stone quarry, a place for building houses, excavating antiquities and so on. In the last chapter Keith Hopkins and Mary Beard give all kinds of advice to tourists who want to visit the Colosseum. At the end of the day you'll know that the Colosseum is more than a place where Gladiators fought.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Helpful Guide to a Great Work of Architecture By Fezziwig This short book gives a quite comprehensive and up-to-date history of this great old Roman monument. One of the authors, Mary Beard, is also the author of Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town, which I read recently (May 2013). Unfortunately, there are no color illustrations, and although there are thirty black and white illustrations and three figures, the reader of a book like this is left hungering for more visuals. Also, some of the black and white illustrations (nos. 8, 20, 24) are so dark and apparently reduced in this publication that one must strain to make out details alluded to in the text. Still, the book is a helpful and informative guide to one of the world's greatest works of architecture.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Unsatisfying By Stephen Healey I did not learn enough about the coliseum from this book. After reading I don't feel I know the building better than I did before. I wish for more information on the technical construction of the building. Also I found the style of writing to be sluggish. I prefer the writing to be quicker to the point. Many of the sentences were cumbersome and lost focus.

Read the Bldg Blog interview with Mary Beard about the Wonders of the World series (Part I and Part II) Byron and Hitler were equally entranced by Rome's most famous monument, the Colosseum. Mid-Victorians admired the hundreds of varieties of flowers in its crannies and occasionally shuddered at its reputation for contagion, danger, and sexual temptation. Today it is the highlight of a tour of Italy for more than three million visitors a year, a concert arena for the likes of Paul McCartney, and a national symbol of opposition to the death penalty. Its ancient history is chockfull of romantic but erroneous myths. There is no evidence that any gladiator ever said "Hail Caesar, those about to die..." and we know of not one single Christian martyr who met his finish here. Yet the reality is much stranger than the legend as the authors, two prominent classical historians, explain in this absorbing account. We learn the details of how the arena was built and at what cost; we are introduced to the emperors who sometimes fought in gladiatorial games staged at the Colosseum; and we take measure of the audience who reveled in, or opposed, these games. The authors also trace the strange afterlife of the monument--as fortress, shrine of martyrs, church, and glue factory. Why are we so fascinated with this arena of death?

From Booklist The authors point out that the Colosseum in Rome was constructed for the enjoyment of murder. They explain the role of that famous monument in Roman history and politics--a place in which the emperor came face-to-face with his people. Inaugurated in A.D. 80, the Colosseum was the scene of animals sent to fight each other or pitted against trained marksmen and hunters, some on horseback, others on foot, picking the animals off with spears, swords, or arrows. There were public executions, and gladiators, described by the authors as "marginal outsiders in Roman society; captives of war, the poor and destitute who saw in possible success in the arena their only hope," fought one another (a wounded or defeated gladiator was at the mercy of the audience). Hopkins and Beard note that the role of the audience was important; the people, seated in hierarchical ranks according to status, were in effect a microcosm of the Roman citizen body. A fascinating account for the Rome-bound traveler as well as the fan of European history.

George Cohen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved This lively book carries the reader painlessly through a complex record of legend and history. By the end the authors have touched authoritatively on architecture, mythological spectacle, imperial patronage, gladiators, sadism, early Christianity, and modern romantic impressions of the Colosseum. A delightful and instructive account. (G. W. Bowersock, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton) A wonderful book, worthy of its subject: horrifying, impressive, blood-soaked, occasionally very funny and always entertaining. (Robert Harris) Stripped of so much of its outer shell, the Colosseum reveals the extraordinary ingenuity of its functional design, comprising horizontal floors radiating from a hollow center and channelling the

movements of crowds around and into its mass through vaulted passageways, or rising along steep staircases. Long admired by architects, an object of wonder during the Middle Ages and for the modern tourist, the very presence of the Colosseum in the center of Rome marks the power of the material past to grasp our imagination even in its present semi-ruinous state. How this has been accomplished is the well-told story of this book. (Richard Brilliant, Columbia University) Stirring stuff! This is a welcome and well-written book--scholarly but accessible and level-headed. It reassesses the myths, politely debunks many misconceptions about what we know--and what we don't know--to put the fabulous monument in context from its founding to the present. The practical notes for modern visitors made me yearn to be there in Rome again. (Lindsey Davis, author of the Falco series of ancient Roman mysteries) Racy and occasionally confrontational... This book revels in the accretions of detail and myth. The improbable animal fights; the unfeasibility of flooding the arena to stage mock sea-battles; the claims of Christianity to the place, with a crucifix and 200 days' indulgence accruing in memory of the early Christians who (probably) didn't get torn to pieces by the lions who (probably) weren't there in the first place; the thunder of footsteps on the wooden floor, deafening those in the undercroft with its winches and ramps and the stink and racket of animals and fighting men; the heat in the arena despite the probable shade offered by great cantilevered canvas awnings: first-class scholarship and an engagingly demotic style bring all this into sharp focus. (Michael Bywater *The Independent* 2005-03-25) It is a work of scholarship written with the general reader in mind. The scholarship is worn lightly, and the book is a pleasure to read. It sums up all that is known, and makes it clear that much must remain conjectural. Anyone visiting Rome and making the obligatory sightseeing tour of the Colosseum will do well to read it in advance and keep it to hand; enjoyment will be much enhanced. (Allan Massie *The Spectator* 2005-03-19) The book covers a wide variety of topics, including--to give but a few examples--the life of a gladiator, which was distinctly unglamorous, the exclusion of women from vast areas of the auditorium, the means by which wild animals were brought to Rome, the duration of the 'shows' (123 days for a Trajan bloodbath, according to one observer), the splendid flora (420 species in 1855, although now diminished by weedkiller), and practical tips for any visitor. The book is a great read. (John McBratney *Irish Times* 2005-03-12) Keith Hopkins and Mary Beard, eminent classical historians, have written a superb new cultural history of the Colosseum. As well as documenting the variety of flowers that once grew wild among the ruins, they offer pithy and occasionally hilarious accounts of the three million tourists who descend on the monument each year. (Ian Thomson *Evening Standard* 2005-03-07) [Hopkins and Beard] succeed remarkably in dispelling many of the myths surrounding the Colosseum... Lively writing brings the Colosseum and its denizens to life in great detail. (Rita Simmons *Library Journal* 2005-08-01) Brisk and illuminating, with much surprising information. (Kirkus s 2005-09-01) A fascinating account for the Rome-bound traveler as well as the fan of European history. (George Cohen *Booklist* 2005-10-01) A lure for travelers since the days of the Grand Tours, this majestic ruin in Rome was, of course, the scene of murderous spectacles in ancient times. The writers, a pair of British academics, recount the origin of the Colosseum on the site of a private lake in Nero's palace, reveal how it was built and operated and draw on archaeology and classical writings to detail the lives of the gladiators. The magnificent, crumbling building still holds pride of place in the Eternal City, and this book provides a readable and informed introduction. (David Armstrong *San Francisco Chronicle* 2005-10-13) It has been, and continues to be, the object of myth as well as the defining symbol of ancient Rome; a romantic ruin to ongoing popular tourist attraction. Filmmakers, too, from Cecil B. DeMille to Ridley Scott, have used it for their own creative impulses. Although work on the building started in AD 72, it did not officially open until AD 80. Authors and classical historians Keith Hopkins and Mary Beard explain how it was built--and at what cost. (June Sawyers *Chicago Tribune* 2006-01-15) This architectural icon of the classical world probably has been the subject of more myths and half-truths than any other building surviving from antiquity... This slim book, which would fit into a pocketbook or a knapsack, would make a worthy travel companion for anyone visiting Rome because it sheds so much light on "what is likely to seem at best a confusing mass of masonry, at worst a jumble of dilapidated stone and rubble." (Spencer Rumsey *Newsday* 2006-02-26) In her concise portrait Beard shines a torch into the dark recesses of the building's long history and illuminates a gladiator here, a fresco there, a medieval bullfight there... Here there is a sophisticated interpretation of the Colosseum's meaning and a survey of nineteenth- and twentieth-century responses to the Colosseum, with quotations from Byron, Mark Twain, Henry James and Hitler. (Debra Aaronson *Lawless New England Classical Journal* 2006-01-01) Gives a sprightly, entertaining account of this archetypal building in all its various incarnations, from the "killing fields" of antiquity to the pilgrim's goal of the sixteenth century, the botanist's paradise of the nineteenth, and the archaeologist's puzzle of today--four different construction crews worked on separate quarters of the building, with conspicuously differing results. (Ingrid Rowland *New York of Books* 2007-10-11) About the Author Keith Hopkins (1934–2004) was Professor of Ancient History at the University of Cambridge. He also wrote *A World Full of Gods*. Mary Beard has a Chair of Classics at Cambridge and is a Fellow of Newnham College. She is classics editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* and author of the blog "A Don's Life." She is also a winner of the 2008 Wolfson History Prize.