

Law Concerning the Power of Vespasian

Source: *Lex De Imperio Vespasiani*: ILS 244.

“The Law concerning the power of Vespasian” (69/70 CE) is an inscription in bronze; only this portion, which is the end of the document, survives.

¶1... that he shall have the right, just as the deified Augustus¹ and Ti. Julius Caesar Augustus² and Ti. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus³ had, to conclude treaties with whomever he wishes;

¶2 And that he shall have the right, just as the deified Augustus and Ti. Julius Caesar Augustus and Ti. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus had, to convene the senate, to put and refer proposals to it, and to cause decrees of the senate to be enacted by proposal and division of the house;

¶3 And that when the senate is convened [in special session] pursuant to his wish, authorization, order, or command, or in his presence, all matters transacted shall be considered and observed as fully binding as if the meeting of the senate had been regularly convoked and held;

¶4 And that at all elections especial consideration shall be given to those candidates for a magistracy, authority, imperium, or any post whom he has recommended to the Roman senate and people or to whom he has given and promised his vote;

¶5 And that he shall have the right, just as Ti. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus had, to extend and advance the boundaries of the pomerium⁴ whenever he deems it to be in the interest of the state;

¶6 And that he shall have the right and power, just as the deified Augustus and Ti. Julius Caesar Augustus and Ti. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus had, to transact and do whatever things divine, human, public and private he deems to serve the advantage and the overriding interest of the state;

¶7 And that the Emperor Caesar Vespasian shall not be bound by those laws and plebiscites which were declared not binding upon the deified Augustus Ti. Julius Caesar Augustus or Ti. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, and the Emperor Caesar Vespasian Augustus shall have the right to do whatsoever it was proper for the deified Augustus or Ti. Julius Caesar Augustus or Ti. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus to do by virtue of any law or enactment;

¶8 And that whatever was done, executed, decreed, or ordered before the enactment of this law by the Emperor Caesar Vespasian Augustus, or by anyone at his order or command, shall be as fully binding and valid as if they had been done by order of the people or plebs.

¶9 Sanction: If anyone in consequence of this law has or shall have acted contrary to laws, enactments, plebiscites, or decrees of the senate, or if he shall have failed to do in consequence of this law anything that it is incumbent on him to do in accordance with a law, enactment, plebiscite, or decree of the senate, it shall be with impunity, nor shall he on that account have to pay any penalty to the people, nor shall anyone have the right to institute suit or judicial inquiry concerning such matter, nor shall any [authority] permit proceedings before him on such matter.

¹ a.k.a. Octavian, who ruled from 31 BCE to 14 CE.

² Tiberius, emperor from 14-31.

³ Claudius, emperor from 41-54. Notably absent here are the emperors C. (Caligula), officially neglected; Nero, afterwards damned; and

Vespasian's immediate predecessors, the other emperors of 69 CE: Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, here ignored. Only the three emperors mentioned were considered worthy examples.

⁴ The official border of the city of Rome proper.