

REWRITING DOMITIAN'S TYRANNY

By

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## ABSTRACT

In my dissertation, I argue that the tyrannical image of the Emperor Domitian (r. 81-96 CE) is a literary construct, which needs to be revisited in a wider spectrum of Roman imperial historiography. I believe that Domitian's tainted reputation owes its origin to Augustus's onerous legacy to his successors. Augustus posed as the *civilis princeps*, who treated senators as if they were his equals. Despite the Republican façade, a *princeps* was a monarch who ruled with absolute power. Stuck between the specter of the Republic and the reality of the monarchic Principate, Augustus's successors would be judged by imperial historiographers on how civil they acted toward the Senate. Emperors, such as Domitian, who refused to pay enough deference to the Senate, were condemned as tyrants. Several misconceptions also besmirched Domitian's image. Domitian was considered so arrogant that he requested that he be officially addressed as *dominus et deus noster*, but there is no evidence that Domitian incorporated this ostentatious appellation into his official titulature. The label, "Reign of Terror," created by modern scholars to encapsulate Domitian's tyranny, led to another misconception that Domitian must have decimated the Senate. However, my scrutiny of the twelve consular victims listed in Suetonius's *Life of Domitian* and the victims of 93 CE refutes that accusation. I show that Domitian employed those senators in his administration and executed them only when they proved treasonous. Despite the positive depictions of Domitian in the poetry of Martial and Statius, composed during the emperor's lifetime, the hostile accounts written after his death by the senatorial authors, such as Tacitus and Pliny the Younger, became prevalent enough to ossify the image of Domitian as a savage tyrant in Roman imperial historiography. I advocate for recasting the image of Domitian as an ordinary emperor who, because of his adversarial relationship with the Roman aristocrats, would go down in history as one of the worst Roman emperors. In studies on Roman

historiography, their biased criteria have so far acknowledged only two impeccably good emperors: the exemplary *civilis princeps* Augustus and the *optimus princeps* Trajan.

## INTRODUCTION

Memory is blind to all but the group it binds—which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative.<sup>1</sup>

A person's memory in history is a combination of the reputation that they built while alive and how others wish to remember the person after their death. As not every word or act can be remembered, the fragments of a person's life to constitute a memory are the results of a fierce and continuous struggle between what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten. In that regard, memory is not the historical reality of a person but more of a construct, built usually in retrospect, and always susceptible to change.

Following the line Pierre Nora draws between memory and history, a memory of an individual *per se* is unlikely to be reflected onto history in the sense of *la longue durée*. Still, there are rare cases of a memory or memories of a person that not only merge into history but even dominate the collective memory of a certain period—memories of rulers, such as kings or emperors in monarchies or leading aristocrats in oligarchies. Despite their political authority, memories of rulers were not always recorded in the way they wished to be remembered. Depending on the way historians view the reign based on their interpretation of the ruler's images, gestures, achievements, and other various factors, each ruler would be situated in the spectrum of good to bad rulers. As it is hard for rulers to fulfill every subject's expectations, it is no wonder that only a handful of rulers have been assessed as good kings or emperors. There

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 9.

is not even an acute word to define the good rule of a good king or emperor. In the meantime, there are many kings or emperors who have been branded as bad rulers, tyrants, or mad kings; various terms exist to denote the bad rule of a bad ruler, such as tyranny, absolutism, autocracy, authoritarianism, despotism, dictatorship, totalitarianism.<sup>2</sup> In this deep chasm between good and bad rulers, there is hardly a word to indicate rulers whose rule can be seen in a positive light at some time but could be seen in a negative one at others, and they tend to be subsumed under the category of bad rulers.

With the convergence of memory and history in the descriptions of rulers and the tendency to draw an arbitrary dichotomy between good and bad rulers as a backdrop, this dissertation revisits the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (r. 81–96 CE), who has been regarded as one of the tyrants of Roman history. The last emperor of the Flavian dynasty, Domitian was assassinated in a palace conspiracy, and his death, according to Edward Gibbon, marked the beginning of the “most happy and prosperous period in the history of the world,” the period also known as the reign of the Five Good Emperors (Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius).<sup>3</sup> The stigma of tyranny is still attached to Domitian in modern scholarship. For instance, in his article of 1996, Peter Wiseman draws a parallel between Domitian and Saddam Hussein in their so-called reigns of terror.<sup>4</sup> Since the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. The near-antonyms of tyranny are as following: democracy, self-governance, self-rule, freedom, autonomy, sovereignty. “Tyranny,” Merriam-Webster, accessed October 19, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/tyranny>

<sup>3</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. I.: 78: “If a man were called upon to fix that period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the deaths of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.” The term “Five Good Emperors” was first coined in the sixteenth century CE by Machiavelli in *Discourses on Livy*, 1.10.4: “He will also see by the reading of this history how a good kingdom can be ordered; for all the emperors who succeeded to the empire by inheritance, except Titus, were bad. Those who succeeded by adoption were all good, as were the five from Nerva to Marcus; and as the empire fell to heirs, it returned to its ruin.” Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 32.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Wiseman, “Domitian and the Dynamics of Terror in Classical Rome,” *History Today* 46, no. 9

assessment of an object as good or bad always requires value judgment, one must question whose standards, or in whose memory, Domitian was first remembered as a bad ruler or tyrant. In my dissertation, I will investigate the process of the crystallization of the memory of Domitian as a tyrant by scrutinizing the historical accounts written the Roman elite.

In modern times, assessing a leading politician or contemporary event requires citizens to carefully select what to believe among the torrent of information from various media outlets. When repeatedly hearing the negative opinions or hearsay about heinous behavior of a certain person, it is easy to view them negatively; however, thanks to the fleeting nature of media in the age of the internet, it is equally easy to change one's opinion once public opinion favors that person. In contrast, before the age of the internet, when conventional media performed a pivotal role in generating public opinions, more time and effort was required to canonize a certain viewpoint about a person over the others. However, once set in the minds of people as the general belief, that perception would persist, and people hated by the public are typically deprived of any opportunity or medium to defend themselves.

Stéphane Gsell, the French scholar who initiated the study of Domitian in 1894, borrowed the terminology of the French Revolution to paint the reign of Domitian in grim colors.<sup>5</sup> Like Gsell, I will invoke the notorious words of the Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, to better illustrate the degree to which forged images can adhere to a person's reputation, to their detriment. When the Paris mob stormed Versailles, it was believed that Marie Antoinette said, "If they don't have bread, let them eat brioche!" This thoughtless statement has been employed to portray the queen as having no interest in the economic

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(September 1996): 24.

<sup>5</sup> Stéphane Gsell, *Essai sur le Règne de l'Empereur Domitien* (Paris: Thorin, 1894). Gsell's use of the term "terreur" in reference to the last years of Domitian's reign will be discussed in the third chapter.

problems that the common people had suffered or to capture their hatred toward her.

However, there is hardly any evidence that she indeed said such a thing. In book VI of his *Confessions*, written in 1767 but published posthumously, Jean-Jacques Rousseau mentions an anecdote from 1741 in which he bought a piece of brioche, recalling a great princess's suggestion that the peasants eat brioche when they do not have any bread.<sup>6</sup> Given that Marie Antoinette was born in 1755, the great princess to whom Rousseau referred cannot be her. What this misattribution illustrates is the extreme hatred and rage that the French people held toward Marie Antoinette, which made them believe whatever heinous charges were attributed to her in their presumably conscious refusal to check their authenticity. A similar thing happened to Domitian, who was known to have ordered or requested that he officially be addressed as *dominus et deus noster*. This will be discussed in detail in the second chapter.

Domitian was not the first emperor to be branded as a tyrant, neither was he the only one who was compared to modern tyrants. In the Julio-Claudian dynasty (27 BCE–68 CE), the first dynasty of the Roman Empire, two out of five emperors had their names marked as tyrants: Caligula and Nero. The word that has been employed to epitomize Caligula (r. 37–41 CE) since antiquity is “madness.” During his short-lived reign, Caligula was notorious for his bad relationship with the Roman Senate, his claim to divinity, his incestuous relationship with his sisters, and other eccentric behavior such as planning to appoint his horse Incitatus as consul. The legacy of his notoriety encouraged Ludwig Quidde, a German scholar, to publish a very brief study on the emperor in 1894 titled *Caligula: Eine Studie über römischen Caesarenwahnsinn*. In this seventeen-page treatise, Quidde criticized the German emperor Wilhelm II, whom he likened to Caligula. Quidde expected that no prosecutor could publicly

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<sup>6</sup> Evelyne Lever, *Marie Antoinette: The Last Queen of France*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 325–6.

list the parallels between the “mad” ancient emperor and the present emperor in an indictment, but he was tried for treason and imprisoned for three months.<sup>7</sup> Caligula’s popularity continued, as seen in Albert Camus’s recasting of his image not as a madman but as a philosopher-emperor who staged his suicide in *Caligula* (1944), or in the consolidation of the traditional image of Caligula as depicted by Suetonius and Dio Cassius in the BBC drama series *I, Claudius* (1976), an adaptation of Robert Graves’s novel of the same name (1934). In modern scholarship, there has emerged a great interest to revisit Caligula and reconsider the label of madness by focusing on the bias innate in ancient sources.<sup>8</sup> As seen in the interpretation of Caligula by Graves in the 1930s, the negative image of Caligula still persisted in modern scholarship. For instance, Arther Ferrill, who had criticized Anthony Barrett’s view of Caligula as a sane emperor in 1991, contended that Caligula was “crazy” and compared the emperor to modern dictators such as Jean-Bédél Bokassa of the Central African Empire and Idi Amin of Uganda.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, the memory of the last Julio-Claudian emperor, Nero (r. 54–68 CE), is fraught with scandalous episodes. For example, Nero ordered the deaths of his family members, such as his stepbrother Britannicus, his ex-wife Octavia, and his own mother, Agrippina the Younger. The performer-emperor was also notorious for the common belief that he fiddled when Rome burned and persecuted the Christians for being responsible for the fire of 64 CE. Stigmatized in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages as the antichrist for

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<sup>7</sup> Aloys Winterling, *Politics and Society in Imperial Rome* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 103–5.

<sup>8</sup> See Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1989); Sam Wilkinson, *Caligula* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); and Aloys Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Arther Ferrill, *Caligula: Emperor of Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991): 8, 165; Ferrill’s review of the first edition of Barrett’s *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*: <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1991/02.01.01.html>

persecuting the Christians, the pictorial image of Nero singing and fiddling while Rome was burning was so embedded in popular memory that his name was employed ironically to refer to the infamous decree (known as the *Nerobefehl*) that Adolf Hitler issued on March 19, 1945, to set fire to Germany's infrastructure. In modern scholarship, various attempts have been made to reevaluate Nero and his reign since Gilbert Charles-Picard's *Auguste et Néron: Le secret de l'Empire*, published in 1962. Charles-Picard viewed Nero as an emperor who deviated from the Augustan norm, the viewpoint that I also apply to Domitian. Other scholars, such as Miriam Griffin, Edward Champlin, and most recently John Drinkwater, view Nero as the last Julio-Claudian emperor who failed to serve the role of emperor in the Principate designed by the first *princeps* Augustus. They also view him as an emperor who developed his understanding of Greek and Roman mythology into a performance, realizing the importance of his public image.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of the diversification of the memory of Nero, his flamboyant and theatrical image has made its way into modern media's criticisms of leading politicians.<sup>11</sup>

Compared to the reputation that Caligula and Nero acquired as tyrants, Domitian is less known to the general public, presumably because of the lack of dramatic elements in his life except for his assassination. Nevertheless, the degree of hostility toward Domitian that is

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<sup>10</sup> Gilbert Charles-Picard, *Auguste et Néron: Le Secret de l'Empire* (Paris, Hachette, 1962); Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); John F. Drinkwater, *Nero: Emperor and Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> One article making such a comparison: Jonathan Jones, "To Understand Trump, We Should Look to the Tyrants of Ancient Rome," *The Guardian*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2017/jan/25/donald-trump-president-tyrants-ancient-rome>; see also Kirk Freudenburg's comments on the rampant comparisons of the politicians to the Roman emperors known as tyrants: "The commentators who write these articles do not seem to realize that they are themselves victims of the fake news industry of the second century A.D., a period when hating on the Julio-Claudian emperors of the previous century was its own burgeoning enterprise." Kirk Freudenburg, "Donald Trump and Rome's Mad Emperors," *Common Dreams*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2018/04/29/donald-trump-and-romes-mad-emperors>

palpable in ancient sources by aristocratic authors in the immediate aftermath of his assassination can be seen in the common beliefs about him, which are still occasionally mistaken for historical fact. According to ancient sources by Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius, Domitian was arrogant enough to officially order the public to address him as *dominus et deus noster*, a title illustrating his autocracy and claim to divinity. He was extremely cruel to persecute senators, some of whom were known as philosophers or Stoics, as well as his closest relatives in the Flavian family. He monitored the aristocracy through his *delatores* (informants), thereby instilling fear in the Senate and agitating distrust among the senators. He was also greedy and profligate enough to confiscate property. Right after the assassination of Domitian, the Senate issued a *damnatio memoriae* to obliterate all records of Domitian throughout the Roman Empire. The memory of Domitian cannot but be left vulnerable to distortion or erasure because there was no one known with motivation to remember the condemned emperor in a better light after his death; moreover, despite his late adoption of two children of a relative, Domitian was the last Flavian emperor, and his immediate successors were not members of the Flavian dynasty. Domitian was later accused of persecution of Christians, though this charge was created long after his death.

Domitian's legacy as a monstrous tyrant was not questioned much between the Middle Ages and the Age of Enlightenment. Edward Gibbon called Domitian the "timid inhuman," and he included his reign in the "age of iron" that was to be followed by the "golden age" of Trajan and the Antonines.<sup>12</sup> In the late nineteenth century, scholars started to look at Domitian from a different angle that ancient authors had never employed in assessing

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<sup>12</sup> Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, vol. I: 96–7: "The golden age of Trajan and the Antonines had been preceded by an age of iron. . . . It is almost superfluous to enumerate the unworthy successors of Augustus. Their unparalleled vices, and the splendid theatre on which they were acted, have saved them from oblivion. The dark unrelenting Tiberius, the furious Caligula, the stupid Claudius, the profligate and cruel Nero, the beastly Vitellius, and the timid inhuman Domitian are condemned to everlasting infamy."

an emperor. Theodore Mommsen first presented Domitian as one of the most careful administrators, calling his reign, “somber but intelligent despotism.”<sup>13</sup> This idea that Rome's subjects benefitted from the industry and vigilance of Domitian as a careful, able, and just administrator was picked up by scholars in the twentieth century such as Ronald Syme and Harry Pleket.<sup>14</sup> In 1894, shortly after Mommsen reassessed Domitian, Stéphane Gsell wrote a biographical monograph about Domitian. His approach, which was to admit Domitian as an in-between ruler, not fitting into the dichotomy of good and bad emperors, was then a novel angle.<sup>15</sup> However, as I will discuss in the third chapter, it was also Gsell who attached the label of the “reign of terror” to the legacy of Domitian, which was to be widely employed to encapsulate the nature of his reign.<sup>16</sup> After Syme and Pleket, the scholar who endeavored to recalibrate Domitian and his reign was Kenneth Waters, who published several articles on the reassessment of Domitian's image in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>17</sup> Pointing to the myths surrounding the memory of Domitian, Waters recast Domitian as a “moderately decent man” and demonstrated the continuity between Domitian's administration and court and those of

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<sup>13</sup> Theodore Mommsen, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6 (Weidmann, 1908), 544.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Syme, “The Imperial Finances under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 20 (1930): 55–70; Harry W. Pleket, “Domitian, the Senate and the Provinces,” *Mnemosyne* 14 (1961): 296–315. For skepticism about Syme's and Pleket's interpretation of Domitian: Miriam Griffin, “The Flavians,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 2, eds. Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Dominic Rathbone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 76–83.

<sup>15</sup> Denis Lengrand, “L'Essai sur le règne de Domitien de S. Gsell et la réévaluation du règne de Domitien,” *Pallas* 40 (1994): 57.

<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Gsell, *L'Empereur Domitien*, 334, did not question the validity of the belief that Domitian requested the public to address him as *dominus et deus noster*. Gsell simply saw that Domitian demanded such excessive honors out of vanity or pride. Franz Sauter and Kenneth Scott, who published books on the Flavian imperial cult as early as the 1930s, hypothesized that Domitian claimed divinity during his lifetime, and therefore did not question the validity of his request for the title *dominus et deus noster*. Franz Sauter, *Der römische Kaiserkult bei Martial und Statius* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1934); Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936).

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth H. Waters, “The Second Dynasty of Rome,” *Phoenix* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 198–218; “The Character of Domitian,” *Phoenix* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1964): 49–77; “Traianus Domitiani Continuator,” *American Journal of Philology* 90, no. 4 (1969): 385–405; “Juvenal and the Reign of Trajan,” *Antichthon* 4 (1970): 62–77.

his successors, especially that of the *optimus princeps* Trajan.<sup>18</sup>

Following the footsteps of the first scholars to cast this new light on the memory of Domitian, Brian Jones has published a series of articles, commentaries on Suetonius's *Lives* of the Flavian Emperors, and biographies of the emperors Titus and Domitian since the 1970s.<sup>19</sup> In the preface to *The Emperor Domitian*, published in 1992, Jones posited the need to revisit Domitian's reign: "The traditional portrait of Domitian as a bloodthirsty tyrant has not completely disappeared and still needs emendation. . . . One important aspect of the reign demands study—the role of his court and his relationship with his courtiers."<sup>20</sup> Jones repudiated the misunderstanding that Domitian antagonized the Senate by looking into the composition of the emperor's court through prosopography. After Jones, Pat Southern approached Domitian from a psychological angle and portrayed Domitian as a tragic tyrant suffering from paranoia, possibly originating in his early childhood, which estranged him from his closest relatives over the course of his reign.<sup>21</sup> As recently as 2012, Jens Gering published a monograph wherein he portrayed Domitian as a politician who selectively employed the traditions set by the first *princeps* Augustus, and his father and founder of the Flavian dynasty, Vespasian. Most recently in 2019, Verena Schulz published a book on the imperial representation of Nero and Domitian in the works of Tacitus, Dio Cassius, and Suetonius.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Waters, "Character of Domitian," 69; Waters, "Traianus Domitiani Continuator," 404: "My aim has been to show . . . how closely Trajan followed the lines established by the preceding dynasty and by Domitian in particular."

<sup>19</sup> Just to name a few: Brian W. Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order: A Prosopographical Study of Domitian's Relationship with the Senate, AD 81-96* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1979); *The Emperor Titus* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992); *Suetonius: Domitian* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, vii.

<sup>21</sup> Pat Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Jens Gering, *Domitian, dominus et deus? Herrschafts- und Machtstrukturen im Römischen Reich*

Despite the efforts to look at Domitian and his reign from a different angle, the pendulum of public opinion always swings to and fro. After tracing the current trends to revisit the reign of Domitian by critically reading senatorial accounts, Richard Saller concluded his article with skepticism:

In the end, these methodological problems leave me skeptical about the possibility of writing [an] imperial biography in the absence of substantial first-hand testimony from the emperor himself. The senatorial hostility toward Domitian is obvious, but it is not obvious that the modern historian has the kind of alternative evidence needed to penetrate the hostility in order to tell a more accurate story of Domitian's attitudes and policies.<sup>23</sup>

Peter Wiseman, who compared Domitian to Saddam Hussein, enumerated the common features of the two: “The importance of the family with the concomitant necessity sometimes to execute close relatives, the importance of military success, with grandiose triumphal monuments to commemorate it; the importance of the personality cult, with images of the leader everywhere; and the importance of totally loyal and ruthlessly efficient security machine.” Wiseman also criticized the revisionist approach to question the authenticity of the senatorial accounts: “To dismiss [the terror of the senators in Domitian’s last years, recalled by Pliny and Tacitus] as rhetorical exaggeration or tendentious apologia is a quite inadequate response. They were there, they lived through it. We should not disbelieve them just because they wanted to put it before our eyes.”<sup>24</sup> Miriam Griffin, who titled her review of Jones’s *The Emperor Domitian* “The Unlikeable Emperor,” added that even his defenders scarcely denied

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*zur Zeit des letzten Flaviers* (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2012); Verena Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation: Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius on Nero and Domitian* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); see also Lisa Cordes, *Kaiser und Tyrann: Die Kodierung und Umkodierung der Herrscherrepräsentation Neros und Domitians* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Richard P. Saller, “Domitian and His Successors: Methodological Traps in Assessing Emperors,” *American Journal of Ancient History* 15 (1990): 17.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Wiseman, “Domitian and the Dynamics of Terror in Classical Rome,” *History Today* 46, no. 9 (September 1996): 24.

that Domitian was autocratic and oppressive.<sup>25</sup>

The goal of my dissertation is neither to portray Domitian as the best, amenable *princeps*, nor to renounce the authenticity of the accounts of the Roman elite. Apparently, there must have been a “profound dysfunction” in communication between Domitian and some senators of his reign,<sup>26</sup> which Domitian and the senators seldom tried to resolve. Nevertheless, although Wiseman emphasized the need to hearken to the voices of Pliny and Tacitus, who presented their testimonies as victims of the terror while Domitian held power, Domitian did not have the upper hand in the battle of the memories that took place after his death. Despite Saller’s indication of the lack of first-hand accounts by Domitian himself to counterbalance the hostile accounts of the senatorial authors, the only emperor whose first-person narrative about his reign has been transmitted to posterity is that of the first emperor Augustus. Augustus’s autobiography, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, delineates the ways that Augustus himself wished to be remembered by posterity. Domitian does not appear to have paid attention to how he would be remembered, especially in the writings of the elite; he might have expected the poetry of Martial and Statius or any works of the authors who depicted him in a positive light to be transmitted to posterity. With the condemnation of Domitian, however, the poems that Martial and Statius wrote during his reign were accused of adulation and the poets were often branded as court poets. Therefore, the hostile accounts of Domitian by the alleged survivors of his reign—Pliny and Tacitus—gained authority and reliability over time. In the battlefield of memories of Domitian, the ultimate victors were Pliny and Tacitus.

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<sup>25</sup> Griffin, “The Flavians,” 76; Griffin, “The Unlikeable Emperor.” Review of *The Emperor Domitian* by Brian W. Jones in *The Classical Review* 43, no. 1 (1993): 113–6.

<sup>26</sup> Mihály Lóland Dészpa, “The Flavians and the Senate,” in *A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome*, ed. Andrew Zissos (Chicster: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016): 183.

The profound dysfunction or misunderstanding between Domitian and some senators cannot be ascribed to only one of the two parties, neither can its origin be confined to the reign of Domitian. The other emperors who were not categorically considered to have been tyrannical (e.g., Tiberius, Claudius) had failed in establishing a rapport with the Senate. Moreover, the somehow strikingly similar traits, or vices, of the emperors branded as tyrants in the accounts by the Roman elite (which will be discussed in detail in the epilogue) imply that there must have been some metrics that had been used to assess each emperor in Roman imperial historiography. In my dissertation, I trace the origins of the dysfunction between emperors and the senatorial elite to the ambiguous nature of the Principate, which appears to be a mixture of monarchy and oligarchy on the surface but was a monarchy in essence. The first *princeps*, Augustus, devised such a mixture because of his contemporary political complexities and successfully maintained the Republican façade of the Principate. One of the keys to his success was catering to the senatorial expectation of the *civilis princeps*, the emperor who acts as one of the senators and treats the Senate with due respect as if the Principate were the Republic. Augustus's success marked him as the exemplary emperor whom every successor was to imitate. Though the Republican wrapping was to be peeled off over time, the senatorial expectation for an emperor to still treat the Senate respectfully without revealing the unwanted monarchical reality did not abate. While Domitian, who did not deign to cater to such demands, was denigrated as a tyrant, his successor Trajan, who did not betray these senatorial expectations, was extolled as the best emperor in Roman history.

### **Chapter Summaries**

To trace the origins of the difficulties that each emperor must have faced in establishing a good relationship with the senatorial elite, the first chapter deals with how the

first emperor, Augustus, became the *exemplum* of the *civilis princeps* in Roman imperial historiography, and the responses of his successors toward the senatorial demand to act like Augustus. Thoroughly aware of the Roman hatred toward monarchs, proven in the recent assassination of Julius Caesar, Augustus devised a new political system, which modern scholars call the Principate. Though the Principate was a monarchy just as much as the *princeps* was a monarch, Augustus needed the collaboration of the Senate, the former *de facto* oligarchs of the Republic, to settle the Principate. He invented the polite fiction of the *civilis princeps*: the first man who acts with civility among the equal senators. His civility was proven in his accessibility to every senator, and his modesty through his refusal of any excessive honors only appropriate for a monarch. Through this polite fiction of the *civilis princeps*, Augustus successfully maintained the illusion in the Senate that the political body still held its traditional power. However, his successors were not equipped with the charisma of the one who extinguished the fire of the civil wars and brought peace to Rome or the ingenuity to walk the fine line of masking monarchy under the Republican façade. Instead, Augustus's successors inherited the dilemma of pretending that their rule was not a monarchy while they were monarchs. The chapter will demonstrate the failure of Augustus's immediate successor Tiberius to tread the Augustan path to the distaste of the senators and the decisions of the later emperors in the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties to follow or not follow the Augustan model of the *civilis princeps*. Caligula and Nero, who followed the Augustan model in their relationship with the Senate only in the early phase of their reign, were marked as tyrants. Likewise, Domitian deviated from the path to act the *civilis princeps* and trod the one that led to being branded as an arrogant, bloodthirsty tyrant.

The second chapter will discuss the public perception of Domitian as an arrogant tyrant who liked to be flattered by examining the unsubstantiated belief that Domitian

ordered or requested the public to officially address or refer to him as “*dominus et deus noster*” (our master and god). Scrutinizing the chapters where Suetonius describes Domitian’s arrogance in the *Life of Domitian*, I will first discuss the relationship between the charge of being arrogant and the title *dominus*. The word *dominus* as a term of address developed into a deferential term in Roman society, with its original meaning, master, somewhat attenuated. At the same time, as the word *dominus* was employed to signify politeness or evoke a speaker’s wish to gratify the addressee, it was often linked to the charge of flattery. When applied to the emperors, the oppressive connotation of the word *dominus*, revived alongside its adulatory sense, bolstered; each emperor’s reaction to the word became the litmus test to determine their character as civil or arrogant. As expected, the most exemplary reactions came from the *civilis princeps* Augustus to ban such a detestable term of address in both public and private. In contrast, Domitian did not prohibit the use of the term for himself, which led to the mistaken belief that Domitian ordered the official use of *dominus* or *dominus et deus noster*. The public perception of Domitian’s arrogance may have led to the belief that he ordered the use of such a term to form part of his tyrannical reputation.

In the third chapter, I will investigate another crucial vice that constitutes Domitian’s tyrannical image: cruelty. I will first challenge the validity of the label “reign of terror,” which was first attached by modern scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to Domitian’s reign and is still occasionally used in current scholarship. In relation to the “reign of terror” and when it started, I dispute the existence of any watershed moment in Domitian’s cruelty, such as in 89 CE when Saturninus rebelled or in 93 CE when the friends, often referred to as philosophers or Stoics, of Pliny and Tacitus were condemned. In the views of Pliny and Tacitus, Domitian’s terror was interwoven with his persecution of the senators; therefore, I will turn to the list of the consular victims that Suetonius provided in the

*Life of Domitian*, and delve into the accusations levelled against each victim, their validity, and the circumstances that might have led to their persecution. For Pliny and Tacitus, the seven victims in 93 CE were the symbols of Domitian's tyranny; yet, Suetonius introduced only two of them in his list of consular victims—Arulenus Rusticus and Helvidius Priscus the Younger—without treating them with special consideration. Suetonius, instead, enumerated the charges against each victim haphazardly and somehow trivialized the charges, thereby highlighting Domitian's image as a tyrant who would execute a consular for the most absurd charges.

In the last chapter, I will discuss the process of the creation of the image of Domitian as a fearful tyrant. First, I will trace the origins of senatorial enmity toward Domitian back to the reigns of Nero and Vespasian. As Helvidius Priscus the Younger, one of the seven victims in 93 CE, had a family tradition of challenging imperial authority, I will discuss the confrontations raised by Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus the Elder against Nero and Vespasian, respectively. Though the family members of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus the Elder might have hated the emperors and their imperial authority, a thorough examination of the victims of late 93 CE will elicit the conclusion that Domitian did not discriminate against the descendants of the senators who raised dissenting voices toward his predecessors and appointed them as consuls. Just like the label "reign of terror," there was another label that played a pivotal role in elevating the victims of the year 93 CE to the status of martyrdom—the "philosophical," "stoic," or "intellectual" opposition. Indicating the invalidity of each label, I will reveal why Pliny and Tacitus saw the prosecutions of the seven victims in 93 CE as the apex of Domitian's cruelty by looking into their friendship with the victims and tracing the careers of Pliny, Tacitus, and Domitian's immediate successors, Nerva and Trajan. Placing special emphasis on the fact that their careers were never cut short by

Domitian, I attribute Pliny's and Tacitus's hostile accounts about Domitian to their feeling of collective guilt toward the victims in 93 CE as survivors of Domitian's reign. With the condemnation of the memory of Domitian, the writings portraying him in a negative light gained authority to portray him as a fearful tyrant.

In the epilogue, I will look at the aftermath of Domitian's assassination as a site of memory where a certain part of Domitian's memory became crystallized and the others faded into oblivion. Despite the senatorial decree to condemn the memory of Domitian, there is continuity between the private counsellors of Domitian and those of his successors, Nerva and Trajan, that I will demonstrate by examining Juvenal's fourth satire describing an imaginary *consilium* of Domitian in his Alban villa and Pliny's letter concerning a dinner with the emperor Nerva. Despite the continuity between the reigns of Domitian and his successors, Trajan became another rare example of a good ruler after Augustus, officially called *optimus princeps* by senatorial vote. In the meantime, Domitian became the example of a bad ruler, or tyrant, as a result of the success of the alleged survivors of his reign in the battle of memories. The later emperors who were vilified as tyrants, such as Commodus and Caracalla, were likened to Domitian in later imperial historiography. However, the fact that only two emperors, Augustus and Trajan, were categorically remembered as good emperors suggests that the criteria for assessing an emperor as good might have been far from objective and was set in the first place according to the taste of those who assessed the emperors. The memory of Domitian as tyrant is a good example illustrating the partiality pervasive in historical writings by the Roman elite.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Augustan Legacy of the *civilis princeps***

This chapter examines the concept of the *civilis princeps*, a term coined by modern scholars to describe a criterion that Roman imperial historiography employed to assess whether a particular emperor and his reign should be considered good or evil. A good emperor ruled with equanimity and shared power with the Senate; a bad emperor claimed absolute authority, ruling as a tyrant who refused to treat senators as equals; such evil tyrants were despised. The Roman public, particularly the Senate who wanted to retain its own power, loathed the very idea of being ruled by an all-powerful monarch. As the first Roman emperor, Augustus was brilliant at retaining the outward forms of Republican rule and paying lip service to the Senate, while keeping full authority for himself. Grandnephew and adopted heir to Julius Caesar, who had been murdered by members of the Senate for his dictatorial aspirations, Augustus was ever mindful that Romans abhorred kingship, so he concealed the true monarchical nature of his rule under a seemingly Republican façade. Modern scholars named the new political system that Augustus created the Principate. Augustus cleverly devised the polite fiction of the *civilis princeps*, portraying himself as the first among many, ostensibly equal, citizens to maintain the veneer of Republican rule and mollify the Senate. No one could be in any doubt that Augustus was the sole ruler, but he feigned modesty and deftly presented himself as the *civilis princeps* who would treat the Senate, the former head of the Republic, with respect. The Senate had been severely weakened due to the civil wars that plagued the late Republican period. Fearing a further weakening of their position, senators were reluctant to acknowledge the demise of the Republic and keen to reassert their power, so they welcomed Augustus's gesture, even if it was patronizing and did not accord them genuine power; instead, it merely gave the illusion that the Senate was on an equal footing with the emperor. Nevertheless, the Senate acquiesced and,

as a result, the Principate was successfully established under Augustus. His reign thrived and Romans, including the later imperial historians, lauded him as a great and good emperor; a sterling example that his successors were expected to follow.

Unexpectedly, the success of the Augustan Principate and the senatorial willingness to embrace the concept of the *civilis princeps* presented Augustus's successors with a dilemma: how could they maintain the pretense of equality between the emperor and the Senate, embodied in the Augustan concept of the *civilis princeps*, when the reality of that power dynamic was anything but equal? Even worse, the authoritarian truth behind imperial rule would become increasingly difficult to disguise over succeeding generations of emperors whose imperial authority was so obvious. The favorable historical context of the Augustan era, coming on the heels of the Republic's demise and a weakened Senate, coupled with his extraordinary political acumen, enabled Augustus to succeed in masking his authority behind the outward show of the *civilis princeps*, a feat that subsequent emperors would find difficult to emulate. Crafting a public image that positioned himself and his reign midway between the Republic and Empire, Augustus intended to set himself up as the *exemplum* for his successors to imitate. Obligated to follow Augustan principles in their reigns and live up to the senatorial expectation of the *civilis princeps*, Augustus's successors were stuck between the imperial reality of their rule and anachronistic Republicanism. Since Roman imperial historiography was written by aristocratic elites—either senators or equestrian aristocrats—each emperor's ability, or inability, to remain on good terms with the aristocracy decided how they would be remembered, as a good *princeps* or a bad tyrant. Except for Vespasian and Trajan, who were praised for restoring order after the brief civil war following Nero's death and replenishing the imperial finances and stabilizing or expanding the empire's frontiers respectively, most Roman emperors did not elicit an entirely positive assessment from the aristocracy, but were not

vilified as tyrants. However, those emperors who flaunted their imperial might and refused to cater to the senatorial expectation of at least the pretense of equal treatment contained within the idea of the *civilis princeps*, were branded as evil tyrants. Among the latter group is Domitian whose reputation as a tyrant is, in my view, undeserved. He was, to be sure, no paragon of virtue, but his actions were not tyrannical. Rather, his realistic unabashed claim to imperial power precluded any desire on his part to mollify the senators and maintain the illusion of equality, which provoked their censure. In this chapter, I argue that the reputation of Domitian and his reign should be reevaluated in a more favorable light within the wider scope of Roman imperial historiography. The aristocratic writers applauded Augustus as the paragon of *civilis princeps* and judged all of his successors in comparison with him, even if, due to individual temperament or changing historical circumstance, they, unlike Augustus, could no longer exemplify *civilis princeps*.

### **The Augustan Dilemma**

“Luckier than Augustus, better than Trajan!” (*Felicio Augusto, melior Traiano!*, Eutropius *Breviarium*, 8.5.3). As this acclamation from the fourth century CE demonstrates, the founder of the Principate, Augustus, remained the paragon of proper imperial leadership more than three centuries after his reign. Despite being considered by his fellow citizens, notably the Senate and imperial historians, to be the most fortunate and best emperor, Augustus wisely shrank from any titles containing the meaning of emperor and forbade anyone to call him such a despised word. He may have been an all-powerful emperor, but in a masterstroke of public relations, he refrained from overtly assuming the role of monarch.<sup>27</sup> The success of the

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition." in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, ed. Karl Galinsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13. For more information on the list of deeds not done, see Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 13–4.

Augustan Principate, the monarchy masquerading as egalitarian rule that replaced the Roman Republic which had lasted for almost five centuries, was not achieved in a day and required deft political maneuvering on Augustus's part. Only in hindsight could Augustus be deemed fortunate.

Augustus renounced any overt or tacit declaration of his position as a monarch, which was rooted in his awareness that Romans hated kingship and in the cautionary tale provided by his predecessor, Julius Caesar, who had been murdered by Roman senators because of his aspirations to kingship. Roman disdain for kingship has a long history that could be traced back to the fate of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome, who, some Roman writers and historians believed, was murdered by the early Senate.<sup>28</sup> Rome had not been ruled by a king since the expulsion of the last king, Tarquin Superbus, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. As Romans wanted to keep it that way, they vehemently resisted the idea of kingship in the Republican period. Anyone accused of aspiring to kingship (*adfectatio regni*) was denounced for encroaching upon senatorial authority. Late Republican history revolves around the tension between advocates for the Republican cause and powerful warlords who coveted personal glory and additional authority, rather than being content as just one voice among several hundred senators.<sup>29</sup> Late in the Republican era, Julius Caesar, Octavian's adoptive father, fueled that tension and directly threatened the integrity of the Republic. The Senate made him *dictator* for life (*dictator perpetuo*) in February 44 BCE (Suet. *Caes.* 76.1; Plut. *Caes.* 57.1; Appian, *BC*

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<sup>28</sup> Others thought that his life ended with an apotheosis. See Livy, 1.16.4; cf. Suet. *Caes.* 81.3; on similarities between Romulus and Caesar as tyrants assassinated by the senators, see Marie ver Eecke, *La République et le roi: le mythe de Romulus à la fin de la République romaine. De l'archéologie à l'histoire* (Paris: De Boccard, 2008), 458 and Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Iulius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 357, 390-391.

<sup>29</sup> A salient example of someone who provoked the Senators by ignoring their authority would be Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, see Plut. *Tib. Gracch.* 19.2-3. On senatorial efforts to curb the overreaching ambition of young generals, such as the *lex Villia annalis*, see Richard J. Evans and Marc Kleijwegt, "Did the Romans Like Young Men? A Study of the Lex Villia Annalis: Causes and Effects," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 92 (1992): 181-195.

2.106), an action which precipitated his assassination. As Appian indicates more than a century after Caesar's death, his dictatorship was perceived by Romans, especially senators, as exactly the same as kingship (*BC*, 111). Roman senators saw the Republic teetering on the brink, so they thought it crucial to act swiftly and oppose Caesar's nascent dictatorship with lethal force.

Julius Caesar, recognizing that he needed an heir, wrote an unprecedented request in his will to posthumously adopt Gaius Octavius as his son. The murder of Julius Caesar gave Gaius Octavius, who was only eighteen years old at the time, sudden entrée into the Roman political arena. Octavian fought ruthlessly in the civil wars, especially against Mark Antony. When he stood as sole victor in 31 BCE, Octavian immediately began to refashion his image into one his countrymen might find more palatable: he endeavored to erase from people's minds his prominent role in the bitter internecine wars as well as Julius Caesar's image of dictator for life.<sup>30</sup> Later, as he recollected his achievements and compiled them in the *Res Gestae*, Augustus gave his past deeds a Republican gloss, asserting that the true purpose of the second triumvirate had been to save the Republic, and defined his current position as *princeps senatus* (*RG* 7.1–2). The latter action was a brilliant move, for it reassured his fellow senators that he was still one of them, and it also gave the impression that he was reaffirming the importance of the Senate. Augustus also claimed to be the one who finally brought the bloody decades-long civil war to an end and thrice closed the gates of the Temple of Janus, thereby championing himself as the bringer of peace—the much-vaunted *Pax Romana*—to war-torn Rome (*RG* 7.13–14). He then transferred the safe-keeping of the Republic into the hands of the Senate and the people of Rome, another deft move that appeared to afford them genuine responsibility without diminishing his authority. In gratitude for this, they bestowed upon him the *corona*

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<sup>30</sup> Edwin S. Ramage, "Augustus' Treatment of Julius Caesar," *Historia* 34, no. 2 (1985): 223–4, shows how Augustus revised his treatment of the memory of Julius Caesar.

*civica*, a civic crown awarded to him for saving Rome and the lives of its citizens, and the golden *clupeus virtutis*, upon which Augustus's four virtues—courage, clemency, justice and piety—were inscribed. Lastly, Augustus declared that although he excelled everyone in authority (*auctoritas*), he wielded no more official power (*potestas*) than any of his peers. Like his earlier adoption of the title, *princeps senatus*, Augustus carefully framed his identity as merely the first among equals.

In 27 BCE, he was given the name Augustus, which would become a title over time. From then onwards, he carefully nurtured his dual image as peace-maker and *princeps*, first among equals, to gain the trust of his fellow Romans and the Senate. Nonetheless, the true nature of the new political order that Augustus created, the Principate, has been debated from antiquity to the present.<sup>31</sup> Augustus manipulated the Senate so that he could be invested with the powers that he needed as *princeps*, while evading the taint of dictatorship or kingship and feigning Republicanism. Augustus's power rested on two solid pillars: the *tribunicia potestas* and the (*maius*) *imperium proconsulare*. He was awarded tribunician power in 23 BCE, which gave him the right to call the people's assembly and the Senate into session and to introduce legislation. Augustus was given tribunician power for life, which he seems to have had no qualms about even though it contravened the Roman Republican constitution (*RG* 10.1). In another deft move, Augustus did not technically hold the office of tribune, but only exercised its power, so he was able to evade the charge of remaining in the same office for thirty-seven years consecutively—such a long tenure would have been considered an abuse of power that

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<sup>31</sup> For example, Penelope J. Goodman wrote an article, "Best of Emperors or Subtle Tyrant? Augustus the Ambivalent," which appears in the volume, *Afterlives of Augustus AD 14–2014*. She discusses the many different interpretations of the reign of Augustus in antiquity and the Middle Ages, during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, and in the modern era. Penelope J. Goodman, "Best of Emperors or Subtle Tyrant? Augustus the Ambivalent," in *Afterlives of Augustus AD 14–2014*, ed. Penelope J. Goodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1–31.

would have infuriated the Senate. With the *maius imperium proconsulare*, Augustus was able to be in charge of the armies in a certain number of imperial provinces, but he wisely never bragged about it, unlike his willingness to frequently refer to his tribunician power in the *RG*.<sup>32</sup>

Augustus may have thought that he successfully masked his monarchal power under the guise of Republican rule, but imperial historians were not so easily hoodwinked. The ambivalence that imperial authors felt concerning whether to define Augustus as a Republican *princeps* or an undisputed monarch is palpable throughout their works.<sup>33</sup> Velleius Paterculus, a contemporary of Augustus and Tiberius, echoed the Augustan propaganda that peace was restored (*revocata*), laws regained their validity (*vis*), authority (*maiestas*) was given back to the courts, dignity (*maiestas*) to the Senate, and power (*imperium*) to the magistrates. thus the Republic, in both form and substance, had been restored (2.89.3–4). About a century after the death of Augustus, Tacitus and Suetonius implied that the Principate was essentially monarchical in character, though they tactfully refrained from making a clear statement to that effect. Tacitus insinuated that the true nature of the Principate was cleverly hidden when he illustrated how Octavian, who was the sole leader who survived the civil war, adroitly changed his image from that of brutal warlord to Augustus, the revered *princeps*. Then, while distracting soldiers and commoners alike by lavishing them with gifts, grain, and the sweet respite from politics (*dulcedine otii*), Augustus managed to covertly appropriate the functions (*munia*) of the Senate, the magistrates, and the laws and gain imperial power (*imperium*) (*Ann.* 1.1–2).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 26; for a brief discussion about the constitutional position of Augustus, see Peter A. Brunt and J.M. Moore, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 8–12; for information about the Roman emperor as the apex of the social and political hierarchy and the basis of his power, see Carlos F. Noreña, "Early Imperial Monarchy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, eds. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 536–7.

<sup>33</sup> Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 15–6; Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Erich S. Gruen, "Augustus and the Making of the Principate," in *The Cambridge Companion to the*

Suetonius began his imperial biographies with Julius Caesar and described Augustus as the second emperor, presumably because the biographer regarded that the monarchy had already started under Julius Caesar. It was not until the era of the Severan emperors that the word “monarchy” was used to describe the Augustan Principate; Dio Cassius was the first imperial author to do so, though he employed the term in a positive light. To Dio Cassius, the Augustan Principate was a felicitous blend of monarchy and democracy that liberated people from the excesses of democracy and the insolence of tyranny (56.43.4–44.1).<sup>35</sup>

As can be seen from Dio Cassius’s positive assessment, Augustus was successful at cloaking the true nature of the Principate—a monarchy that would be detested by both the Senate and the people of Rome—behind a Republican façade. Underneath the seemingly Republican veneer, however, Augustus made changes to the Senate by reducing its membership (Caesar had inflated the number of senators to 1,200) and introducing legislation to curb senatorial power (e.g. the *Lex Julia de senatu habendo* in 9 BCE).<sup>36</sup> Between 27 and 18 BCE, he instituted a *consilium*, which allowed him to consider items in advance of their being laid before the Senate, thereby stripping the Senate as a whole of its right to be the first to examine and debate items of business. Augustus took increasing control over administrative structures when he created new public offices, such as supervisors for aqueducts and roads, and the supply

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*Age of Augustus*, ed. Karl Galinsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>35</sup> See Walter Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, eds. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Mark Toher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 74, on a clear tripartite schema that Dio Cassius set: "after the (republican) phase of *demokratia* (up to Philippi: Books 3–47), a *dynasteia* (up to 29 or 27 B.C.: Books 48–52), and finally the *monarchia* (Books 51–80)."

<sup>36</sup> For more on how Augustus reduced the size of the Senate and subsequently created a new senatorial class, see Richard J. A. Talbert, "Augustus and the Senate," *Greece & Rome* 31, no. 1 (1984): 55–6; for information on the *lex Julia de senatu habendo*, see Talbert, "Augustus and the Senate," 57–9; Jonathan S. Perry, "The *Lex Julia de Senatu Habendo*: A View from the 1930s," in *Aspects of Ancient Institutions and Geography: Studies in Honor of Richard J. A. Talbert*, eds. Lee L. Brice and Daniëlle Slootjes (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 49–52.

and distribution of grain. Those actions demonstrated his considerable administrative skill and awareness that maintaining fresh water and adequate food supplies to Roman cities was vital. Roads were crucial for the military and for commerce. By creating a supervisor of roads, Augustus was taking an active hand in overseeing the building of a vast network of roads and bridges which would facilitate commerce, the efficient movement of Roman armies and communication to distant parts of the empire. In effect, the Senate was deprived of its major functions, such as oversight of foreign policy, the military and financial affairs.<sup>37</sup>

Senators likely objected to their diminished power under Augustus, but their criticism was never overt, so it can only be inferred. Tacitus describes the absence of senatorial opposition to the augmentation of Augustus's power in the *Annals* 1.2.1: the boldest (*ferocissimi*) had fallen in battle or in the proscription, whereas the remaining nobles, who were more willing to acquiesce, were elevated higher with wealth and honors; promoted by revolution (*nouis ex rebus aucti*), they preferred the safety of the present to the perils of the past.<sup>38</sup> Tacitus's description seems to be true, at least on the surface. While the military and imperial administration were controlled by Augustus without any statute restricting the reach of his power, the Senate was still nominally in charge of administrative tasks within the provincial administration, legislation, and diplomacy, and the titles of magistracies remained the same. Individual senators served as provincial governors, whose primary duties were the administration of justice and the resolution of territorial disputes, and as commanders of legions.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Talbert, "Augustus and the Senate," 61–2; *Senate in Imperial Rome*, 488.

<sup>38</sup> How to translate *tuta et praesentia quam uetera et periculosa*, see Francis R. D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus: Volume 1, Annals 1.1-54* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107.

<sup>39</sup> Noreña, "Early Imperial Monarchy," 537; Richard J. A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 341–487; Clifford Ando, "From Republic to Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (Oxford: Oxford University

### **Augustus, the Exemplary *civilis princeps***

Along with his ingenuity in masking the true extent of his power, Augustus created the polite fiction of the *civilis princeps*, a sly improvement on the previous fiction that the senatorial aristocrats had held during the Republic. In order to better understand the concept of “polite fiction” and how it might have interacted with other conceits in ancient Rome, it may be helpful to borrow an example from the modern world. Sakamoto and Naotsuka introduced the concept of “polite fiction” to illustrate typical cultural misunderstandings between Japanese and Americans.<sup>40</sup> The main reason for adopting a polite fiction is to mask any hierarchy that could result from differences in class, social rank, age, gender and so on and not to offend one party who is likely superior, or at least equal, to the other party by shattering the socially established polite fiction. What matters here is that each society, or even each class, holds its own polite fiction that would likely differ from that of others. For instance, North American society holds the polite fiction that “you and I are equals” even when a hierarchy in rank between the two interlocutors exists. Meanwhile, the prevalent fiction in Japan, where politeness is gauged as an expression of humility, is that “I will treat you as my superior, irrespective of whether or not you are.” This is characteristic of most people from East Asia where similar notions of politeness abound. Accordingly, students from South Korea or Japan would feel uneasy if an American professor were to ask them to interact with him/her on a first name basis, because that would be unimaginable in their own country. The professor from America would, in turn, be puzzled by the students’ seeming aloofness. Ultimately the students would likely change their manner of address as a way to adapt to a different culture and to

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Press, 2011), 38.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Sakamoto and Reiko Naotsuka, *Polite Fictions in Collision: Why Japanese and Americans Seem Rude to Each Other* (Tokyo: Kinseido, 2004), 5–8.

satisfy the professor. Despite the goodwill of both parties, the cultural misunderstanding remains unaltered, as would happen when different polite fictions collide.

The disappointment and confusion that could arise from one party's refusal to satisfy the polite fiction of the other party also existed in Republican Rome. In the late Republic, aristocrats had their own polite fiction: they expected a certain level of courtesy to exist among themselves due to their presumed equal standing as senators, as will be seen in the case of Cicero and Brutus.<sup>41</sup> In two letters to his friend Atticus dated to 50 BCE, Cicero intimated his unease regarding Brutus's epistolary tone. In the first letter, Cicero asserted that Brutus wrote in a haughty and arrogant tone that lacked *savoir-faire* (Cic. *Att.* 6.1.7: *contumaciter, adroganter, ἀκοινονοήτως*) even when he had a favor to ask and, therefore, should have been more conciliatory. Cicero asked Atticus to write to Brutus about this issue so that he could find out how Brutus would react to hearing of Cicero's discomfort. Apparently, Brutus did not change his tone; three months later, Cicero wrote to Atticus that Brutus continued to send him letters that unfailingly contained something arrogant or uncivil (Cic. *Att.* 6.3.7: *adrogans et ἀκοινονόητον*). Despite his concession that he was amused rather than irritated by Brutus, Cicero added that Brutus should give more thought to what he wrote and to whom. Though Brutus and Cicero were both senators, and therefore of the same political rank, Brutus was more than twenty years younger than Cicero. This meant that Brutus should have been deferential and courteous to his elder colleague. Despite Cicero's protestation that he was not offended, he likely was for his choice of words suggested a veiled condemnation of Brutus for being either unwilling or unable to meet Cicero's expectations.<sup>42</sup> But Cicero's irritation

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<sup>41</sup> For more on "polite fiction" in the late Republic, see Jon Hall, *Politeness and Politics in Cicero's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66–7; Brutus's arrogance might have been due to his noble lineage as a member of the Iunii family. Cicero, as a *novus homo* from Arpinum who blazed a trail for himself as orator and senator, might have found Brutus's noble haughtiness irritating.

<sup>42</sup> Cic. *Att.* 6.1.7: *contumaciter, adroganter, ἀκοινονοήτως*, 6.3.7: *adrogans et ἀκοινονόητον*; see also

stemmed less from his expectation of deference due to his age and more from Brutus's class-based arrogance, who assumed that he could be arrogant and uncivil with impunity. Though there was an expectation of civility among senators, that civility was both predicated upon and the outward manifestation of the polite fiction that senators were presumed to be equal, despite differences in age or class. That polite fiction of genuine equality among senators was supposed to apply to the emperor as well. It was that pretense of sharing equal power with the Senate, when he kept full authority for himself, that Augustus sought to maintain.

As he established and stabilized the Principate, Augustus did not deny or discard that aristocratic polite fiction of civility based upon presumed equality. Instead, through self-deprecation that made him appear to be less powerful than he was in reality (e.g., *RG* 34), Augustus married the Republican polite fiction of civility among equals that the senators espoused to the imperial fiction of the *civilis princeps*. According to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill who first used the term, *civilis princeps*, to show the equivocal position of *princeps* in the Principate and investigated its application in the imperial biographies written by Suetonius,<sup>43</sup> the imperial virtue of *civilitas* represents the behavior of a *princeps* who voluntarily stoops to play the role of *civis* so that citizens could be assured that in their society the freedom and standing of individual citizens were protected by law, not by the whim of an autocrat.<sup>44</sup> Though the term *civis* seems to have been intended to connote all Roman citizens, the most significant citizens, whom the first *princeps* had to win over, were the senators who themselves capitalized on the Augustan fiction of the restored Republic. Moreover, it was aristocratic authors who left accounts of the emperors. For instance, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Dio Cassius belonged

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Hall, *Politeness and Politics*, 4, 211 n. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King." *Journal of Roman Studies* 72 (1982): 32–48; *Suetonius* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps," 42–3.

to the Senate, and the equestrian biographer Suetonius employed senatorial tropes in his characterization of each emperor. How an emperor is remembered, whether as a good, civil *princeps* or a bad, arrogant autocrat, always revolved around his rapport with the aristocracy, more precisely whether or not he catered to the senatorial interpretation of the *civilis princeps*.

An ideal *princeps* featured two crucial aspects of *civilitas*: an act of denial (*recusatio*) of any elevated status or excessive honors that would suggest the superiority of the emperor over the supposedly equal senators and an elaborate show of respect by the emperor towards the Senate.<sup>45</sup> These two aspects of *civilitas* were exemplified by Augustus who was keenly aware of the imperious, arrogant behavior of his predecessor, Julius Caesar, which provoked the senators' hatred and led to his murder. Julius Caesar accepted excessive honors that were appropriate only for Hellenistic kings or deities and assumed extraordinary offices in direct violation of Republican traditions of collegiality or limited terms of office. He flaunted his contempt for the Senate and aspiration to kingship especially in the final years when he reached the apex of his *cursus honorum*—the perpetual dictatorship (Suet. *Iul.* 76–79). In stark contrast to Caesar's arrogant folly, Suetonius lauds Augustus for having left “ample and powerful evidence of his *clementia* and *civilitas*.”<sup>46</sup> Suetonius devoted six chapters to exemplifying these virtues of Augustus, but focused only on a few select examples (*Aug.* 51–6).

It is worth noting that Julius Caesar did, on occasion, display the virtue of *clementia*. for he pardoned the remaining followers of Pompey (Suet. *Iul.* 75); and Augustus also showed *clementia* when he did not pursue libelous words against himself with the charge of *maiestas* (*Aug.* 51). What sharply differentiated Augustus from Caesar was his *civilitas*, which he demonstrated by his refusal (*recusatio*) of any inappropriate honors and his good rapport with

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<sup>45</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 163.

<sup>46</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 51: *clementiae civilitatisque eius multa et magna documenta sunt.*

the senators.<sup>47</sup> Augustus refused self-aggrandizing honors such as temples dedicated in his name both in the city of Rome and throughout the provinces, and he even melted down silver statues of himself, spending the money instead on dedicating the golden tripod to Apollo on the Palatine (*RG.* 22.3). When the Roman people demanded that he become a dictator, he knelt down, threw his toga from his shoulders, baring his breast in feigned humility, and begged them not to insist. He forbade the application of the word *dominus* to himself, which could have been legitimately applied to him as *paterfamilias*, even in his own household. He was accessible to anyone and everyone: his morning *salutatio* was always open even to commoners. Whenever he attended the meetings in the Senate, Augustus remembered every senator and greeted each one of them by name (*Aug.* 52–3). In a clear show of *civilitas*, he did not suppress senatorial freedom of speech (*libertas*; *Aug.* 54–6).<sup>48</sup>

After listing select cases representing Augustus's clemency and civility, Suetonius added that it would be easy to surmise how much he was loved because of this deserving conduct (*pro quibus meritis quanto opere dilectus sit, Aug.* 57.1) As if to prove their esteem for the civil *princeps*, the Senate and every class of Roman citizens voluntarily decreed a series of honors for Augustus (*Aug.* 57–60). The Senate and the Roman people were finally able to successfully bestow on Augustus the title *pater patriae* in 2 BCE, an honor he had previously refused, only after Valerius Messala made a sincere entreaty to the emperor to accept the title. Augustus was known to have expressed his gratitude to the senators that he had retained their unanimous approval through to the end of his life (*ut hunc consensum vestrum ad ultimum*

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<sup>47</sup> E.g., Suet. *Iul.* 77.1: *eoque arrogantiae*; 79.1: *contumeliam multo arrogantius*.

<sup>48</sup> David Wardle, *Suetonius: Life of Augustus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 36, categorizes these occasions into three types: 1) Augustus's refusal of honors only appropriate to the gods, 2) his refusal of inappropriate offices, and 3) his upholding of *libertas*, related to freedom of expression, and his reluctance to compromise the sovereignty of the law.

*finem vitae mihi perferre liceat?*, Suet. *Aug.* 58.2). As Peter Brunt points out, it was wise for Augustus to create a regime based on the consent of the Senate for it would be more durable.<sup>49</sup> How genuine Augustus's sincerity in seeking ongoing approval of the Senate really was, in light of his actual authoritarian rule, can be called into question, yet his astute display of sincerity and his important concessions before the Senate must have sufficed to mollify the senators and give credence to the illusion that the Republic was restored and the *princeps* was merely one among equals in the Senate. That pretense to equality was undercut, however, by the fact that acts of clemency could be offered only by the socially superior and the act of denial (*recusatio*) was far from Republican. Yet Augustus's repeated denial of excessive honors would only serve to reinforce his image as the *civilis princeps* and the Senate and the people would need to persist in making him accept some of them in the end.<sup>50</sup> Behind the success of the Augustan Principate there must have been a tacit agreement between Augustus, who successfully acted the role of *civilis princeps* until the end of his reign, and the senators who wanted to appear greater than they actually were to give the illusion that they had maintained the authority they used to have during the Republic. That charade of genuine senatorial power was reinforced by the civil and patronizing treatment of the Senate by Augustus, the *de facto* sole-ruler.<sup>51</sup>

By cleverly developing the Republican fiction of courtesy and equality in the Senate

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<sup>49</sup> Peter A. Brunt, "The Role of the Senate in the Augustan Regime," *Classical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1984): 423.

<sup>50</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, "*Civilis Princeps*," 37; Ellen O'Gorman, "On Not Writing About Augustus: Tacitus' <<Annals>> Book I," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 35 (1995): 104.

<sup>51</sup> Playing the civil game, Christian Meier, "Divi Filius and the Formation of the Alternative in Rome," in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, eds. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Mark Toher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 65–7; cf. *libertas senatus*, see Chaim Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome During the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 136–8.

into the polite fiction of *civilis princeps*, Augustus consciously cast himself, the head of the new political system, as a conduit of Republican *exempla* and the creator of new ones for the age to come.<sup>52</sup> Augustus's adherence to Republican precedents is well illustrated in Suetonius. Augustus was obsessed with precepts and examples (*praecepta et exempla*, Aug. 89.2) both in Latin and Greek writings, which might be instructive to the public or to individuals. Often, he copied them word for word and gave them as guidance to members of the imperial family, generals, and provincial governors. Augustus also assumed the role as restorer of old customs. As he recollected the venerable traditions he had revived, Augustus claimed that he restored many exemplary ancient practices that had become obsolete over time.<sup>53</sup> The Forum Augustum, the most visible proof of Augustus's interest in *exempla*, grafted the memory of the great ancestors of the Julii family, including Julius Caesar who was commemorated through the temple of Mars Ultor, onto the entirety of Roman history. To be sure, the apex of this great history of Rome was to be found at the center of the forum, where the bronze statue of the *pater patriae*, Augustus, stood in a bronze quadriga. Nonetheless, Augustus did not want his reign to be seen as a departure from the Republic. The statues of the Republican *summi viri* were also displayed in one of the two exedrae, which were decorated with each great man's *titulus* (consisting of name and *cursus honorum*) and *elogium* (a longer description of the honoree's deeds and accomplishments).<sup>54</sup> The same combination of the illustrious members of the Julian

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<sup>52</sup> Christina S. Kraus, "From Exempla to Exemplar? Writing History around the Emperor in Imperial Rome," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason and James Rives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 194–5.

<sup>53</sup> Aug. RG. 8.5: *legibus novis me auctore latis multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi*.

<sup>54</sup> Suet. Aug. 31.5; Jane D. Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 174–7; Augustus's intention in the Forum Augustum: Matthew B. Roller, *Models from the Past in Roman Culture: A World of Exempla* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 116–9.

family and those in the Regal and Republican periods were showcased at Augustus's funeral.<sup>55</sup>

The efforts of the founder of the Principate to make his reign appear to continue seamlessly from the Republic can also be found in his own writing, the *Res Gestae*. Even when Augustus recorded his unparalleled achievements, he made it clear that those achievements were performed with Republican precedents in mind.<sup>56</sup> Augustus's closing of the gates of the Temple of Janus three times best illustrates this point. Augustus began the thirteenth chapter of the *RG*, which describes this feat, with a reference to ancestors: "It was the will of our ancestors that the gateway of Janus Quirinus should be shut (*maiores nostri voluerunt*)." Then, he reminded his readers that the gates of the temple had been closed only twice before his birth but with him as *princeps* the Senate decreed that the temple be shut on three occasions. Accordingly, Augustus achieved the great feat of keeping the peace as the ancestors had wished, and it was the Senate that acknowledged and honored his achievements. This pattern also holds true for Augustus's account of his new laws. In the *RG* 8.5, Augustus validated the legitimacy of the new, moral legislation that he proposed based on the virtuous customs of the ancestors which had faded into disuse but would be restored by his new laws. He asserted in the *RG* 6.1 that he had not accepted any magistracy offered against the *mos maiorum* and claimed that he did not do anything unconstitutional, or against the *mos maiorum*.<sup>57</sup>

Regarding exemplary behavior, however, Augustus must not have been content with

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<sup>55</sup> Dio 56.34.1–3.

<sup>56</sup> Edwin S. Ramage, *The Nature and Purpose of Augustus' Res Gestae* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987), 31, counts eleven occasions where Augustus drew attention to the fact that he surpassed all predecessors or did something for the first time; cf. the occasions that Augustus used the phrase "never before," see *RG* 30.1, 31.1, 32.3; Ramage, *Augustus' Res Gestae* 146. Augustus described himself as the first and only one (*primus et solus*, *RG* 16.1) to have compensated Italians for land that had been confiscated so that veterans would have land to settle on, see Michèle Lowrie, "Making an Exemplum of Yourself: Cicero and Augustus," in *Classical Constructions. Papers in Memory of Don Fowler, Classicist and Epicurean*, eds. Stephen J. Heyworth, P. G. Folwer and Stephen. J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 104.

<sup>57</sup> Aug. *RG* 6.1: *nullum magistratum contra morem maiorum delatum recepi*; Lowrie, "Making an exemplum," 103–4.

connecting his achievements solely to the Republican past. As Michèle Lowrie suggests, Augustus did not hide his desire to “make an *exemplum*” of himself for posterity.<sup>58</sup> Lowrie points to Augustus’s use of the word *exemplum* twice in the same sentence in the *RG* 8.5, which Alison Cooley contends is the “key phrase for understanding Augustus’ conception of his place in society.”<sup>59</sup> The first group of *exempla maiorum* was restored by Augustus through his new laws, but Augustus also stated that he himself handed down noteworthy *exempla* to be imitated by future Romans (*ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi*).<sup>60</sup>

Augustus’s deeds were to be commemorated by posterity in general, yet there were specific people whom Augustus intended, even mandated, should follow his *exempla*, namely his successors. As Edwin Ramage points out, there is not a single reference to any senator by name in the *Res Gestae*, but Augustus specifically mentioned potential candidates for his succession, such as Marcellus, Agrippa, Gaius, Lucius, and Tiberius, by name.<sup>61</sup> Despite Augustus’s alleged denial of the dynastic nature of the Principate, he did not refrain from referring to potential successors, selected from members of the imperial family. The *RG* 20.3 posits the involvement of multiple generations of the imperial family with regards to construction and restoration of prominent Roman buildings. Augustus’s father (*a patre meo*, s.c. Julius Caesar) had initiated and almost finished the construction of the Forum Julium and the basilica between the temples of Castor and Saturn that Augustus later completed. When the basilica was destroyed by fire, Augustus had it rebuilt and rededicated in the name of his sons

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<sup>58</sup> Lowrie, “Making an *exemplum*.”

<sup>59</sup> Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 144.

<sup>60</sup> Lowrie, “Making an *exemplum*,” 105.

<sup>61</sup> Ramage, *Augustus’ Res Gestae*, 27–8; It is also noteworthy that fragments of the names of Germanicus, Tiberius, and Augustus were found in Apollonia where the Greek inscription of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* was found. See Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 16–8.

(*sub titulo nominis filiorum meorum*). In case its reconstruction was not finished during his lifetime, he gave orders that it should be completed by his heirs (*perfici ab heridibus meis iussi*). Suetonius documented Augustus's dynastic plans in *Aug.* 31.5 using Augustus's own words about the Forum Augustum: "I have devised it so that I myself, as long as I live, and the leading men of later times (*insequentium aetatum principes*) should be required by their citizens to live up to the life of those [leaders who had raised the imperium of the Roman people from obscurity to greatness] as an example (*exemplar*)."<sup>62</sup> Mindful of his own inevitable death,<sup>63</sup> Augustus anticipated that his successors would execute what he had left undone according to the path that he had paved.<sup>64</sup>

Despite Augustus's wishes that his successors follow in his footsteps, the big question for subsequent Roman leaders in the first and second centuries CE was this: Do they still need to define their reigns in Republican terms even when everything has changed? Augustus was able to perform multiple roles under the loosely defined term *princeps* which was only possible due to his charisma, accomplishments and extraordinary political acumen. His power was strongly linked to his person and personal accomplishments, especially having put an end to the civil wars and having successfully ruled for more than four decades without defining his position constitutionally as *princeps*.<sup>65</sup> During his reign, the imperial body politic was in fact *his* body. Augustus may have envisioned himself as the appropriate *exemplum* to his successors, firstly because he had created and deftly employed the polite fiction of the *civilis princeps*,

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<sup>62</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 31.5: *commentum id se, ut ad illorum vitam velut ad exemplar et ipse, dum viveret, et insequentium aetatum principes exigerentur a civibus*; Wardle, *Life of Augustus*, 52–3 and 257–8; Wardle added the word, excellence (*virtutem*), in his translation.

<sup>63</sup> *Aug. RG.* 20.3: *si vivus non perfecissem*; Suet. *Aug.* 31.5: *dum viveret*.

<sup>64</sup> Augustus desired that his successors follow his example: Kraus, "From *Exempla* to *Exemplar*?" 194–5; Roller, *Models from the Past*, 116–9.

<sup>65</sup> Olivier Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors: Roman Rulers and the Constraints of Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

which was the key to his rapport with the Senate and secondly because he hoped to bequeath to his successors the considerable political capital that he had accumulated as the founder of the Principate and as the “binding link”<sup>66</sup> between the Republic and the Empire, which elicited the loyalty of the Roman people and the Senate.

As Lowrie aptly points out, however, no one can control one’s imitators after death. That was true for Augustus’s immediate successors and for those who followed even millennia later. The most notorious imitator was the Fascist *duce* Mussolini, who appropriated or abused the memory of Augustus in an attempt to reincarnate the great Roman Empire.<sup>67</sup> How pertinent Augustus’s example might have been for his successors depended on how much time had passed since his reign—he was a far more potent *exemplar* for his immediate successors than for much later ones—and on changing political circumstances, which made Augustus’s legacy problematic for subsequent imperial reigns. His immediate successors, the Julio-Claudians, were expected to act like him and did refer to Augustus in order to confirm the legitimacy of their rule.<sup>68</sup> As time passed and circumstances changed, later rulers, especially the Flavians and the emperors in the second century CE, began to question whether it was still necessary to hide the monarchical nature of the Principate behind a Republican façade. Nonetheless, each emperor’s decision whether or not to cater to senatorial expectations by playing the role of civil *princeps* and following Augustus’s example would decide how each would be viewed in the works of aristocratic writers, such as Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and, later, Dio

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<sup>66</sup> ‘the binding link’: Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), vii.

<sup>67</sup> Lowrie, “Making an exemplum,” 111–2; on the contradiction between the ambiguity of the Principate and the hereditary system of succession, see Griffin, *Nero*, 187–8.

<sup>68</sup> On the exceptional significance of Augustus for the century following his death, see Emmanuel Lyasse, *Le Principat et Son Fondateur: L’Utilisation de la référence à Auguste de Tibère à Trajan* (Bruxelles: Éditions Latomus, 2008), 11–20.

Cassius, who continued to view Augustus as the paragon of emperors who treated the Senate with respect.<sup>69</sup> These writers had enormous influence and, as the main creators of imperial reception, were crucial in shaping how each emperor would be remembered by posterity. Augustus was certainly a tough act to follow, and, not surprisingly, none of his successors passed muster with aristocratic writers, who were highly critical of any defects in their character, until the reign of the *optimus princeps*, Trajan.

### **In the Wake of Augustus: the Julio-Claudian Emperors**

The impact of the Augustan legacy can be clearly seen in how the reign of Tiberius, Augustus's immediate successor, fared in imperial historiography. Tiberius was Augustus's heir, so his succession revealed the true dynastic intent behind the Augustan Principate, which Augustus had striven to conceal. Tiberius had become part of the imperial family early on when his mother, Livia, married Augustus; those ties were strengthened when he later became Augustus's son-in-law and then his adopted son and heir in 4 CE. Despite his long association with the imperial family, Tiberius had to endure accusations, which marred his reign from the very beginning, that he owed his accession to his mother Livia's ambition and his adoption by Augustus, who by then was an old man [sc. Augustus] (*Tac. Ann. 1.7.7: per uxorium ambitum et senili adoptione*). Moreover, the succession itself was a novelty. Public gratitude for Augustus's many accomplishments, especially ending the bitter civil wars and bringing peace, along with his personal charisma and political acumen encouraged the Senate and the Roman people to turn a blind eye to the monarchical nature of the Principate. The special treatment accorded Augustus was not bequeathed to his adopted son, who already had the reputation of

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<sup>69</sup> The omnipresent use of Augustus as an example in the works of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius: Lyasse, *Principat et son Fondateur*, 29–30.

being arrogant (Tac. *Ann.* 1.4.3; 10.7).<sup>70</sup>

No matter how arrogant Tiberius might have been or how tenuous his status as legitimate successor was in 14 CE, Tiberius did not deviate from the path that Augustus had laid out to achieve a stable reign. In her biography of Tiberius, Barbara Levick points out the two most striking features of Tiberius's policy as *princeps*,<sup>71</sup> both of which derive from his predecessor. Firstly, Tiberius maintained the Augustan form of governance, the Principate, and adhered to Augustan precedents whenever necessary.<sup>72</sup> Tiberius followed Augustan *exempla* in everything from trivial matters to momentous affairs of state and imperial administration. For instance, Tacitus reported that Tiberius felt he must continue Augustus's policy of giving actors relatively light sentences for their infractions rather than flogging them (*neque fas Tiberio infringere dicta eius, Ann.* 1.77.3) which had been the custom in earlier eras, a stance he still maintained ten years later, as can be seen in his speech to the Senate in 25 CE. He also proclaimed that he regarded all the acts and utterances of Augustus as law (*omnia facta dictaque eius vice legis observem, Tac. Ann.* 4.37.2).<sup>73</sup>

The second feature of Tiberius's policy as *princeps* that Levick highlights is his deference to the Senate. Instead of accepting excessive honors and extraordinary powers he issued refusals (*recusatio*) on multiple occasions and allowed senators to have the decision-

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<sup>70</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.4.3: *Tiberium Neronem maturum annis, spectatum bello, sed vetere atque insita Claudiae familiae superbia*; 1.10.7: *ne Tiberium quidem caritate aut rei publicae cura successorem adscitum, sed quoniam adrogantiam saevitiamque eius introspexerit*

<sup>71</sup> Barbara Levick, *Tiberius: The Politician* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 223–4.

<sup>72</sup> Tiberius's references to Augustus at all times: Lyasse, *Principat et Son Fondateur*, 139–49; Robin Seager, *Tiberius* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 147–50.

<sup>73</sup> Tiberius's speech in Tac. *Ann.* 4.37 is included to highlight Tiberius's inconsistency: he allowed Asia to build a shrine to him and Livia but refused the same opportunity to the province of Further Spain. Tiberius justified his action because firstly, Augustus had also allowed a temple to be built in his honor in Pergamum and in Rome in 29 BCE and secondly, the Senate was also venerated with Tiberius in Asia.

making power that they used to have in the Republic.<sup>74</sup> Conceding such power to the Senate was a mark of Tiberius's *moderatio*,<sup>75</sup> and further proof that Tiberius strictly adhered to the Augustan model of the *civilis princeps*. Just as Augustus repeatedly demonstrated his refusal of any unprecedented honors or offices in the *Res Gestae*,<sup>76</sup> the act of denial or refusal (*recusatio*) on the part of the *princeps* as a way to mask his superiority over his fellow citizens, especially senators, and to hide the autocratic nature of the Principate was ritualized from reign to reign.<sup>77</sup> The act of *recusatio* may have been intended as conciliatory, but as Wallace-Hadrill points out, it was, much like the virtue of *clementia*, not truly republican because only social superiors could perform the act of *recusatio*.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, despite Augustus's claim not to have received any extraordinary honors, there are some cases where he accepted them after he had initially refused or after the proposed honors were altered. Of greater importance to the senators was the seemingly inane rituals that they and the civil *princeps* had to perform to keep the Republican gloss of the Principate intact. By professing to follow the Augustan example, Tiberius implicitly agreed to collude with the senators in their tacit denial about being ruled by a monarch. Tiberius's willingness to uphold the polite fiction of the *civilis princeps* was construed in a positive light by his contemporary and intimate, Velleius Paterculus, who depicted Tiberius as the *optimus princeps* who benevolently taught his fellow citizens how to act in the correct way.<sup>79</sup> The close relationship between Tiberius and Velleius Paterculus may

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<sup>74</sup> Levick, *Tiberius*, 223–5.

<sup>75</sup> Levick, *Tiberius*, 89; Tiberius's *moderatio*: Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.5: *adroganti moderatione*, 2.36.2: *moderationi suae*, 3.12.11: *pari modestia*

<sup>76</sup> O'Gorman, "Not Writing about Augustus," 102, n. 29: *RG* 4.1 (*supersedi*); 5.1 (*non recepi*); 5.3 (*non recepi*); 6.1 (*nullum ... recepi*); 10.2 (*recusavi*); 21.3 (*non accepi*)

<sup>77</sup> Examples of *recusatio* for the first two emperors, O'Gorman, "Not Writing about Augustus," 102; Wallace-Hadrill, "*Civilis Princeps*," 36–7.

<sup>78</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, "*Civilis princeps*," 37.

<sup>79</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.126.4: *nam facere recte civis suos princeps optimus faciendo docet, cumque sit imperio*

have biased the latter, for a similarly positive assessment of Tiberius could not be found among the aristocratic writers of one or two generation(s) later, such as Tacitus or Suetonius.

On multiple occasions, Tiberius demonstrated *moderatio* in refusing excessive honors or those honors that had been accepted by Augustus.<sup>80</sup> He seemed to be succeeding at the polite fiction of *civilis princeps* as Augustus had done so brilliantly, but then Tiberius faltered. The so-called accession debate that happened between Augustus's death and September 17<sup>th</sup> in 14 CE provides the first and best example of a misunderstanding between Tiberius, who seemed to genuinely want to cooperate with the Senate in ruling the Empire, and the senators who had become so inured to monarchy. The accession debate described by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius (Tac. *Ann.* 1.10.8–13.5; Suet. *Tib.* 24–5; Dio Cassius 57.2–3)<sup>81</sup> started with Tiberius confessing that he was overwhelmed by the weight of ruling the empire and he refused to take on the mantle of the *principatus*, though he had already assumed full military power, which Suetonius regarded as the actual power and outward sign of sovereignty (*principatum ... recusavit ... vi et specie dominationis*, *Tib.* 24.1). All three ancient authors defined this refusal as typical of Tiberius, who had always employed indirect and obscure words (*suspensa ... obscura verba*, Tac. *Ann.* 1.11.2; *ambiguus responsis*, Suet. *Tib.* 24.1; Dio 57.1.1) as a way to obfuscate his true intentions. Tacitus insinuated that such lame protestations masked hypocrisy (*dissimulatio*), claiming that Tiberius did indeed want to assume the role of *princeps* and that his excessively uncertain and ambiguous wording merely showed that he wished to hide his true intentions.

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*maximus, exemplo maior est.*

<sup>80</sup> The list of Tiberius's refusal of honors (e.g., to accept the title *Imperator* as his *praenomen*, the title *pater patriae*), see Seager, *Tiberius*, 119–20.

<sup>81</sup> The outline of accession debate, see Anthony J. Woodman, *Tacitus Reviewed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 69.

Ancient authors were critical of Tiberius primarily because his reluctance or delay (*cunctatio*, Suet. *Tib.* 24.1) elicited the lowest adjurations of the Senate (*infimas obtestationes*, Tac. *Ann.* 1.12.1; *ad genua*, Suet. *Tib.* 24.1), as can be seen from the use of the word prostration (*procumbere*) by both Tacitus and Suetonius (Tac. *Ann.* 1.12.1; Suet. *Tib.* 24.1). As noted by Suetonius, senators such as Asinius Gallus, Lucius Arruntius, Quintus Haterius, and Mamercus Scaurus were exasperated with Tiberius's feigned equivocation and may have shouted "Let him take it or leave it!" In the end, Tiberius gave up and the debate ended. Nevertheless, both Tacitus and Suetonius remained highly critical of Tiberius who had created an unnecessary fuss at the beginning of his reign. While calling this debacle a thoroughly shameless farce (*impudentissimo mimo*), Suetonius pointed out that Tiberius accepted the imperial office as if he were being forced (*coactus*, *Tib.* 24.2) by the supplications of others. Tacitus also made it clear that Tiberius may have ceased his refusals and listened to entreaties to accept the imperial office, but he slyly never acknowledged that he assumed sovereignty (*non ut fateretur suscipi a se imperium*, Tac. *Ann.* 1.13.5) which only served to underscore his duplicity.

Most modern scholars agree with the negative assessment of these ancient authors and doubt Tiberius's sincerity concerning the accession debate between him and the senators: Patrick Sinclair called the debate "a ritual," Ronald Martin termed it "a charade," and Syme dubbed it a "solemn comedy."<sup>82</sup> More recently, however, Anthony Woodman, after having presented updated and more accurate translations of Tacitus's passages on the accession debate, proposed a new interpretation. Woodman found no evidence that Tacitus portrayed Tiberius as a dissembling, tyrannical, and hypocritical *princeps* who pretended not to want the imperial

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<sup>82</sup> Patrick Sinclair, *Tacitus The Sententious Historian: A Sociology of Rhetoric in Annales 1-6* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995), 170; Ronald H. Martin, *Tacitus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 113; Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 410.

power that he, in fact, desired. Instead, Woodman contends that Tacitus described Tiberius in more positive and nuanced terms as a man whose sense of responsibility to his subjects was in perpetual conflict with his desire for withdrawal from politics, someone who was truly *ambiguus imperandi*.<sup>83</sup> Tiberius was not helped by his natural inclination nor by the fact that he was the first to succeed Augustus, which meant that there was no precedent for his imperial succession. Fortunately, Tiberius at least had the opportunity to consult Augustus, who had ritualized the exchange between the Senate and himself, the former proposing honors which he modestly refused, as a means to establish his image as the *civilis princeps*, a successful formula that Tiberius could emulate. Moreover, the detailed altercations between Tiberius and the senators noted in Tacitus's *Annals* 1.12.2–13.4 touch upon sensitive subjects that both Augustus and Tiberius would never willingly address. While Tiberius claimed to be overwhelmed by the duty of ruling the empire and implicitly asked the Senate to shoulder the burden, Asinius Gallus inconsiderately posed this question: “What part of the Republic (*quam partem rei publicae*) do you wish to be entrusted to you?” If Tiberius answered the question, his response would clearly define the role of the *princeps* in the ruling of the empire. Clarifying the role of *princeps* and its prerogatives would likely reveal the monarchical nature of the Principate, or at the very least, the superiority of the *princeps* over the supposedly equal senators. Tiberius was frustrated and angered by Gallus's impertinence—the tactless senator might not have understood the subtle nature of the Principate or posed the question on purpose to embarrass and needle Tiberius. Quintus Haterius asked another jarring question: “How long would you let the Republic lack a head (*caput*)?” Haterius's question implies that despite the existence of two consuls that year, the Republic still needed a head, and that head would be the *princeps*. What Tiberius meant to achieve in the accession debate must have been to give the impression that he acceded to the

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<sup>83</sup> Woodman, *Tacitus Reviewed*, 63, 69; in the similar vein, Seager, *Tiberius*, 218.

demands of the senators as the civil *princeps* and his new reign would ensue in a harmonious fashion with the help of the Senate.<sup>84</sup> Contrary to Tiberius's expectations, the pointed questions posed by the senators almost tricked him into revealing the true monarchical nature of the Principate, which his predecessor had wisely striven to avoid.

Despite the distinct possibility of future mutual misunderstandings between himself and the senators, Tiberius seems to have treated the senators with respect during the “good years” (14–26 CE) which ended with the tragic and unexpected death of Tiberius's son, Drusus the Younger, and his subsequent retreat to the island of Capri.<sup>85</sup> Seager explored those years in his biography of Tiberius, enumerating his good intentions towards the Senate. For instance, Tiberius, following instructions left by Augustus, transferred the right to elect the magistrates from the Roman people to the Senate in 14 CE and reserved the post of *consul ordinarius* primarily for members of old Republican families and the sons of men who had been appointed to the consulate under Augustus. He took up public business as well as private issues in the Senate and he did not raise any objections to the opinions of senators even when they opposed him.<sup>86</sup> Suetonius commented that Tiberius's words were excessively courteous both in addressing senators and in paying respect to them (*in appellandis venerandisque ... excesserat humanitatis modum*, *Tib.* 29). After appealing for a different opinion from Quintus Haterius, Tiberius humbled himself to the entire Senate and even used the metaphor of slavery to present his own definition of the relationship between *princeps* and the Senate: “as the good and helpful *princeps*, to whom you have given such great and unrestrained power, ought to be a slave to the Senate ... you have been kind, just, and generous masters to me and you are still like that

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<sup>84</sup> Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, 175.

<sup>85</sup> The ‘good years’: Seager, *Tiberius*, 104; Talbert, *Senate in Imperial Rome*, 175–6.

<sup>86</sup> Seager, *Tiberius*, 104–8; Vell. Pat. 2.126.2; Suet. *Tib.* 30–1; Dio 57.7.2.

(*bonum et salutarem principem, quem vos tanta et tam libera potestate instruxistis, senatui servire debere ... et bonos et aequos et faventes vos habui dominos et adhuc habeo*, Suet. *Tib.* 29).” Given Tiberius’s extreme reluctance to have the term *dominus* applied to himself, as noted earlier in Suetonius, his reference here to a master-slave relationship—with its connotation of domination and subordination—as a metaphor for himself vis-à-vis the Senate, is all-the-more striking.

Tiberius may have tried to ingratiate himself with the Senate, but public perception about his treatment of the Senate is dominated by criticism. Only Velleius Paterculus, Tiberius’s contemporary, looked at the reign of Tiberius in an affirmative light. He maintained that justice, equity, and industry had been restored to the state and authority was added to the magistrates, majesty to the Senate, and dignity to the courts.<sup>87</sup> Writers from later generations, such as Tacitus and Suetonius, disagreed with Paterculus’s assessment of Tiberius’s reign, especially his relationship with the Senate. Though Tiberius was often associated with the virtue of moderation, Tacitus, at the very beginning of his description of Tiberius’s reign, challenged Tiberius’s claim that he had allowed the Senate to oversee the details of Augustus’s funeral with the phrase, *adroganti moderatione* (*Ann.* 1.8.5), what Goodyear calls the “most effective oxymoron.”<sup>88</sup> Tiberius had a reputation for arrogance even prior to his accession because he was extremely proud of his noble Claudian origins (*Tac. Ann.* 1.4.3; 10.7). Like Tacitus, Suetonius also accused Tiberius of insincerity in his treatment of the Senate, employing similar expressions to sardonically criticize him. According to Suetonius, Tiberius championed free speech claiming that in a free country there should be free speech and free thought (*in ciuitate*

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<sup>87</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.126.2: *iustitia, aequitas, industria civitati redditae; accessit magistratibus auctoritas, senatui maiestas, iudiciis gravitas.*

<sup>88</sup> Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, vol. I, 149–50.

*libera linguam mentemque liberam esse debere*, Tib. 28). In the following chapter, however, Suetonius accused Tiberius of supporting only the pretense of freedom (*speciem libertatis*, Tib. 30.1) by preserving the old dignity and power for the Senate and the magistrates at the expense of freedom for others. Similarly, Tacitus also decried Tiberius for allowing the Senate only the semblance of freedom (*simulacra libertatis*, Ann. 1.77.3). The words, *species* and *simulacrum*, which emphasize pretense over reality, give the impression that senators, even during the “good years” of Tiberius’s reign, did not feel that they could express their opinions freely because they might not be to Tiberius’s liking.

The unwillingness of senators to speak their minds did not result solely from their fear of censure from Tiberius. Senatorial reticence also stemmed from the many years the Senate spent acquiescing to the wishes and demands of Augustus, who so deftly won their allegiance, so their ability to assert independent thought had atrophied. Tacitus sharply criticized the decline of senatorial morals at the beginning of the *Annals*: “with the change of the state, nothing was left of pristine and unadulterated customs; as equality was cast aside, everyone gazed upon the orders of the *princeps*.”<sup>89</sup> Tacitus enumerated the reasons for the compliant senatorial dependence on Augustus: the boldest spirits had fallen in the previous wars or in the proscriptions and the remaining nobles had grown indulgent as they enjoyed wealth, honors, and other fruits of peacetime.<sup>90</sup> At the time of Tiberius’s accession, according to Tacitus, consuls, senators, and knights eagerly rushed forward to become servile to the new emperor.<sup>91</sup> Despite Tiberius’s assiduous efforts to reinvigorate the Senate, by abolishing the *consilium* and

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<sup>89</sup> Tac. Ann. 1.4.1: *Igitur verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris: omnes exuta aequalitate iussa principis aspectare*

<sup>90</sup> Tac. Ann. 1.2.1: *nullo adversante, cum ferocissimi per acies aut proscriptione cecidissent, ceteri nobilium, quanto quis servitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur ac novis ex rebus aucti tuta et praesentia quam vetera et periculosa mallent.*

<sup>91</sup> Tac. Ann. 1.7.1: *At Romae ruere in servitium consules, patres, eques*

consulting the body on every issue, even trivial ones, and by voluntarily reducing his authority during the “good years,” all his efforts turned futile.<sup>92</sup>

In *Ann.* 3.65, while discussing the events of the year 22 CE, Tacitus commented further on the steep decline of morals. The time period that Tacitus described was so corrupt and riddled with sycophancy that not just the foremost citizens, who felt that they had to safeguard their reputations through servility, but all the ex-consuls, most of the ex-praetors, and many of the low-ranking senators would propose outrageous sycophantic motions. To make his point clear, Tacitus commented on Tiberius’s revulsion at this rampant sycophancy, which the historian mistook for opposition to the idea of public freedom (*qui libertatem publicam nollet*). It is said that whenever he left the *curia*, Tiberius used to declare sardonically in Greek, “Ah, men ready to be slaves!” Apparently, even Tiberius, who, as absolute ruler, did not welcome the idea of unlimited public freedom, was appalled by the abject abasement of his people.<sup>93</sup> Tiberius might have had offensive qualities, such as arrogance and inconsistency in his words, which were presumably incompatible with the ideal of *civilis princeps*, wherein the leader was expected to treat his fellow senators with equanimity. Yet at the same time, Tiberius’s main virtue, *modestia*, was not fully appreciated; instead, it was misconstrued as condescension or hypocrisy by the later senatorial writer, Tacitus, who sarcastically added the word *adrogans* to describe Tiberius’s moderation (*Ann.* 1.8.5). Likewise, Tiberius’s efforts to follow in the footsteps of Augustus in his civil treatment of the Senate were not successful, leading to his

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<sup>92</sup> Tiberius's assiduous effort to keep the Senate onto their former functions: Talbert, *Senate in Imperial Rome*, 488–9; Levick, *Tiberius*, 85.

<sup>93</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.65.2–3: *ceterum tempora illa adeo infecta et adulatione sordida fuere ut non modo primores civitatis, quibus claritudo sua obsequiis protegenda erat, sed omnes consulares, magna pars eorum qui praetura functi multique etiam pedarii senatores certatim exsurgerent foedaque et nimia censerent. 3. memoriae proditur Tiberium, quoties curia egrederetur, Graecis verbis in hunc modum eloqui solitum 'o homines ad servitutem paratos!' scilicet etiam illum qui libertatem publicam nollet tam proiectae servientium patientiae taedebat*; on this passage, see Anthony J. Woodman and Ronald H. Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus: Book 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 457–8.

seclusion on the island of Capri from 26 CE until his death.

After Tiberius failed to successfully emulate Augustus, Caligula succeeded Tiberius with high expectations that he would be looked upon favorably by the Senate and the Roman people because he was the son of beloved Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder, Augustus's grand-daughter. Caligula seemed to have molded the first half of his short reign after the Augustan Principate, but the latter half witnessed escalating conflicts between Caligula and the aristocracy, and, as a result, Caligula was deemed a tyrant. Either due to his alleged madness in 37 CE or as part of a conspiracy in early 39 CE, Caligula exposed the truth behind the façade of the *civilis princeps* that Augustus and Tiberius had striven to conceal, expressing his contempt for the servility of the Senate and declaring himself an absolute monarch.<sup>94</sup> That rash act enraged his countrymen and he was murdered by members of his praetorian guard. In the tumult following Caligula's assassination, Claudius ascended the throne with the help of the praetorian guard. The senators, who had hoped to restore the Republic upon the assassination of Caligula, declared Claudius a public enemy only to be stymied by the praetorian guard who had been bribed by Claudius to protect him. After his initial power grab, Claudius took steps to erase the senatorial dissension from people's minds so that he could reconcile with the Senate and, in further deference to the Senate, he refused excessive honors as Augustus and Tiberius had done as *civilis princeps*.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, his posthumous reputation was abysmal. Later writers treated him with utter contempt and derision, best illustrated by Seneca's disdainful comments about him in the *Apocolocyntosis*. Seneca was particularly acerbic, for he held a

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<sup>94</sup> Winterling, *Caligula*, 99–105, 132–47; cf. Caligula's *insania*, see Winterling, *Politics and Society*, 103–19.

<sup>95</sup> Claudius's virtues, such as *clementia*, *pietas*, *moderatio*, and *civilitas*: Suet. *Claud.* 11–2; Donna W. Hurley, *Suetonius: Divus Claudius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 101–11; Claudius's empowerment of the Senate: Barbara Levick, *Claudius* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 93–103

personal grudge against the deceased emperor because of the eight-year long exile Claudius had imposed upon him.<sup>96</sup> Though Nero, Claudius's successor and Seneca's pupil, displayed proper *civilitas* at the beginning of his reign by refusing excessive honors, Nero later discarded all the cumbersome expectations of *civilis princeps* to become an über-aristocrat who haughtily occupied the highest rung of the Roman political and social hierarchy.<sup>97</sup>

### **Modeled on the Augustan Image or Not: the Flavian Emperors**

After the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty marked by the suicide of Nero in 68 CE, a bitter rivalry sprang up among four contenders for the throne during the years 68-69 CE. None of them had any connection with the Julio-Claudian dynasty, yet all of them made use of the appellations Caesar or Augustus; though Dio Cassius would later point out that their seemingly clever ploy did not confer any tangible power upon them.<sup>98</sup> Vespasian, the ultimate victor in the civil war and founder of the new Flavian dynasty, was treated favorably by the aristocratic writers, who all agreed that he was qualified as *civilis princeps*. Suetonius praised Vespasian for being civil and displaying clemency from the beginning of his reign until its end and acknowledged that Vespasian refused to accept tribunician power and the title of *pater patriae* until very late in his reign.<sup>99</sup> Pliny the Elder confirmed that Vespasian was open and accessible to everyone, a positive trait in an emperor.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, because of his humble

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<sup>96</sup> For more on the phases of Claudius's posthumous reputation, see Levick, *Claudius*, 187–97.

<sup>97</sup> Griffin, *Nero*, 62, 205.

<sup>98</sup> Dio 53.18.2; about the attempts of the contenders to increase their legitimacy by relating to Augustus, see Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors*, 9–10.

<sup>99</sup> Barbara Levick, *Vespasian* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 79, points to the different attitudes among the emperors in accepting the essential powers of *princeps*, such as *imperium*, *tribunicia potestas*. Though Caligula is the one who departed from the reserved attitude of Augustus and Tiberius concerning such prerogatives, it was the four contenders of the year 68 CE who received all essential powers *en bloc*.

<sup>100</sup> Suet. *Vesp.* 12.1: *ab initio principatus usque ad exitum civilis et clemens*; Plin. *NH* 33.41: *omnia*

origins, which meant that he did not have any connection to the Julio-Claudian dynasty and came to the throne unexpectedly, Vespasian was deemed to be lacking in authority and a certain majesty.<sup>101</sup> Since Vespasian had no familial connection to the Julio-Claudians and lacked the aristocratic standing deemed appropriate to imperial rank, he strove to emulate the good emperors. That was a smart move for the bad emperors, Caligula and Nero, who were detested by the Senate, had been expunged from the *Lex de Imperio Vespasiani* (CIL.6.930) ratified by the Senate in 69 CE, a law which referred extensively to the positive precedent set by Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius.<sup>102</sup> The fact that the law which gave Vespasian imperial power at the beginning of his reign highlighted the three emperors who had tried to show respect to the Senate indicates that the Senate expected Vespasian to be another *civilis princeps*. Vespasian did not betray that expectation. He portrayed himself as an accessible emperor, who gladly exchanged dinner invitations with senators and treated them as social equals.<sup>103</sup>

No matter how civil Vespasian might have been, he was still the emperor. By the time of his accession, all senatorial attempts to restore the Republic had withered away and the Principate was the reality.<sup>104</sup> Though they could never disregard the importance of Augustus as the founder of the Principate, the emperors of the Flavian dynasty—Vespasian, Titus, and

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*salutaris*; in the same vein, Dio 66.10.1–11.1

<sup>101</sup> Suet. *Vesp.* 7.2: *auctoritas et quasi maiestas quaedam ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat: haec quoque accessit.*

<sup>102</sup> The purpose of this law could be either to bestow the same monarchical power upon Vespasian that the first monarch had held or, in deference to the Senate's own authority, to regulate the power of the new emperor through codification of his powers: Peter A. Brunt, "Lex de Imperio Vespasiani," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 67 (1977): 95–116; Frédéric Hurlet, "La Lex de imperio Vespasiani et la légitimité augustéene," *Latomus* 55, no. 2 (1993): 261–280.

<sup>103</sup> Vespasian's civility: Karen Louise Acton, "Vespasian Augustus: Imperial Power in the First Century CE" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011), 156–8; Levick, *Vespasian*, 179–82.

<sup>104</sup> Alain Gowing, *Empire and Memory: The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 104–9, discusses the Flavian depoliticization of the Republican past in Flavian epic as well as in the works of Quintilian and Tacitus.

Domitian—must have felt that they had a certain amount of latitude in deciding whether to reveal or hide the monarchical and dynastic nature of the Principate. For instance, Vespasian expressed his dynastic intentions by stating that either his sons would succeed him or no one would. However, there were a few senators who daringly expressed their qualms about Vespasian’s dynastic plans, such as Helvidius Priscus.<sup>105</sup> Vespasian’s eldest son, Titus, was considered to be an imperial partner to Vespasian (*particeps imperii*, Suet. *Titus* 6.1) from 71 CE onwards, whose status and power were elevated by granting him proconsular *imperium*, *tribunicia potestas*, the assumption of consulships, the right of censorship, and the prefecture of the praetorian guard.<sup>106</sup> Though Vespasian followed the same path for promoting heirs that Augustus had set for Gaius, Lucius, Tiberius, and Germanicus, Augustus would have never have laid out his dynastic scheme so blatantly before the Senate, thereby incurring their wrath and subverting his image as a staunch advocate for Republican *libertas*.

Depending on how much latitude each Flavian emperor thought they were allowed in exposing or concealing the true nature of the Principate and how the aristocracy, particularly senators and aristocratic authors, responded to that, dictated how they were remembered: Vespasian was remembered as a good emperor, and his eldest son Titus was, according to Suetonius, the darling of the human race, despite his short-lived reign.<sup>107</sup> In stark contrast to that positive reputation, Domitian, Vespasian’s younger son and the last Flavian *princeps*, is still considered a tyrant, thanks to his negative evaluation in imperial historiography written by aristocratic authors such as Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and, later, Dio Cassius. Yet

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<sup>105</sup> Suet. *Vesp.* 25; Dio 66.12.1; Levick, *Vespasian*, 88–9; about Helvidius Priscus and his opposition to Vespasian: Epictetus 1.2.19–24; Tac. *Hist.* 4.6–8.

<sup>106</sup> Powers and offices that Titus held under Vespasian: Jones, *Titus*, 79–87 and 99–100.

<sup>107</sup> Suet. *Titus* 1.1; Brian W. Jones and Robert Milns, *Suetonius: The Flavian Emperors* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 2002), 90; the character of the reign of Titus: Jones, *Titus*, 114–22.

even Tacitus, who actively defamed Domitian's memory, posed a pestering question at the beginning of the *Annals* (1.3.7): "How many were left who had even seen the *res publica*? (*quotus quisque reliquus qui rem publicam vidisset?*).” Through this question, Tacitus, who was just a few years younger than Domitian, acknowledged that for his generation Republicanism was a distant memory and soon Romans would be familiar only with the imperial rule of the Principate.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, though the towering memory of Augustus might have been relatively more vivid than that of the Republic, the sense of obligation to strictly follow the Augustan *exempla* must have subsided for Domitian. As Levick points out, Domitian's real crime, which has forever branded him as a bad emperor, or tyrant, likely stemmed from his inability to live up to the exacting standards of civility set by his predecessors and cherished by the aristocracy.<sup>109</sup>

### **Domitian as an Antithesis to Augustus**

Domitian was not the first to be condemned as a bad emperor; before him, Caligula and Nero were considered notorious, and Commodus and Caracalla would later join the queue of tyrants. Despite their different ruling styles and characters, these emperors have been lumped together as tyrants in Roman history. What qualities, real or imagined, do they share that caused them to be vilified as tyrants in imperial historiography?

According to Dunkle, tyrants exhibit four typical vices, the origins of which can be traced back to the Greek concept of tyranny, and which continued to be employed in invective writings during the late Republic.<sup>110</sup> Republicans despised kingship, considering it tantamount

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<sup>108</sup> O'Gorman, "Not Writing about Augustus," 104.

<sup>109</sup> Levick, *Vespasian*, 200; Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 166.

<sup>110</sup> J. Roger Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant and Roman Political Invective of the Late Republic," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 98 (1967): 151–71 and "The Rhetorical Tyrant in Roman

to tyranny. The four main vices, or moral defects, that could turn one's political enemy into someone who aspired to kingship (*regnum, dominatio, and tyrannis*) and through wielding that power might topple the Republic, were *vis, superbia, libido, and crudelitas*.<sup>111</sup> The first vice, *vis*, is the force which a tyrant employs as a general instrument of oppression against his subjects. *Superbia* (or *adrogantia*), which can be traced back to the Greek concept of *hybris* and recalls the cognomen of Rome's last king, Tarquinius Superbus, designates a tyrant's arrogant attitude in setting himself above all others and forcing his will onto his subjects. *Libido* means lust, or the unchecked desire for sexual fulfillment, but is often associated with another vice, *avaritia*, the tyrant's unbridled greed satisfied only through heavily taxing his people and confiscating their property. *Crudelitas* (or *saevitia*) denotes the tyrant's repression of his political enemies by way of banishment or politically motivated assassination.<sup>112</sup>

After the establishment of the Principate, these four vices continued to be applied to negative portrayals of actual emperors, who were detested by their subjects, in the works of imperial historiographers who assumed that virtues made for a praiseworthy emperor, vices a tyrant.<sup>113</sup> Bad emperors must be remembered by posterity as tyrants so that their memory could be condemned forever. To ensure that fate, the aristocratic authors imbued the image of each hated emperor with these tyrannical vices. In his depiction of bad emperors, Tacitus employed trite, but still valid motifs, to create a "stock tyrant," such as cruelty, lust, hunger for despotic power, sacrilege, and greed.<sup>114</sup> Both Pliny the Younger and Suetonius contrasted the virtues

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Historiography: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus." *The Classical World* 65, no. 1(1971): 12–20.

<sup>111</sup> Dunkle, "Greek Tyrant", 151.

<sup>112</sup> Dunkle, "Rhetorical Tyrant," 19; "Greek Tyrant," 168–9.

<sup>113</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 145, 148.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Keitel, "Feast Your Eyes on This: Vitellius as a Stock Tyrant (Tac. Hist. 3.36-39)," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Marincola (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 441.

of good emperors with the vices of bad ones, which Wallace-Hadrill grouped in contrasting pairs: humanity (equivalent to civility) and pride, clemency and cruelty, liberality and avarice, and luxury and lust with their opposites, frugality and continence.<sup>115</sup> Suetonius judged each Caesar by those criteria in his imperial biographies, most of whom exhibited a mixture of virtues and vices, except for the flawless Augustus or the irredeemable Caligula. For instance, Julius Caesar was avaricious and arrogant, but clement and moderate. Augustus, as the exemplary emperor, was generous, clement, and civil. Tiberius was initially civil, but late in his reign, he revealed his lust, avarice, and cruelty. Caligula was proud, cruel, self-indulgent, and rapacious. Nero was initially liberal, clement, and genial, but after his mother's death he also turned self-indulgent and full of lust, avaricious, and cruel. The founder of the second dynasty, Vespasian, was civil and clement, but known for his appetite for money.<sup>116</sup>

As for Domitian, the last emperor whom Suetonius dealt with in his imperial biographies, there have been a debate about his true character. Imperial authors are divided on whether Domitian had been initially somewhat virtuous, but later turned vicious, or had always been vicious like Caligula.<sup>117</sup> That is because Suetonius and Tacitus disagree about how consistent Domitian's character was. Suetonius opines that there was an abrupt decline in Domitian's character (Suet. *Dom.* 10.1) after he put down the revolt of Saturninus; Domitian, who had previously been clement and modest (2.2; 9) turned vicious. Perhaps the dire threat

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<sup>115</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 3.4: *quum loquar de humanitate, exprobrari sibi superbiam credat; quum de frugalitate, luxuriam; quum de clementia, crudelitatem; quum de liberalitate, avaritiam; quum de benignitate, livorem; quum de continentia, libidinem; quum de labore, inertiam; quum de fortitudine, timorem.*; Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 142, 152–5.

<sup>116</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 142, n.1, enumerates virtues and vices that Suetonius attributed to each emperor; see also Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 33–4.

<sup>117</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 10.1: *Sed neque in clementiae neque in abstinentiae tenore permansit, et tamen aliquanto celerius ad saevitiam descendit quam ad cupiditatem*; cf. *Cal.* 11.1: *Naturam ... saevam atque probrosam.*

posed by that revolt traumatized Domitian and, due to fear, a once kind man became a vicious tyrant. Suetonius's interpretation conflicts with that of Tacitus. Tacitus denies the existence of *modestia* and *clementia* in Domitian's youth and his early years as emperor, believing that Domitian's cruelty lasted throughout the entirety of his reign (*Agr.* 3.2).

Despite these differences in interpretation, Suetonius and Tacitus do not disagree, in principle, in their overall assessment of Domitian's character. Suetonius hinted at Domitian's innately autocratic nature in the opening chapter of *Domitian*, describing Domitian's role in December 69 CE in Rome. The eighteen-year old Domitian emphatically exercised the power of absolute rule (*dominatio*) without restraint, so he already showed what kind of person he would turn out to be.<sup>118</sup> After describing Domitian's preference for keeping his own company, not even allowing a single fly around him, Suetonius went on to describe Domitian's administrative style: "Domitian presented a varied picture with regard to the governance of the empire, with an equable blending of vices and virtues until he turned his virtues into vices: as far as one can conjecture, in addition to his natural disposition he was rapacious because of indigence and cruel because of fear."<sup>119</sup> The point that Suetonius was trying to make about Domitian exhibiting select virtues early in his reign is that those virtues overlay a far more sinister nature. Suetonius concluded that Domitian stopped suppressing his natural disposition at a certain point to exercise full autocratic power. Tacitus held a similar view, in that he thought that Domitian displayed a duplicitous hypocrisy (*dissimulatio*) when, early on in his reign, he

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<sup>118</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 1.3: *ceterum omnem vim dominationis tam licenter exercuit, ut iam tum qualis futurus esset ostenderet.*; Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 17.

<sup>119</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 3.2: *Circa administrationem autem imperii aliquamdiu se varium praestitit, mixtura quoque aequabili vitiorum atque virtutum, donec virtutes quoque in vitia deflexit; quantum coniectare licet, super ingenii naturam inopia rapax, metu saevus*; translation from Jones and Milns, *The Flavian Emperors*, 30; Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 34, introduces the debate concerning the translation of the phrase, *super ingenii naturam* (Suet. *Dom.* 3.2), either as 'contrary to his natural disposition' or 'beyond/above his natural disposition.' I agree with Jones's preference of the latter, based on Suetonius's consistent characterization of Domitian whom the biographer categorically described as exhibiting tyrannical vices at the beginning of the chapter (1.3). n

feigned *modestia* and *simplicitas*.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, both Suetonius and Tacitus agreed that if there was ever any moment when Domitian seemed to be modest or clement, that behavior must have been feigned and insincere.

Believing that Domitian was naturally inclined to being autocratic and disinterested even in pretending to be modest and clement, especially in the latter part of his reign, Suetonius was able to create a “chiaroscuro effect” between Domitian and the exemplary civil *princeps*, Augustus.<sup>121</sup> This stark contrast becomes salient in Suet. *Aug.* 51–8 and *Dom.* 10–14.1, where Suetonius compares Domitian unfavorably to Augustus, lauding Augustus’s genuine *clementia* and *moderatio* and deploring Domitian’s tyrannical vices, such as *saevitia* (*Dom.* 10–12), *cupiditas* (12.1–12.2), *arrogantia* (12.3–13).<sup>122</sup> After providing ample proof of Augustus’s clemency and moderation, Suetonius begins chapter 57 of his *Life of Augustus* with the following accolade: “It may be easily imagined how much he was loved (*dilectus*) because of these acts.”<sup>123</sup> Suetonius describes how Augustus was awarded the title of *pater patriae* as a token of the high esteem in which the Senate and public held him and their gratitude for his benevolent rule. Even at the very zenith of his powers, when he could have triumphed over everyone, Augustus never forgot to declare his wish to cooperate with the Senate: “Having attained my highest hopes, Fathers of the Senate, what more have I to ask of the immortal gods than that I may retain this same unanimous approval of yours to the very end of my life (*Aug.* 58.2).” In stark contrast to Augustus’s civility and magnanimity, Suetonius claims that

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<sup>120</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 23; Suet. *Dom.* 2.2: *simulavit ... modestiam*; Tac. *Hist.* 4.86: *simplicitatis ac modestiae imagine*.

<sup>121</sup> Peter A. Brunt, “Charges of Provincial Maladministration Under the Early Principate,” *Historia* 19, no. 2 (1961): 221, refers to the decline of each emperor’s character from virtue to vice as the “Chiaroscuro effect” that Suetonius employed as a literary tool.

<sup>122</sup> cf. Suet. *Vesp.* 1.1: *Domitianum cupiditatis ac saevitiae*.

<sup>123</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 57.1: *Pro quibus meritis quanto opere dilectus sit, facile est aestimare*

Domitian forsook his early pretension of clemency and modesty and revealed his cruelty, avarice, and arrogance, which engendered a completely different response from the public: “Through these deeds, he became an object of terror and hatred (*terribilis ... invisus*) to all, but he was overthrown by a conspiracy of his friends, freedmen, to which his wife was also privy (*Dom. 14.1*).”<sup>124</sup> Feared and detested by his closest friends and family, let alone the public and the Senate, Domitian spent his last years fearing for his life and suspecting the murderous intent of those around him (*pavidus ... anxius ... suspicionibus, Dom. 14.2*) until he was eventually assassinated on September 18 of 96 CE.

On September 1<sup>st</sup> of 100 CE almost four years after the assassination of Domitian, the suffect consul-elect, Pliny the Younger, gave the thanksgiving speech in the Senate. In this speech, Pliny extolled Trajan as the best *princeps* and situated him on a continuum with Augustus: just as the name of Augustus reminds the people of the man who was first addressed with it, the appellation of *Optimus* will never return to their memory without recalling Trajan (*Pan. 88.10*). Shortly after comparing Trajan with the founder of the Principate, Augustus, Pliny contrasted the *optimus princeps* Trajan and the recently removed *pessimus princeps*, i.e. Domitian (*Pan. 92.4*). Augustus and Trajan were exemplary *principes* who, in Pliny’s view, were diametrically opposed to the tyrannical Domitian. Yet, the year of 100 CE was too early for Trajan to be unequivocally hailed as the *best* emperor. It was only the second year of his reign and Trajan had spent precious little time in the city of Rome since his accession. Pliny’s rosy assessment of Trajan was based less on actual deeds than on his hope for a positive future for Trajan’s reign. Pliny may have gotten ahead of himself by naming Trajan the best emperor at such an early stage in his reign, but Pliny’s willful vilification of Domitian in front of the

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<sup>124</sup> Suet. *Dom. 14.1*: *Per haec terribilis cunctis et invisus, tandem oppressus est insidiis amicorum libertorumque intimorum simul et uxoris.*

Senate strongly suggests that a consensus had been reached between the senators and Trajan regarding how to treat the memory of Domitian. Since both Pliny and Trajan had spent considerable time in Domitian's court, they had observed firsthand Domitian's arrogant cruelty which would ultimately make him loathed and feared by all. To fulfill the expectations of Pliny and the other senators and become the best emperor, Trajan had only to avoid all the misdeeds Domitian had committed and the erroneous paths he had trodden. The following chapter will probe how the public and the aristocracy, including the Senate, viewed Domitian, who would not have surprised anyone if, in an act of unbridled arrogance, he had bestowed the excessive appellation of *dominus et deus noster* on himself.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Dominus et deus noster: The Perception of Domitian*

This chapter will examine how the bombastic form of address, *dominus*, that Domitian allegedly requested his subjects call him, contributed to forming a misleading image of Domitian as an arrogant emperor who desired, above all, to be flattered. To make matters worse, some claimed that Domitian also wanted to be referred to by the even more vainglorious title, *dominus et deus*. This imperious title, combining divine status with supreme mastery over all Roman lands, was offensive to his subjects and left such a deep imprint on the public perception of Domitian's reign, especially after his death, that *dominus et deus* has been considered the catchword encapsulating Domitian's deeply arrogant nature and his tyrannical reign.

Early scholars, who initially studied the reign of Domitian, seemed to be in no doubt that Domitian had assumed such an excessive title. In 1894, Stéphane Gsell held that Domitian was not satisfied with being the first among all citizens, so he insisted that he be called master and god.<sup>125</sup> Around four decades after Gsell, Kenneth Scott claimed that the term *dominus et deus* must have been the calque of the Greek θεός και κύριος which had been used to refer to the late Ptolemaic kings, thereby placing Domitian on a par with Hellenistic monarchs. He also dated Domitian's application of the term to himself to the early phase of Domitian's reign, presumably 85 or 86 CE.<sup>126</sup> It was not until the 1960s that Kenneth Waters pointed out the lack of documentary evidence to corroborate Suetonius's claim that *dominus et deus noster* had been an official appellation requested by Domitian.<sup>127</sup> In a similar vein, Brian Jones challenged the

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<sup>125</sup> Gsell, *L'Empereur Domitien*, 334.

<sup>126</sup> Scott, *Imperial Cult*, 103–4, 112; Sauter, *Der romische Kaiserkult*, 32; cf. Hier. *chron.* ad a. 86: *primus Domitianus dominum se et deum appellari iussit*.

<sup>127</sup> Waters, "Character of Domitian," 67; similarly, J. Rufus Fears, *Princeps a Diis Electus: The Divine Election of the Emperor as a Political Concept at Rome* (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1977),

conventional wisdom that Domitian surely had demanded that excessive appellation. In his biography of Domitian and his critique of Suetonius's *Life of Domitian*, Jones contended that Domitian obviously knew that he was not a god and, whilst he did not ask or demand to be addressed as one, neither did he actively discourage the few obsequious flatterers who did.<sup>128</sup> Other scholars, such as Pat Southern and Christer Henriksén, also acknowledged the lack of evidence that Domitian ordered the official use of this type of address, though they still maintained that Domitian must have decided to assume the title *dominus et deus* around 85/86 CE.<sup>129</sup> Jens Gering, who recently published a monograph on Domitian's reception, emphasized the significance of whether or not Domitian had in fact requested such an excessive form of address. If Domitian did so, not only did he deviate from the Augustan model of the Principate, but the request itself would have been considered proof that he, like the Hellenistic monarchs, had absolutist and theocratic tendencies.<sup>130</sup>

Relying on my own research as well as pertinent scholarship, I will first analyze Suetonius's *Domitian* 12.3–13.2, the section in which Suetonius characterizes Domitian as an arrogant, uncivil emperor. Suetonius believes that Domitian had requested that the appellation, *dominus et deus noster*, be officially applied to him, which exemplified his arrogance. After laying out how the term *dominus* developed into a polite, deferential term in Roman society, I

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<sup>128</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 108–109; Suetonius: *Domitian*, 109–10; Leonard Thompson, “Domitianus Dominus: A Gloss on Statius Silvae 1.6.84,” *American Journal of Philology* 105, no. 4 (1984): 474: “There is no evidence contemporary with Domitian to support the post-Domitian claims that he required titles appropriate to a tyrant or that he shifted from principate to dominate.”

<sup>129</sup> Southern, *Tragic Tyrant*, 45; Christer Henriksén, *Commentary on Martial: Epigrams Book 9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 89.

<sup>130</sup> Gering, *Dominus et deus?*, 130; see also Alain Martin, “Princeps, Dominus, Dux. Les dénominations imperiales dans les poèmes de Martial,” in *Hommages à Jozef Veremans*, eds. Freddy Decreus and Carl Deroux (Paris: Latomus, 1986), 205–6; Bonishe-Meyer & Witschel, “Neros und Domitians,” 122–3; Cordes, *Kaiser und Tyrann*, 230–1.

will look into proper and improper responses that a civil *princeps* might display when addressed or referred to as *dominus*. Since the term *dominus* was so closely linked to the charge of flattery (*blanditia, adulatio*), Domitian, who never showed any scruple in referring to himself as *dominus* in official correspondence, unlike his civil predecessors, must have been perceived and remembered as an arrogant monarch who welcomed excessive flattery. There is no clear evidence that Roman subjects were ordered to call Domitian *dominus*, much less *dominus et deus noster*, so I argue that it was the *appearance*, rather than fact, of unbridled arrogance that besmirched Domitian's reputation. I contend that Domitian's deviation from the outwardly modest protocol set by Augustus, namely his apparent unwillingness to refuse excessive appellations, created a negative public perception about Domitian as an unduly arrogant emperor who desired flattery above all.

### **Domitian's *arrogantia* in Suet. *Dom.* 12.3–13.2.**

Suetonius introduced Domitian's notorious request that he be addressed as *dominus et deus noster* as the main proof of his arrogance, which had developed from the notable lack of civility that Domitian had shown in his youth (*Dom.* 12.3–13.2):<sup>131</sup>

12.3 Ab iuventa minime civilis animi, confidens etiam et cum verbis tum rebus immodicus, Caenidi patris concubinae ex Histria reversae osculumque, ut assuerat, offerenti manum praebuit; generum fratris indigne ferens albatos et ipsum ministros habere, proclamavit: Οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη.

13. 1 Principatum vero adeptus neque in senatu iactare dubitavit et patri se et fratri imperium dedisse, illos sibi reddidisse, neque in reducenda post divortium uxore edicere revocatam eam in pulvinar suum. Adclamari etiam in amphitheatro epuli die libenter audiit: "Domino et dominae feliciter!" Sed et Capitolino certamine cunctos ingenti consensu precantes, ut Palfurium Suram restitueret pulsum olim senatu ac tunc de oratoribus coronatum, nullo responso dignatus tacere tantum modo iussit voce praeconis. 2 Pari arrogantia, cum procuratorum suorum nomine formalem dictaret epistulam, sic coepit: "Dominus et deus noster hoc fieri iubet." Unde institutum posthac, ut ne scripto quidem ac sermone cuiusquam appellaretur aliter.

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<sup>131</sup> This translation is from Jones and Milns, *The Flavian Emperors*, 36.

12.3 Being from his youth of a character that was not at all civil and being also impudent and immoderate both in word and in deed, he held out his hand to Caenis, the mistress of his father, who had returned from Istria and was offering him a kiss, as was her practice. Taking it ill that the son-in-law of his brother had also himself servants dressed in white, he exclaimed: ‘A multiplicity of kings is not a good thing.’

13.1 Indeed, after he had gained the position of emperor, he neither hesitated to boast in the Senate that he had given the imperial position to both his father and his brother and they had given it back to him, nor to issue an edict, when he was bringing back his wife after divorcing her, saying that she had been recalled to his divine bed. He also heard with pleasure people shouting, ‘Good luck to our Lord and Lady!’ on the day of his official banquet in the amphitheater. But, when everybody was begging him in great concord at a competition on the Capitol to restore Palfurius Sura, who had formerly been expelled from the Senate and had just then won the crown of victory over the orators, he even deemed them worthy of no answer and merely ordered them, by way of the herald, to shut up. 2 With the same arrogance, when he was dictating a circular letter in the name of his procurators, he began thus: ‘Our Lord and God orders this to be done.’ From this came the practice henceforth that he should not be called otherwise even in the writing or conversation of anyone.

To track the development of Domitian’s arrogance, Suetonius presented several anecdotes about how Domitian treated others with haughty disdain. The first two examples relate how Domitian, in his youth, already exhibited a gauche lack of civility (*minime civilis animi*), undue confidence, and an immoderate nature, especially in how he treated those who were not immediate royal kin but merely tangentially associated with the imperial family. When Caenis, Vespasian’s mistress, returned from Histria and offered to kiss him as usual, Domitian instead offered his hand to her, clearly signaling that he expected her to defer to him. Caenis was no stranger at court; she was the former secretary and freedwoman of Antonia the Younger, as well as Vespasian’s mistress. After Vespasian became emperor, Caenis was treated as his *de facto* wife,<sup>132</sup> so it is quite conceivable that she offered the imperial kiss to Domitian as usual (*ut assuerat*). Bestowing an imperial kiss would have been a greeting more appropriate between social equals or close friends,<sup>133</sup> thus, how ancient writers and modern scholars alike interpret

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<sup>132</sup> (Antonia) Caenis: Suet. *Vesp.* 3; Dio 60.14.1–2; 67.14.3; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 888; Acton, “Vespasian Augustus,” 221–9, 232.

<sup>133</sup> Jeremy Paterson, “Friends in High Places: The Creation of the Court of the Roman Emperor,” in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, ed. Anthony Spawforth (Cambridge: Cambridge

Domitian's refusal of Caenis's offer of a kiss differs depending on one's perception of social hierarchy. Since Vespasian's real wife had been dead for so long, Caenis might have thought it perfectly reasonable to offer a kiss to the son of her lover. From Domitian's point of view, however, Caenis likely seemed only the mistress of his father, who had inferior status as a freedwoman. Southern has pointed out that Domitian, by refusing a kiss from Caenis and, instead, insisting that she deferentially kiss his hand was tactlessly putting Caenis in her place, a social inferior who should rightly defer to his imperial superiority.<sup>134</sup>

Domitian did not just take umbrage at Caenis's apparent impudence, but was also indignant that Titus Flavius Sabinus, his younger cousin by about two years,<sup>135</sup> had his own retinue clad in imperial white. Piqued with frustration, Domitian blurted out the Homeric verse: "Not good is the rule of many (Hom. *Iliad* 2.204: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη)." Titus Sabinus was Vespasian's nephew and Titus's son-in-law, so his grand behavior might have aroused Domitian's suspicion that his cousin harbored imperial ambitions, which was something that Domitian simply could not tolerate.<sup>136</sup> As if to substantiate Domitian's suspicion, Titus Flavius Sabinus, elected as regular consul with Domitian as his colleague in 82 CE., was executed on the charge that he was mistakenly announced as emperor, not consul, by the herald on the day of the election (Suet. *Dom.* 10.4).<sup>137</sup> Another Homeric verse, which, admittedly, Domitian

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University Press, 2007), 147–8; cf. Caligula's refusal to kiss the senators: Dio 29.27.1–2.

<sup>134</sup> Southern, *Tragic Tyrant*, 10; Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 106, questions Suetonius's inclusion of this example among Domitian's non-commendable *acta*, commenting that "he would have done better to have omitted this *exemplum* altogether as a triviality." However, if Suetonius focuses on the people toward whom Domitian exhibited his *arrogantia*, this example would fall under the category of Domitian's rebuke of lesser members of the court, rather than as one of Suetonius's "hurried gathering of evidence of imperial *arrogantia*."

<sup>135</sup> Gavin Townend, "Some Flavian Connections," *Journal of Roman Studies* 51, no. 2 (1961): 62; Titus Flavius Sabinus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 355; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 105 no. 112; *CIL* 3828.

<sup>136</sup> If Suetonius's division between *ab iuventa* (Suet. *Dom.* 12.3) and *principatum . . . adeptus* (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1) is to be trusted, this incident must have taken place before Domitian's ascension to the throne.

<sup>137</sup> Townend, "Some Flavian Connections," 55; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 94; *Suetonius: Domitian*,

never uttered, might well reveal his state of mind: “let there be one Lord, one king (Hom. *Iliad* 2.204-5: εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω,/εἷς βασιλεύς).”<sup>138</sup> This very same line from the *Iliad* appears in Suet. *Cal.* 22.1 when Suetonius describes Caligula’s transformation from *princeps* to monster and the transition from the semblance of a Principate to an actual *regnum*. As Titus Flavius Sabinus had bragged about his membership of the imperial family only to be caught out by Domitian, Caligula happened to overhear some client kings—who had come to Rome to pay their respects to Caligula—assert the nobility of their descent at supper. Caligula blurted out the Homeric verse that Domitian stopped short of uttering in Suet. *Dom.* 12.3: “let there be one Lord, one king.”<sup>139</sup>

Combining the two Homeric verses that Domitian and Caligula quoted in Suet. *Dom.* 12.3 and *Cal.* 22.1, gives us the complete lines of Hom. *Iliad* 2.204–5: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη: εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω,/ εἷς βασιλεύς. As Wardle points out, Hom. *Iliad* 2.204–5 might have been proverbial.<sup>140</sup> However, the contexts in which Caligula and Domitian uttered these Homeric lines are noteworthy. Caligula, who may have inherited from his mother excessive pride in the fact that he descended from Augustus,<sup>141</sup> silenced the client kings competing with one another about who was more noble, by emphasizing the fact that he was

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94; Paul A. Roche, “The Execution of L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus,” *Classical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2003): 320.

<sup>138</sup> The use of βασιλεύς in address form: Eleanor Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address from Herodotus to Lucian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 90–5. According to Dickey, βασιλεῦ was used by both Greeks and Romans on rare occasions; several of the examples she mentions were addressed, in jest, to someone imagining himself to be an oriental monarch (Lucian, *Nav.* 30, 33).

<sup>139</sup> Suet. *Cal.* 22.2: *Verum admonitus et principum et regum se excessisse fastigium, divinam ex eo maiestatem asserere sibi coepit.*

<sup>140</sup> David Wardle, *Suetonius' Life of Caligula: A Commentary* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1994), 204–5: “this example was almost proverbial (cf. Aristotle *Metaphys.* 1076a, *Pol.* 1292a; Plutarch *Ant.* 81; Suetonius *Dom.* 12.3) and was used by Dio of Prusa (*Or.* 3.46) to justify the doctrine of the emperor’s rule as Jupiter’s elect.”

<sup>141</sup> Agrippina the Elder: Tac. *Ann.* 4.52.2; Caligula’s brother Nero: Tac. *Ann.* 4.60.1.

the sole emperor and a descendant of Augustus. Domitian claimed that Titus Flavius Sabinus, a lesser member of the Flavian house, should on no account have imperial ambitions, and that he, Domitian, was the legitimate heir. “Let there be one Lord, one King,” may well characterize Domitian’s idea of monarchy. The preceding Homeric line about “the rule of many” might have also provoked the senators, the former “oligarchs” who pined for their lost dominance since the beginning of the Principate.

While Suetonius employed these two anecdotes to exemplify Domitian’s lack of civility in his youth, they also reveal Domitian’s elite sentiments concerning royal blood and his swift rebuke of anyone who overstepped the bounds of their social status. Caenis, no matter how much Vespasian treated her as a *de facto* wife, was a mere freedwoman; in Domitian’s view, she had stepped over the line by assertively offering him a kiss, as if she were one of the imperial women. The herald’s mistake in hailing Titus Flavius Sabinus as imperator, not consul, might have further fueled Domitian’s conviction about the imperial ambitions of his cousin, who had once had the audacity to parade his attendants in imperial white. Setting the stage for the full-blown *arrogantia* that Domitian would display after his ascension, Suetonius gives readers a taste of how Domitian, in his youth, prided himself on being a legitimate Flavian (Suet. *Dom.* 13).

Suet. *Dom.* 13 provides several anecdotes illustrating Domitian’s *arrogantia* in his attitude towards his father, brother, and wife as well as the senators, and the Roman people after he ascended the throne; he first displayed his arrogance in the Senate and then in the amphitheater and at the Capitoline Games. In the first anecdote, we are told that Domitian did not hesitate to flaunt before the Senate (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1: *in senatu iactare dubitavit*) the fact that he had conferred *imperium* on both his father and his brother, an honor which they then gave back to him. Domitian’s boast about his imperial status had some merit: between

Vitellius's death in December 69 CE and the arrival of Vespasian in October 70 CE, Domitian, then just eighteen years old, was addressed as Caesar and appointed praetor with consular *imperium* (Suet. *Dom.* 1.3; Tac. *Hist.* 3.86; 4.2–3, 39).<sup>142</sup> What matters here is that Domitian had the temerity to gloat about this to the Senate, and, in the process, besmirched the temperate reputations of Vespasian and Titus. Suetonius left it up to his readers to imagine how the senators might have reacted to Domitian bragging about the “enthronement” of his father and brother, and by extension, himself.

Tacitus also criticized Domitian for his arrogant ways. In the *Agricola*, Tacitus contrasted the behavior of Agricola with that of Domitian and described Domitian's *malignitas* toward Agricola using these two terms: *iactatio*, a cognate of *iactare* and *arrogantia* (Tac. *Agr.* 42.2: *in adrogantiam compositus*, 42.3: *inani iactatione libertatis*). Domitian's vices were, according to Tacitus, *arrogantia*, hypocrisy, the wish to be formally and deferentially thanked, that is flattered, and his temper. Despite Domitian's irascible nature, he was mollified by Agricola's *moderatio* and *prudencia*, which were devoid of any defiance (*contumacia*) or inane boast about liberty (*inani iactatione libertatis*) that could challenge Domitian's claim to fame and imperial destiny.<sup>143</sup> Tacitus concludes in *Agr.* 42 that it is far wiser to display *obsequium* and *modestia* towards bad emperors than to boldly resist them and pay for it with one's life; such misguided bravery and resulting death brought no profit (*inanis*) to the Roman Republic.

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<sup>142</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 107, notes that Domitian had no real power, and that Mucianus held the real authority. In his reference to Martial 9.101.15–6 (*tradidit*) and Quint. 10.1.91 (*donato imperio iuuenis*), where cognates or even the same vocabulary that Domitian himself used in Suet. *Dom.* 13.1 (*dedisse, rededisse, imperium*) occur, Jones considers the striking similarity as an effort on the part of court poets and others to adulate Domitian.

<sup>143</sup> *Contumacia* in Tacitus: Cynthia Damon, *Tacitus: Histories, Book I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95, 205. *Contumacia* and its cognates mean both admirable “defiance” (*Hist.* 3.1, 85.3) or pointless and often harmful provocation (*Hist.* 51.4). Those who know how to avoid *contumacia*: Agricola (*Agr.* 42.3) and Marcus Lepidus (*Ann.* 4.20.3). The *exempla* of inane *contumacia*: Agrippina the Elder (*Ann.* 5.3.2: *arrogantiam oris et contumacem animum*) and her son Nero (*Ann.* 4.60.1), Cn. Calpurnius Piso (*Ann.* 3.12.1), and Thrasea Paetus (*Ann.* 16.22.2).

The term *iactatio* modified by *inanis* is also found in Seneca (*Ben.* 2.11.6; *Brev. Vit.* 13.7) and Quintilian (1.8.18: *inanis iactantiae*).<sup>144</sup> To the senators, Domitian displayed *iactantia* when he bestowed *imperium* on his two Flavian predecessors and then retrieved it back from them, behavior which would have appeared outrageously arrogant and, needless to say, futile (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1).

Domitian would also arrogantly proclaim (*edicere*) that he had recalled (*revocatam*) his wife Domitia,<sup>145</sup> after their divorce, to reside on his own *pulvinar*. A *pulvinar* was a fancy couch with cushions where images of deities were displayed during a banquet. In the late Republic, a raised couch in the orchestra was reserved for Julius Caesar, which was counted among the excessive honors bestowed upon him; additionally, he received the honor of his statue being carried on a *pulvinar*, which Suetonius considered as an honor befitting only deities, not mortals (Suet. *Iul.* 76.1). Apparently not unaware of its divine association, Augustus had a permanent *pulvinar* built at the Circus Maximus as a royal box reserved for the members of the imperial family (Aug. *RG.* 19.1; Suet. *Aug.* 45.1). In his letters to Livia regarding the role of Claudius at the *ludi Martiales* and the *feriae Latinae*, Augustus mentioned that he did not wish the public to observe Claudius in the very front of the *pulvinar* because of his deformity (Suet. *Claud.* 4.3). The patina of divinity conferred by the royal *pulvinar* only added to Augustus's luster for he was able to adroitly cultivate public perceptions of himself as both divine and human without appearing arrogant.

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<sup>144</sup> Anthony J. Woodman and Christina S. Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 301–3. Woodman and Kraus point out that Tacitus had the *libertas* of the Stoics in mind, such as Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, when he used the phrase, *inani iactatione libertatis*.

<sup>145</sup> Domitia: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> 3 D181, Suet. *Dom.* 1.3, 3.1, 13.1, 14.1, 22.1, cf. 8.3, 10.2, 4; Martha P. Vinson, "Domitia Longina, Julia Titi, and the Literary Tradition." *Historia* 38 (1989): 438–40, 444–9; Charles L. Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction, Galba to Domitian: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 64-67 (A.D. 68-96)* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 213–5; Barbara Levick, "Corbulo's Daughter," *Greece & Rome* 49, no. 2 (2002): 199–211.

Just like the *pulvinar* of the Julio-Claudians, the *pulvinar* at the Circus Maximus was a place where members of the imperial family were on display to the public. Accordingly, Domitian's choice of the word *pulvinar* as a metonymy for the imperial house would seem credible; however, it might well have been pompous and reckless, even arrogant, of Domitian to announce in the Senate that he was the one who brought Domitia back to his *own pulvinar*, not to his *domus*, especially given the allusion to divinity contained in the word *pulvinar*.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, given the deification of both Vespasian and Titus after their deaths, the word *pulvinar* itself would also have implicitly conferred divine nature on the imperial family.

This anecdote is a telling example of Domitian's acerbic sense of humor.<sup>147</sup> The gist of the first half of Suet. *Dom.* 13.1 is that Domitian bragged to the senators about having transferred the *imperium* to Vespasian and Titus in 69 CE, who then conferred that honor upon Domitian twelve years later. It was Domitian who brought the empress, whom he had once divorced, back to the imperial family, provocatively conferring the gloss of divinity upon himself in the process. In the face of such wanton abuse of power by an arrogant monarch, the Senate remained helpless, and that sense of helplessness must have rankled the senators and provoked their antipathy towards Domitian. With Domitia as a link between the first anecdote and subsequent ones in *Dom.* 13.1, Suetonius proceeded to describe the next episodes staged in the amphitheater and the Capitoline Games. On the feast day in the amphitheater, Domitian is said to have been quite pleased (*libenter*) to hear the people applaud (*adclamari*) him and enthusiastically acclaim "Good fortune to our Lord and Mistress! (*domino et dominae feliciter!*)."<sup>148</sup> Presumably Domitian and Domitia might have heard this tribute from the crowd

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<sup>146</sup> *Pulvinar* as a divine honor: Weinstock, *Divus Iulius*, 283–6.

<sup>147</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 107: "Suetonius inserts this amidst Domitian's non-commendable *acta* when it could well have been used as an example of his sense of humor (as with *clinopalen* in 22)."

<sup>148</sup> While Statius's *Silvae* 1.6 depicts the people expressing unreserved gratitude to Domitian at the

as they sat in the royal *pulvinar*. Domitian may have basked in the people's adulation at the games, pleased that they flatteringly called him lord, which is yet another example of his vainglorious nature.

There are other anecdotes in Suetonius's *Lives*, staged at the games, theaters, or festivals where the emperor was visible to his people and they could communicate with each other, as is evident in *Dom.* 13.1.<sup>149</sup> As demonstrated by Augustus's qualms about having Claudius's deformity on public display as he sat on the *pulvinar* (Suet. *Claud.* 4.3), the public could observe the imperial family at the spectacles and games,<sup>150</sup> which served as a medium for forming and transmitting popular views to the emperor through direct communication, such as exclamations or public demands. These spectacles were opportunities for the emperor to express his concern for the community (*liberalitas*). Such virtuous concern for the Roman public was typically made manifest by the emperor overseeing the construction of new buildings, sponsoring spectacles or games, and distributing largesse (*congiaria*) to the attendants.<sup>151</sup> Augustus had been very generous to the people (*RG.* 22–3), but his adopted heir, Tiberius, was quite the opposite. He was parsimonious and displayed a haughty disregard for the public and its desire for entertainment, since he sponsored no spectacles (Suet. *Tib.* 47). Even though emperors were expected to show moderation in offering public entertainment,

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amphitheater to celebrate his Saturnalia, Plin. *Pan.* 33.3–4 undertands the people's reaction in a completely different way; according to Pliny, the people attending the spectacles of this insane man (*Pan.* 33.4: *demens*), fed up with and terrified by his atrocious acts, had to conceal their true feelings and fake their gratitude in order not to be killed.

<sup>149</sup> Suet. *Iul.* 39; *Aug.* 43–5; *Tib.* 47; *Cal.* 18–20; *Claud.* 21; *Nero* 11–3; *Vesp.* 19.1; *Titus* 7.3, cf. 8.2; *Dom.* 4, 13; Suetonius' personal interest in the Games: Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 35.

<sup>150</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 45.1; *Claud.* 21.5; *Nero* 12.1; *Titus* 8.2; *Dom.* 4.2, 4; cf. *Cal.* 18.1.

<sup>151</sup> Keith R. Bradley, "The Significance of the *spectacula* in Suetonius' *Caesares*," *Rivista storica dell'Antichità* 11 (1981): 129–35; Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC–AD 337)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 368–75. The kinds of spectacles that emperors provided to the people are as follows: chariot or horse races in the Circus Maximus; gladiatorial shows in the amphitheater; wild-beast hunts (*venationes*); and Greek-style athletic, literary and music contests.

they were not supposed to be lax or dissolute (*enerve nec fluxum*) when trying to appease the public (Plin. *Pan.* 33.1). Neither should they be excessive in their largesse. Suetonius was quite critical of the waste or dissipation (*Cal.* 18.2: *sparsit*; *Nero* 11.2: *sparsa...missilia*; *Dom.* 4.1: *magnificia...sumptuosa*, 4.5: *sparsit*) for the indulgent gifts and vast quantities of food that Caligula, Nero, and Domitian had distributed at or after the Capitoline Games or spectacles.<sup>152</sup> Notwithstanding criticism concerning these lavish feasts and spectacles or doubts about the sincerity of the public's enthusiasm, it is still apparent that the populace felt genuine gratitude for the gift-giving by the emperor.<sup>153</sup>

Despite the lack of context in Suet. *Dom.* 13.1, the phrase *epuli die* may still give a clue as to why the spectators at the scene exclaimed “*domino et dominae feliciter!*”<sup>154</sup> One example of imperial largesse that could elicit such praise from Roman subjects would be an *epulum*, a banquet given at the expense of an emperor (or private individual) in a public place to which all or a part of the city's population was invited.<sup>155</sup> Domitian was known to have given such elaborate banquets. Besides Suetonius, Dio 67.4.4–5 and Statius's *Silvae* 1.6 tout Domitian's gift-giving at spectacles and festivals. Summing up the depictions of Domitian's benefaction in Suetonius, Dio, and Statius, Domitian was far from stingy. During celebrations

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<sup>152</sup> cf. Bradley, “The Significance,” 132, comments that the spectacles in Suetonius' *Lives* always appear in a positive light, among the commendable *acta* of the relevant emperor. However, the acts of each particular emperor at these spectacles were not necessarily deemed commendable in the *Lives*. See also Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 35 on Suetonius' hostility toward Domitian's costly *ludi*.

<sup>153</sup> Reactions to Domitian's *liberalitas* vary among the social orders. Immediately after his report on the enthusiastic reaction of the populace to Domitian's gifts, Dio Cassius attributes the downfall of the powerful ones, whose properties were confiscated for lack of expenditures in Domitian's treasury (67.5).

<sup>154</sup> Transgressive commensality of the *cenae* of Domitian: John F. Donahue, “Toward a Typology of Roman Public Feasting,” *American Journal of Philology* 124, no. 3 (2003): 434–7.

<sup>155</sup> John D'Arms, “The Roman Convivium and the Idea of Equality.” In *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposium*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 309–11, attributes Domitian's revival of the custom of formal dinners (*cenae rectae*) and state banquets (*cenae publicae*) to his desire to display the new *domus Flavia*, where all his *clientela* of every social order were in his sight; cf. There is another *epulum* in Suet. *Dom.* 4.5, provided by Domitian in celebration of the Seven Hills (*epulum Septimontiali sacro*) that was held on 11 December.

associated with the feast of the Seven Hills, Domitian held an *epulum* and distributed food to all social classes. According to Dio Cassius, Domitian held a banquet where he even provided wine to spectators who had remained in their seats until nightfall; those who attended the Saturnalia, as noted in Stat. *Silv.* 1.6, were given exotic presents. The people's exclamation of "*domino et dominae feliciter!*" that was recorded in Suet. *Dom.* 13.1 might have been their means of expressing gratitude for Domitian's *liberalitas*; similarly, felicitous public sentiments were mentioned by Dio Cassius, and Statius. Domitian demonstrated imperial beneficence on multiple occasions, showering his loyal subjects with gifts or hosting elaborate banquets, but his prickly temperament meant that he could also be quite fickle. Suetonius's telling use of an adversative conjunction, *sed*, in a sentence reveals just how fickle Domitian could be. According to Suetonius, Domitian had willingly (*libenter*) listened to people's accolades about him and his wife as *dominus et domina*, but would then become completely disinterested in fulfilling their requests.

Suetonius discussed another incident where Domitian turned a deaf ear to a fervent supplication by the Roman people to restore Palfurius Sura to his rightful place in the Senate, who had achieved great success in Latin oratory at the *Ludi Capitolini*. Without even deigning to reply to the people's demand, Domitian merely had the herald bid them be silent. What we know of Palfurius Sura is somewhat peculiar; in addition to Juvenal's description of him as one of Domitian's *delatores* (Juv. *Sat.* 4.53), he was also known to have had a wrestling bout with a Spartan woman during Nero's reign and to have suffered exile.<sup>156</sup> Neither the extant historical information about Palfurius Sura nor Suetonius's comments about him suggest any possible bad blood between him and Domitian. Furthermore, if the public request was to restore

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<sup>156</sup> Palfurius Sura: *PIR*<sup>1</sup> P 7; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, 103–4, 181; Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 108, suggests that Palfurius Sura may be the same as "Seras," a Domitianic informer executed by Nerva (Dio 68.1.2).

Palfurius Sura to the Senate, Domitian might have been vexed by the request itself. More significant to Suetonius is that Domitian failed to show the graciousness and magnanimity appropriate to a *civilis princeps*, as Augustus had wisely done. Instead, in an act of arrogant incivility, Domitian did not even deign to reply to the people's supplication and ordered the herald to keep them silent.

Refusal to answer a demand or question or to listen to other people's opinions has been construed as a sign of *arrogantia*, *superbia*, or severity from the time of Cicero through the imperial period. Cicero gave the following advice to Lucius Valerius (Cic. *Ad Fam.* 1.10): if Lucius does not answer, the people will say he is arrogant (*superbum*); if he gives bad answers, people will say he is insolent (*contumeliosus*). In the imperial period, Josephus noted that Caligula refused to listen to the demands of the people to abate taxation in the Circus and he ordered his soldiers to kill many who were present at the scene, vile actions which served as a catalyst for Cassius Chaerea to remove Caligula (*AJ* 19.24–6). Caligula's brutality proved his undoing, while Trajan was renowned for his generosity and attentiveness. Pliny extolled Trajan for granting requests, anticipating unspoken wishes, and, without hesitation, encouraging his subjects to make fresh demands at the spectacles (*Pan.* 33.2). Though Pliny did not refer specifically to Domitian here, his positive description of Trajan's civility provides a convenient foil to Domitian's arrogance. In stark contrast to Trajan who was receptive and obliging to public demands, Domitian, who was very attentive to public acclaim—exemplified by the jubilant cry of *domino et dominae feliciter*—which stroked his considerable ego, was unwilling to reciprocate and listen to his people's requests.

Domitian's arrogant indifference to public demands, as noted in Suet. *Dom.* 13.1, was a clear *exemplum* to Hadrian of inappropriate imperial behavior which he would be wise not to emulate when he faced a similar situation at a gladiatorial contest (Dio 69.6.1-2). Hadrian, who

chose to be a severe and strict leader who despised flattery (ἐμβριθῶς μᾶλλον ἢ θωπευτικῶς), did not gratify the people's demand at that game. Instead, he bade his herald proclaim "Silence!" just as Domitian had done. When the herald cleverly managed to quiet the crowd without invoking the emperor's flippant order to silence them, Hadrian honored him for not imitating the loathsome manner of Domitian (τὴν δυσχέρειαν τοῦ κελεύσματος).<sup>157</sup> As Dio Cassius documented Hadrian's acknowledgment that it would be foolish and reckless as emperor to emulate Domitian's arrogant response to public requests, Suetonius used the expression *pari arrogantia* (*Dom.* 13.2), categorizing Domitian's refusal to his subjects, as one, among many, indications of Domitian's arrogance.<sup>158</sup>

### Development of *dominus* as a Deferential Appellation

Before delving into Suetonius's report on Domitian's notorious request to be addressed as *dominus et deus noster* in *Dom.* 13.2, I will examine how the term *dominus* had acquired various meanings in Roman society over time. Then I will discuss the different connotation it acquired when applied to emperors. The word *dominus* and its usage have been discussed by many scholars in their studies of diverse authors who employed *dominus* in their works, namely Martial, Statius, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius.<sup>159</sup> The word

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<sup>157</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 108–9; Anthony R. Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (London: Routledge, 1997), 100, remarks, in his discussion of Dio 69.6.1–2 and SHA *Had.* 19.8, that, in following the *exemplum* of Domitian Hadrian might have risked being perceived as a new Domitian by the people, which would have been a serious setback for Hadrian.

<sup>158</sup> Kenneth H. Waters, "The Character of Domitian." *Phoenix* 18, no. 1 (1964): 57 n.19, finds Suetonius's accusation that Domitian was arrogant unconvincing in that Domitian's refusal to grant the people's request to restore Palfurius Sura, the only such example provided by Suetonius, may have been based on other motives than arrogance. Yet, the appearance of *pari arrogantia* at the beginning of Suet. *Dom.* 13.2 demonstrates that Suetonius provided other evidence for Domitian's arrogance besides the Palfurius Sura incident.

<sup>159</sup> Adrian N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 557; Peter Howell, *Martial Epigrams V. Edited with an Introduction, Translation & Commentary* (Warminster: Aris & Philips, 1995), 140–1; Martin, "Princeps. Dominus, Dux." 201–7; Marguerite Garrido-Hory, "L'Empereur chez Martial: Dominus, Caesar, Deus." in *Mélanges Pierre*

*dominus* is closely related etymologically to notions of possession and subjugation. Derived from the Greek and Latin roots, δαμάω and Latin *domo* respectively, *dominus* originally meant “he who subdues,” therefore it refers to a lord or ruler; also related to *domus*, the word, *dominus*, extended its meaning to connote a master or owner of a house or anything capable of being possessed, such as land, slaves, animals and material goods.<sup>160</sup> Accordingly, *dominus* was employed within a household to designate the *pater familias*; members of the family, who were under his *potestas*, called him such as did any household slaves or former slaves who would have regarded him as their master.

This familial usage of *dominus* is attested to by Suetonius who asserted that Augustus was likely called *dominus* by his children and grandchildren, until he prohibited them from doing so after an actor in a comedy had spoken the words O just and generous Lord, which were received by the audience with a standing applause (Suet. *Aug.* 53.1).<sup>161</sup> The term may well have been employed by free women *in potestate* of the *pater familias*; in his portrayal of discussions about the abrogation of the Oppian Law, Livy had Lucius Valerius assert that men should prefer to be called fathers or husbands rather than masters (*patres...aut viros quam dominos*) by their wives and daughters, who were under their guardianship and not their slaves (*in manu et tutela, non in servitio*; Livy 34.7.13).<sup>162</sup> Livy’s reference to the loose association between the word *dominus* and slavery and Augustus’s ban on the use of the term

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*Lévêque. Tome 8: Religion, anthropologie et société* (Besançon: Université de Franche-Comté, 1994), 247-251; Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 256–257; Eleanor Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address: From Plautus to Apuleius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77–109; Jens Leberl, *Domitian und die Dichter: Poesie als Medium der Herrschaftsdarstellung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 194–6; Henriksén, *A Commentary on Martial*, xxiv–xxvi, 88–9; Matthew B. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy: Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 220, 255–8; Gering, *Domitian, dominus et deus?*, 130–4.

<sup>160</sup> Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 78.

<sup>161</sup> Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 95.

<sup>162</sup> Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 85–7.

implies that by this time *dominus* was not used in a domestic environment, but could be used if the *pater familias* insisted.<sup>163</sup>

There is another social relation, which revolved around the term *dominus*, namely the master-slave relationship. Dickey points out that slaves may have preferred the less derogatory term, *ere*, rather than *domine*, in addressing their masters,<sup>164</sup> but the close association between slavery and *dominus* continued into the late first century CE, as is well illustrated by Martial's *Epigrams*.<sup>165</sup> In *Epigrams* 1.81, Martial made fun of Sosibianus due to his origins as a slave. Sosibianus was aware that he was begotten from a union involving a slave (*servus*); by calling his father *dominus*, he fawningly (*blande*) acknowledges that.<sup>166</sup> In a similar vein as seen in Mart. 2.68, a former slave asks Olus, his former master or patron, not to find him contumacious. He had previously called Olus with the deferential title, *rex et dominus*, but now that he had purchased his cap of freedom (*pilleus*), he had gained enough status to salute his previous master by his given name (*nomine...tuo*), Olus.<sup>167</sup>

Clients who wanted to express respect towards their patrons used the term, *dominus*, because of its inherently adulatory and deferential tone. As a complimentary form of address,

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<sup>163</sup> Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 99, argues that familial use paved the way for generalized use of the term, *dominus*.

<sup>164</sup> Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 78–81, points to the lack of the vocative *domine/a* by slaves to their masters in Latin literature until the time of Horace. While *domine/a* was used among free men and women, slaves, mainly in Latin comedy, used to refer to their owners as *erus/a* which can be translated as ‘master’ rather than ‘owner’. She attributes this euphemism to slaves’ natural aversion to the connotation of ownership contained in the term, *dominus*, which equated slaves to inanimate objects.; Henriksén, *A Commentary on Martial*, 88: “it seems clear that *dominus*, in the vocative, had lost most of its semantic content.”

<sup>165</sup> Martial's manipulative use of *dominus* in Ep. 5.57 and 1.81: William Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12–3.

<sup>166</sup> Peter Howell, *A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), 285; cf. Suet. *Cal.* 32.3: *blande quaerentibus*.

<sup>167</sup> Mart. 2.68: Craig A. Williams, *Martial's Epigrams Book Two* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 220–2.

*dominus* was often coupled with the term, *rex*.<sup>168</sup> Romans may have detested the notion of kingship, yet *rex* appears to have been an acceptable way for clients to address their patrons. For instance, in the *Epist.* 1.7.37 written around 19–18 BCE, hence in the era of the Augustan Principate when Augustus was carefully crafting his public image, not as a monarch, but as a *princeps*, Horace claimed that Augustus called his patron, Maecenas, *rex* and *pater*.<sup>169</sup> Approximately a century later, Martial also combined *dominus* and *rex*—two problematic terms when applied to emperors—to refer to patrons.<sup>170</sup> Though these terms did not connote either “king” or “master,” the hierarchical inference and adulatory nature of these terms stroked the egos of arrogant patrons. Wailing against the haughty consul Paulus, a wretched plebeian asks whether he has to call anyone who will take notice of him and his plight, *dominus rexque* (10.10.5).<sup>171</sup> Patrons, who expected that their clients would flatter them, deferentially addressing them as *dominus* or *rex*, did not belong solely to the highest echelons of society. Martial referred to Priscus on numerous occasions: initially, when he did not know Priscus very well, he called him “lord” and “king” (*Ep.* 1.112.1: *dominum regemque*). Later, as he became better acquainted with him, he was allowed to simply greet him by his first name, Priscus.

The example of Priscus illustrates that there must have been a widespread agreement

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<sup>168</sup> *rex et dominus*: Mart. 1.112.1, 4.83.5, 10.10.5, 12.60.14; Juv. *Sat.* 8.161; *rex* alone also appears to be used by parasites in Plaut. *As.* 919, *Capt.* 92, *Stich.* 455 and Ter. *Phorm.* 338; cf. Mart. 2.18.8.

<sup>169</sup> Concerning *rex* as a form of address for patrons, see: Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 106–7; 355.

<sup>170</sup> Kathleen M. Coleman, *Statius: Silvae IV* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 81–2, discusses whether *rex* is necessarily pejorative with reference to Domitian in Stat. *Silv.* 4.1.46. She proposes that the use of *rex* is the result of artistic license. Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 106, n.72, maintains that if this address could be used as a means to flatter a patron, it would be an acceptable way to address an emperor, especially one who liked to be called *dominus et deus*.

<sup>171</sup> Edwin Post, *Selected Epigrams of Martial* (Boston: Ginn & Co. 1910), 235, translates *qui...respiciet* as “who will look condescendingly upon me” or “who will give me nothing but a patronizing glance.”

within Roman society that social inferiors should address their superiors with a proper deferential term so as not to offend them. Similarly, a desire not to offend one's social equals also existed in Roman society. Feeling insecure as to whether one were using the proper deferential term might be best illustrated from the vantagepoint of people, such as Koreans or Japanese, whose culture has an innately polite language based on hierarchies of age, gender, and social status.<sup>172</sup> In South Korea where respect for elders and politeness have long been regarded as paramount virtues, it is still acceptable for people of the same age to address each other informally after they have gotten acquainted with each other. Nonetheless, suppose that I, a native South Korean and graduate student, run into a person apparently of my own age at a conference in South Korea. As was the case with Priscus (*Ep.* 1.112), it is likely that we may call each other by the polite formal term, "seonsaengnim," which means "teacher" in Korean, before we become better acquainted.<sup>173</sup> That polite address does not suggest that either person is, in fact, a teacher; rather, it is the most polite form of address that can be used between strangers in an academic setting; at the same time, it is also a safe way to prevent any inadvertent offense, just in case the other person actually is a professor or is one's elder.

The same anxious desire to properly respect or, at the very least, not offend others, especially those who wielded enough power to positively or negatively affect one's career, was common in ancient Roman society. For instance, the embittered plebeian, previously mentioned with regard to one of Martial's *Epigrams*, asks the incumbent consul if he has to

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<sup>172</sup> Hwang, Juck-Ryoon, "Role of Sociolinguistics in Foreign Language Education with Reference to Korean and English Terms of Address and Levels of Deference at University" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1975), 57–8. After enumerating the factors that may affect one's choice of address such as social status, age, occupational rank, or other familial and social relationships, Hwang states that there is no "triumph of the solidarity at the expense of the status semantics" in the Korean language system, while it is a common trend in Western societies. He also added that it is very difficult for most Koreans to regard their teachers, bosses, or anyone who is more than five years older than they are as merely a "friend" and reciprocate with an identical form of address, even after considerable exposure to Western culture.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. The Japanese language also has a similar honorific system, adding "san" to the last name.

call anyone who looks at him “Master and King (10.10.5: *dominus rexque*),” especially if that person could become his patron in the future. Seneca also admitted that if the name of a person slipped his mind, he would error on the side of safety and salute the person as *dominus* (*Ep.* 1.3.1) to avoid giving any possible offense. Martial played with and even subverted the presumably adulatory connotation of *dominus* in his *Epigrams* 5.57; he advised Cinna not to be pleased when he called him *dominus*, for he often returned Cinna’s slave’s greeting that way.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, when a Roman was addressed as *dominus*, they might have been pleased and flattered with that polite form of address even if the person addressing them as *dominus* only did so to avoid giving offense rather than acknowledge them as their true master.

Martial also shows what price a client would pay if he forgot to address his patron properly in 6.88: when Martial accidentally called his fictitious patron Caecilianus by his given name rather than *dominus meus*, that liberty cost Martial 100 *quadrantes*, the standard amount of a dole (*sportula*) that was distributed at the morning *salutatio*.<sup>175</sup> The value of the lost *centum quadrantes* can be assessed by Martial's references to *sportula* in 3.7 and 3.30. Upon Domitian’s temporary abolition of monetary *sportula* (*Suet. Dom.* 7.1), Martial bids farewell to the *centum quadrantes* or *sportulae* of the arrogant patrons (3.7.5: *regis superbi sportulae*).<sup>176</sup> Yet, Martial also asks a poor client, Gargilianus, how he would manage in Rome without any *sportula* (3.30.1).<sup>177</sup> Therefore, *centum quadrantes* could have been used

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<sup>174</sup> Howell, *Martial Epigrams V*, 140–1.

<sup>175</sup> 100 *quadrantes* (=25 *asses*=1 *denarius* and 9 *asses*); Lindsay Watson and Patricia Watson, *Martial: Select Epigrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 167, suggest that *regemque* is understood to follow *dominum*; *sportula* in Juvenal and Martial: Edward Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), 85–6.

<sup>176</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 62: Domitian understood a patron to be someone who provided his clients with dinners (*cena recta*), a concept which seemed to have been so unpopular that the *sportula* appeared again in the later books of Martial (e.g. 9.100.1; 10.27.3).

<sup>177</sup> Because he provided three *denarii* as a *sportula*, Bassus in 9.100 is deemed more generous than Caecilianus in 6.88. Three *denarii*, however, would not have been enough for a client to purchase a new toga to

in a punitive way by a parsimonious patron to discipline a client for lack of proper respect; and depending on the client's financial situation, he would have found that loss either trifling or grave.

In sum, from the late Republic to the early Principate and onwards, the term *dominus* marked its place in the Roman society as a polite form of address. Those who needed to use this term were bound by a certain asymmetrical social relationship, namely patronage, where superiors, patrons, wielded authority over inferiors, clients. Depending on the context of its use, especially the sway that this implied social hierarchy could have, *dominus* was open to being construed as either a sign of flattery, excessive expression of gratitude, or subservience. In its development into a polite, deferential term, the slave-like connotation of *dominus* seems to have attenuated gradually, though not to have disappeared entirely.

### **How an Emperor Should React When Addressed as *dominus***

The negative connotation of the term *dominus* could be mitigated in the private sector, but not so in the political arena, where its offensive meaning was laid bare and it unquestionably indicated raw ambition, aspiration to kingship, or the tyrannical nature of anyone who would treat supposed equals as a master would treat his slaves.<sup>178</sup> Especially when the Republic had been on the brink, the warlords were considered potential *domini*, ambitious enough to overthrow the system. For instance, after mentioning the *superbia* of Rome's last king Tarquin Superbus, Cicero questioned how a despot (*dominus*) could arise from a king (*rex*); then he linked the term *dominus* to the Greek concept of *tyrannus* (*Rep.*

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replace a shabby one which he had worn while accompanying Bassus's on errands.

<sup>178</sup> Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 220, n. 12; see also Henriksén, *A Commentary on Martial*, 88.

2.26).<sup>179</sup> Cicero did not rely only on such examples from centuries past, but found a salient example of *dominus* in the recent past: he thought that Julius Caesar was insane (*amens*) in that he desired to be the king of the Roman People and master of the whole world (*rex populi Romani dominusque omnium gentium*) and he achieved his goal by defying the law and suppressing people's liberties (Cic. *Off.* 3.83).<sup>180</sup> Cicero may have accurately spotted Caesar's desire for unbridled power, but when it came to his adopted son Octavian, Brutus thought that Cicero had lost his knack for identifying a potential *dominus*. Brutus confided to Atticus his concern over Cicero's naïveté regarding Octavian. In stark contrast to Cicero's overly positive assessment, Brutus clearly saw the potential in Octavian for kingship (*regnum*) and despotism (*dominatio*) and remarked that such authoritarian rule contravened the ancestors, who did not wish that even a parent should be a master (*dominus*; Cic. *Brut.* 26.6).<sup>181</sup> Cicero and Brutus, both anxious about the survival of the Republic and wanting to forestall the rise of a monarch, used the word *dominus* to denote ambitious politicians who they feared might become despotic.

As if fulfilling Brutus's worst fears, Octavian/Augustus established the Principate, whose true monarchical nature he took great care to conceal. Augustus refused to publicly define himself as emperor but since the public and private realms converged in him—the Roman body and body politic united in one person—the line between public and private was

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<sup>179</sup> Cic. *Rep.* 2.26: *videtisne igitur, ut de rege dominus exstiterit, uniusque vitio genus rei publicae ex bono in deterrimum conversum sit? Hic est enim dominus populi, quem Graeci tyrannum vocant.*

<sup>180</sup> Cic. *Off.* 3.83: *Ecce tibi, qui rex populi Romani dominusque omnium gentium esse concupiverit idque perfecit. Hanc cupiditatem si honestam quis esse dicit, amens est; probat enim legum et libertatis interitum earumque oppressionem taetram et detestabilem gloriosam putat.*

<sup>181</sup> Cic. *Brut.* 26.6: *ego certe quin cum ipsa re bellum geram, hoc est cum regno et imperiis extraordinariis et dominatione et potentia quae supra leges se esse velit, nulla erit tam bona condicio serviendi qua deterrear, quamvis sit vir bonus, ut scribit, Octavius, quod ego numquam existimavi; sed dominum ne parentem quidem maiores nostri voluerunt esse.*

blurred. Within the private realm, Augustus was the *pater familias* of the imperial family and within the public realm, he was the *pater patriae*, the patriarch of the state.<sup>182</sup> As *princeps*, Augustus sat at the apex of Roman society, the *über*-patron, who was the one person in Roman society best suited to be called *dominus*. However, as will be illustrated below, Augustus showed extreme revulsion at being called *dominus*, while leaving his successors with the same dilemma of being an absolute authority while pretending to be an equal. In a similar vein, Carlos Noreña focused on the fluid boundary between “public” and “private” especially in the case of Roman emperors, while Pliny the Younger manipulated the fluidity inherent in Roman imperial society when he fashioned himself into an ideal senator under the ideal *princeps* Trajan.<sup>183</sup> The personal patronage that existed between emperors and senators, a key means of running the vast Roman empire, stands somewhere between “personal and private” and “official and public” and this ambiguity was a fundamental aspect of Roman imperial government. Therefore, any effort to draw a clear distinction between “public” and “private” is misguided in the case of Roman emperors.<sup>184</sup> Nor does the typical dichotomy between master and slave truly represent the malleability that the word *dominus* had acquired within various Roman contexts.

In the imperial context, the term *dominus* was employed to create a rhetorical

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<sup>182</sup> Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 253–4, contrasts Augustus’s reception of the honorific title, *pater patriae*, in 2 BCE (Suet. *Aug.* 58; Aug. *RG.* 35; Ovid *Fasti* 2.127–8) to his stern refusal of the insulting address, *dominus*; consequently, the dichotomy between a *civilis princeps-pater* and a tyrannical *dominus* was created. Still, this dichotomy is only valid when comparing Augustus and Domitian. Tiberius, who refused the address of *dominus*, did not receive the titles *pater patriae*, *Imperator*, or *Augustus* (Suet. *Tib.* 26.2).; cf. another pairing of *dominus* (sc. Domitian) and *parens* (sc. Trajan): Plin. *Pan.* 2.3; Similarities can be seen between Tiberius and Domitian in their peculiar vices: Daniel J. Kapust, “Between Contumacy and Obsequiousness. Tacitus on Moral Freedom and the Historian’s Task,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 8, no.3 (2009): 303–5.

<sup>183</sup> Carlos F. Noreña, “The Social Economy of Pliny’s Correspondence with Trajan,” *American Journal of Philology* 128, no. 2 (2007): 240–51.

<sup>184</sup> Noreña, “The Social Economy,” 242, 245.

yardstick that would mark an emperor either as a *civilis princeps* or a tyrant.<sup>185</sup> The best example of an emperor who was branded a tyrant because his fellow Romans assumed that he wanted to be addressed as *dominus* is Domitian, as recounted by Suetonius in *Dom.* 13.2:

Pari arrogantia, cum procuratorum suorum nomine formalem dictaret epistulam, sic coepit: "Dominus et deus noster hoc fieri iubet." Unde institutum posthac, ut ne scripto quidem ac sermone cuiusquam appellaretur aliter.

With the same arrogance, when he was dictating a letter to be circulated in the name of his procurators, he began thus: 'Our Lord and God orders this to be done.' From this came the practice henceforth that he should not be called otherwise even in the writing or conversation of anyone.

Since Suetonius put "with the same arrogance (*pari arrogantia*)" at the beginning of *Dom.* 13.2, this anecdote, along with the preceding anecdotes, testifies to Domitian's presumed *arrogantia*. Earlier in 13.1, Suetonius had related the anecdote about Domitian and Domitia in the amphitheater where Domitian had heard the people's acclamation, "*domino et dominae feliciter!*," with pleasure (*libenter*). Now, at the height of his arrogance, Domitian referred to himself as *dominus et deus noster* in a formal letter issued under the names of his own procurators. Suetonius diplomatically refrained from explicitly saying that this was done at the behest of Domitian. Nevertheless, widespread public understanding that Domitian yearned to be called *dominus et deus noster* established the custom (*institutum est*) that he should be addressed in this manner; so, Domitian was not called by any other form of address in writing or conversation. The presumption that Domitian himself had given the order to be addressed as *dominus et deus noster* persisted into the Severan period. This time, Dio Cassius emphasized the arrogance underpinning Domitian's order by using ἀξιόω, the verb of request, depicting Domitian as exulting in being called master and god (67.4.7).<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Emperors who refused the term, *dominus*: Suet. *Aug.* 53.1 (Augustus), *Tib.* 27; Tac. *Ann.* 2.87 (Tiberius), 12.11 (Claudius); Emperors who insisted on the title, *dominus*: Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 13.3 (Caligula); Suet. *Dom.* 13.2 (Domitian); Dio 72(73).20.2 (Commodus); On the basis of Martial 10.72, Roller, "Constructing Autocracy," 257 sees *dominus* as "a true designation for a despotic ruler."

<sup>186</sup> Dio 67.4.7: ἤδη γὰρ καὶ θεὸς ἡξίου νομίζεσθαι, καὶ δεσπότης καλούμενος καὶ θεὸς ὑπερηγάλλετο. ταῦτα οὐ μόνον ἐλέγετο ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐγράφετο; The passages referencing *dominus et deus* for Domitian: Dio

Though Domitian was not the first emperor whose character was tainted by close association with the appellation *dominus*, he was the one whose subsequent reputation, or memory, was affected most negatively. His behavior seemed to be in such stark contrast to that of Augustus, so Domitian's blackened memory owed much to the tenebrism effect accrued from his apparent deviation from the *exemplum* set by the civil *princeps*, Augustus, especially regarding how best to respond to the Roman public's desire to call him *dominus*. In his *Life of Augustus* 53.1, Suetonius introduced the exemplary reaction that Augustus had shown to *dominus* as an imperial appellation:

Domini appellationem ut maledictum et obprobrium semper exhorruit. Cum spectante eo ludos pronuntiatum esset in mimo: "O dominum aequum et bonum!" et universi quasi de ipso dictum exsultantes comprobassent, et statim manu vultuque indecoras adulationes repressit et insequenti die gravissimo corripuit edicto; dominumque se posthac appellari ne a liberis quidem aut nepotibus suis vel serio vel ioco passus est atque eius modi blanditias etiam inter ipsos prohibuit.

He was always terrified of the appellation 'dominus' as abusive and reproachful. When he was watching a spectacle in which 'O just and good Lord' was delivered in a farce and the entire audience leapt and applauded as if it were said of him, he immediately curbed the inappropriate flatteries by look and gesture and on the following day reproached them in a very severe edict. Thereafter, he did not allow himself to be addressed as 'Lord' even by his children or grandchildren, either in earnest or in jest, and he also forbade them flatteries of this kind even among themselves.<sup>187</sup>

Suet. *Aug.* 53.1 appears to closely reflect *Dom.* 13.1–2 in the setting and sequence of events. Both Augustus and Domitian received public acclaim at a public spectacle. The setting may have been similar, but Suetonius utilized divergent phrases to show how differently each emperor reacted to the appellation *dominus*. Suetonius described Augustus's reaction with the

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67.4.7; 67.13.4; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 45.1; Suet. *Dom.* 13.1–2; Mart. 5.5.2–3; 5.81; 7.2.1, 6; 7.5.3; 8.2.6; 8.82.2–3; 9.28.7–10; 9.66.3.

<sup>187</sup> Dio Casius has a similar account in 55.12.2, where Augustus, right after being called "master (Δεσπότης)" just once by Romans, banned that form of address; Peter M. Swan, *The Augustan Succession: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55-56 (9 B.C.-A.D. 14)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137, comments that the word ποτε makes it uncertain whether Dio dates this event to 2 CE or 3 CE; Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 87 also points out the connection between flattery and the title, *dominus*, though she questions what type of flattery was originally involved.

verb, *exhorresco*, which means to “shudder exceedingly at or to dread.” That word epitomized the astute response of the first *princeps* who was always (*semper*) appalled at being called *dominus*, which he deemed abusive, disgraceful, and unseemly flattery (*maledictum et obprobrium ... indecoras adulationes*).<sup>188</sup> Previously in Suet. *Dom.* 13.1, far from shuddering at such a vainglorious term, Domitian is depicted as gladly (*libenter*) accepting such public adulation. Unlike Augustus who issued an edict severely reproaching Romans for addressing him as *dominus*, Domitian composed an official letter, in the name of his procurators, that referred to him in an even more flattering way, as *dominus et deus noster*. Augustus prohibited the term’s use even among members of his own household, who could have followed custom and addressed their *pater familias* as *dominus*. Since it was common knowledge that Domitian wished to be called *dominus et deus noster*, it became customary to always address him in that way both in writing and in conversation. Suetonius used two words connoting flattery, *adulatio* and *blanditia*, to underscore that Augustus abhorred the obsequious flattery associated with the imperial appellation, *dominus*, while Domitian reveled in such flattery and refused to follow the precedent that Augustus had wisely set.

The second *princeps*, Tiberius, known for his aversion to flattery, faithfully followed Augustus’s example in deploring the title *dominus* as noted by both Suetonius and Tacitus.<sup>189</sup>

*Adulationes adeo aversatus est, ... si quid in sermone vel in continua oratione*

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<sup>188</sup> Margareta Benner, *The Emperor Says: Studies in the Rhetorical Style in Edicts of the Early Empire* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1975), 79, comments that though there is no need to assume that *dominus* necessarily demanded a servile attitude on the part of the addressee, Augustus rejected the term out-of-hand because of the mater-slave relationship that this appellation implies, which demonstrates that he was just a *civis*, not a *dominus*. That Augustus felt considerable trepidation and abhorrence towards *dominus* is suggested by Juvenal’s collocation of *exhorresco* and death (8.196: *mortem sic quisquam exhorruit*); cf. *Tert. Apol.* 34: *Augustus, imperii formator, ne dominum quidem dici se volebat, et hoc enim dei est cognomen*.

<sup>189</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 27; Tac. *Ann.* 2.87.2; 3.69; 4.6.2; similar wording in Suetonius (Suet. *Tib.* 27) and Tacitus (Tac. *Ann.* 2.87.2) suggests that they are referring to the same incident or share the same sources; both Tacitus and Suetonius mention that Tiberius was addressed as *dominus* despite his deep aversion to flattery (Suet. *Tib.* 27: *adulationes adeo aversatus est*; Tac. *Ann.* 2.87: *sub principe qui... adulationem oderat*); they also note that Tiberius’s works were praised as sacred (Tac. *Ann.* 2.87.2: *divinas occupationes*; Suet. *Tib.* 27: *sacras...occupationes*); Tiberius refused the appellation, δέσποτα: Dio 57.8.1.

blandius de se diceretur, non dubitaret interpellare ac reprehendere et commutare continuo. Dominus appellatus a quodam denuntiavit, ne se amplius contumeliae causa nominaret.

He hated flattery so much ... if anyone spoke of him in a flattering manner either in conversation or a prepared speech, he did not hesitate to interrupt him, rebuke him, and correct him right away. When he was called “Lord,” he denounced the speaker and admonished him not to address him anymore in such an insulting fashion (Suet. *Tib.* 27).

Suetonius closely associated *dominus* with these words of flattery (*adulatio*, *blandius*) when emphasizing that Tiberius abhorred flattery. Tiberius astutely followed Augustus’s example and showed repulsion at being addressed as *dominus*, assuming that the intent of the speaker was not to adulate the emperor but to insult him (*contumelia*). Suetonius is not the only author who linked *dominus* to flattery; Tacitus also highlighted the incident when Tiberius severely rebuked those who called his work divine (*divinas*) and him Lord (*dominus*), adding that free speech would be restricted and considered dangerous (*angusta et lubrica*) under a *princeps*, like himself, who was wary of giving the public such freedom and loathed flattery (*adulatio*).<sup>190</sup> Whenever a *princeps* was addressed as *dominus*, if that emperor wanted to be esteemed as a *civilis princeps*, he was expected to refuse (*recusatio*) the excessive title as Augustus or Tiberius had done, and display great disgust at being addressed in such a flattering, even fawning, manner.

Suetonius also mentioned two rare instances in which a *princeps* called his interlocutors *domini* (*Tib.* 29.1; *Claud.* 21.5). On each occasion, both Tiberius and Claudius referred to their inferiors as *domini*. Suetonius focused on their idiosyncratic behavior to illustrate their hypocrisy, feigned humility, or the inanity of such extreme subservience on the part of an emperor. In Suet. *Tib.* 29.1, Tiberius describes the ideal relationship between the *princeps* and the Senate. Tiberius addressed the Senate, asserting that a good and beneficial

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<sup>190</sup> Tiberius’s hatred of flattery as evidenced in Tacitus’s works: *Ann.* 2.87.2; 3.69; 3.70; 4.6.2; cf. the pairing of *increpo* and *adulatio*: Tac. *Ann.* 2.87.2: *increpuit...adulationem*; 3.69.1: *adulationem...increpitis*.

*princeps (bonum et salutarem principem)*, whom the senators trusted and therefore gave unrestrained power, must serve the Senate (*senatui servire*), the entire Roman population, and even specific individuals. He ends his address by saying that he regarded the senators as good, just, and indulgent masters (*bonos et aequos et faventes...dominos*). Given that he forbade anyone to call him *dominus* (Suet. *Tib.* 27), Tiberius was excessively patronizing to the senators when he used the term *servire* in reference to himself and *dominus* in reference to them, thereby invoking the master-slave hierarchy inherent in such expressions. His disingenuous flattery may have just been the prelude to the subsequent deterioration in the relationship between him and the senators, whose servitude Tiberius came to deplore (Tac. *Ann.* 3.65). Claudius's behavior echoed that of Tiberius. In Suet. *Claud.* 21.5, Claudius attends a public spectacle, just like Augustus and Domitian had done (*Aug.* 53.1; *Dom.* 13.1). Rather than being applauded as *dominus* by the audience, as was the case for Augustus and Domitian, Claudius inverted the situation and called them *domini* instead. His reference to the spectators as *domini* may infer Claudius's subordinate position in the social dynamic between himself and the audience;<sup>191</sup> on the other hand, it is far more likely that it was just an unsuccessful, tactless and far-fetched joke on Claudius's part (Suet. *Claud.* 21.5: *frigidis et arcessitis iocis*).<sup>192</sup> What is clear, is that both Tiberius and Claudius disingenuously employed the expression *dominus* when addressing their social inferiors—the senators and the Roman public, respectively—in a misguided and vain attempt to curry their favor. When applied to inferiors by their social superiors, especially by the emperor who sits at the apex of Roman society, the term *dominus* sounds so inappropriate that it exposes the insincerity of the speaker or highlights the irony of the situation.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Hurley, *Suetonius: Divus Claudius*, 154.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Martial applied *dominus* to Tucca and *blanditia* to his slaves, whom he was about to sell, describing the words of his slaves as *blanditiae* (11.70.2–3).

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Mart. *Epigrams* 5.57.

In a nutshell, the appellation *dominus* seems to have been a taboo that any emperor, who aspired to be remembered as a *civilis princeps*, should avoid. A simple refusal (*recusatio*) to be addressed as *dominus* would not suffice to prove an emperor's *civilitas*; instead, a proper emperor must express his extreme repugnance at being called that excessively flattering term and ban anyone from addressing him as such. He should also refrain from applying the term to his social inferiors, because that act of condescension would merely reveal his insincerity and false humility. As an arrogant *princeps*, Domitian did not make that mistake for he never deigned to treat his inferiors with more respect than befitted their status. Yet he still failed to craft himself in the image of an Augustan *civilis princeps*, as exemplified by the Homeric verses he quoted to comment on his cousin's misappropriation of imperial trappings (Suet. *Dom.* 12.3). There could be only one king and Lord—Domitian—to whom the others must submit.

The embittered reactions of the senators, who were desperate to be treated civilly by the emperor, and Domitian's betrayal of that expectation are best encapsulated in Pliny's *Panegyrics* which he addressed to his *optimus princeps*, Trajan (*Pan.* 2.3–4):

Nusquam ut deo, nusquam ut numini blandiamur: non enim de tyranno sed de cive, non de domino sed de parente loquimur. 4 Unum ille se ex nobis—et hoc magis excellit atque eminet, quod unum ex nobis putat, nec minus hominem se quam hominibus praesse meminit.

Nowhere should we flatter him as a divinity and a god; we are talking of a fellow citizen, not a tyrant, one who is our father not our overlord. He is one of us—and his special virtue lies in his thinking so, as also in his never forgetting that he is a man himself, while a ruler of men (Plin. *Pan.* 2.3–4).<sup>194</sup>

This speech, delivered in the second year of Trajan's Principate, is rather instructive in that Pliny delineated the virtues of Trajan, who, in his opinion, was unquestionably the best *princeps*. Pliny purposely touted those stellar qualities as a foil to the recent and grim example of Domitian, whom he considered the antithesis of Trajan. Without mentioning Domitian by

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<sup>194</sup> Translation from Betty Radice, *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 325

name,<sup>195</sup> since his inference was clear, Pliny listed several negative labels attached to Domitian to create a stark contrast between him and the illustrious Trajan. Pliny also employed dichotomous word pairings to differentiate Domitian from Trajan, such as tyrant vs. citizen and *dominus* vs. *parens*. Trajan was the citizen (*cives*) because he regarded himself as one of the senators (*ex nobis*), their equal rather than their superior, and he never forgot that he was just a human being and not a god, who was duty-bound to serve as a beneficent parental figure to his people rather than their overlord. In contrast to the model citizen *cum* emperor, Trajan, Domitian proved himself a tyrant by claiming divine status (*deus, numen*) for himself and forcing people to revere him as *dominus*.<sup>196</sup>

### The Public Perception of Domitian

Despite the customary interpretation of Suetonius that *dominus et deus noster* was publicly used in conversation and writings about Domitian, there is no epigraphic evidence employing the title *dominus et deus noster* in its entirety. A few Latin inscriptions have survived from that time period, but they only show either *dominus* or *deus* being used separately.<sup>197</sup> Two inscriptions were commissioned by people associated with the imperial family, one a slave and

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<sup>195</sup> Domitian's name appears only twice in the *Panegyricus* (*Pan.* 11.1; 20.4). Pliny seems to have refrained from mentioning Domitian by name, perhaps to insinuate his hatred for and fear of the assassinated emperor.

<sup>196</sup> Noreña, "Social Economy," 247, also detects Pliny's casual assimilation of *dominus* into the concept of *tyrannus*, adding that this shows how easily the term *dominus* could assume odious connotations.

<sup>197</sup> Scott, *Imperial Cult*, 109, points to the inscriptional and papyrological use of κύριος, the Greek equivalent of the Latin word *dominus*, as early as 82 CE for Domitian. Nonetheless, Domitian was not the only emperor who was addressed or referred to as κύριος in the Eastern provinces; see also Sophia Bönische-Meyer and Christian Witschel, "Das epigraphische Image der Herrschers. Entwicklung, Ausgestaltung und Rezeption der Ansprache der Kaisers in den Inschriften Neros und Domitians," In *Nero und Domitian: Mediale Diskurse der Herrscherrepräsentation im Vergleich*, edited by Sophia Bönische-Meyer, Lisa Cordes, Verena Schulz, Anne Wolsfeld, and Martin Ziegert (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2014), 133. n. 237: Domitian as κύριος; *SEG* 47, 2147 (κύριος; unknown location in Egypt); *CID* IV 142 (κύριος ἡμῶν ἐπιφανέστατος αὐτοκράτωρ).

the other a freedman. The first inscription, dated to 81-83 CE, was commissioned in Rome by Olympus who refers to himself as the slave of the master Domitian Augustus.<sup>198</sup> The other inscription, from southern Italy, was commissioned by Lucius Domitius Phaon, who applied the term *dominus* to refer to Domitian; Phaon is thought to have been a freedman connected with Domitia, the wife of Domitian, or her father, Corbulo.<sup>199</sup> In praying for the emperor's health, Phaon referred to Domitian as both the best *princeps* (*optumus princeps*) as well as master (*dominus*). More challenging to decode is an inscription from Corduba in Baetica.<sup>200</sup> The inscription dates to 90 CE and expresses gratitude to Domitian who ordered the revamping of the old military road, the Via Augusta. It has been reported that the dedication of this inscription bore the letters D.N. in front of Domitian's imperial title (until 1627 when those letters were expunged). Though it is tempting to assume that this inscription was public in nature, and, therefore, sanctioned by the emperor, that does not prove that Domitian gave instructions that he be referred to as *dominus noster* in the dedication.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, the only conclusion that can be drawn from Latin epigraphic evidence is that freedmen and slaves attached to the imperial house of Domitian might have addressed the emperor as *dominus*.

Domitian's lack of interest in portraying himself as *dominus et deus noster* in public becomes clear when compared with his promotion of two other titles, *Germanicus* and *ensor*

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<sup>198</sup> CIL 6.23454=Michael McCrum and Arthur G. Woodhead, *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors, A.D. 68–96* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), no. 228: *Olympus domin[i] Domitiani Aug[usti] ser[vus]*

<sup>199</sup> CIL 10.444=ILS, 3546=McCrum and Woodhead, *Select Documents*, no. 175: *pro salute optum[i] l principis et domini*; Identifying Phaon, see Gsell, *L'Empereur Domitian*, 49-50.

<sup>200</sup> CIL 2.4722: *(D[ominus] n[oster]) [Im]perator Caesar / divi Vespasiani Aug(usti) f(i)lius / Do[mitianus Augustus] / Germanicus pontifex / maxumus(!) trib(unicia) pot(estate) VIII imp(erator) XXI / co(n)s(ul) XV censor perpetuus / [p(ater) p(atriciae) ab arcu unde incipit Baetica Viam augustam milutarem vetustate crruptam restituit (milia pasuum) - - -]*; Scott, *Imperial Cult*, 49–50; Bonishe-Meyer & Witschel, "Neros und Domitans," 121.

<sup>201</sup> Gering, *Dominus et deus?*, 134, n. 123, comments that the inclusion of D.N. by the dedicator might have been a gesture of courtesy to Domitian.

*perpetuus*, in inscriptions and on coins. Only two or three inscriptional references to Domitian as *dominus* are known. In contrast to that scant evidence, Martin found more than twenty references to *Germanicus*—a title that Domitian assumed after his victory over the Chatti in 83 CE—among the inscriptions that he studied; this title remained part of Domitian’s official titulature throughout the rest of his reign.<sup>202</sup> Martin also confirmed at least 71 instances of *cens. perp.*, the abbreviated term for the office of perpetual censorship that Domitian assumed in 85 CE.<sup>203</sup> Ancient Roman coinage adds further credence to the idea that Domitian had little interest in being called *dominus*. The motto, *dominus et deus noster*, is virtually absent from imperial coinage, while there are numerous coins that feature Domitian’s perpetual censorship or his title, *Germanicus*, as part of their legends.<sup>204</sup>

Suetonius appears to have been the first author to allege that Domitian “requested” the appellation, *dominus et deus noster*. He makes that allegation in his biography of Domitian, referring to just a single occurrence and even that is a flimsy piece of evidence for it lacks any specific words connoting a direct order or request from Domitian himself (*Dom.* 13.2). Recalling the passage in question, Suetonius claims that Domitian had dictated a formal letter in the name of his own procurators, which started: “Our Lord and God orders this to be done.” Suetonius neither clarified the meaning of this passage nor put it in context, much less revealed how he got hold of this letter, but the damage was done for it seems that this single letter was the origin of the widespread belief that Domitian asked his subjects to address him as *dominus et deus noster*. Given the official nature of this letter, its widespread circulation, and its

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<sup>202</sup> Martin, *La Titulature Épigraphique*, 185; Jones, *Domitian*, 129.

<sup>203</sup> Martin, *La Titulature Épigraphique*, 192.

<sup>204</sup> On the title *Germanicus*, see Theodore V. Buttrey, *Documentary Evidence for the Chronology of the Flavian Titulature* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1980), 52–6; Martin, *La Titulature Épigraphique*, 183–7; Jones, *Domitian*, 129; Gering, *Dominus et deus?*, 152, n. 74.

ramifications, Domitian might have been reckless enough to refer to himself by this excessive title, but that is a far cry from proving that he also requested his subjects do likewise.

It is noteworthy that the letter was issued in the name of Domitian's procurators. If they were his freedmen, their reverential act of addressing Domitian as *dominus* might have been tolerated as had been the case for Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 53.1); if it were customary for the equestrian imperial procurators to call Domitian *dominus et deus noster*, this could serve as testimony to the subservient ambience of Domitian's court where even members of the free upper class were expected to address the emperor as *dominus*.<sup>205</sup> However, Suetonius did not include any context for the letter or its full content in *Dom.* 13.2. Nor are we certain who Domitian's procurators actually were. Though Suetonius mentioned that Domitian bestowed prominent offices on both freedmen and Roman equestrians,<sup>206</sup> it is unclear whether his own (*suorum*) procurators were exclusively freedmen or equestrians, or even included a mixture of the two.

While Suetonius claimed to know the specific appellation employed by Domitian's procurators, whether equestrians or freedmen, Statius, in his *Silvae* 5.1, may provide a glimpse into how people in and around the court customarily addressed Domitian. This poem, composed before 94 CE, is an *epicedion* that Statius wrote to commemorate the death of Priscilla, wife of Titus Flavius Abascantus. Being in charge of imperial correspondence (*ab*

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<sup>205</sup> On the status of imperial procurators, either as freedmen or equestrians, Paul R.C. Weaver, "Freedmen Procurators in the Imperial Administration," *Historia* 14 (1965): 460–9. After introducing the disagreement between Hans-Georg Pflaum and Fergus Millar about the takeover of imperial procuratorship by the equestrian order in the late first and early second centuries CE, Weaver maintains that it was commonplace in the early Empire for freedmen procurators to be gradually replaced by members of the equestrian order. Cf. Jean-Jacques Aubert, *Business Managers in Ancient Rome: A Social and Economic Study of Institores, 200 B.C.–A.D. 250* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 355–6, points to the co-existence of equestrian and freedmen procurators in the position of *procurator bibliothecarum Graecarum et Latinarum* in the early Empire.

<sup>206</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 7.2: *Quaedam ex maximis officiis inter libertinos equitesque Romanos communicavit*; on different interpretations of this passage, especially the word, *communicavit*, see Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 66–67.

*epistulis*) under Domitian, Abascantus might have been one of the last freedmen to do so, for he was later replaced by Cn. Titinius Capito, an equestrian who held the office during the rest of Domitian's reign and through those of Nerva and Trajan.<sup>207</sup> In his multilayered commemorative poem, Statius praises Domitian for installing Abascantus in the role of imperial correspondent and commends Abascantus for his loving devotion to Priscilla and for faithfully carrying out his vital, though arduous, duties as *ab epistulis*. It is noteworthy that in this poem Statius uses the term *dominus* four times when referring to Domitian.<sup>208</sup> Abascantus was apparently a freedman, therefore Statius could have referred to Domitian as *dominus* to suggest that Abascantus, as befitted his status, usually addressed Domitian in this manner. However, since the emperor was the primary person at court, it might also have been customary for everyone at court to address him with similar deference. Members of the imperial court may have addressed or referred to the emperor according to his wishes, and the equestrian or freedman status of each person would have had minimal influence on the choice of address. Domitian may have wanted members of his court to address him as *dominus*, but that does not automatically mean that he wanted the general public to follow suit.

Though Statius referred to the emperor as *dominus* thirteen times in the entire *Silvae*, a poem commemorating relatively high-status members of court who would have considered it appropriate to address Domitian in such a deferential manner, Statius was also aware of how intricately nuanced that title could be especially when applied to emperors. In an earlier poem (*Silv.* 1.6.81–84), Statius emphasized how Domitian refused that title in a more public setting. During the Saturnalia of the *princeps*, the public showered acclaim upon Domitian, lovingly

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<sup>207</sup> Bruce Gibson, *Statius: Silvae 5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxviii, 72–73.

<sup>208</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 5.1. 42: *a domino ... censore*; 74: *domini*; 94: *dominus*; 112: *domini*; 261: *dominum*; Cf. Gibson's discussion about Statius's reference to the divinity of Domitian in *Silv.* 5.37, see Gibson, *Silvae 5*, 92–3, 106.

calling him *dominus*, but Caesar Domitian banned its use.<sup>209</sup> Much scholarly debate has arisen due to the fact that Statius, whose poems were composed during Domitian's lifetime, cast his response to being addressed as *dominus* in a completely different light than Suetonius, who was writing after the emperor's death.<sup>210</sup> As is always the case with poetry—a genre steeped in metaphor whose authors are famed for taking “poetic license”—scholars debate the historicity of this poem, whether or not it depicts the actual Saturnalia and accurately portrays Domitian's actions at the festival.<sup>211</sup> Klaus Kircher assumed that this poem did depict that festival, so he focused on the Saturnalian context of Stat. *Silv.* 1.6: the social order between masters and slaves was temporarily reversed during the Saturnalia, so Domitian might have banned the use of *dominus* based solely on the Saturnalian norm rather than his true feelings about the title.<sup>212</sup>

Given that Statius did not contextualize his poem in specific historical terms, to historicize this poem does not appear to suit Statius's intention. The poem's setting is very similar to that in Suet. *Aug.* 53.1, where Augustus shuddered at even an indirect reference to himself as *dominus* at a public spectacle. Statius suggests that Domitian displayed a similar and genuine repugnance at being publicly addressed as *dominus* at the Saturnalia, irrespective of

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<sup>209</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.81–4: *tollunt innumeras ad astra voces/ Saturnalia principis sonantes/ et dulci dominum favore clamant:/ hoc solum vetuit licere Caesar.*

<sup>210</sup> To name just a few studies on Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.81–4: Klaus Kircher, "Domitians 'Ablehnung' der Dominus-Anrede (Statius, *Silvae* I.6.81-6)." *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 120 (1977): 90-91; Thompson, "Domitianus Dominus"; Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 107–8; Ruurd Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons: Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 401–2; Carole Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 248–9; Leberl, *Domitian und die Dichter*, 195–8.

<sup>211</sup> Leberl, *Domitian und die Dichter*, 194–5, interprets this poem as an imagined, ideal state where the social order is intact, without any reversal, and, therefore, presumes that Statius was not describing actual events that happened during the Saturnalian festivals under Domitian; contra Gsell, *l'Empereur Domitien*, 49, n.5, who dated this event to 1 December in 89 CE.

<sup>212</sup> Kircher, "Domitians 'Ablehnung'," 91, also considered Domitian's refusal of the term *dominus* to be a single event.

its temporary inversion of the social order. Statius could have known about Augustus's aversion to the term *dominus* for it was likely common knowledge decades before Suetonius collected anecdotes related to various emperors' reactions to being called *dominus*. Statius's poetry predated Suetonius's imperial biographies; the different socio-political contexts in which each author wrote may have significantly affected their interpretation of actions taken by emperors. That is particularly true of Domitian, who was initially treated with respect, especially during the early years of his reign and then, justifiably or not, reviled after his death. Also, it may have been dangerous for a writer to be too critical of an emperor during his lifetime; authors writing about an emperor after his death probably did not face the same threat of censure. Suetonius may have had greater liberty to focus on Domitian's *arrogantia* in *Dom.* 13.1–2 at a time when his reputation was in disgrace, while Statius, who might have genuinely had a more favorable view or felt less able to criticize the emperor, chose to present Domitian's virtues, such as generosity (*liberalitas*) at public festivals and *civilitas* in refusing the excessive title of *dominus*.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, as Newlands discovered, the positive image of Domitian in *Stat. Silv.* 1.6.81–4 contradicts Suetonius's assertion that Domitian was viewed with terror and hatred by all (*terribilis cunctis et invisus*, *Dom.* 14.1). Statius portrays Domitian not as hated and feared, but beloved by all: Domitian, who was lauded as *dominus* with affectionate enthusiasm (*dulci favore*) by the crowd at the festival, resembles Augustus, who was loved even more by the Roman people because of his virtues (*dilectus*, *Suet. Aug.* 57.1).

Purposefully enumerating the imperial titles, *princeps*, *dominus*, and *Caesar*, in four consecutive lines, Statius demonstrated that he was aware of the tensions surrounding how to appropriately address or refer to the emperor.<sup>214</sup> The term, *princeps*, was acceptable when

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<sup>213</sup> In a similar vein, Leberl, *Domitian und die Dichter*, 196–7.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Martin, “*Princeps, dominus, dux*,” and Garrido-Hory, “L’empereur chez Martial,” scrutinize

people wanted to praise the generosity (*liberalitas*) of the emperor. *Caesar* was also an appropriate appellation for the emperor: it showed his modesty in wanting to be called *Caesar* rather than the excessive term, *dominus*. The only title that an emperor should categorically refuse to allow was *dominus*; but, as Noreña suggests, it could have been the case that Domitian never wanted to be hailed publicly as *dominus*, even by the adoring crowd at the Saturnalia, and even if members of his own court customarily addressed him as *dominus* away from the public eye.<sup>215</sup>

Despite a paucity of evidence concerning the official use of *dominus et deus noster* to address Domitian, these three key factors—the custom at the imperial court of addressing or referring to Domitian as *dominus*, Domitian’s notorious arrogance, a trait he had displayed since his youth, and the negative image that was attached to the term *dominus*—might have worked synergistically to undermine Domitian’s reputation and cast a pall on how he would be remembered by successive generations. As pointed out earlier, the word *dominus* was tainted by the assumption that the one addressing the emperor with that appellation wished to adulate him in an obsequious manner and that the emperor must be excessively fond of flattery because he did not refuse such attention. Since any emperor who was that fond of flattery could never exhibit civility, both Augustus and Tiberius expressed utter disdain at the very thought of the term *dominus* being applied to them, an action they reviled as a grave insult. Suetonius and Tacitus critiqued the use of *dominus* and explicitly associated it with undue adulation (*adulatio*; *blanditia*).<sup>216</sup> The close association between flattery and the appellation, *dominus*, was not confined to the imperial realm; it could also be found in other relationships within ancient

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the use of the titles, *dominus*, *Caesar*, and *deus* in Martial’s epigrams.

<sup>215</sup> Noreña, “The Social Economy,” 248, n. 25.

<sup>216</sup> Suet. Aug. 53.1: *domini appellationem ut maledictum et obprobrium ... indecoras adulationes ... blanditias*; Tib. 27: *adulationes ... blandius ... contumaliae*; Tac. Ann. 2.87.2: *adulationem oderat*

Roman society that were characterized by an imbalance of power. In one of his amatory poems, Ovid had a woman utter blandishments and call her lover *dominus* (*blanditias ... dominumque*) to satisfy him (*Am.* 3.7.11–2).<sup>217</sup> Martial, writing at a later date, also employed derivatives of *blandus* and *dominus* in his epigrams, which still constituted *blanditia* even though they did not deal directly with the emperor.<sup>218</sup> Martial claims, in *Epigrams* 1.81, that Sosibianus addressed his own father as *dominus*, thereby “courteously (*blande*)” acknowledging his subordinate position relative to his father. In an epigram pointing out the hypocrisy of the consul, Paulus, who takes and performs the duties of clients, a plebeian asks if he has to flatter anyone who looks at him by calling them *dominus rex*, adding that Paulus also does this, but far more condescendingly (*quanto blandius*; 10.10.5–6).

Public perception about Domitian became increasingly negative and cast him as an emperor who preferred to be flattered and fawningly adulated as an omniscient *dominus* rather than genuinely admired as a virtuous *civilis princeps*. Since the evidence supporting that negative perception was sparse or equivocal, there must have been some who could profit from that skewed perception and who sought to manipulate the emperor into recklessly accepting being called *dominus* publicly. Andersen’s scathing exposure of imperial hubris, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, might be, as Kapust suggests, a fitting analogy for Domitian’s misguided behavior,<sup>219</sup> especially considering that those who were in closest proximity to Domitian, members of his court, inadvertently revealed their own insincerity when they claimed that they

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<sup>217</sup> Ovid, *Am.* 3.7.11–2: *et mihi blanditias dixit dominumque vocavit et quae praeterea publica verba iuvant*; on this passage and the use of *dominus* and *domina* in amatory poetry, see Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 82.

<sup>218</sup> Howell, *A Commentary on Book One*, 286: the polite form of address constitutes a *blanditia*.

<sup>219</sup> Daniel J. Kapust, *Flattery and the History of Political Thought: That Glib and Oily Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 2–5.

were forced to flatter Domitian to survive. In the right hands, flattery can turn into a risky business that does not merely stroke the ego of the recipient. Flattery can be brandished as a weapon by the weak to control the powerful, a deceptive and cunning façade behind which they try to gain control they could not achieve overtly.<sup>220</sup> If someone, such as a courtier in Domitian's orbit, found themselves in an adverse situation, they might endeavor to ingratiate themselves though flattering those in power around them and thereby improving their situation. Even an astute emperor like Augustus, who detested any form of adulation, could hardly prevent a desperate person from attempting such a ruse; and Domitian, who appears to have been much more susceptible to flattery and far less inclined to perpetuate the pretense of *civilis princeps*, would have been more vulnerable to the machinations of the less powerful within his imperial court and beyond.

Dio Cassius described an incident where a man named Licinus called Augustus master (δέσποτα; 54.21.8).<sup>221</sup> Licinus was Caesar's former slave from Gaul and was appointed procurator of Gaul by Augustus.<sup>222</sup> He would later become notorious for his ostentatious wealth, which he accrued through cheating the subjects in his province by dividing the year into fourteen months (rather than the twelve months assigned by the Julian calendar) so as to gather more tribute. Upon learning of Licinus's extortion, Augustus was ashamed and regretted having installed such a corrupt procurator. Licinus cleverly managed to escape punishment by creating the pretext that he had demanded excess tribute from the province solely to prevent

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<sup>220</sup> Kapust, *Flattery*, 9.

<sup>221</sup> John W. Rich, *Cassius Dio: the Augustan Settlement (Roman History 53-55.9)* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990), 95, suggested the date of this event as 15 BCE; Δέσποτα as an address form used for rulers: Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address*, 96–8.

<sup>222</sup> Licinus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 381; Rich, *Cassius Dio*, 147: Licinus is the only known freedman procurator of a province; Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 71 says of Licinus: he is “a striking example of the fluidity possible within the generally status-conscious society of Rome.”; Ludwig Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), 38.

revolt and then intended to give the excess to Augustus; to mollify Augustus further, Licinus is said to have addressed him as “master” when called before the emperor to explain his actions. Dio Cassius does not relate how Augustus reacted to that despicable pretext or Licinus obsequiously addressing him as δέσποτα, the Greek equivalent of *dominus*—an application that Augustus loathed and prohibited anyone to call him (Suet. *Aug.* 53.1). As Julius Caesar’s former slave, Licinus had been accustomed to a servile position which may have led him to address Augustus as *dominus*. Though he was elevated to the rank of Augustus’s procurator, it would have been inappropriate for him to use that term of address.<sup>223</sup> Nevertheless, Licinus likely realized how irresistible flattery can be to those in power and consciously chose the lofty address of *dominus* as the only viable way to save his life. Perhaps in consideration of his former status as Julius Caesar’s slave, Augustus might not have bothered to discipline Licinus in this situation. Licinus’s tactic worked and his life was spared; after governing in Lyon for many years (Sen. *Apoc.* 6), he retired to Rome and died during the reign of Tiberius.<sup>224</sup>

Dio Cassius (59.27.2–6) described a similar event that occurred in 40 CE during the reign of Caligula which involved Lucius Vitellius, who was the father of Aulus Vitellius (the ephemeral emperor in 69 CE). Vitellius enjoyed a stellar political career: he was consul three times, which was unusual for someone who was not a member of the imperial family, including twice as a colleague of Claudius, and he served with distinction as governor of Syria. He wielded great influence which made him a target of Caligula’s jealousy and fear of successful men who might plot against him. How Vitellius deftly employed adulation to narrowly escape

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<sup>223</sup> Peter L. Viscusi, "Studies on Domitian" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 1973), 94: “there is, however, the possibility that it was the normal form of address to be used by imperial procurators in speaking to the emperor. It may be that since the imperial procurators were in a sense “servants” of the emperor that [it was appropriate for them to use] the specific form of address of *dominus*.”

<sup>224</sup> Rich, *Cassius Dio*, 199.

death and ultimately became one of Caligula's favorites is remarkable. Arraying himself in a manner beneath his rank, Vitellius fell at the emperor's feet with tears and lamentations, worshipping him as divine and making repeated gestures of obeisance (θείασας ... προσκυνήσας).<sup>225</sup> In the end, he vowed that if Caligula were to save his life, he would offer sacrifice in his honor. Mollified and appeased, Caligula not only saved his life but befriended him. Caligula then asked Vitellius if he could see Luna, the divine embodiment of the Moon. Vitellius replied: "You gods alone, master, can behold one another (τοῖς θεοῖς, δέσποτα, μόνοις ἀλλήλους ὄρᾶν ἔξεστιν)." That deferential response ingratiated him with Caligula, who expected to be adulated as a god on a par with all the other gods. Dio Cassius remarks that Vitellius surpassed all others in flattery (κολακεία). Vitellius's shrewd use of the vocative form, δέσποτα, was not the only factor that saved his life and elevated him to being an intimate friend of Caligula, but it was a brilliant and successful way to adulate an emperor which was emulated by others in years to come.

After describing how effusive flattery mollified Augustus and Caligula and saved the lives of those who had incurred their ire, Dio Cassius related a similar instance regarding Domitian (67.13.3–4). Juventius Celsus, whose life was in peril, addressed Domitian as *dominus et deus noster*, a form of address that the emperor was known to have requested. Presumably a jurist, Juventius Celsus was accused of having a leading role in a conspiracy against the emperor.<sup>226</sup> When the conspiracy was revealed and he was about to be condemned,

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<sup>225</sup> Janick Auberger, *Dion Cassius Histoire Romaine Livres 57-59 (Tibère-Caligula)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995), 160: Dio Cassius's use of προσκυνέω confirms that Vitellius acted as if he were appearing before an oriental monarch for whom that form of address would have been appropriate; however, Caligula might have been flattered by Vitellius's subservient performance and motivated to elevate him to be one of his favorites, as opposed to Auberger's conclusion that Vitellius's action might not have pleased Caligula; introduction and development of προσκύνησις in Rome: John W. Humphrey, "An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's 'Roman History,' Book 59 (Gaius Caligula)" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1976), 268–9.

<sup>226</sup> Uncertainty of correctly identifying Juventius Celsus: Murison, "Rebellion and Reconstruction," 256–7; Richard A. Bauman, *Lawyers and Politics in the Early Roman Empire: A Study of Relations between the Roman Jurists and the Emperors from Augustus to Hadrian* (Munich, C. H. Beck, 1989), 181–4, identifies

Juventius Celsus begged that he might speak with Domitian in private (ἀπορρήτων); then, he made a gesture of obeisance (προσκυνήσας) to Domitian,<sup>227</sup> addressing him as “master and god (δεσπότην τε καὶ θεόν),” a flattering appellation that had been applied to Domitian by others many times before.<sup>228</sup> The ploy worked—a remarkable (θαυμαστῶς) feat, according to Dio Cassius, considering the severity of the accusation against him—and Domitian spared his life, but in return, demanded that he become an informant for the emperor. That action may have been less a response to the flattery and more a canny move on Domitian’s part, who saw the potential to use Juventius Celsus to ensnare other conspirators. Juventius Celsus naturally agreed, but then undermined the emperor by resorting to all manner of pretexts to avoid surrendering anyone to him. Ironically, after narrowly escaping execution, Juventius Celsus ended up luckier than Domitian for he outlived the emperor.

These examples, recounted by Dio Cassius about the powerful effect that flattery could exert on an emperor, share similarities with the examples taken from earlier writers. Like the Latin writers previously mentioned, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, Ovid, and Martial, the Severan historian and senator, Dio Cassius, also associated δεσπότης with excessive flattery (κολακεία) and recognized it as a clever stratagem on the part of social inferiors to manipulate their social superiors. Dio Cassius’s examples, however, focus on flattery as the last resort of the truly desperate, whose perceived insolence, powerful influence, or treasonous actions made them

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Juventius Celsus as Celsus Pater, the first of three known Iuventii Celsi.

<sup>227</sup> Dio 59.27.5 (θείσας ... προσκυνήσας) employed the word, *proskynesis*, to depict Vitellius’s maneuver to save his life from Caligula’s jealous wrath.

<sup>228</sup> Dio 67.13.4: μέλλων γὰρ ἀλίσκεσθαι ἠτήσατο δι’ ἀπορρήτων εἰπεῖν τι αὐτῷ, κὰν τούτῳ προσκυνήσας αὐτῷ, δεσπότην τε καὶ θεόν, ἃ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἤδη προσηγορεύετο, πολλάκις ὀνομάσας; Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 257, denies the authenticity of this anecdote. Identifying this conspiracy with the so-called prosecution of the philosophers in 93 CE and arguing that Domitian might have been fooled by Juventius Celsus for at least three years, satisfied that he was not involved, Murison labels this episode, except for Domitian’s release of Juventius Celsus, as denigrative fiction, “perhaps even put about by Celsus himself—after Domitian’s death.”

fear for their lives. Since their very lives were at stake, they each needed to put on an especially convincing performance of contrite submission and obsequious flattery to convince those in power to give them a reprieve. For them, flattery, whether sincerely meant or not, was far more than courteous adulation, it was a potentially life-saving strategy which worked spectacularly well in all three cases. In any event, Licinus, Vitellius and Juventius Celsus had the last laugh for they all outlived their imperial masters, Augustus, Caligula and Domitian, respectively.

As seen in the case of Augustus, who made his extreme aversion to being addressed as *dominus* patently clear, yet failed to prevent Licinus from doing so anyway, extenuating circumstances, such as Licinus's former life as an imperial slave, may have led Augustus to overlook the infraction; in other cases, emperors and other social superiors may simply not have bothered to rebuke the flatterer or did not want to seem overly sensitive by rejecting every single instance of flattery, however minor or innocuous. In his *Epistles* 10, Pliny, who had enormous respect for Trajan, referred to him with the vocative form of *dominus*, *domine*, eighty-two times. As the *optimus princeps*, Trajan might have felt the need to dissuade Pliny from using that term whose meaning had become so tainted. Trajan may have hoped that Pliny would have the sense to censure himself, but even if he failed to do so, as was the case, Trajan did not discipline Pliny because he did not want to forfeit his senatorial friend's goodwill.

Equally pivotal to the discussion of *dominus* is the asymmetrical or non-reciprocal relationship between superiors and inferiors, often made manifest by how the socially inferior address their superiors in an effort to gratify the latter's desire for adulation or just to be polite. The socially inferior may employ appropriately deferential forms of address so as not to irritate their superiors, or out of fear of being punished for insubordination or possibly incurring some disadvantage if they fail to use the proper address. The socially inferior may also realize that

they could accrue certain benefits by adulating superiors in the way they desire.<sup>229</sup> Despite the unequal power relationship between the two parties, the socially inferior tend to take the initiative in how they choose to address their superiors, unless the latter specifies a preferred form of address. Martial, for example, was unceremoniously docked 100 *quadrantes* for addressing his patron, Caecilianus, in an inappropriate manner (*Epigram* 6.88), but even that overbearing and miserly patron would not have had the audacity to overtly ask his clients to call him *dominus*.

Augustus and Tiberius, who both wisely cultivated the image of *civilis princeps* in their behavior and demeanor, were keenly aware that the term *dominus* had garnered negative connotations over the years so they emphatically declined to embrace it. If we can take Suetonius's negative characterization of Domitian at face value, Domitian, unlike his august predecessors, apparently thought that his status as emperor gave him the *de facto* right to set himself above all others. He took pride in his Flavian legitimacy, and he may have felt that it was beneath him to have to prove his worth by acting as a *civil princeps* and treating the aristocracy and the Senate as his equals. He also seems to have been reckless in allowing members of the imperial household, his freedmen, and courtiers to address or refer to him as *dominus*, the dubious appellation that ought to be handled with special care or simply avoided. Likewise, he let the rumor that he had officially requested his subjects to address him as *dominus et deus noster* go unchecked and permeate public perception without rectifying the situation. Domitian may have let his arrogance, a trait he had exhibited since childhood, blind him to the negative consequences of that inaction. His lack of prudent wariness concerning *dominus* and other self-aggrandizing titles would lead to the posthumous tarnishing of his reputation.

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<sup>229</sup> Dickey, *Latin Forms of Address*, 17–8.

Political figures and writers alike weighed in on how Domitian should be remembered. The opinion of the Roman poet, Martial, exerted considerable influence. He shows a marked change in tone in his epigram 10.72, written after Domitian's death, which crystallized how people would remember this problematic emperor. Prolific during the reign of Domitian, Martial used the term *dominus* thirty-two times to refer to the emperor, with *dominus deusque noster* applied in its entirety three times.<sup>230</sup> However, in the seventy-second epigram of Book 10, published as part of a revised edition two years after Domitian was assassinated,<sup>231</sup> Martial changes tact dramatically and critically represents Domitian's reign through personifications of flattery (*Blanditiae*). Warding off the Flatteries, whose lips are thin and worn from constantly uttering fawning words, Martial tells them that they come to him in vain. He declares that he will no longer speak the words, "Lord and God," and that there is no place for the Flatteries in the city of Rome; he then admonishes them to depart the city at once and go far away to join the felt-cap wearing Parthians. Martial claims that the craven subservience expected of Romans living under the rule of an emperor who fancies himself *dominus et deus* would also occur under a Parthian king, whose subjects, repulsive, lowly, and submissive (*turpes humilesque supplicesque*) because they are possessed by the Flatteries, kiss the soles of their painted king, a vainglorious oriental monarch. Now that the pernicious influence of the Flatteries has been expunged from Rome and there is no longer a "Lord (*dominus*)" in the capital, Martial states

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<sup>230</sup> Martial is the only poet who used the combination, *Dominus deusque noster*, in its entirety, see *Epigrams* 5.8.1; 7.34.8; 9.66.3.

<sup>231</sup> The first edition was published either in December 95 or at the beginning of 96; the second version that we have now was published in mid-98. Pointing to the lack of attention to Book 10 in scholarship, Hannah Fearnley, "Reading the Imperial Revolution: Martial, Epigrams 10." in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, eds. Anthony J. Boyle and William J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 619–20 stresses the importance of understanding the implications of the rewriting of *Epigrams* 10 and suggests reading the books in this order: *Epigrams* 9 (prominence of Domitian), then 11 (extensive treatment of Nerva), then 10 (Martial's relatively few references to Trajan), then 12. John P. Sullivan, *Martial: the Unexpected Classic. A Literary and Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 44–6, also posits that, had Domitian still been alive, even Book 11, assembled just three months after Domitian's assassination, would have been vastly different.

that the commander-in-chief (*imperator*), the most just senator of all, has restored the proper social order and brought Truth (*Veritas*) back to Rome from exile in the house of Styx. Under this civil *princeps*, if those who had previously been seduced by flattery are wise, Martial warns, they would refrain from speaking in the fawning manner of bygone days. When Martial calls attention to the effusive appellations, *dominus* and *dominus et deus*, not to mention a conceited oriental king adoringly kissed by servile subjects, he is pointedly and critically alluding to Domitian; on the other hand, when he describes the *imperator*, the most just senator, the one who has brought *Veritas*, rustic and devoid of flattery, back to Rome, he clearly means Trajan. This reversal in his assessment of Domitian, after the emperor's ignominious downfall and assassination, is all the more striking considering how complimentary Martial had previously been towards Domitian. The stark contrast between a thinly veiled critique of Domitian and admiration for Trajan in *Epigrams* 10, "a book of transition,"<sup>232</sup> can be construed as Martial's attempt to adjust to the new political climate under Trajan and part of what he hoped would be a successful strategy to dissociate himself from his earlier deference towards Domitian, lest he be tainted by it.<sup>233</sup> Demonstrating his change of heart in epigram 10.72, Martial asserts that unvarnished Truth characterizes Trajan's reign, while personified *Blanditiae* epitomized the Domitianic era.<sup>234</sup>

Apparently, a consensus was reached among prominent political and literary figures, who had lived during the reign of Domitian, on how best to (re)formulate his image. Pliny

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<sup>232</sup> Fearnley, "Reading the Imperial Revolution," 635.

<sup>233</sup> Marc Kleijwegt, "Introduction." in *Martial: Selected Epigrams, Translated with Notes by Susan McLean* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), xxxvii; Sullivan, *Martial*, 48; cf. Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 229: "Martial can be seen as an 'outsider' attempting to gain entrée to Domitian's inner circle by rather shameless flattery, which, of course, he subsequently abjured after Domitian's death."

<sup>234</sup> Contrast between terror (*metus*) of Domitian's reign and freedom under Nerva: Martial, *Epigrams* 12.5.3–6; 12.6.11–2; cf. Suet. *Dom.* 3; 10; Tac. *Hist.* 1–3; Juv. *Sat.* 4.151 (*tempora saevitiae*); Philostr. *VA* 7.4; Plin. *Pan.* 35–95; Euseb. *HE* 3.17; Oros. 7.10.

claimed, in his speech of *actio gratiarum* in 100 CE (*Pan.* 2.3), that he (and presumably the senators) had been forced to adulate (*blandiamur*) Domitian as *deus*, *numen*, and *dominus*.<sup>235</sup> Despite admitting that his flattery of the *tyrannus* was patently insincere, Pliny insisted that he paid genuine panegyric homage to Trajan because he was born a citizen not a prince, just like the other senators, and was benevolently paternalistic like Augustus. The claim by Pliny and others that they had barely survived Domitian's tyrannical reign notwithstanding, there is no hard evidence that Domitian ordered senators, or anyone else, to call him *dominus* or *dominnus et deus noster*, much less that he took advantage of the meaning implicit in those titles and arrogantly assumed that if anyone addressed him as such that they were servile subjects over whom he wielded unqualified imperial authority. Definitive proof of such grandiose titles being officially adopted by the Roman state does not appear until late in the third century CE when Emperor Aurelian had *deus et dominus* inscribed on two imperial coins bearing his image and minted during his reign.<sup>236</sup> Nevertheless, Domitian's reputation suffered after his death when many Romans began to view the excessive title, *dominus et deus noster*, as emblematic of Domitian, branding him as a tyrant who would later be accused of spreading terror near and far.

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<sup>235</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 2.3: *nusquam ut deo, nusquam ut numini blandiamur; non enim de tyranno sed de cive, non de domino sed de parente loquimur.*

<sup>236</sup> Béranger, *l'Aspect Idéologique du Principat*, 63.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Domitian's "Reign of Terror"

#### Creation of the Image of Domitian's "Reign of Terror"

Among the emperors whose reigns were branded as tyranny in ancient Rome, the expression "reign of terror," a term generally used to denote a certain period during the French Revolution, is almost exclusively attributed to the reign of Domitian. During the French Revolution, around 17,000 people were massacred, and more than 300,000 suspects were arrested within a year under the Committee of Public Safety, helmed by Maximilien de Robespierre. This period ended with Robespierre's own death. To no one's surprise, the first imposition of this infamous expression regarding Domitian came from French scholarship, when a scholar named Stéphane Gsell published *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Domitien* in 1894. Based on the account of Tacitus, who described the last phase of Domitian's reign after Agricola's death on August 23, 93 CE, as full of terror, Gsell titled the eighth chapter of his book "Période de Terreur." Because he published his book in 1894, precisely a century after the "terreur" of the French Revolution, French readers may have expected the casualties during Domitian's reign to have equaled those of the French Revolution. They might have envisaged Domitian as someone as ruthless as Robespierre, with the parallel in mind that the period of terror in the late first century CE ended with Domitian's own death just as the French reign of terror ended with Robespierre guillotined.

The influence of Gsell's label of Domitian's reign as the "reign of terror" can be seen in the Loeb translation (1914) of Tacitus's *Agricola* 45.1; the translators supplemented the expression "reign of terror," though the original text does not contain such expression.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Maurice Hutton and William Peterson. *Tacitus: Agricola, Germania, Dialogus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 111.

Almost three decades after Gsell's publication, Bernard Henderson also used the expression "reign of terror"<sup>238</sup> in his *Five Roman Emperors*, which deals with the reigns of Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan. Henderson did not ascribe the invention of the label to Gsell in particular, presumably because the identification of Domitian's reign as that of terror might have already been widely accepted in anglophone scholarship around 1927. In the same paragraph, Henderson describes Domitian as a "complete crafty tyrant," based on the personal animosity of Pliny and Tacitus as well as the bitterness aroused by Domitian's alleged persecution of Christians.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, scholars were divided into two groups: those who maintained that Domitian maltreated the Roman Senate without questioning the validity of the "reign of terror" label and those who questioned branding Domitian's reign as tyranny. The most prominent and up-to-date member of the first group is Pat Southern, who wrote *Domitian, Tragic Tyrant* in 1997. Because she focused on the development of Domitian's paranoia, she could not disregard the last phase of Domitian's reign, when he developed full-blown paranoia. In her eleventh chapter, "The Dark Years," she uses the phrase "terror of the last years" several times.<sup>239</sup>

Another group of scholars who have attempted to discredit the traditional picture and paint a more balanced picture of the Emperor Domitian have been intermittently active.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Bernard W. Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors: Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, Trajan* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1927), 13. The quotation marks are Henderson.

<sup>239</sup> Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 35, 40, 61; without necessarily employing the expression "reign of terror," there are scholars who have maintained a similar stance when weighing Pliny's and Tacitus's retrospective recollections and their claims that Domitian showed hostility to the Senate. For example, Syme, *Tacitus vol. 2*, 215: "Domitian reduced the Senate to servitude and complicity"; Levick, *Tiberius*, 221: "To Domitian, whose aim was to reduce the Senate's role in politics to a nullity"; Gowing, *Empire and Memory*, 128: "a reversal of the destruction of the nobility . . . perpetuated by Trajan's predecessors, most notably Domitian."

<sup>240</sup> Pleket, "Domitian, the Senate and the Provinces"; Waters, "Character of Domitian," "Traianus Domitiani Continuator"; Brian W. Jones, "Domitian's Attitude to the Senate," *American Journal of Philology* 94,

As early as 1961, Harry Pleket questioned the validity of the engraved image of Domitian as a monstrous tyrant; he presented an alternative image of Domitian as a strenuously working emperor who cared about the lives of the provincials.<sup>241</sup> In an article published three years after Pleket's, Kevin Waters highlighted the "perversion of the historical tradition that the relationship of Domitian with the Senate created."<sup>242</sup> Developing on Waters's research, Brian Jones prolifically produced scholarship about Domitian over thirty years. The focal points of Jones's research are whether or not Domitian's relationship with the senatorial aristocracy did indeed deteriorate to the point of being irreparable and what the economic and administrative aspects of Domitian's reign were. These topics have been neglected by the biased aristocratic literature.<sup>243</sup> Reflecting on this new trend of scholarship, Jens Gering published his doctoral dissertation in 2012, shedding new light on Domitian as a realpolitiker who, while maintaining the traditions of Augustus and Vespasian, took interest in the real life of the public.<sup>244</sup>

Despite various attempts to recast the image of Domitian and his reign, the label "reign of terror" has not been challenged yet. As I mentioned, Domitian's reign did not witness as great a massacre of people as Robespierre's reign of terror did. What is manifest, Jones, and even Southern, admitted that a mere comparison of the number of executions under other emperors' reigns and under Domitian's reign would help reduce the stigma of the latter. Even

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no. 1 (1973): 79–91, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order, Emperor Domitian*; Gering, *Domitian, dominus et deus?*

<sup>241</sup> A more reserved position: for example, Alessandro Galimberti, "The Emperor Domitian," in *A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome*, ed. Andrew Zissos (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 104–5: "such actions [executions] do not justify a view of Domitian's entire reign as tyrannical. ... Domitian's most fundamental project, which was to strengthen the autocratic aspects of the Principate at the expense of the senatorial aristocracy, failed."

<sup>242</sup> Waters, "Character of Domitian," 65.

<sup>243</sup> Jones, "Domitian's Attitude to the Senate"; *Domitian and the Senatorial Order, Emperor Domitian*.

<sup>244</sup> Gering, *Domitian, dominus et deus?*.

though Suetonius's list of consular victims in *Life of Domitian* (10.2–4; 11.1; 15.1) does not seem comprehensive, we know that twelve executions of consular victims were carried out over fifteen years of Domitian's reign. In comparison, Claudius killed 200–300 people, including thirty-five senators and more than 200 equestrians.<sup>245</sup> Claudius might have been ridiculed by Seneca after his death, but he did not acquire the ignominy of terror or savagery. These differences in posterity in regard to Claudius and Domitian must have originated partly from their different fates as emperors. Claudius's heir, Nero, sought to gain legitimacy from his adoptive father, whereas Domitian was the last Flavian emperor. Moreover, Domitian was accused of persecuting early Christians, a charge that is not true but makes the hated emperor far more vulnerable to the judgements of posterity.<sup>246</sup>

Regardless of the truth, the image of Domitian as a savage emperor who killed and oppressed members of the Senate has persisted. This is because aristocrats who claimed to have been threatened by Domitian left retrospective accounts about their sufferings under the cruel emperor. These accounts, namely those of Tacitus and Pliny the Younger, greatly influenced later authors, who mainly reiterated and reinforced these alleged first-hand accounts. Another main source of information on Domitian's reign is Suetonius's *Life of Domitian*. The biographer spent his teens and twenties under the assassinated emperor, and later he might have

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<sup>245</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 192; Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 116; Suet. *Claud.* 29.2 places the number of executions of equestrians as 300, whereas Seneca places it as 221 (*Apocol.* 13). Attempts to re-examine the emperor Domitian have recently been made in works not specifically dealing with the reign of Domitian. For instance, see Greg Woolf, *Et Tu, Brute? The Murder of Caesar and Political Assassination*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 105: “there were not, in fact, many executions of senators under Domitian. Dio and Suetonius both admit many were simply exiled or even pardoned. Given their hostility to Domitian, we can be sure that any real bloodbath would have received full coverage. The truth is that Domitian was relatively moderate.”

<sup>246</sup> For example, Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.17: “Domitian, having shown great cruelty toward many, and having unjustly put to death no small number of well-born and notable men at Rome, and having without cause exiled and confiscated the property of a great many other illustrious men, finally became a successor of Nero in his hatred and enmity toward God. He was in fact the second that stirred up a persecution against us, although his father Vespasian had undertaken nothing prejudicial to us.”

been permitted to access the imperial archive as *ab epistulis* and *a bibliothecis* to Hadrian. Overall, Suetonius did not deviate from Pliny's and Tacitus's accounts of Domitian's cruelty. Nonetheless, there is a difference in the level of hatred toward the assassinated emperor between the equestrian biographer Suetonius and the senatorial authors—Pliny and Tacitus. Suetonius's description of Domitian is not colored by personal enmity, whereas the descriptions of Pliny and Tacitus—Suetonius's senior by approximately eight years and thirteen years, respectively—detail what they, their friends, and their family members underwent during the reign of Domitian.

Another issue regarding Domitian's "reign of terror" is whether there was a watershed in Domitian's cruelty or whether his executions were carried out at random. Despite Gsell's and Southern's labelling of the last phase of Domitian's reign as a period of terror or as the dark years, ancient scholars could not pinpoint a historical moment when Domitian's cruelty rapidly intensified. Suetonius tracked the deterioration of Domitian's virtues into vices over time. The initial modesty that Domitian showed must have gone against his nature, which was rapacious and characterized by need, cruelty, and fear. In pointing out that Domitian's descent into cruelty occurred faster than his descent into avarice, Suetonius seems to suggest that Domitian's cruelty became more pronounced after the revolt of Saturninus in 89 CE.<sup>247</sup> However, unlike Suetonius, who defined the revolt of Saturninus as a civil war, Pliny and Tacitus did not associate the revolt with Domitian's cruelty. In the third chapter of the *Agricola*, Tacitus recalls the people who perished over fifteen years because of the emperor's cruelty, but he also expresses relief that *Agricola* missed Domitian's final years, when he consistently

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<sup>247</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 3.2: *mixtura quoque aequabili vitiorum atque virtutum, donec virtutes quoque in vitia deflexit; quantum coniectare licet, super ingenii naturam inopia rapax, metu saevus*; 10.1: *Sed neque in clementiae neque in abstinentiae tenore permansit, et tamen aliquanto celerius ad saevitiam descivit quam ad cupiditatem*; 10.5: *Verum aliquanto post civilis belli victoriam saevior.*

drained the Republic of its life blood by executing senators.<sup>248</sup> Pliny refers neither to any turning point in Domitian's cruelty nor to any mass execution of senators either after the revolt of Saturninus in 89 CE or at any other point.<sup>249</sup> A later Severan historian, Dio Cassius, reported on Domitian's numerous executions after the condemnation of the Vestal Virgin Cornelia in 83 CE, and in the wake of the revolt of Saturninus; however, the latter victims were most likely the ringleaders of the revolt, and it is difficult to establish any senatorial support for Saturninus.<sup>250</sup> Pliny and Tacitus also did not contribute to clarifying the identities of the ringleaders, for whose removal the Arval Brethren celebrated a thanksgiving on 22 September 87. Pliny and Tacitus described only Domitian's executions of their friends in late 93. These descriptions were misleadingly referred to as "philosophical," "Stoic," or "intellectual" opposition. Suetonius, meanwhile, mentioned two of the alleged opposition group among the other consular victims but did not call the year 93 as a point of no return.

Keeping the different levels of bias and discrepancy among ancient sources in mind, this chapter examines each consular victim that Suetonius enumerated in *Dom.* 10.2–4, 11.1, and 15.1. A thorough investigation of each victim will reveal the arbitrariness of Suetonius's categorization of the victims into two groups: quasi-revolutionaries and those who were accused for trifling causes. The investigation will also reveal the biographer's aim to trivialize the charges that Domitian imposed on each victim. Regardless of how lackadaisical Suetonius

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<sup>248</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 3.2: *quid, si per quindecim annos, grande mortalis aevi spatium, multi fortuitis casibus, promptissimus quisque saevitia principis interciderunt; Agr.* 44.5: *ita festinatae mortis grande solacium tulit evasisse postremum illud tempus, quo Domitianus non iam per intervalla ac spiramenta temporum, sed continuo et velut uno ictu rem publicam exhausit*; cf. 1.4: *saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora*. Based on Tacitus's expression, *postremum illud tempus*, in Tac. *Agr.* 44.5, Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 314, imply that Tacitus clearly regarded late 93, the immediate aftermath of Agricola's death, as a turning point.

<sup>249</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 148–9.

<sup>250</sup> Dio 67.3.3; 11.2; Steven H. Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions. Prosecutors and Informants from Tiberius to Domitian* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 129–30.

was in providing details about each victim and regardless of the speculative nature of the reconstruction of each charge that Suetonius reported, a closer examination of each victim's life may prove that the charges were sufficient to provoke Domitian, who was known to mistrust anyone who could pose a threat to his imperial authority.

### **The Consular Victims in Suetonius's *Life of Domitian***

After introducing Domitian's nonsenatorial victims, Suetonius introduced the many (*complures*) senatorial victims in *Dom.* 10.2–4, without specifically referring to the exact number of victims. Suetonius categorized the consular or ex-consular victims that he chose to list among the many senatorial victims into two groups: 1) those who were accused of plotting revolution (Civica Cerialis, Salvidienus Orfitus, and Acilius Glabrio) and 2) those who were accused of a trivial charge (Aelius Lamia, Salvius Cocceianus, Mettius Pompusianus, Sallustius Lucullus, Arulenus Rusticus, Helvidius the Younger, and Flavius Sabinus).<sup>251</sup> The incomplete nature of this list has been noted by Jones, who stated that Suetonius relegated two other consular victims, who were also Domitian's imperial relatives, to the later passages.<sup>252</sup> Suetonius alluded to the arbitrariness of his categories and the inauthenticity of the charges, as can be seen in his use of words such as *quasi* or *levis*. The alleged lightness of each charge was intended to highlight the steep degradation of Domitian's savagery (*ad saevitiam descivit*, Suet. *Dom.* 10.1). Regardless of Suetonius's intentions, a more thorough investigation of each victim's life may provide some glimpses of the factors that agitated Domitian the most.

### ***Quasi Molitores Rerum Novarum***

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<sup>251</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 10.2: *quasi molitores rerum novarum, ceteros levissima quemque de causa.*

<sup>252</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 87: M. Arrecinus Clemens was discussed in 11.1 and T. Flavius Clemens in 15.1.

Suetonius generalized the charges levelled against three consular individuals (Civica Crialis, Salvidienus Orfitus, and Acilius Glabrio), stating that they were accused of scheming to orchestrate a revolution. Though Suetonius might have regarded the charge of treason as sufficient to convey the impression of the blindness of Domitian's persecution, the lack of details provides room for circumstantial speculation about each charge based on existing information about each victim.

Before discussing each individual, Suetonius's choice of words, *molitores rerum novarum*, deserves examination. Denoting a political revolution in the late Republican context,<sup>253</sup> the expression *res novae* continued to imply conspiracy and revolution against *princeps* in the early Principate in conjunction with the implementation of the *lex maiestatis*. While Caesar's *lex Julia de maiestate* targeted those who attempted to harm or kill magistrates with *imperium*, the law extended its scope under Augustus for reasons of *maiestas minuta principis* (the diminished "majesty" of the emperor). It included the charges of adultery, *repetundae*, *secessio*, and words or actions against the *princeps* and his family, associates, and magistrates.<sup>254</sup> Nevertheless, the question of whether each *princeps* relied on the *lex maiestatis* has been debated,<sup>255</sup> and it appears that the law intermittently went into abeyance in the early Principate.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> For example, Sall. *BC.* 28.4, 37.1; *BJ.* 19.1.

<sup>254</sup> Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 87–8.

<sup>255</sup> Richard A. Bauman, *Impietas in Principem: A Study of Treason against the Roman Emperor with Special Reference to the First Century AD* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 1974), 18–21, argues for the installation of an institution for the abolition of charges of *maiestas*. According to Bauman, Caligula initiated that tradition upon his accession, and it continued with the Severi. This action was taken as proof of the *civilis animis* of the emperor. Repudiating Bauman, Arthur Keaveney and John. A. Madden, "The Crimen Maiestatis under Caligula: The Evidence of Dio Cassius," *The Classical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1998): 320, contend that Caligula simply forgave some people who had been charged with *maiestas* under Tiberius upon accession, but continued to accuse others of the same crime.

<sup>256</sup> Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 88, comments that there was no *maiestas* trial between 41 and 62, and presumably 69 and (possibly) 87 or even 93.

What seemed to matter to Suetonius was creating the impression that each charge was construed by Domitian as tantamount to conspiracy regardless of its validity. Especially in regard to the umbrella charge of plotting a revolution or conspiracy in Suet. *Dom.* 10.2, the biographer used a similar combination of words in the case of Libo Drusus in 16 CE under Tiberius (*Tib.* 25.1: *L. Scribonius Libo vir nobilis res novas clam moliebatur*). Suetonius was not the only one who collocated *res novae* with the verb *molior*; both Tacitus and Velleius Paterculus employed the same combination when it came to Libo Drusus (*Tac. Ann.* 2.27.1: *Libo Drusus defertur moliri res novas*; *Vell.* 2.129.2: *nova molientem oppressit*).<sup>257</sup> Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus, a young noble praetor in the year 15 CE, committed suicide after he was charged with conspiracy against Tiberius with the help of divination. His property was divided among his accusers, and the Senate decreed that September 13, the day Libo Drusus committed suicide, a holiday (*dies festus*), astrologers were to be expelled from Italy.<sup>258</sup> Despite the debates about whether Libo Drusus was tried under *maiestas* law,<sup>259</sup> the fact that Tacitus denounced the measures proposed by the senators as sycophantic and evil committed by the state (*Tac. Ann.* 2.32.2 *adulationes . . . vetus . . . in re publica malum*) may reflect the sense of insecurity that Tiberius felt and that was bolstered by the disturbance of Clemens,

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<sup>257</sup> The use of *res novae* in trials in the early principate: The trial of Vivius Serenus, a proconsul of Baetica, in 23 CE (*Tac. Ann.* 4.28: *non enim se cadem principis et res novas uno socio cogitasse*); a conspiracy of Asinius Gallus in 46 under Claudius (*Suet. Claud.* 13: *conspirauerunt autem ad res nouas*); about the charges contemplated against Agrippina in 55 (*Tac. Ann.* 13.19: *Rubellium Plautum . . . ad res novas extollere*).

<sup>258</sup> *Fasti. Amit.* Sept. 13 *nefaria consilia . . . de salute Ti. Caes. liberorumque eius et aliorum principum ciuitatis*; Description of the development of Tiberius's suspicion of Libo Drusus in the years 14–16 and the charge against him: *Tac. Ann.* 2.27–32; Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 158–61; Seager, *Tiberius*, 74–7; Andrew Pettinger, *The Republic in Danger: Drusus Libo and the Succession of Tiberius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17–27. For the discrepancies regarding the measures taken among ancient authors, see Francis R. D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus: Volume II, Annals 1.55–81 and Annals 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 284–5.

<sup>259</sup> Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 159, denies the possibility that Libo Drusus was tried under *maiestas* law because those charges concerning magic did not fall under the law until much later. However, Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, vol. 2, 262, calls the case of Libo Drusus the first major case of *maiestas* in Tiberius's principate. In a similar vein, see Pettinger, *Republic in Danger*, 26–7.

Agrippa Postumus's slave.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, though Suetonius refrained from offering details about the alleged conspiracies under Domitian in *Dom.* 10.2, a reader familiar with the events of 16 CE under Tiberius is likely to anticipate the same level of insecurity in the emperor. It is also worth noting that the biographer, unlike Pliny or Tacitus, included Arulenus Rusticus only among the four people attributed to the "philosophical," "stoic," or "intellectual" opposition in 93 CE and categorized Arulenus as one who was accused of a trivial charge, not *res novae*.

### **Gaius Vettulenus Civica Cerialis**

The only information Suetonius provided about Gaius Vettulenus Civica Cerialis is that he was executed during his proconsulship of Asia.<sup>261</sup> Nevertheless, the careers of the two brothers, Gaius and Sextus Vettulenus Cerialis, his elder, verify that they were deeply involved in the administration of the Flavian emperors. Those two Vettuleni presumably shared their Sabine origins with the Flavians. Sextus had commanded one of Vespasian's three legions in Judaea, with Titus and Trajan's father in charge of the other two. After Sextus's suffect consulship in around 72 CE, the two brothers seem to have been adlected to patrician status in 73/74 CE by Vespasian. Gaius also held his suffect consulship in around 74. Sextus and Gaius were appointed as legates in Moesia from 74/5 to 78/9 and from 81/2 to 83/4, respectively. Sextus was probably proconsul of Africa in 83/4, and Gaius served his proconsulship in Asia. The date of the proconsulship has been contested in relation to the reason Domitian executed Gaius. After the execution of Gaius, nothing was heard about Sextus.<sup>262</sup> What is evident is that the two Vettuleni brothers were favored by

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<sup>260</sup> Tiberius's sense of insecurity, Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, vol. 2, 149. The possible correlation between the conspiracy of Libo Drusus and the disturbance of Clemens: Seager, *Tiberius*, 77.

<sup>261</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 10.2: *Civicam Cerealem in ipso Asiae proconsulatu*; Tac. *Agr.* 42.1: *occiso Ciuica nuper*.

<sup>262</sup> About two brothers: Ronald Syme, "Antonine Relatives: Ceionii and Vettuleni," *Athenaeum* 35

Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian to be promoted hand in hand to the positions of proconsuls of the most illustrious public or senatorial provinces of Asia and Africa. These positions were awarded to the two most senior ex-consuls by lot.<sup>263</sup>

Suetonius did not provide any details about the downfall of Gaius Vettulenus Civica Cerialis. Domitian construed Gaius's crime as so grave that his former favors to the brothers could not make up for it; several attempts have been made to identify this crime.<sup>264</sup> For instance, based on the then-prevalent dating of Gaius's proconsulate to 88/89, Ogilvie and Richmond suggested an association of the cases of Gaius Vettulenus Civica Cerialis and Sallustius Lucullus to the revolt of Saturninus in January of 89.<sup>265</sup> After the publication of Ogilvie and Richmond's book in 1967, however, most scholars have agreed with the new attribution of Gaius's proconsulship to 87/88 argued by Werner Eck in 1970. In this case, Domitian's decision to execute Gaius because of his association with Saturninus would be improbable.<sup>266</sup>

Brian Jones presented an alternative association between the execution of Gaius Vettulenus Civica Cerialis and the appearance of a "false Nero" in around 88. Jones's premise consists of a few if's: first, that the false Nero, whoever he was, must have passed through

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(1957): 312–3, and Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 87; Gaius Vettulenus Civica Cerialis: *PIR*<sup>I</sup> V 352; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 120, no. 303, Werner Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1970), 307 n. 108; Sextus Vettulenus Civica Cerialis: *PIR*<sup>I</sup> V 351 Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 120, no. 302, Eck, *Senatoren*, 236.

<sup>263</sup> Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 298.

<sup>264</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 36–7, refutes the existence of a "Titus faction," in which L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus, Ser. Cornelius Scipio Salvidienus Orfitus, and M. Acilius Glabrio were thought to have been involved.

<sup>265</sup> Robert M. Ogilvie and Ian Richmond, *Cornelii Taciti: De Vita Agricola* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 294.

<sup>266</sup> Eck, *Senatoren*, 86; Roche, "L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus," 320. See also Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 33, and *Emperor Domitian*, 148.

Asia, and Cerialis might have ignored him believing that support for him would eventually wither away. Considering the reference to the sacrifices made by the Arval Brethren on 22 September 87,<sup>267</sup> Domitian might have been paranoid about another conspiracy. Jones argues that Domitian might have interpreted Gaius's lack of action as tantamount, to a certain degree, to conspiracy.<sup>268</sup> Nonetheless, as Jones admits, the year when the false Nero appeared is also uncertain as are the proconsulship of Cerialis in 87/88 or that of his successor M. Fulvius Gillo in 88/89.<sup>269</sup> Thus, all the associations of Domitian's execution of Gaius during his proconsulship with either the revolt of Saturninus or the false Nero remain hypothetical.

The last noteworthy point about Gaius Vettulenus Civica Cerialis, according to Jones, pertains to the social rank of C. Minucius Italus, who filled Gaius's position after his execution. C. Minucius Italus was not one of Gaius's *legati* or his quaestors but one of Domitian's own equestrian procurators.<sup>270</sup> Focusing on Domitian's near regularization of an equestrian *cursus honorum* to fill the imperial bureaus with his equestrians, Jones comments that Domitian's choice of C. Minucius Italus might have been an "affront to senatorial dignity."<sup>271</sup> The two Vettuleni, presumably adlected to patrician status by Vespasian, were in charge of the provinces of Asia and Africa, respectively. Tacitus also raised the possibility that Agricola was chosen by lot as proconsul of either Asia or Africa around 89/90 CE,

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<sup>267</sup> CIL 6.2065: *ob detecta scelera nefariorum*.

<sup>268</sup> Brian W. Jones, "C. Vettulenus Civica Cerialis and the 'False Nero' of A. D. 88'," *Athenaeum* 61 (1983): 516-521 and *Emperor Domitian*, 182-3.

<sup>269</sup> Jones, "C. Vettulenus Civica Cerialis," 519.

<sup>270</sup> C. Minucius Italus: *proc[urator] prouvinciae Asiae quam mandatu principis uice defuncti proco[n]s[ulis] rexit, procurat: ILS 1374=McCrum and Woodhead, Selected Documents, no. 336= CIL 5.875 (from Aquileia).*

<sup>271</sup> Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 84-85; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 179.

referring to the recent death of Civica Cerialis in *Agr.* 42.1 (*occiso Civica nuper*).<sup>272</sup> Given the prestige of the former proconsuls of Asia and Africa and the likely candidates, Domitian's choice of an equestrian procurator in a senatorial province might have provoked senatorial ire. If we follow Woodman and Kraus's suggestion that the case of Civica Cerialis served as a warning and precedent (*consilium ... exemplum*, Tac. *Agr.* 42.1) for Agricola not to accept the proconsulship of Asia or Africa, we can argue that Civica Cerialis was immoderate and imprudent to have ignored the emperor's warnings.<sup>273</sup> Nonetheless, given the abrupt and prompt nature of his execution, Cerialis might have committed a crime tantamount to rebellion that Domitian did not anticipate.

### Salvidienus Orfitus

The only source referring to Orfitus other than Suetonius, who mentioned his execution in the *Life of Domitian*, is Philostratus's *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, written in the early third century CE. According to *VA* 7.8, along with Nerva and Rufus, Orfitus was regarded as a suitable candidate for sovereignty. Accusing the three of plotting against him, Domitian had Orfitus and Rufus confined to islands, and he ordered Nerva to live in Tarentum.<sup>274</sup> However, as Christopher Jones points out, if "Rufus" was Verginius Rufus, who was Nerva's senior by fifteen or sixteen years, then Verginius was not known to have been exiled by Domitian. Neither do we have any evidence that Domitian banished Nerva to Tarentum.<sup>275</sup> This lack of historical authenticity naturally requires one to treat the portion

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<sup>272</sup> Tacitus did not specify how long he meant by *nuper*. Civica Cerialis appeared in an inscription at Metropolis, a suburb of Ephesus (*Inscriften von Ephesos* 3050), dated to 87/88. Because Civica Cerialis's own death was dated to ca. 87/88, two or three years must have been what Tacitus meant by *nuper*.

<sup>273</sup> Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 74–5 and 298–9.

<sup>274</sup> Philostratus *VA* 7.8: ἀρχῆν πρέπειν . . . Ὀρφίτον . . . ἐπιβουλεύειν ἑαυτῷ.

<sup>275</sup> Christopher P. Jones, *Philostratus: Apollonius of Tyana, Volume I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 220–3.

about Salvidienus Orfitus in *VA* 7.8 with great caution.

More is known about Salvidienus Orfitus's family than about Salvidienus Orfitus, who received a suffect consulship from Domitian before 87 CE.<sup>276</sup> Salvidienus Orfitus was connected to the senators who were known to oppose the emperors through his great-grandmother, Vistilia. Vistilia had begotten sons from different men, such as Cn. Domitius Corbulo, who committed suicide on Nero's orders in 67 CE; Q. Pomponius Secundus, who seems to have been involved in Arruntius's conspiracy against Claudius; and the father of P. Glitius Gallus, who was exiled in 65. As Vistilia's great-grandson, Salvidienus Orfitus was also related to Domitian's imperial family via Domitia Longina, daughter of Cn. Domitius Corbulo and Domitian's wife.<sup>277</sup> His namesake father, the elder Salvidienus Orfitus, was a prominent figure who held his regular consulship in 51 with the emperor Claudius as his colleague. The elder Salvidienus Orfitus fell prey to the then-young *delator* M. Aquilius Regulus, who was to support the aforementioned accusation against Arulenus Rusticus or possibly even accuse him later in 93. On the uncommon charge that he allowed his estates near the Forum to be leased for public use, the elder Salvidienus Orfitus was executed in 66.<sup>278</sup> Brian Jones speculates that the real reason for the execution of the elder might have been his connections with the "opposition" as a great-grandson of Vistilia.<sup>279</sup>

Given Suetonius's reticence about the real cause and exact date of Domitian's execution of Salvidienus Orfitus and the victim's stellar familial links to the senatorial

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<sup>276</sup> Servius Cornelius Scipio Salvidienus Orfitus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1445; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 42–3, 103, no. 92; *Emperor Domitian*, 183–4; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 87–8.

<sup>277</sup> Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 42–3,

<sup>278</sup> The Elder Salvidienus Orfitus: Tac. *Hist.* 4.42.1; Suet. *Nero* 37.1; Dio 62.27.1; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1444; Vasily Rudich, *Political Dissidence Under Nero: The Price of Dissimulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), 199; M. Aquilius Regulus's role in the accusation of Arulenus Rusticus: Robert S. Rogers, "A Group of Domitianic Treason-Trials," *Classical Philology* 55 no. 1 (1960): 23 n.14; Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 132–3.

<sup>279</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 182.

victims under previous emperors, this topic has been the subject of much speculation by scholars. Brian Jones interpreted Domitian's grant of suffect consulship around 87 as a genuine effort to come to terms with senators of patrician rank. This interpretation can be validated by presuming that the emperors might have been inclined to be suspicious of the sons of senators who were executed by former emperors.<sup>280</sup> Concerning the date of the execution, Robert Rogers raises the possibility that Salvidienus Orfitus was killed in the year 93 along with Helvidius Priscus, Arulenus Rusticus, Junius Ruscitus, and Herennius Senecio.<sup>281</sup> This implies that Salvidienus Orfitus was related to the so-called "opposition group" in the year 93. However, both Pliny and Tacitus did not make any reference to Salvidienus Orfitus in the context of the executions of the year 93. Salvidienus Orfitus's name appears not to have occurred to Pliny even in his tirade against the *delator* Regulus (*Ep.* 1.5). Presumably, Philostratus's reference to Orfitus as an individual who was suitable for power might also have been related to the continued prominence of the latter's family in the second century CE. Three consulships were ascribed to Salvidieni Orfiti in 110, 149, and 178.

### **Acilius Glabrio**

As with the other two quasi-revolutionaries, the only information that Suetonius provided about Acilius Glabrio is that he was executed while already in exile. Later authors such as Juvenal and Dio Cassius offered more information about the victim and his family, though they do not appear to have agreed with Suetonius on the charge of his execution.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 166.

<sup>281</sup> Rogers, "Domitianic Treason-Trials," 23 n.14, clarifies that this link is based on conjecture.

<sup>282</sup> M. Acilius Glabrio: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 67; Dio 67.12.1, 14.3; Juv. Sat. 4. 94–103; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 96, no. 4; *Emperor Domitian*, 51, 115, 184; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 88; for a complete list of the sources mentioning the Acilii, see Monique Dondin-Payre, "Domitien et la Veille Aristocratie Sénatoriale:

Acilius Glabrio was mentioned twice in the epitome of Dio Cassius's sixty-seventh book. Acilius Glabrio held his regular consulship with Marcus Ulpius Trajan, the later emperor, in 91 CE. Dio Cassius mentioned the same portents—whose contents he did not reveal—had appeared to both Trajan and Acilius Glabrio upon their assumption of the consulship. This can be construed in different ways: the impending destruction of Glabrio and the transfer of imperial power to Trajan. Dio Cassius appeared to have included the death of Glabrio among those who were killed in the year 95, along with Flavius Clemens, Domitian's cousin and the father of the two children Domitian adopted, and his wife Flavia Domitilla. These two members of the Flavian family were accused of atheism (ἀθεότης), a charge that Dio Cassius interpreted as the adoption of Jewish ways. Dio Cassius appeared to have made a contrast between Domitian's treatment of Flavia Domitilla, who was simply banished to Pandateria, and that of Glabrio, who was executed, despite the fact that they shared the same charge. However, the following details that the Severan historian provided do not appear to constitute the charge of atheism. Glabrio was accused of fighting as a gladiator with wild beasts. According to Dio Cassius, Domitian had summoned Glabrio, the incumbent consul for the year 91, to his Alban villa to attend a festival called the Juvenalia and forced the consul to kill a large lion. Glabrio proved his prowess in the arena by killing the lion, which fueled the emperor's jealousy (ὀργὴν αὐτῷ ὑπὸ φθόνου).<sup>283</sup>

Acilius Glabrio also featured with his aged father in Juvenal's fourth satire in lines 94-104, published presumably in the early decades of the second century CE. The location of this poem is set in Domitian's Alban villa, where only Domitian's closest friends or courtiers

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Ruptures et Continuité," *Pallas* 40 (1994): 278–82.

<sup>283</sup> Dio 67.12.1; 14.1–3; Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 250 and 258–60; cf. for the hunting contests and stage plays at Domitian's Alban villa, see Suet. *Dom.* 4.4; Domitian's killing of a hundred beasts in his Alban estate and his particular interest in archery, Suet. *Dom.* 19.

were allowed. The father Acilius, introduced after Quintus Vibius Crispus—who was of a similar age as Acilius and was known to have died at the age of 83—came with the young Acilius Glabrio.<sup>284</sup> Questioning the validity of the presumption that reaching one's senility as a noble is akin to being a prodigy or portent, Juvenal continued to portray poor young Glabrio, who did not deserve his savage and premature death. Calling the young Glabrio an unfortunate (*misero*) man, Juvenal denounced Domitian as the master who wielded his sword (*domini gladiis*) and treated the miserable Glabrio in a cruel and ignominious way. In the Alban arena, the naked and wretched Glabrio had to fight Numidian bears with spears.

A reading of the accounts of Dio Cassius and Juvenal indicates that M. Acilius Glabrio fought animals in the arena like a gladiator, an inappropriate occupation for a senator.<sup>285</sup> However, Dio Cassius's argument that jealousy of Glabrio's prowess motivated Domitian's decision to have him executed does not account for the speed of the execution, especially given that Glabrio was already in exile. However, in opposition to Juvenal, there was no amphitheater in Alba until the reign of Septimius Severus. Moreover, if the context of Glabrio's appearance in the amphitheater was the Juvenalia, this incident must have taken place before Glabrio's consulship (therefore, against Dio Cassius's account) when Glabrio was regarded as *iuvenis*. Consequently, it cannot be ascertained whether Glabrio did fight in the arena or his alleged appearance in the arena had anything to do with the accusations against him that should have constituted a *res nova* case.

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<sup>284</sup> Q. Vibius Crispus: *PIR*<sup>1</sup> V 379; *Juv. Sat.* 4.84–93; *Tac. Hist.* 4.41, 43; Cf. The identity of the old Acilius has been much debated, especially regarding the historicity of Juvenal's fourth satire. There have been attempts to identify the elder Acilius at stake as M. Acilius Aviola, who was regular consul in 54 under Claudius, curator of water in 74, and died in 97. See Vassileiou, "Crispinus et les Conseillers," 50–1; Susanna Morton Braund, *Juvenal: Satires, Book I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 255–8; Courtney, *Satires of Juvenal*, 26, 186–8; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 51, suggests that it would be better to view them as two different senators because of the dramatic date of the satire.

<sup>285</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 260; Dondin-Payre, "Domitien et la Vieille Aristocratie Sénatoriale," 273–7.

### *Levissima quemque de causa*

Suetonius listed seven consular victims who were persecuted for trivial causes. As he had employed *quasi* in the cases of three people suspected of *res novae*, Suetonius meticulously chose the words *levis* and *quisque* to allude to the lack of validity of the charges against the victims.

### **Lucius Aelius Lamia Platius Aelianus**

The first victim in the list was L. Aelius Lamia Platius Aelianus, the former husband of Domitian's wife, Domitia Longina.<sup>286</sup> According to Suet. *Dom.* 10.2, Domitian executed Aelius Lamia for making jokes, which were certainly suspicious but old and innocuous (*suspiciosos quidem, verum et veteres, ... innoxios iocos*). After his wife was taken away (by Domitian), Lamia said to someone who admired his voice, "I practice continence (*eutacto*)."<sup>287</sup> When Titus urged him to marry again, Lamia answered in Greek, "Do you not want to marry again? (μη̄ καῑ σὺ γαμη̄σαι θε̄λεις;)"<sup>287</sup> Though there is no solid evidence to specify the date of the execution of Aelius Lamia, these jokes must have been outdated, given the date of the marriage of Domitian and Domitia Longina in 70 CE. As Dio Cassius also tainted the perception of the marriage of Domitian and Domitia Longina by using the expression "snatching" in 66.3.4. Apparently, the public perception was that there was some embitterment on Lamia's part regarding the marriage of Domitian and Domitia Longina. The

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<sup>286</sup> L. Aelius Lamia Platius Aelianus: Suet. *Dom.* 10. 2; Juv. *Sat.* 4. 153–4; Dio 66. 3. 4; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 205; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 96, no. 9; *Emperor Domitian*, 184–5; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 88–9.

<sup>287</sup> Cf. Jones and Milns, *Suetonius: the Flavian Emperors*, 34, identifies the agent of the dative participle (*laudanti vocem suam*) as Domitian. If Domitian admired Lamia's voice and did not detect sarcasm in Lamia's response, this might suggest Domitian's intention not to misconstrue Lamia or his inability to detect criticism. If the relationship between the current and previous husbands of Domitia Longina had already deteriorated, as was implied in Suetonius's choice of words, *abductum*, Domitian might have held a grudge against Lamia during this conversation. However, there is no clue to the identity of the admirer of Lamia's voice in this passage, I let the agent of *laudanti* as mere someone.

execution of Aelius Lamia also appears in Juvenal's fourth satire—but not in the marital context—as an example of noble souls whom Domitian had deprived of Rome during a time of savagery (*tempora saevitiae . . . Lamiarum caede*, Juv. *Sat.* 4.151–4).

The most salient feature of Lamia's life aside from his marriage is the long period of his suffect consulship in 80 CE. During the Flavian period, the minimum tenure for suffect consulship was two months; however, Aelius Lamia was in office for six months and had three different consular colleagues.<sup>288</sup> Along with the unconventionally longer tenure of Lamia's consulship, Lamia's biting retort to Titus's suggestion that he remarry—that Titus would steal Lamia's new wife like his younger brother had done—is suggestive of favor of Titus who was able to tolerate Lamia's sarcasm. Regarding the alleged enmity between Titus and Domitian, Stéphane Gsell claimed that Titus granted a suffect consulship to Lamia to provoke Domitian.<sup>289</sup> As in the case of Acilius Glabrio, Aelius Lamia was labelled a possible member of a 'Titus faction' against Domitian.<sup>290</sup> However, this is based on speculation, and there is no solid evidence of bad blood between Titus and Domitian or of the existence of a 'Titus faction'. As Jones suggests, it is more likely that Titus honored a member of the Plautii who had supported the Flavians.<sup>291</sup>

At the same time, it may be worth questioning the authenticity of Suetonius's and Dio Cassius's charge that Domitian snatched Domitia Longina from Aelius Lamia. Highlighting the parallel with Augustus's marriage to Livia—whom her former husband Tiberius Claudius Nero willingly divorced upon Octavian's request and gave in marriage to

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<sup>288</sup> Paul Gallivan, "The Fasti for A.D. 70–96," *The Classical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1981): 199; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 185.

<sup>289</sup> Gsell, *L'Empereur Domitien*, 28.

<sup>290</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 36.

<sup>291</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 20.

Octavian on 17 January 38 BCE—Charles Murison suggested that Aelius Lamia might have performed a similar role to that of Tiberius Claudius Nero in Domitian's marriage.<sup>292</sup> Though Murison's suggestion is speculative, the marriage of Domitian and Domitia Longina might have been initiated for political reasons. First, Domitia Longina carried the name and reputation of her father Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, a successful general under Nero who later ordered Corbulo to commit suicide. Moreover, Domitian's marriage might have been a reconciliatory gesture to the senatorial elite who were skeptical about Vespasian's Principate. Before Domitian's marriage, Vespasian had renounced his friendship with Barea Soranus and Titus had divorced the latter's niece, Marcia Furnilla.<sup>293</sup>

More crucial to understanding Domitian's execution of Aelius Lamia would be, as Bauman suggests, his extreme sensitivity to any sardonic reference to his marriage. The younger Helvidius, who will be discussed later in depth, was convicted for writing a farce starring Paris and Oenone that could be viewed as a roundabout criticism of the imperial couple.<sup>294</sup> If one puts Aelius Lamia in the shoes of Oenone, the abandoned wife, an odd equation would be established—Domitia as Paris and Domitian as Helen. According to Jones, Lamia's sarcastic remarks might have been intended to increase Domitian's suspicious feelings about the former husband of his wife. Unlike his brother, Domitian neither had reason to favor the former husband of his wife nor the ability to tolerate any inappropriate humor. Domitian had already proven his rigorism in his punitive treatment of those who published lampoons of distinguished people (Suet. *Dom.* 8.3).<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 132; similarly, Waters, "Character of Domitian," 59.

<sup>293</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 18 and 33–4.

<sup>294</sup> Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 162–3.

<sup>295</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 185.

In any event, Aelius Lamia seems not to have enjoyed the same amount of favor from Titus's brother, and Lamia's name is not attested further under Domitian. The lack of reports about Lamia after 80 CE also make it difficult to date his execution. If his death was connected to the executions of 93—of which the younger Helvidius was a victim—Lamia's jokes, old and innocuous but manifestly dangerous because they were directed at the emperor, might have been employed to create a case of treason for Lamia.<sup>296</sup>

### Lucius Salvius Otho Cocceianus

The second victim tried under a trivial charge was Salvius Cocceianus.<sup>297</sup> According to Suet. *Dom.* 10.3, he was put to death for having celebrated the birthday (28 April) of the emperor Otho, his paternal uncle. Salvius Cocceianus was a patrician from Ferentium; according to Plut. *Otho* 16.2, Otho considered adopting his young nephew Salvius as his son. Further, Salvius "Cocceianus" might have been related to Domitian's successor, Nerva.<sup>298</sup> Though his name was not mentioned in the existing consular *Fasti*, as Syme suggests, it is likely that Salvius might have held his suffect consulship around 80 CE.<sup>299</sup>

Tacitus and Plutarch both referenced Salvius Cocceianus receiving Otho's last bit of affectionate and somewhat prophetic advice. Tacitus depicted Salvius Cocceianus as a frightened and sad young man who felt a sense of dutiful affection toward his uncle (who was about to commit suicide). Consoling his young nephew, Otho told him to take pride in his rise to the throne: "After the Julii, the Claudii, and the Servii, I have been the first to bring in

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<sup>296</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 88–9.

<sup>297</sup> L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus: Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; Tac. *Hist.* 2.48; Plut. *Otho* 16.2; *PIR*<sup>1</sup> S 110; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 117, no. 255; *Emperor Domitian*, 185–6; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 89; Roche, "L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus;" cf. Martial *Epigrams* 6.32.

<sup>298</sup> Marie-Thérèse Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des Femmes de l'Ordre Sénatorial (Ier-IIème Siècles)* (Louvain: Peeters, 1987), 235, suggests that Salvius Cocceianus was the nephew of both Otho and Nerva.

<sup>299</sup> Ronald Syme, *Roman Papers*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 668.

*imperium* to a new family. Therefore, face life with a brave heart. Never forget or too much remember that Otho was your uncle.”<sup>300</sup> Plutarch’s report on Otho’s advice does not differ from that of Tacitus. What is evident from ancient works is the affinity between uncle and nephew, and it is not surprising that Salvius continued to memorialize his uncle even a few decades later.

The practice of remembering and celebrating the birthday of a deceased relative was not exceptional. According to Dio Cassius 47.18.5–6, Julius Caesar’s birthday was officially celebrated after his death on the day before the *Ludi Apollinares*, and the later emperors were also memorialized in this way.<sup>301</sup> Nonetheless, Dio Cassius reported that Domitian had abolished the horse races that had been held on the birthday of Titus (67.2.6–7). The Severan historian’s intention was to reveal Domitian’s hypocrisy in feigning affection for his deceased brother by delivering a tearful eulogy while abolishing the memorial races held in honor of the same brother. There is no way to determine Domitian’s real motives for banning the races, but Dio Cassius’s account relies on Domitian’s alleged jealousy or enmity toward his elder brother, which had already become a literary trope in the immediate aftermath of Domitian’s death.<sup>302</sup>

The details of Salvius Cocceianus’s life and career other than his deep bond with his paternal uncle are lost to posterity. However, to date Salvius Cocceianus’s execution, Paul Roche employs Martial’s *Epigram* 6.32, which compares the emperor Otho to Cato, who sacrificed his life to save the lives of innocent people during the civil war. The date of

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<sup>300</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 2.48: *post Iulios Claudios Servios se primum in familiam novam imperium intulisse: proinde erecto animo capesseret vitam, neu patrum sibi Othonem fuisse aut oblivisceretur umquam aut nimium meminisset.*

<sup>301</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 185.

<sup>302</sup> In a similar vein, Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 213.

publication of Martial's sixth book is vital in this case. If Martial published his book 6—which contained a poem glorifying Otho's suicide—after Salvius was executed, Martial's life would have been in danger; after all, Salvius had been executed for merely celebrating Otho's birthday. Presuming that Martial did not take such a risk, Roche dates the execution of Salvius to after the publication of Martial's sixth book—March 91 CE.<sup>303</sup>

As in all the other cases, the real motive for provoking Domitian to execute Otho's nephew is difficult to grasp. Given that Domitian was averse to holding a horse race for his deceased brother, the former might have been irked by how persistently Salvius commemorated Otho, who had perished in the civil war. Salvius may also have committed other misdeeds such as flaunting his imperial connections. Suetonius dismissed these in his works as trifling, but Domitian may not have found them so. Otho's nephew forgot to abide by the last words of his uncle, asking him not to forget Otho but not to remember him too much as well.

### **Mettius Pomposianus**

The third victim tried on a trivial charge was Mettius Pompusianus.<sup>304</sup> After Mettius Pompusianus had been given a suffect consulship by Vespasian in 70 or 75 CE,<sup>305</sup> no other offices have been attested for him. Nonetheless, Suetonius referred to the famous notion of Mettius's imperial nativity based on his horoscope (*imperatoria genesis*) twice—first in *Vesp.*

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<sup>303</sup> Roche, "L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus," 321–2.

<sup>304</sup> Mettius Pompusianus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 570; Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; *Vesp.* 14; Dio 67.12.2–4; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 129, no. 444; *Emperor Domitian*, 119–121; Suetonius: *Domitian*, 89–90; Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 251; Roche, "L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus," 321; Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 66, 136; Pascal Arnaud, "L'Affaire Mettius Pompusianus ou Le Crime de Cartographie." *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 95, no. 2 (1983): 677–99.

<sup>305</sup> The year of Mettius Pompusianus's suffect consulship: Arnaud, "L'Affaire Mettius Pompusianus," 682 and Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 129.

14 and second in *Dom.* 10.3.<sup>306</sup> During Vespasian's reign, Vespasian's *amici* warned him that he should keep an eye on Mettius Pompusianus because of his imperial nativity, but Vespasian installed Mettius as consul, ensuring that someday the latter would remember this favor. Domitian seems not to have regarded himself to afford such clemency. According to Suetonius, Mettius Pompusianus carried with a map of the world on a piece of parchment along with speeches of kings and generals from Livy, and he had named two of his slaves Mago and Hannibal. Without differing from Suetonius's account, Dio Cassius added slightly different information about Domitian's charges against and treatment of Mettius. A map of the world was painted on the walls of Mettius's bedchamber, and Domitian first exiled him to Corsica and later put him to death.

The first question about Mettius Pompusianus is whether he was related to astrologers. Despite the existence of common knowledge on his imperial natal horoscope, neither Suetonius nor Dio Cassius examined Mettius's direct engagement in astrology or inquiry about his fate as one of the charges against Mettius. The notion that the charge against Mettius might have been related to astrology may be attributed to his imperial natal horoscope and Dio Cassius's discussion of Mettius, immediately after he discussed a man who was associated with astrologers.<sup>307</sup> Dio Cassius listed Mettius as one of many people who perished around then, but this does not necessarily mean that Mettius was tried for involvement in astrology. Nonetheless, Domitian was known to believe in astrology. There is no evidence of any "court

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<sup>306</sup> Suetonius's description about Mettius's imperial nativity is almost identical in both biographies: Suet. *Vesp.* 14: *Mettium Pompusianum, quod volgo crederetur genesim habere imperatoriam*; *Dom.* 10.3: *Mettium Pompusianum, quod habere imperatoriam genesim vulgo ferebatur*.

<sup>307</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 251, suggests that the latter might have inquired about Domitian's horoscopic prospects or the inquirer's "imperial" prospects, both of which were banned by the Augustan edict of 11 CE; for the political overtones that astrology acquired in the early empire, see Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 119–21.

astrologer” in Domitian’s court,<sup>308</sup> but according to Suet. *Dom.* 14.1, Domitian had been informed in his youth about his last year and manner of death by astrologers. Therefore, Mettius’s natal horoscope predicting his rise to *imperium* might have made him a suspicious figure to Domitian.<sup>309</sup>

Suetonius and Dio Cassius agreed that Mettius Pompusianus was convicted partly because he used to carry the orations (*contiones*) of kings and leaders from Livy with him and read them. Despite Bauman’s interpretation that Domitian’s uneasiness at Mettius Pompusianus could have originated from the latter’s choice of literature,<sup>310</sup> it is possible that the provocative nature of the speeches, especially those of kings and generals, irritated Domitian. The word *contio*, which Suetonius employed to denote speeches, means an oration before a public assembly, but it is often used in military contexts as well.<sup>311</sup> Cremutius Cordus’s speech in Tacitus *Ann.* 4.35.2 may provide a better understanding of the connotation of *contio*, which is crucial to understanding the nature of the charge raised against one of the later victims, Quintus Junius Arulenus Rusticus. Cremutius Cordus, who was accused of praising Brutus and Cassius in his history, disparaged the inanity of the charges against him. After referring to Augustus’s friendship with Livy—who extolled Pompey—and hence implicitly attacking Tiberius’s lack of tolerance, Cremutius Cordus continued his rejoinder

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<sup>308</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 251.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. According to Herodian 4.12.3, Caracalla’s extreme caution about his fate led him to consult oracles, prophets, astrologers, and entrail examiners.

<sup>310</sup> Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 136, regards Caligula as Domitian’s “lineal ancestor” to show aversion to Livy, because Caligula once threatened to remove the busts of Vergil and Livy from all libraries (Suet. *Cal.* 34.2). Wardle, *Life of Caligula*, 265–7, introduces some scholars’ assertions that Virgil and Livy made a hidden underlying criticism of Augustus’s principate regarding Suet. *Cal.* 34.2. However, Arnaud, who devotes an article to the connotation of cartography in relation to imperial aspiration in the case of Mettius, comments that the sentiment behind reporting Mettius’s reading of Livy in Dio Cassius was surprise that one could be executed for reading such a renowned and hardly subversive author as Livy. Arnaud, “L’Affaire Mettius Pompusianus,” 698.

<sup>311</sup> For example, Caes. *BC.* 3.73: *contionem apud milites habuit.*

using the word *contio*: “for surely it is not the case that I am inflaming the people in support of civil war through public speeches (*contiones*) at the very moment when Cassius and Brutus are holding the field in full armor at Philippi?”<sup>312</sup> Moreover, according to both Suetonius and Dio Cassius, Mettius Pompusianus either carried around a map of *orbis terrarum* or *oikoumene* or had it painted on the wall of his bedchamber. Another piece of information provided by Suetonius alone is that Mettius named two of his slaves after two Carthaginian generals, Mago and Hannibal, both of whom terrorized Romans during the Second Punic War. Mettius Pompusianus in his daily life was a Roman ex-consul who always carried about and read orations by great kings and generals from Livy and decorated his bedchamber with a map of the known world. This ex-consul was predicted to one day gain sovereign powers by astrologers. To Domitian, this made Mettius Pompusianus a dangerous threat to imperial authority and not a “harmless eccentric.”<sup>313</sup>

No information about Mettius Pompusianus’s military and political career after his suffect consulship in the reign of Vespasian exists, and neither does any decisive clue to the date of his execution.<sup>314</sup> What is clear is that contrary to Suetonius’s contentions, Domitian might not have viewed the charges levelled against Mettius Pompusianus as trivial.

### **Sallustius Lucullus**

Among those who were convicted of trivial charges, Sallustius Lucullus may have

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<sup>312</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 4.35.2: *num enim armatis Cassio et Bruto ac Philippensis campos optinentibus belli civilis causa populum per contiones incendio?*; How to translate this passage: Anthony J. Woodman, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 200.

<sup>313</sup> “a harmless eccentric”: Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 116.

<sup>314</sup> Roche, “L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus,” 321, suggests that Mettius might have been executed in the mid-90s, based on the careers of Mettius’s likely kinsmen (M. Mettius Modestus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 565; M. Mettius Rufus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 572). The latter was prefect of Egypt until at least 91/2, when his name was erased from a number of papyri. Nonetheless, unless the kinship between Mettius Pompusianus and M. Mettius Rufus is clarified, Roche’s dating remains speculative.

been the first one to be given a suffect consulship by Domitian. Sallustius Lucullus, governor of Britain, was convicted for allowing some lances of a new type to be named “Lucullean” after his own name.<sup>315</sup> Sallustius Lucullus’s governorship of Britain must have been dated after Agricola’s departure in spring 84 and before 94/5. As Jones admits, however, no information exists about the year in which he held the consulship, and neither is his full name known.<sup>316</sup> No information about Sallustius Lucullus exists in other ancient sources besides Suetonius, and multiple attempts have been made to identify him.

Ronald Syme, Anthony Birley, and Edward Champlin suggest that Sallustius Lucullus was actually P. Sallustius Blaesus.<sup>317</sup> A praetor in 77 CE, Blaesus was also described as a *frater arualis* and he held his suffect consulship from May 1 to August 31 89.<sup>318</sup> However, Blaesus’s alleged governorship of Britannia while serving as one of the Arval brothers has not yet been established. The same is true of P. Aburius Lucullus, the procurator of Baetica and the second name most frequently suggested by scholars when discussing Sallustius Lucullus’s true identity. Therefore, the identity question remains unanswered.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Sallustius Lucullus: Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; *PIR*<sup>1</sup> S 63; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 117, no. 253; *Emperor Domitian*, 186; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 91; Peter Conole and Brian W. Jones, “Sallustius Lucullus,” *Latomus* 42, no. 3 (1983): 629–33.; Roche, “L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus,” 230–1.

<sup>316</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 91.

<sup>317</sup> P. Sallustius Blaesus: Edward Champlin, “Hadrian’s Heir,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 21 (1976): 85–6; Ronald Syme, “I Fasti Consolari dell’ Impero Romano dal 30 Avanti Christo al 613 Dopo Christo by Attilio Degrassi,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 43 (1953): 158; Anthony R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 95–9.

<sup>318</sup> Conole and Jones, “Sallustius Lucullus,” 620.

<sup>319</sup> Ronald Syme, *Some Arval Brethren* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 42–9, suggested another alternative, P. Aburius Lucullus, procurator of Belgica (sometime between 70 and 89). This suggestion was rejected by Birley, *Roman Government of Britain*, 97; Conole and Jones, “Sallustius Lucullus,” 629, points to the lack of Blaesus’s preparation for governorship of Britannia while serving as an Arval brother; refutation of Conole and Jones, see Birley, *Roman Government of Britain*, 97 n. 98.

Focusing on Sallustius Lucullus's governorship of Britain, Brian Jones tries to reveal what might have motivated Domitian to execute Sallustius. Crucial to his attempt to do so is the inscription about the unusually generous awards of three crowns and a silver spear shaft granted to G. Julius Karus for his activities in a *bellum Britannicum* (*AE* 1951: 88).<sup>320</sup> Jones assumes that Karus was one of the subordinates of the governor Lucullus. Because the legionary fortress at Inchtuthil was demolished not long after the departure of Agricola and after Domitian moved the Roman forces out of Scotland, Sallustius Lucullus might have resented Domitian's rejection of expansionist warfare. Jones suggests that Karus reported that resentment to Domitian and thus received the above rewards.<sup>321</sup> Just as the revolt of Saturninus was referred to as *bellum Germanicum*,<sup>322</sup> the case of Sallustius Lucullus, which Domitian might have construed as one of treason, was referred to as *bellum Britannicum*.<sup>323</sup> Though it is tempting to develop hypotheses using the sparse circumstantial evidence available, Jones's assumption can be validated only after the relationship between Sallustius Lucullus and Julius Karus is proven.

Suetonius's charge—that Sallustius Lucullus named a new type of lance as “Lucullean”—has not received any attention in scholarship, presumably because of a lack of any study in such actions to be eponymous for military equipment. Nonetheless, considering the number of legions stationed in Britain and the implications of giving one's name to something used on a daily basis, the soldiers in Britannia might have recalled Sallustius's

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<sup>320</sup> *AE* 1951, 88: *C. Iulio C.f.Vo[l] / Karo ex prouincia Narbo/nensi, trib. mil. leg. III Cy[r], / praef. coh. II Astyrum eq., / donato bello Britannico c[or]. / murali corona vallari cor. / aurea hasta pura.*

<sup>321</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 186; Anthony R. Birley, "Roman Frontiers and Roman Frontier Policy: Some Reflections on Roman Imperialism," *Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland* 3 (1974): 16.

<sup>322</sup> McCrum and Woodhead, *Selected Documents*, 60=*ILS* 1006: *...eliae [L]appi Maximi bis cos. confectoris belli Germanici.*

<sup>323</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 31.

name whenever they used the new lance. Suetonius's choice of words, *passus esset*, may well point to the lack of initiative on Sallustius Lucullus's part in naming the new lances after himself. Domitian may have misconstrued this lack of imagination as Lucullus's desire to acquire popularity among his soldiers and been alarmed. Therefore, the emperor could not view the charge levelled against Sallustius Lucullus as trivial.

### Quintus Junius Arulenus Rusticus

Q. Junius Arulenus Rusticus is better known than the previous victims.<sup>324</sup> Arulenus Rusticus, brother of Junius Mauricus—who was exiled but survived Domitian's reign<sup>325</sup>—was a plebeian tribune in 66 and praetor in 69. After a long interval, Arulenus Rusticus was given a suffect consulship by Domitian in 92 and then executed a year later. Though he and the next victim, Helvidius Priscus, are often classified as members of the “philosophical” or “intellectual” opposition group, the question of whether a “philosophical opposition” existed under the reign of Domitian, whose memory was then besmirched even more by the sympathizers of the victims in late 93 CE, will be dealt with in the fourth chapter. Likewise, to group together the cases of Arulenus Rusticus and the next victim, Helvidius the Younger, simply because they might have belonged to the “philosophical opposition” would hamper the understanding of each case. One group's writing was laudatory, and the other's was defamatory, especially toward the imperial couple. Thus, I will delve into the charge levelled against Arulenus Rusticus here, leaving the case of Helvidius the Younger for the subsequent section.

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<sup>324</sup> Q. Junius Arulenus Rusticus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 730; Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; Tac. *Agr.* 2.1, 45.1; *Ann.* 16.26.1; Dio 67.13.2; Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.2; 3.11.3; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 110, no. 166; *Emperor Domitian*, 186-187; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 92-3.

<sup>325</sup> Junius Mauricus: Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 110, no. 168: *Senator* 68; possibly *cos. suff.* 81/96.

The charge against Junius Rusticus, according to Suet. *Dom.* 10.3, was that he had published eulogies (*laudes*) on Paetus Thrasea and Helvidius Priscus and called them the holiest men (*sanctissimos viros*). Unlike the other victims whom Suetonius had previously discussed, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger retrospectively provided details about Arulenus Rusticus, expressing how they felt at the time of his execution. For instance, Arulenus Rusticus featured in Tacitus's *Agricola* 2.1, which offered a different account of the authorship of the eulogies: “[W]e have read that as Thrasea Paetus was eulogized by Arulenus Rusticus and Helvidius Priscus by Herennius Senecio, it was made capital crimes, that not only the authors but their books were also considered outrageous, and that the triumvirs were commissioned to burn those books of great ingenuity in the forum.” In his letter written in early 97, Pliny resented Marcus Aquilius Regulus, who lent support to the trial of Arulenus Rusticus and rejoiced at his death, even going to the extent of publicly reciting and then publishing a written attack on the deceased. In that attack, Regulus called Arulenus Rusticus “the ape of the Stoics” and said he had been “branded with Vitellius’s scar.”<sup>326</sup> Dio Cassius, in agreeing with Tacitus that the authorship of the eulogy of Helvidius Priscus could be attributed to Herennius Senecio, pointed to the main indictment of Arulenus Rusticus as the latter being a philosopher and calling Thrasea holy.<sup>327</sup> In sum, Arulenus Rusticus was indicted for writing a eulogy for Thrasea Paetus.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Aquilius Regulus’s reference to Vitellius in his slander of Arulenus Rusticus is far from ungrounded. During his praetorship in 69, Arulenus Rusticus was sent by Vitellius and the Senate to the armies of Vespasian as they advanced on Rome. Petillius Cerialis rejected this mission, wounded Arulenus, and killed his lictor. Therefore, Regulus, by mentioning Vitellius, pointed out the gloomy prospect between Arulenus Rusticus and the Flavians. See Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 44.

<sup>327</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 10.3: *Iunium Rusticum, quod Paeti Thraseae et Helvidi Prisci laudes edidisset appellassetque eos sanctissimos viros*; Tac. *Agr.* 2.1: *Legimus, cum Aruleno Rustico Paetus Thrasea, Herennio Senecioni Priscus Helvidius laudati essent, capitale fuisse, neque in ipsos modo auctores, sed in libros quoque eorum saevitum, delegato triumviris ministerio ut monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum in comitio ac foro urerentur*; cf. *Agr.* 45.1; *Plin. Ep.* 1.5.2, 3.11.3; Dio 67.3.2.

<sup>328</sup> Suetonius’s attribution of the panegyrics of Helvidius Priscus to not Herennius Senecio but Arulenus Rusticus differs from that of other ancient authors. Considering that Suetonius was writing a list of consular

Publius Clodius Thrasea Paetus, whom Arulenus Rusticus eulogized, was consul in 56 CE but refused to attend the Senate in 63–66 CE in protest against Nero’s autocracy. After Cossutianus Capito’s and Eprius Marcellus’s accusation of him for *maiestas*, Thrasea Paetus committed suicide in 66. Known to have written a biography of Cato (Plut. *Cato Min.* 25.1, 37) and to have celebrated the birthdays of Cassius and Brutus (Juv. *Sat.* 5.36–7), Thrasea Paetus is regarded as the most prominent example of the alleged philosophic opposition under the Early Empire.<sup>329</sup> Tacitus reported Arulenus Rusticus’s admiration for Thrasea Paetus, which can be traced back to 66. A young and ardent tribune of the plebs, Arulenus Rusticus, craving praise, planned to veto the resolution of the Senate to condemn Thrasea Paetus. Thrasea Paetus dissuaded the young man, who had just started his official career (*Ann.* 16.26.1). Nevertheless, Arulenus Rusticus seems to have maintained his admiration even two decades after his hero’s suicide. Eventually, he paid with his life for this admiration.

Highlighting the lack of uniformity in ancient sources regarding the authorship of each eulogy, Rogers claims that the sources alone are not sufficient to establish the contents of the actual indictment. He concludes that the indictment was undoubtedly for treason.<sup>330</sup> However, Bauman refutes Rogers, stating that disagreement among ancient sources is not a unique phenomenon.<sup>331</sup> Presuming that Arulenus Rusticus was indicted for writing a *laus*, it would be more useful to examine the implications and outcomes of writing a eulogy of a person who raised a dissenting opinion against the emperor or the monarchy.

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victims, Herennius Senecio was not eligible because of the latter’s abstention from promoting his career further than questor. Tristan Power suggested that this passage might be lacunose, and Suetonius might have correctly ascribed the eulogy of Helvidius Priscus to Herennius Senecio. See Tristan Power, “Helvidius Priscus in Suetonius *Domitian* 10.3,” *Classical Philology* 109, no. 1 (2014): 79–82.

<sup>329</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1187; both Wirszubski, *Libertas*, 138–43, and Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 92, opposed making an example out of Thrasea Paetus as a Stoic philosopher who desired to overthrow the republic.

<sup>330</sup> Rogers, “Domitianic treason trials,” 22.

<sup>331</sup> Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 160 n. 105.

The best example of both the implications and dire outcomes of writing a eulogy is the case of Cremutius Cordus, whom I have already discussed. After his digression on the difficulties and tedium of writing contemporary history, Tacitus introduced the case of Cremutius Cordus in *Ann.* 4.34–5. The charge against Cremutius Cordus, which Tacitus argued was novel and unheard of, was publishing a history, eulogizing Brutus, and calling Cassius the last of the Romans (*Romanorum ultimum*). Cremutius Cordus's speech in the Senate, presumably Tacitus's own invention,<sup>332</sup> contains the likely rejoinders that Arulenus Rusticus or Herennius Senecio could have delivered in 93 CE.

Arguing that he was condemned for his words, and not for his actions, Cremutius Cordus claimed that he had never vilified Tiberius or Livia, so he was not liable to be charged with *maiestas*. Regarding the charge of eulogizing Brutus and Cassius, Cremutius Cordus referred to Livy, whom Augustus teased as a *Pompeianus* for the historian's extolling of Cn. Pompeius. Livy was not harmed, and neither was Augustus's or Livy's friendship marred. Enumerating more examples from Rome and Greece, Cremutius Cordus disparaged the absurdity of the charge against him. He was not agitating people to fight a civil war on the fields of Philippi with Cassius and Brutus, who had been dead for more than seventy years. Cremutius Cordus added that even if he was condemned, there would be those who would remember him, as well as Cassius and Brutus. Then, after leaving the Senate, Cremutius Cordus ended his life through starvation. His books were burnt, but a few were preserved and published later by Caligula. Tacitus mocked the stupidity of men who thought that the present power could efface the memory of posterity and added that genius that is persecuted only grows in authority, not diminishes. Foreign kings and imitators of their cruelty only achieved ignominy, whereas their victims achieved renown.

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<sup>332</sup> Cremutius Cordus's speech as Tacitus's invention: Woodman, *Annals of Tacitus: Book 4*, 191–2.

As Woodman points out, the specters lurking behind Tacitus writing these chapters were probably Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio, about whom Tacitus had already expressed a sense of guilt when he wrote the opening chapters of *Agricola* as early as 97 CE.<sup>333</sup> In the concluding sentences of *Ann.* 4.34–5, Tacitus fulfilled Cremutius Cordus’s wishes by painting him as an innocent man who fell victim to Tiberius’s lack of tolerance.

Cremutius Cordus did not attack Augustus, Tiberius, or Livia; however, as Mary McHugh indicates, his praise of Brutus and Cassius can be considered even more subversive than the alleged attacks. Calling Cassius the “last Roman” inevitably denigrated those Romans who outlived Cassius as spiritually dead or languid under a monarch, and the immortalization of Brutus and Cassius in history could also resonate in some rebellious minds. Therefore, it attacked the institution of monarchy itself.<sup>334</sup> Likewise, Arulenus Rusticus’s eulogy of Thrasea Paetus, who had withdrawn from his public career to protest against the autocracy, might have been a way to criticize Domitian from a safe distance. Arulenus probably thought that Domitian had become an autocrat as well. However, unlike Thrasea Paetus, who abstained from holding office under Nero, Arulenus Rusticus was neither a reactionary nor a political nonentity at the time of his execution in 93 CE. A year before his death, Domitian revived the official career of Arulenus Rusticus—which appears to have long been in abeyance since his praetorship in 69 CE—by appointing the latter as a suffect consul in 92 CE.<sup>335</sup>

Tiberius’s punishment of Cremutius Cordus earned him ignominy in history.

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<sup>333</sup> In the same vein, Woodman, *Annals of Tacitus: Book 4*, 190: “Tacitus no doubt has in mind the eulogies of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus by Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio respectively (*Agr.* 2.1), which are always in the background of the present episode.”

<sup>334</sup> Mary R. McHugh, “Historiography and Freedom of Speech: The Case of Cremutius Cordus,” in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, eds. Ineke Sluiter and Ralph Rosen (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 403.

<sup>335</sup> Pliny’s negligence to include Domitian’s promotion of Arulenus Rusticus to suffect consulship in his letters: Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 40–1.

Domitian paid much heed to the writings of not only aristocrats but also of members of other classes. This is well illustrated in the case of Hermogenes of Tarsus, who was the subject of the tenth chapter of the *Life of Domitian*.<sup>336</sup> Hermogenes of Tarsus was executed because his history contained certain *figuras* (innuendos or indirect attacks); even the slaves who had written it out were crucified. Despite the lack of evidence on the date of Arulenus Rusticus's composition of the eulogy, if the date fell close to the date of his consulship, then it is likely that Domitian had not been duped into overlooking the roundabout criticism of his imperial authority. His acuity in this regard was proven by his execution of the slaves of Hermogenes of Tarsus. Therefore, the case of Arulenus Rusticus undermines Suetonius's seemingly carefree categorization of each charge in *Dom.* 10.3 as trivial or light.

### **Helvidius Priscus the Younger**

As in the case of Arulenus Rusticus, ancient authors have provided more information about Helvidius Priscus the Younger, most likely because of his family ties with the alleged members of the philosophic or Stoic opposition.<sup>337</sup> Helvidius Priscus the Younger was the son of the elder Helvidius Priscus, who is often cited as another example of the opposition under Nero and Vespasian. Vespasian exiled Helvidius Priscus the Elder and eventually executed him.<sup>338</sup> Helvidius Priscus the Younger's stepmother was Fannia, the daughter of Thræsea Paetus and granddaughter of A. Caecina Paetus, who had been involved in the conspiracy against Claudius. In the year 93 CE, when Arulenus Rusticus, Helvidius Priscus the Younger, and Herennius Senecio were executed, Fannia and Arria were exiled.

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<sup>336</sup> Hermogenes of Tarsus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 147; Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 84–5.

<sup>337</sup> Helvidius Priscus the Younger: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 60; Suet. *Dom.* 10.4; Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.3; 9.13.3; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 105, no. 121; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 93–94.

<sup>338</sup> Helvidius Priscus the Elder: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 59; Tac. *Hist.* 4.5–8, 43; Suet. *Vesp.* 15; Dio 66.13.

Given the family tradition of the Helvidii, one may presume that Helvidius Priscus the Younger refused to start an official career under Domitian, following the example of Thrasea Paetus or Herennius Senecio. Additionally, Domitian was the son of Vespasian, who ordered the execution of Helvidius the Elder. Pliny, who referenced his friendship with Helvidius Priscus the Younger in *Ep.* 9.13.3, provided presumably misleading information that Helvidius Priscus hid his fame and virtues in retirement out of fear of the times (*metu temporum ... secessu tegebat*).<sup>339</sup> At any rate, Vespasian's execution of Helvidius Priscus the Elder did not seem to deter Domitian from awarding Helvidius the Younger a consulship. Helvidius the Younger's consulship can be dated to either before 87 CE or during 93 CE.<sup>340</sup> Moreover, Helvidius's son-in-law, M. Annius Herennius Pollio, served as consul with his own father P. Herennius Pollio in 85.<sup>341</sup> It would be rash to presume that Domitian was targeting members of a certain family that had a tradition of opposing emperors; it would be more informative to shed light on the charge levelled against Helvidius the Younger, which is often ignored because of Helvidii's fame and the generally dire situation under Domitian.

According to Suetonius, Helvidius the Younger was executed presumably because Helvidius reproached Domitian for divorcing his wife by composing a farce on the characters of Paris and Oenone.<sup>342</sup> As I discussed in the case of Domitia's former husband, Aelius Lamia, Domitian expressed great sensitivity to issues touching upon his marriage.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.13.3: *Fuerat alioqui mihi cum Helvidio amicitia, quanta potuerat esse cum eo, qui metu temporum nomen ingens paresque virtutes secessu tegebat*; Pliny's selective omission of evidence: Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 492; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 43.

<sup>340</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 93–4; Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des Femmes*, 86; Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 492.

<sup>341</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 175.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 35, suggests that Domitian did not divorce Domitia. She was probably exiled c. 83, based on the silence about the sources of such rarity of remarrying a wife whom one had once divorced.

<sup>343</sup> Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 162–3; cf. John L. Penwill, "Expelling the Mind: Politics and

Helvidius the Younger knew exactly what would provoke the emperor. Regarding the main characters of Helvidius's farce, Oenone was Paris's first wife, whom he deserted for Helen, and Oenone was so faithful to her marriage and her husband that she refused to return and cure Paris, who had been wounded by an arrow. If one keeps in mind the bawdy rumor about the relationship between Domitian and his niece Julia, then one can surmise that Paris was Domitian, Helen was Julia, and Oenone was Domitia. Paris was also the name of the alleged lover of Domitia (Suet. *Dom.* 3.1). Dio Cassius 67.3.1 incorrectly claimed that Domitian murdered Paris in the middle of the street after abandoning his plan to kill his wife.<sup>344</sup> If this farce were indeed performed onstage, Domitian may have viewed it as a public mockery of himself and Domitia.

Apparently, Domitia Longina's reputation was damaged beyond measure. Domitia Longina allegedly had an affair with an actor named Paris, but Domitian was not able to bear losing her and took her back.<sup>345</sup> As Vinson aptly points out, the charges raised against Domitia and her affair follow the pattern that has often been employed to embroil women of the ruling house in cases of adultery with performing artists.<sup>346</sup> It must have been tempting to challenge Domitian, who had assumed perpetual censorship in 85, on his hypocrisy and inability to keep the morals of his own house under check; moreover, Domitian's decision to bring Domitia back to the imperial house after their divorce constituted a legal violation

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Philosophy in Flavian Rome," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, eds. Anthony J. Boyle and William J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 356 n. 35 points to Vespasian's touchiness about criticism of his and his sons' private lives. Penwill references Dio 65.15.1, where Dio Cassius introduced Diogenes and Heras, two Cynic philosophers. Those two philosophers had managed to sneak back to Rome and publicly criticize Titus's relationship with Berenice. In response, Vespasian had Diogenes flogged and Heras beheaded.

<sup>344</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 187; inauthenticity of Dio 67.3.1, Vinson, "Domitia Longina," 444.

<sup>345</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 3.1; Cf. Suet. *Dom.* 13.1, where Domitian boasted recalling Domitia to the imperial pulvinar.

<sup>346</sup> Vinson, "Domitia Longina," 438–44.

because a man who failed to divorce an adulterous wife as well as one who married a convicted adulteress was liable to face prosecution on the charge of *lenocinium*.<sup>347</sup> Even though no one could punish Domitian, there were ways to allude to his hypocrisy, as Helvidius the Younger had abortively attempted. Suetonius likely intended to include Domitian's treatment of an equestrian among the deeds Domitian had performed as censor (*Dom.* 8.3). Domitian removed a member of the equestrian order from the list of jurors because the latter had taken his adulterous wife back after their divorce. This was exactly what Domitian was known to have done with Domitia.

Punitive treatment of people who wrote libelous works was not unique to Domitian. According to Tacitus, Augustus was the first person to apply legal inquiry to libelous writings.<sup>348</sup> However, Suetonius tried to paint a different picture of Augustus in this regard. Augustus in Suetonius's *Life of Augustus* did not fear the libelous writings (*famosos libellos*) against him that were scattered in the *curia*, he tried to refute their contents without trying to uncover the identity of the authors.<sup>349</sup> Tiberius seems to have maintained the same stance as his predecessor, but it was in his reign that a person was executed for using words that could harm the imperial family. In 17 CE Appuleia Varilia, Augustus's grandniece, was accused of adultery as well as treason (*maiestas*) by an informer for making insulting remarks against the Divine Augustus, Tiberius, and Livia. She was convicted of adultery but not treason; Tiberius refused to apply the treason law without evidence that she had spoken irreverently of the

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<sup>347</sup> Vinson, "Domitia Longina," 445 esp. n. 52.

<sup>348</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.72.3: *primus Augustus cognitionem de famosis libellis specie legis eius tractavit*; though Tacitus attributed the legal treatment of defamatory writings to Augustus, it seems that the Twelve Tables had long ago ordained the penalty for defamatory verses as death (Cic. *Rep.* 4.10.12). As Goodyear suggests, Augustus might have been the first emperor to apply the law of treason (*maiestas*) to such writings. See Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 74; Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus*, vol. 2, 151.

<sup>349</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 55–6; Wardle, *Life of Augustus*, 380–2.

Divine Augustus.<sup>350</sup> Four years later, in 21 CE, Clutorius Priscus, a man of the equestrian order, was convicted of writing a set of verses for Drusus, who was ill but eventually recovered. After a dispute in the Senate, Clutorius Priscus was sentenced to death and executed. Tiberius reprimanded who made such decisions for meting out punishment so hastily for the mere use of words.<sup>351</sup> Probably because of the execution of Clutorius Priscus, Tacitus criticized Tiberius for carrying out prosecutions for treason. He added that Tiberius was exasperated by the publication of verses of uncertain authorship and highlighted his cruelty, arrogance, and disagreements with his mother.<sup>352</sup>

Each emperor's attitude toward criticism of himself or the imperial family, in particular a desire to curtail freedom of speech, was a yardstick to gauge his *civilitas*, like the term *dominus*. By that yardstick, Tiberius was disqualified from being assessed as a good emperor because of the execution of Clutorius Priscus, as was Domitian. Moreover, it was not the first time for Domitian to punish an author of libelous writings against illustrious men and women. In the same chapter that discussed Domitian's censorial performances (*Dom.* 8.3), Suetonius reported that Domitian purged libelous (*famosa*) writings in which leading men and women were mentioned from publication and meted out harsh penalties on their authors.<sup>353</sup>

In sum, Helvidius Priscus the Younger provoked Domitian beyond endurance in various aspects; his farce directly mocked the imperial couple and indirectly criticized

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<sup>350</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.50.1–2. A similar image of Tiberius is recorded by Suetonius in his *Life of Tiberius*, 28.

<sup>351</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.49–51; Dio 57.20.3–4; Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 62–3; cf. Bessie Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the Writing of History* (Manchester: University Press, 1952), 100: “The trial of Clutorius Priscus . . . gives the first instance of a condemnation based only on trivial charges.”

<sup>352</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.72.4.

<sup>353</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 8.3: *Scripta famosa vulgoque edita, quibus primores viri ac feminae notabantur, abolevit, non sine auctorum ignominia*; translation from Jones and Milns, *Suetonius: the Flavian Emperors*, 33.

Domitian's censorial actions.<sup>354</sup> Domitian did make some reconciliatory attempts to appoint Helvidius Priscus the Younger as suffect consul either in 87 or 93. If Helvidius the Younger's consulship fell in 93, the year when he was executed, then that would mean Domitian could not tolerate Helvidius's challenge to his imperial authority any longer so that he executed the consul of the year. Yet, if it were the case, Pliny, Tacitus, or even Suetonius must have given a remark on that point, for Domitian's execution of the consul of that year must have served their purpose to denigrate Domitian. What prompted Helvidius the Younger to write such a sensational farce is unclear. However, Helvidius was probably aware what might befall him while writing the farce, especially if Domitian's execution of Aelius Lamia had taken place before 93 CE.

Before discussing the last victim in Suet. *Dom.* 10.2–4, one should note that Suetonius used the word *quasi* again to dilute the validity of the charge against Helvidius Priscus. As with his use of *quasi* in the case of the first three consular victims who were thought to have attempted *res nova*, Suetonius here appeared to display his own opinion of Domitian's execution of Helvidius the Younger; the biographer suggested that it was absurd to punish someone for his or her literature and that there was a hidden reason for the execution. However, neither Pliny nor Tacitus offered any alternative charge regarding Helvidius Priscus the Younger.

### **Titus Flavius Sabinus**

Titus Flavius Sabinus,<sup>355</sup> the last consular victim in Suet. *Dom.* 10.2–4, belongs to the imperial family. He was probably the grandson of Vespasian's brother, making him

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<sup>354</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 39: "Helvidius was about to overstep the bounds of safe criticism."

<sup>355</sup> Titus Flavius Sabinus: Suet. *Dom.* 10.4; 12.3; Dio 65.17.4; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 355; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 105, no. 112; *Emperor Domitian*, 44–7; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 94–5; Townend, "Some Flavian Connections," 55; Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 43–4; Roche, "L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus," 320.

Domitian's cousin and Titus's son-in-law thanks to his marriage to Titus's daughter Julia. He is mentioned twice in Suetonius's *Life of Domitian*. In 12.3, he is reported to have clad his attendants in imperial white. Domitian, who was not emperor yet, uttered the Homeric verse, "Not good of a number of rulers." This anecdote might have been a prelude to what eventually happened to Flavius Sabinus. Flavius Sabinus raised Domitian's suspicions by bragging about his membership of the imperial family. However, he was convicted, according to Suet. *Dom.* 10.4, of someone else's lapse, not his own. On the day of the consular elections, the crier erroneously announced him to the people as *imperator*, not consul.

Flavius Sabinus held his regular consulship in 82 CE, with Domitian as his colleague. Because the year 82 CE was the second year of Domitian's reign, the agent who appointed Flavius Sabinus as a regular consul was probably Titus. Titus was responsible for making such decisions in the *comitia* in March 81; however, as Eck has shown, Domitian might have designated Flavius Sabinus as his colleague in regular consulship for the next year at the *comitia* of October in 81, just after his accession.<sup>356</sup>

Likewise, the year of the execution of Flavius Sabinus is also contested. Townend suggests that Flavius Sabinus might have been offered another regular consulship, and this was when Domitian executed his cousin.<sup>357</sup> However, as Jones points out, both Suetonius and Dio Cassius implied that Flavius Sabinus was executed early, not long after his consulship. This early date is based on each author's reference to Flavius Sabinus's wife, Julia. Suetonius referred to Julia residing in Domitian's palace after her father and husband died, therefore coupling the deaths of Titus and Sabinus. Dio Cassius also placed the date of the alleged cohabitation of Domitian and Julia before the date of execution of the Vestals,

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<sup>356</sup> Eck, *Senatoren*, 53; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 15–6 n. 68; *Emperor Domitian*, 45–6.

<sup>357</sup> Townend, "Some Flavian Connections," 55.

which is usually given as 83, and the outbreak of the war against the Chatti. Therefore, Flavius Sabinus might have been executed during his consulship in 82.<sup>358</sup>

Domitia Longina had to face slanderous rumors because of her status as wife of the much-reviled emperor, as did Julia, who was born in the purple as the daughter of Titus and who married her relative, Flavius Sabinus. Suetonius in *Dom.* 22 reported that Domitian refused the offer of his niece's hand. Nevertheless, Domitian seduced her while Titus was still alive. Later, according to Suetonius, Domitian likely caused her death by compelling her to have his child aborted.<sup>359</sup> Domitian granted Julia permission to dwell in the imperial palace, an action that might have started all rumors about their relationship, whose authenticity is yet to be verified. However, what can be gleaned from these rumors is the mere public perception of the enmity between Domitian and Flavius Sabinus.

Domitian might have been paranoid and suspicious about possible contenders to his throne. Two of his relatives had marital bonds with the Flavians: Flavius Sabinus and Titus's daughter, Julia, and T. Flavius Clemens and Domitilla, daughter of Domitian's sister.<sup>360</sup> Considering that T. Flavius Clemens, who had kept a low profile in fear of the emperor's paranoia,<sup>361</sup> was executed, Flavius Sabinus's imperious insistence on having his entourage clad in imperial white might have provoked Domitian even further. Moreover, if Townend is to be believed in dating Sabinus's own birth to circa 53 CE,<sup>362</sup> Flavius Sabinus was

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<sup>358</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 22; Dio 67.3.2, 4.1; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 46–7, presented a presumably more precise date between October 82 and 28 August 83; the alternative date for the execution of Flavius Sabinus is 87 CE, see Roche, "L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus," 320.

<sup>359</sup> See Juv. *Sat.* 2.32–3: *Cum tot abortiuus fecundam Iulia uulvam / solueret et patruo similes effunderet offas*, for a more sardonic version of this rumor.

<sup>360</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 94.

<sup>361</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 15.1: *Flavium Clementem patruelem suum contemptissimae inertiae*.

<sup>362</sup> Townend, "Some Flavian Connections," 55.

Domitian's junior by only two years. After Julia's marriage to Flavius Sabinus, Domitian might have been wary of his cousin's designs on the throne. Southern uses this theory to posit that the very existence of Sabinus, the son-in-law of Titus, may have made the transition of power less facile than most modern scholars have assumed.<sup>363</sup> At any event, Flavius Sabinus seems to have taken pride in his Flavian blood, regardless of whether his demeanors to boast his imperial membership were considerate or not. Suetonius might have intended to include the case of Titus Flavius Sabinus among the cases of those who were accused of trivial charges, but for Domitian, vying for *imperium* with himself as *imperator* was not a trifling matter.

### Marcus Arrecinus Clemens

Suetonius refrained from naming many victims.<sup>364</sup> He probably had not intended to name all the consular victims in *Dom.* 10.2–4. Two consular victims who were featured in the *Life of Domitian* were not included in 10.2–4 but were saved for Suetonius's literary purpose.

The first consular victim not included in *Dom.* 10.2–4 was Marcus Arrecinus Clemens, who appeared in the following chapter dealing with Domitian's sadistic cruelty.<sup>365</sup> After discussing two rare cases of people who were exonerated thanks to their abject behavior, Suetonius started the eleventh chapter with the assertion that Domitian's cruelty was not only excessive but also sneaky and unexpectedly sudden (*magnae ... callidae inopinataeque saevitiae*, *Dom.* 11.1). Suetonius had used the word *callidus* in *Tib.* 24.1 to describe Tiberius's repeated refusal to accept sovereignty. Tiberius delayed his acceptance of

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<sup>363</sup> Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 32.

<sup>364</sup> For example, Suet. *Dom.* 10.2: *Complures senatores*; 10.5: *Pleros partis adversae*.

<sup>365</sup> Marcus Arrecinus Clemens: Suet. *Dom.* 11.1; Tac. *Hist.* 4.68; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 1072; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 98, no. 28; Suetonius: *Domitian*, 98–9; Brian W. Jones and Robert Develin, "M. Arrecinus Clemens," *Antichthon* 10 (1976): 79–83.

*imperium* by giving ambiguous answers with calculated suspension (*callida cunctatione*).

Suetonius mocked Tiberius's histrionic *recusatio* as a shameless farce (*impudentissimo mimo*) because Tiberius had to accept dominion anyway.<sup>366</sup> In Domitian's case, his *callida inopinata saevitia* took the form of alternate expressions of friendship and sudden executions that took the victim by surprise. The first example of Domitian's sudden cruelty pertains to one of his accountants. This person was invited to Domitian's bedroom, where the emperor bade him sit on the couch next to him and even gave him leftovers from his dinner before sending him away carefree and happy.<sup>367</sup> The next day Domitian had him crucified.

The next example of Domitian's sadistic cruelty pertains to Marcus Arrecinus Clemens, whose close connection to the Flavians has been attested well. Titus married Domitian's sister Arrecina Tertulla before 63 CE, and he was a praetorian prefect around 70–71. Tacitus viewed Mucianus's appointment of Arrecinus Clemens as a placatory gesture to Domitian, because Clemens was closely connected with the house of Vespasian [sc. via Titus] and he was also a great favorite of Domitian.<sup>368</sup> Clemens had been awarded a suffect consulship in 73, and he was governor of Hispania Citerior around 81–83. While holding a second suffect consulship in 85, he seems to have been appointed *praefectus urbi* around 86.<sup>369</sup> After he fell out of the emperor's favor for unknown reasons, Arrecinus Clemens was likely executed or banished.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 24.1: ... *dominationis assumpta, diu tamen recusavit, impudentissimo mimo nunc adhortantis amicos increpans ut ignaros, quanta belva esset imperium, nunc precantem senatum et procumbentem sibi ad genua ambiguis responsis et callida cunctatione suspendens.*

<sup>367</sup> Translation from Jones and Milns, *Suetonius: The Flavian Emperors*, 35.

<sup>368</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.68: *Arrecinum Clementem, domui Vespasiani per adfinitatem innexum et gratissimum Domitiano.*

<sup>369</sup> Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 39; Suetonius: *Domitian*, 98–99; Jones and Develin, "M. Arrecinus Clemens," 79–80.

<sup>370</sup> Arrecinus Clemens as banished, not executed: Townend, "Some Flavian Connections," 57 n. 9.

Suetonius, who focused solely on Domitian's cruelty, offered no details about the charge against Arrecinus Clemens or about why Arrecinus Clemens fell out of Domitian's favor. Arrecinus Clemens was an ex-consul and one of Domitian's intimates and agents (*unum e familiaribus et emissariis suis*). When Domitian had already premeditated condemnation of Arrecinus Clemens, he decided to treat the latter with great favor; as he was riding with Arrecinus Clemens for the last time, Domitian saw Arrecinus Clemens's accuser and said to Arrecinus Clemens, "See, shall we hear this vilest slave tomorrow?" Jones construes the meaning of *emissarius* in Suetonius as an unofficial imperial agent or spy, which suggests that obtaining information through spying for the emperor could at times result in charges of *maiestas*.<sup>371</sup>

The date of execution or banishment of Arrecinus Clemens is a matter of speculation. Because the date of Arrecinus Clemens's prefecture was probably 86 or 87, scholars like Syme, Jones, and Develin associate his punishment with the suggested removal of wicked men (*ob detecta scelera nefariorum*) reported in the minutes of the Arval Brethren for 22 September 87. Moreover, the regular consul for 88 was a *novus homo*, L. Minicius Rufus. The election of a *novus homo* as a regular consul was a deviation from previous customs because regular consuls in previous years were patricians of consular families. This deviation was attributed to the possible removal of accomplices to the *scelera*, in which Arrecinus Clemens might have been implicated. Alternatively, as Jones and Develin suggest, Domitian might have been dissatisfied with Arrecinus Clemens's performance as *praefectus urbi* during

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<sup>371</sup> Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 99; translation of *emissarius* as spy: Jones and Milns, *Suetonius: the Flavian Emperors*, 35; Cf. Suetonius applied the word *emissarius* to Halotus and Tibellinus to illustrate Galba's clemency (*Galba* 15.1: *Haloti et Tigillini ... Neronis emissariis vel maleficentissimo*). The public called for their punishment because they were most vicious under Nero; turning down their request, Galba honored the former with procuratorship and even issued an edict rebuking the people for their cruelty in the case of Tigellinus.

the events of 87.<sup>372</sup>

Given the lack of information about Marcus Arrecinus Clemens, it is difficult to gauge the validity of the above speculations. What intrigued Suetonius in the case of Arrecinus Clemens was the fall of a person who had been regarded as one of the emperor's favorite friends. Likewise, Suetonius appeared to have used the adjective *callidus* to denote the viciousness of those who had power toying with and manipulating their helplessly desperate inferiors.

### Titus Flavius Clemens

After describing Domitian's arrogance, which made him all the more hated and feared, Suetonius introduced the last consular victim in the fifteenth chapter. This victim who did not appear in *Dom.* 10.2–4 was another cousin of Domitian called Titus Flavius Clemens.<sup>373</sup> As he had refrained from providing any information about the accusation against Arrecinus Clemens, Suetonius contextualized Domitian's execution of Flavius Clemens as the culmination of Domitian's anxiety and cruelty and equivocated about the real cause of Clemens's death:

15.1 Finally, he killed his own cousin Flavius Clemens, suddenly and on the slenderest suspicion, almost before the end of his consulship. Flavius Clemens was a man of the most contemptible inactivity, but Domitian even openly named his sons, who were then very young, as his successors, abolishing their former names and calling one Vespasianus and the other Domitianus. It was by this deed in particular that he hastened his own death.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Ronald Syme, *Roman Papers*, vol. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 560; Jones and Develin, "M. Arrecinus Clemens," 83; on scholarly interpretations of *ob detecta scelera nefariorum*, see Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 182.

<sup>373</sup> Titus Flavius Clemens: Suet. *Dom.* 15.1; Dio 67.14.1–2; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 240; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 104, no. 110; *Emperor Domitian*, 47–8; *Suetonius: Domitian*, 121; Bernard Poudéron, "L'énigme Flavius Clemens, consul et martyr sous Domitien," *Ktèma* 26 (2001): 307–319.

<sup>374</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 15.1: *Denique Flavium Clementem patruelem suum contemptissimae inertiae, cuius filios etiam tum parvulos successores palam destinaverat abolitoque priore nomine alterum Vespasianum appellari, alterum Domitianum, repente ex tenuissima suspitione tantum non in ipso eius consulatu interemit. Quo maxime facto maturavit sibi exitium.*

Setting aside authenticity, Dio Cassius provided more details about the charges against Flavius Clemens and his wife Flavia Domitilla in 67.14.1–2. Without mentioning Domitian’s adoption of the two sons of Clemens and Domitilla, Dio Cassius described the couple’s nobility, adding that Domitilla herself was also Domitian’s relative. The charge brought against both was that of atheism, according to Dio. Though some were executed or deprived of their property, Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria.

Summing up the accounts of Suetonius and Dio Cassius, the point that they agreed on was the perilous proximity of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla to the throne.<sup>375</sup> Flavia Domitilla was the daughter of Domitian’s sister and probably Q. Petillius Cerialis Caesius Rufus. Q. Petillius Cerialis Caesius Rufus had two sons from his earlier marriage, one of which was Q. Petilius Rufus, who shared the regular consulship with the emperor in 83. Moreover, Flavius Clemens’s own brother, Titus Flavius Sabinus, who appeared in Suet. *Dom.* 10.4, had shared his regular consulship with Domitian, only to be executed either in 82 or 87.<sup>376</sup>

The death of this brother, who bragged about his Flavian lineage to Domitian’s ire, may provide a clue to Suetonius’s characterization of Clemens as a man of the most contemptible *inertia* (*contemptissimae inertiae*). In this context, *inertia* means inactivity in politics instead of leisured sluggishness;<sup>377</sup> collocating *contemptissima* with *inertia*, Suetonius might have been judgmental about Clemens’s cowardice for keeping a low profile after observing the extent to which Domitian could turn ruthless toward his relatives. As Pat

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<sup>375</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 47: “both husband and wife were perilously close to the throne.”

<sup>376</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 47-48.

<sup>377</sup> Pouderon, “L’énigme Flavius Clemens,” 309, also relates Clemens’s contemptible inertia to Clemens’s not having served as a consul.

Southern states, family members with even the remotest claim to the throne were compelled to make themselves inconspicuous; unless they could display miraculous and consistent loyalty and detach themselves completely from the rest of humanity, their genealogy could pose a threat to their lives at any time.<sup>378</sup> Flavius Clemens and Domitilla seemed to have lived the kind of lives that Southern describes. There is no evidence that Flavius Clemens pursued an official career; the only attested office he held was the regular consulship he shared with Domitian in 95. Therefore, it was Domitian who brought his cousin out of political inertia by adopting two of the latter's seven children; Domitian's bestowal of regular consulship upon Clemens was most likely to empower these newly adopted sons.<sup>379</sup> Domitian's sincerity in bringing up the two boys is illustrated by his act of renaming them as Vespasian and Domitianus; accordingly, to execute the biological father of the heirs-apparent would require more than the slenderest charge (*tenuissima suspicione*, Suet. *Dom.* 15.1).

Dio Cassius discussed the nature of the charge against Flavius Clemens, calling it as atheism (ἀθεότης)—or the adoption of Jewish ways. Although Judaism can hardly be conflated with Christianity, Henri Leclercq, a Belgian theologian and church historian, called Titus Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla true Christian martyrs as early as 1911.<sup>380</sup> It was only at the turn of the second millennium that Bernard Pouderon ascribed the origin of the charge of atheism to the confusion between Pope Clement of Rome and Domitian's cousin Flavius Clemens.<sup>381</sup> Eusebius's misleading evidence about Flavia Domitilla also contributed

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<sup>378</sup> Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 41.

<sup>379</sup> Dating Domitian's adoption of Flavius Clemens' sons: Edward Dąbrowa, "The Origin of the Templum gentis Flaviae," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 41 (1996): 159.

<sup>380</sup> Henri Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Chalcédoine-Chapelle, 1911), 1389.

<sup>381</sup> Pouderon, "L'énigme Flavius Clemens," 316; Already in 1973, Paul Keresztes, "The Jews, the Christians, and Emperor Domitian" *Vigiliae Christiaenae* 27, no. 1 (1973): 27, stated that "Flavius Clemens and his wife, Domitilla, must not join the ranks of Christians and Christian martyrs." However, he did not go further

to the use of Christianity in understanding the cases of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla.<sup>382</sup>

Turning away from Judaism and Christianity, Murison focuses on reading the context in which Dio Cassius used the word ἀθεότης. Focusing on Domitian's alleged assumption of the appellation *dominus et deus noster* in the preceding passage, Dio 67.13.4, Murison suggests that Flavius Clemens and Domitilla refused to accept Domitian's divinity.<sup>383</sup> It is unclear what might have caused Clemens and Domitilla, who were accused of contemptible inertia, to openly refuse to accept an emperor's divinity, especially when their own sons were adopted and made the heirs-apparent. Therefore, the real charge—whether it was trivial or grave—against Flavius Clemens is difficult to identify.

The last point worth noting is that Suetonius regarded Clemens's death as the event that precipitated Domitian's own death (*maturavit, Dom.* 15.1). One of the prime movers in the assassination of Domitian was Stephanus, Domitilla's freedman steward, who had recently been accused of embezzlement (*Suet. Dom.* 17.1). Philostratus claims that Stephanus wanted to either avenge Clemens or fight for everyone's freedom like the Athenian tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogeiton (*VA* 8.25).<sup>384</sup> It is tempting to presume that some of the remaining members of the imperial family who were alarmed by Domitian's recent execution of Flavius Clemens were involved as well, but there is no evidence of this. Neither do we have evidence of senatorial involvement in the so-called tyrannicide that would restore *libertas*.<sup>385</sup>

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to indicate the origin of the misconception of Domitian's persecution of Christianity.

<sup>382</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.18.4, wrongly defines Flavia Domitilla as daughter of a sister of Flavius Clement, who was one of the consuls in 95 CE. He added that Domitilla was exiled as a result of her testimony borne to Christ; cf. Philostratus also wrongly identified Domitilla as Domitian's own sister in *VA* 8.25.

<sup>383</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 258–9.

<sup>384</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 48.

<sup>385</sup> The imperial freedmen who premeditated Domitian's murder in Dio 67.15.1 and *Suet.* 16.2–17.1 were Parthenius (Domitian's *a cubiculo*), Sigerius (one of Domitian's *cubicularii*), Entellus (Domitian's *a*

### Concluding Remarks

After completing the list of consular victims in *Dom.* 10.2–4, Suetonius commented on Domitian’s increasing cruelty after the civil war (i.e., the revolt of Saturninus) in *Dom.* 10.5. His reference to the revolt of Saturninus implies that all the victims in Suet. *Dom.* 10.2–4 were executed before the year of 89. However, the chronology of all the executions of consular victims in Suetonius’s *Life of Domitian* has not been conclusively established. Among twelve consular victims, only four victims’ execution dates can be confirmed: Arulenus Rusticus and Helvidius Priscus the Younger in late 93 and Acilius Glabrio and Titus Flavius Clemens in 95. Regardless of scholarly speculation on the dates of the executions of the remaining victims, it is unlikely that Domitian turned fully cruel toward the Senate all at once. Contrary to Suetonius’s own periodization of the phases of Domitian’s cruelty, his consular victims were not massacred after the year 89, and there is no evidence that the victims lent any support to Saturninus. Locating the eight remaining victims whose execution dates are uncertain in the context of the so-called philosophic opposition in the late 93, as Pliny or Tacitus did, is also not convincing. In the list of victims, Salvidienus Orfitus’s familial links make him the most likely candidate for involvement in the “philosophic opposition.” However, Suetonius did not group him along with Arulenus Rusticus or Helvidius Priscus the Younger, and neither did Pliny or Tacitus reference Orfitus in the context of the executions in 93. As for the other seven victims, no link—not even a tenuous one—to the opposition group in late 93 has been suggested in ancient sources.

It is likely that the tensions between the senators and Domitian existed consistently

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*libellis*), and Stephanus. Among these imperial freedmen, only Stephanus technically did not belong to the house of Domitian.

throughout the latter's reign. Suetonius referred to two people in *Dom.* 10.5, a tribune of senatorial rank and a centurion, who escaped Domitian's notice by making themselves seem harmless. By displaying immodesty or lewdness, they showed the emperor that they had no influence with any generals or soldiers.<sup>386</sup> Suetonius might have included this detail to illustrate Domitian's sadistic curiosity about the lengths one will go to make oneself miserable when one's life is in danger. On the other hand, the last part of Suet. *Dom.* 10.5 provides a clue to the factor that made Domitian suspicious: the person's level of influence in the military. Given his governorship of the province of Britannia, Sallustius Lucullus may fall under the latter category. Another factor that likely agitated Domitian was people's designs on the throne. Salvius Cocceianus, Mettius Pompusianus, and Titus Flavius Sabinus might have been suspected of such designs based on their tenuous or close links to the former and current imperial families. Likewise, Domitian might have considered Aelius Lamia and Helvidius Priscus the Younger to have undermined the reputation of the imperial couple or his authority as censor.

By undermining the authenticity of the charges against each victim using such words as *quasi*, *levissima*, and *tenuissima*, Suetonius seems to have been expressing his own disbelief or to demonstrate Domitian's cruelty and anxiety. The biographer succeeded in hammering Domitian's cruelty home by describing Domitian's sadistic habit of toying with his inferiors' fears, as in the case of Arrecinus Clemens. However, Suetonius's inertia in providing sufficient context for each execution deprives readers of the ability to make their

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<sup>386</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 10.5: *impudicos probaverant et ob id neque apud ducem neque apud milites ullius momenti esse potuisse*; Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 96–7, references Dio Cassius's introduction of Calvaster, who escaped vengeance by claiming that the meetings that he had with Saturninus were for amorous intercourse. Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 247–8, also suggests that Calvaster is the same unnamed person mentioned by Suetonius in *Dom.* 10.5; Cf. Dio 67.13.3–4 also mentioned the successful case of Juventius Celsus, who addressed Domitian as *dominus et deus noster* when his life was in peril.

own judgements. Consequently, the next chapter will delve into Pliny's and Tacitus's recollection of the reign of terror; unlike Suetonius, who did not seem to have any attachment to the victims, Pliny and Tacitus enthusiastically offered details about the deaths of their friends, painting them as victims of a savage tyrant.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Creation of the Image of Domitian as a Fearful Tyrant

This chapter aims to examine the creation of the image of Domitian as a fearful tyrant, the full features of which were produced only after the emperor's death. As shown in the third chapter, the equestrian biographer Suetonius contributed to the negative image of Domitian in his own right; however, his *Life of Domitian* does not reveal the kind of enmity toward Domitian which is palpable in the accounts of the senatorial authors, namely Pliny and Tacitus. For Suetonius, the year 93 CE, when three victims of senatorial status were killed and four of their family members were exiled was just an ordinary year; likewise, Suetonius never gave any special treatment to Arulenus Rusticus and Helvidius Priscus the Younger, the only two of the seven victims of late 93 CE that he chose to mention, among the other consular victims.

For Pliny and Tacitus, on the other hand, the seven individuals who were either exiled or executed in 93 CE, often misleadingly referred to as the "philosophical," "Stoic," or "intellectual" opposition in modern scholarship, symbolized the implacable hatred between the emperor and the Senate, generated by the emperor's cruelty.<sup>387</sup> Hearing about Domitian's capital punishment of their fellow senators and the actions of Domitian's informers who themselves were also senators, both Pliny and Tacitus reported in writing published after Domitian's death that they felt that they were next in line. Tacitus criticized the emperor for hurling the Senate into slavery (*Agr.* 2.3); for Tacitus, the last phase of Domitian's reign was an age so hostile to virtues that it was a happy coincidence of Agricola's death that he was not exposed to the full force of the emperor's cruelty (*Agr.* 44–5). According to Tacitus, the other senators, such as Arulenus Rusticus, Herennius Senecio, and Helvidius Priscus the Younger,

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<sup>387</sup> Gsell, *L'Empereur Domitien*, 261: "entre le prince et les sénateurs, il y eut désormais une haine implacable."

all fell prey to the emperor's hatred of virtues in late 93 CE. As these executions served as a premonition to the senators not to open their mouths and keep a low profile, the Senate became a place filled with fear of the emperor and distrust among the fellow senators. In the *Panegyricus* and in his letters, Pliny also recalled the memory of fear when the senators silenced themselves.<sup>388</sup>

Despite Pliny's and Tacitus's retrospective tarnishing of Domitian's reign in grim colors, their survival of that era itself conflicted with their rhetorical glorification of the seven victims in late 93 CE. As opposed to the vivid images of their suffering under the tyrant in their writings, Pliny and Tacitus did not withdraw themselves from the political arena under the emperor they hated and feared; the situation was even more potentially embarrassing for Nerva and Trajan, Domitian's immediate successors, whom Pliny and Tacitus praised for restoring senatorial liberty. Nerva and Trajan both held consulships under Domitian, in 90 and 91 respectively. Therefore, highlighting the deaths of the three victims while not mentioning their political careers under the tyrant or lack of actions to save the victims during the time of fear would have benefitted Pliny, Tacitus, and Nerva and Trajan, all of whom Domitian had never excluded from his court.

With the senatorial description of Domitian's reign as one filled with terror and fear as one side of the coin, the main question that I pose in the fourth chapter is whether Domitian in turn detected hatred toward him and targeted a specific group of senators as potential dissidents. Because the previous generations of the families of the seven victims had clashed with Domitian's predecessors, and their resistance had become a model for future generations, the first section will present a brief sketch of how the opponents in the previous generations, namely Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus the Elder, had challenged the imperial authority

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<sup>388</sup> E.g. Plin. *Ep.* 8.14.2: *prospeximus curiam, sed curiam trepidam et elinguem.*

of Domitian's predecessors. Returning to Domitian's reign, I will discuss the victims of the year 93 CE in detail and I will also examine the labels imposed on them, that of the "philosophical," "Stoic," and "intellectual" opposition. The next section will cover the relationship that Tacitus and Pliny had with the seven victims. Despite the varying depth of friendship that Tacitus and Pliny had with the victims and their families, the feeling of collective guilt as survivors pervades both accounts of Pliny and Tacitus. Then, the primary question of the fourth chapter—whether Domitian discriminated against possible dissidents in the Senate or not—will be answered by exploring the careers of the consular victims in 93 CE as well as those of Pliny, Tacitus, Nerva and Trajan. I will discuss in the remaining part the image of Domitian as a fearful tyrant who sadistically enjoyed terrifying others, an image consolidated after his death. The accounts of the reign of Domitian written by those who survived his “reign of terror” triumphed.

### **The Origins of Senatorial Enmity toward Domitian**

My discussion of the fates of Arulenus Rusticus and Helvidius Priscus the Younger in the previous chapter strongly brought out the fact that Domitian was not the only Flavian emperor who was alleged to have had a difficult relationship with the Senate. The sources report on Helvidius Priscus the Elder's confrontation with Vespasian's authority during the first weeks of the new regime;<sup>389</sup> Helvidius Priscus the Elder is mostly cited as an example of the opposition under Nero and Vespasian and was the father of the homonymous senator who was to be executed by Domitian in 93 CE.

Ronald Mellor states that Vespasian's most lasting contribution was the creation of a new aristocracy of power that determined the shape and direction of political and cultural life

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<sup>389</sup> Helvidius Priscus the Elder: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 59; Tac. *Hist.* 4.5–8, 43; Suet. *Vesp.* 15; Dio 66.13.

until the death of Commodus in 193 CE. Vespasian brought Italians, western provincials, and a few easterners into the Senate so that twenty percent of Vespasian's Senate consisted of provincials. He expanded the horizon of the Senate by adlecting senators and granting his equestrian supporters access to the Senate.<sup>390</sup> Nevertheless, as Suetonius aptly pointed out, Vespasian was an unexpected and new *princeps* who lacked *auctoritas* and *maiestas*, two elements that had appeared in Augustus's own definition of his position in the Principate in *RG* 34.<sup>391</sup> The deficiency of *auctoritas* and *maiestas* invites the question how willingly the senators who used to take pride in their list of senatorial ancestors or who remembered Vespasian as one of their own, probably a less-cultured but unaffected man who had fallen asleep during Nero's singing in Greece (Suet. *Vesp.* 4.4), might have accepted Vespasian as their new *princeps*. Presumably, some senators might have expected to capitalize on the new emperor's lack of experience.

The execution of Helvidius Priscus the Elder became a hallmark for Vespasian's treatment of the senatorial opposition. Helvidius the Elder was the son-in-law of Thrasea Paetus, who had married Arria, the daughter of Aulus Caecina Paetus (*cos. suff.* 37) and Arria the Elder, both of whom were implicated in the revolt of L. Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus against Claudius in 42 CE.<sup>392</sup> Since Tacitus started his introduction of Helvidius the Elder with his admiration of Thrasea Paetus in *Hist.* 4.5,<sup>393</sup> and the phases of the life of Thrasea Paetus

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<sup>390</sup> Ronald Mellor, "The New Aristocracy of Power," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, eds. Anthony Boyle and William J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 69 and 84–5.

<sup>391</sup> Suet. *Vesp.* 7.2: *auctoritas et quasi maiestas quaedam ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deerat*; Aug. *RG.* 34.3: *Post id tempus auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistratu conlegae fuerunt.*

<sup>392</sup> A. Caecina Paetus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 103; Arria the Elder: Plin. *Ep.* 3.16; Tac. *Ann.* 16.34.2; Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des Femmes*, no. 96; Arria the Younger: Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.10; Tac. *Ann.* 16.34.2; Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des Femmes*, no. 159.

<sup>393</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.5.2: *Thrasea ... e moribus soceri nihil aequae ac libertatem hausit*

foreshadow what would happen to his son-in-law as well as the victims of 93 CE, I will return to the tension between Vespasian and Helvidius the Elder after a brief digression on the life of Thrasea Paetus.

Consul in 56 CE under Nero, Thrasea Paetus is known for writing a biography of Cato the Younger (Plut. *Cato Min.* 25.1, 37) and celebrating the birthdays of Brutus and Cassius (Juv. *Sat.* 5.36–7). His commemoration of the Republican heroes and his ties to senators involved in the revolt against Claudius invite such a discussion involving the alleged members of the "Stoic," "philosophical," or "intellectual" opposition: whether Thrasea Paetus was a Stoic who happened to be senator or a senator influenced by Stoicism. As Strunk claims, though Thrasea was a practicing Stoic, there is nothing to suggest that he was in any way a fundamentalist or that Stoicism was the crucial factor in any of his political activities.<sup>394</sup> Thrasea Paetus marked his displeasure with the political climate when he conspicuously left the meeting when the Senate had voted in favor of celebrations of thanks for the uncovering of Agrippina's conspiracy against her son in 59 CE. In 62 CE when Antistius Sosianus was accused of writing an abusive poem against Nero, therefore tried under the revived *lex maiestatis*, Thrasea Paetus argued against the other senators' opinion that Antistius Sosianus should be executed in the traditional manner (Tac. *Ann.* 14.39.1)<sup>395</sup> It was only 63 CE when Thrasea Paetus stopped attending the senatorial meetings, after he was banned from joining the celebrations at Antium for the birth of Nero's daughter (15.23.4). Afterwards, Thrasea Paetus retired from public life (*secessio*) by not attending the senatorial meetings from 63 to 66. When he finally received the

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<sup>394</sup> Thomas E. Strunk, *History After Liberty: Tacitus on Tyrants, Sycophants, and Republicans* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 104; Wirszubski, *Libertas*, 138, 149; Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, 164.

<sup>395</sup> Cf. Tacitus commented in *Ann.* 14.49.1 that Thrasea's act of freedom destroyed the servility of the others [senators] (*libertas Thraseae servitium aliorum rupit*).

senatorial verdict to commit suicide in 66, Thrasea killed himself, finding some consolation in the knowledge that his son-in-law, i.e. Helvidius, was merely banished from Italy (Tac. *Ann.* 16.35.1).

As noted earlier, Tacitus attributed all of Helvidius's qualities related to the pursuit of liberty to his father-in-law, as a citizen, senator, husband, son-in-law, and friend. In all of life's duties, Helvidius was just the same: he despised wealth, was tenacious in his rectitude, and unmoved by fear.<sup>396</sup> Accordingly, Helvidius the Elder, who had barely saved his life under Nero, had attempted to impeach Eprius Marcellus, the prosecutor of Thrasea Paetus already under Galba (Tac. *Hist.* 4.6.1-2). Despite his eagerness to avenge the deaths of his family members, Helvidius was rebuffed in his first attempt by Galba's reluctance to pursue the matter further. He resumed his attack after the defeat and death of Vitellius at the senatorial meeting where imperial power was voted to Vespasian.<sup>397</sup> The aim of his attack was not the new emperor himself; but the moment of the attack on Eprius Marcellus suggests that Helvidius may have wanted to benefit from the yet unsettled nature of the new Principate.

In the same senatorial meeting, the debate between Helvidius and Eprius Marcellus divided the Senate. This debate, far from philosophical but rather political and personal to a certain extent,<sup>398</sup> focused on how to choose the envoys to be sent to Vespasian, whether by lot (Eprius) or by nomination (Helvidius). At first glance, they seem to have clashed because of their personal hostility; however, as Pigoñ suggests, Eprius Marcellus's apprehension was possibly that election of the envoys would result in the formation of a powerful group of

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<sup>396</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.5.2: *quaestorius adhuc a Paeto Thrasea gener delectus e moribus soceri nihil aequae ac libertatem hausit, civis, senator, maritus, gener, amicus, cunctis vitae officiis aequabilis, opum contemptor, recti pervicax, constans adversus metus.*

<sup>397</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.6–8, 43; Penwill, "Expelling the Mind," 347.

<sup>398</sup> Penwill, "Expelling the Mind," 350: "The contrast between Helvidius and Eprius Marcellus is clearly political."; Tac. *Hist.* 4.6: *ea ultio, incertum maior an iustior, senatum in studia diduxerat.*

senators, to which he did not belong to.<sup>399</sup> Eprius's concern is not completely without foundation, as the new reign was used as an opportunity to take revenge on senators who had supported Nero's regime. After the debate between Helvidius and Eprius Marcellus, Musonius Rufus prosecuted P. Egnatius Celer for bringing false testimony against Barea Soranus (Tac. *Hist.* 4.10.1; 40.3), Curtius Montanus instituted proceedings against Aquilius Regulus (4.42.2), and Iunius Mauricus, who was exiled by Domitian later in 93 CE, also demanded the release of Nero's personal records to glean evidence for further prosecutions (4.40.4).<sup>400</sup> As if to reflect Eprius Marcellus's concerns, Helvidius referred (4.7.2) to the new emperor Vespasian as once the friend of Thrasea, Barea Soranus, and Sentius, those innocent victims who were brought down by Eprius Marcellus. He continued to say that the new emperor would need better friends (*Vespasianum melioribus relinqueret*, 4.7.3). As a consequence, no place would be left for Eprius Marcellus at the new court of Vespasian.<sup>401</sup>

In his response to Helvidius's attack, Eprius Marcellus pointed out that Thrasea Paetus had fallen not mainly because of his rhetorical skills but by the judgement of the Senate (*iudicio senatu*, Tac. *Hist.* 4.8.3). Describing himself as a member of the Senate who made a decision under the savage emperor Nero, Eprius Marcellus exculpated himself from the charge of driving Thrasea to his death. Adducing a sardonic compliment that Helvidius may vie with Cato and Brutus in his constancy and intrepidity, Eprius Marcellus issued a warning that Helvidius or any maverick senators would need to take seriously (4.8.3). He said he would like to advise Priscus not to elevate himself above the *princeps*, and not to impose his precepts on

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<sup>399</sup> Jakub Pigoń, "Helvidius Priscus, Eprius Marcellus, and *Iudicium Senatus*: Observations on Tacitus, *Histories* 4.7-8," *The Classical Quarterly* 42, no. 1(1992): 236.

<sup>400</sup> Penwill, "Expelling the Mind," 347.

<sup>401</sup> Pigoń, "Helvidius Priscus, Eprius Marcellus," 236.

Vespasian, a senior who won triumphal honors and has two grown-up sons.<sup>402</sup> According to Eprius Marcellus, Helvidius masked his own ambition to play the role of conscience of the new Principate.<sup>403</sup> At the same time, according to Eprius Marcellus, Helvidius Priscus underestimated the new emperor as someone who needed senatorial guidance. The majority of senators preferred to keep the precedent and voted in favor of selecting the envoys by lot, out of fear that if they were nominated themselves this would incur jealousy (Tac. *Hist.* 4.8.5).

Tacitus hints at how senators like Helvidius and his friends might have assessed Vespasian at the beginning of his reign in the debates between Helvidius and the *delatores* or informers. In another speech by Montanus regarding the prosecution of Aquilius Regulus, Montanus seemed to praise Vespasian in contrast to Nero: "we do not fear Vespasian, as the *princeps* is mature and moderate." Deploring that the Senate had grown weak, Curtius Montanus contended that the Senate was now less inclined to take action against the *delatores* than on the day when Nero committed suicide.<sup>404</sup> Curtius Montanus asked the Senate to punish *delatores* like Regulus according to tradition, because if he were left unpunished, the younger generation may imitate Regulus (Tac. *Hist.* 4.42.5) Both Helvidius and Curtius Montanus expressed their regret about the lack of senatorial will to pursue *delatores* such as Eprius Marcellus and Regulus. However, at the next senatorial meeting, Domitian began by recommending that the wrongs, the resentments, and the terrible necessities of former times, should be forgotten. Mucianus also spoke in favor of the informers. He admonished in gentle terms and in a tone of entreaty those who were reviving indictments, which they in the past had

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<sup>402</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.8.4: *suadere etiam Prisco ne supra principem scanderet, ne Vespasianum senem triumphalem, iuvenum liberorum patrem, praeceptis coerceret.*

<sup>403</sup> Penwill, "Expelling the Mind," 351.

<sup>404</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.42.6: *non timemus Vespasianum; ea principis aetas, ea moderatio ... elanguimus, patres conscripti.*

started and afterwards dropped. The Senators, when they found themselves opposed, relinquished the liberty which they had begun to exercise (*patres coeptatam libertatem, postquam obviam itum, omisere*, Tac. *Hist.* 4.44.1). Though there is no clear statement in Tacitus about the senatorial response to Montanus, Montanus's attack might not have dealt a serious blow to Aquilius Regulus; in any event, Regulus was to survive even the death of Domitian.

Presumably embittered and disillusioned by the escape of the Neronian *delatores*,<sup>405</sup> Helvidius continued to exhibit a lack of respect to Vespasian.<sup>406</sup> When the praetors of the treasury complained about the poverty of the State and demanded a reduction in spending, the consul-elect, reserved the matter for the attention of the emperor who had not yet arrived in Rome (Tac. *Hist.* 4.9.1). On the other hand, Helvidius gave an opinion that the measures should be taken at the discretion of the Senate, therefore bypassing the emperor. Vulcatius Tertullinus, one of the tribunes of the plebs, vetoed Helvidius's opinion on the same grounds as the ones suggested by the consul-elect. Without yielding, Helvidius, one of the praetor-designates for the year 70 CE, suggested a motion that the Capitol should be restored at public expense, and that Vespasian should (simply) offer financial aid (4.9.2). This time, all the moderate senators let Helvidius's opinion pass in silence, then forgot it. Tacitus adduced that almost everyone forgot that motion, some still remembered it. That someone must have been Helvidius; as praetor in 70 CE, Helvidius even purified the ground before the rebuilding of the temple began, which would be construed as a usurpation of imperial authority (Tac. *Hist.* 4.9.1–2; 53.3).<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, "Dictators and Philosophers in the First Century A. D.," *Greece & Rome* 13 (1944): 55–6.

<sup>406</sup> Cf. David Wardle, "Vespasian, Helvidius Priscus and the Restoration of the Capitol," *Historia* 45, no. 2 (1996): 210, refers to the early chapters of Tacitus's *Histories* Book 4 as an element of the "power struggle" between Vespasian and Helvidius Priscus.

<sup>407</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.53.3; Jacqueline M. Carlon, *Pliny's Women: Constructing Virtue and Creating Identity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 26–7; Wardle, "Vespasian, Helvidius

Though Vespasian's attitude to Helvidius's actions is hard to recover merely from Tacitus's account, Vespasian who returned to Rome later in 70 CE participated in the restoration of the Capitol.<sup>408</sup>

Tacitus is not the only one who discussed Helvidius's lack of respect to Vespasian. Suetonius reported that Helvidius greeted the emperor on his return from Syria by his private name of "Vespasian"; during his praetorship, which he owed to Vespasian, Helvidius left the latter unhonored and unmentioned in edicts (Suet. *Vesp.* 15). Dio Cassius 66.12 described Helvidius Priscus as a turbulent fellow who cultivated the favor of the rabble and denounced kingship and praised democracy. Helvidius irritated the emperor either in private or in public. Dio attributed the cause of Vespasian's execution of Helvidius to his meddlesome interference. Moreover, in Dio Cassius's version, it was Helvidius Priscus himself who elicited from Vespasian the famous comment, "My successor shall be my son or no one at all," thereby the latter enunciated his dynastic plan before the staunch advocate of senatorial authority.<sup>409</sup> Despite Vespasian's unwillingness to punish Helvidius (according to Suetonius) or the test of his own patience (as Dio Cassius and Epictetus suggested), Vespasian eventually banished Helvidius and executed him subsequently in ca. 74 CE, probably at the instigation of Titus.<sup>410</sup>

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Priscus," 210, 213 and 215–6, points out that even though Helvidius's actions in the restoration of the Capitol was one of the elements of the "power struggle" between Vespasian and Helvidius Priscus, Tacitus records no further senatorial discussion on the question; after the interval of forty-two chapters when the historian gets to discuss the year 70 CE, Tacitus described the prominence of Helvidius. Domitian was the urban praetor, but he might have not been available because he was on his way to Gaul or was ruled out by his age. While Domitian was either absent or was deliberately ignored, Helvidius the senior magistrate prayed to the Capitoline gods and touched the fillets.

<sup>408</sup> The representation of Vespasian in various mediums concerning the Capitol, Wardle, "Vespasian, Helvidius Priscus," 216–21.

<sup>409</sup> In *Vesp.* 25, Suetonius introduced the addressee of Vespasian's words as the entire Senate.

<sup>410</sup> Characterization of Helvidius Priscus by Epictetus, a pupil of the philosopher Musonius, in *Diss.* 1.2.19–24, see Wolfgang-Rainer Mann, "You Are Playing You Now: Helvidius Priscus as a Stoic Hero," in *Roman Reflections: Studies in Latin Philosophy*, eds. Gareth D. Williams and Katharina Volk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 215–21; Titus's involvement, see Levick, *Vespasian*, 209; cf. Dio 67.12.2 presented a different picture that Vespasian had come to hate Helvidius Priscus who became more and more provocative to

Vespasian's execution of Helvidius Priscus marred the relationship between Vespasian and the senatorial elite.<sup>411</sup> Nevertheless, it is not particularly the case that Vespasian deliberately targeted a certain group led by Helvidius Priscus the Elder or Helvidius Priscus himself. For instance, Vespasian excluded Musonius from his expulsion of the philosophers from Rome, but he confined Demetrius the Cynic to an island (Dio 65.11.2). At the same time, Vespasian did not aim at expunging all the members of Helvidius's family. G. Caecina Paetus was the brother-in-law of Thrasea Paetus, but he was awarded a suffect consulship in November of 70.<sup>412</sup> At any event, it was the same Vespasian who did not deter the trouble-maker Helvidius Priscus the Elder from holding the praetorship and tolerated his free speech and provocative actions for some time.

One may expect Domitian to have a certain amount of unease with the family of Helvidii or their sympathizers, especially because he was present at the senatorial meeting where Helvidius Priscus and Eprius Marcellus clashed. Vespasian's friendship with Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus (Tac. *Hist.* 4.7.3: *fuisse Vespasiano amicitiam*) might have been diluted during the political vicissitudes in Nero's reign, such as the Pisonian conspiracy; likewise, Titus also divorced Barea Soranus's niece, Marcia Furnilla, after having acknowledged his daughter Julia (Suet. *Titus* 4.2), who would later marry Titus Sabinus. However, the marriage between Domitian and Domitilla Longina, the daughter of Domitius Corbulo, another senator involved in the Pisonian conspiracy, of 70 CE, was allowed to continue.<sup>413</sup> Though this marriage is likely to have been arranged by Vespasian as a gesture of

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Vespasian. On this passage, see Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 164–5.

<sup>411</sup> The tainted image of Vespasian's relationship with the senatorial elite by the execution of Helvidius the Elder, Stefano Rebeggiani, *The Fragility of Power: Statius, Domitian and the Politics of the Thebaid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 49.

<sup>412</sup> Mellor, "New Aristocracy," 98–9.

<sup>413</sup> Titus's marriage with Marcia Furnilla and its changed implications after the revelation of the

reconciliation to the survivors of the families of victims of Nero's reign, the sympathizers with Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus might not have been greatly impressed by such a coalition, and were perhaps even disenchanted after Vespasian's execution of Helvidius the Elder. When it comes to Domitian's reign, however, the emperor maintained a relaxed attitude toward the family members of those who had been punished under his predecessors. There is no evidence that he attempted to sideline the remaining family members or friends of the senators executed by his father; rather the opposite. Helvidius Priscus the Younger (before 87 CE or during 93 CE), Arulenus Rusticus (92 CE), and Salvidienus Orfitus (before 87 CE) all received consulships. Nonetheless, those who were greatly influenced and had sympathized with Thrasea Paetus or Helvidius the Elder continued to gauge the height of the emperor's threshold by provoking the emperor.

### **The Victims of the Year 93 CE**

This section will discuss the victims of 93 CE, the year often referred to as the start of Domitian's "Reign of Terror." On the victims, a series of misnomers such as "philosophical," "Stoic," or "intellectual" opposition has been imposed, the validity of which I will disprove later. As two consular victims, Arulenus Rusticus and Helvidius the Younger, mentioned by Suetonius, have already been studied in detail in the third chapter, this section will examine the charges against the remaining victims: Herennius Senecio, Junius Mauricus, and the female victims, Gratilla, Arria the Younger, and Fannia.

#### **Herennius Senecio**

Herennius Senecio, from an unknown town in Hispania Baetica, held his quaestorship

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Pisonian conspiracy: Jones, *The Emperor Titus*, 19–20; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 33–4 and 168.

in that province sometime in Domitian's reign (Plin. *Ep.* 7.33.5).<sup>414</sup> Senecio's decision not to pursue a senatorial career after the quaestorship (Dio 67.13.2) may account for Suetonius's omission of Senecio in his list of consular victims. At the same time, his decision not to pursue another senatorial office after the quaestorship was construed as a form of *secessio* (Dio 67.13.2). The *secessio* is the symbolic act of withdrawing from political activity, which was first taken by Cato the Younger and more recently by Thrasea Paetus.<sup>415</sup> Before his execution in late 93 CE, Herennius Senecio had prosecuted Baebius Massa, governor of Baetica, for an aggravated form of extortion, together with Pliny the Younger.<sup>416</sup> Despite the failure of Baebius Massa's attempt to prosecute Senecio in turn for *impietas*, another *delator* Mettius Carus charged him presumably with *maiestas*, for eulogizing Helvidius Priscus the Elder in his biography.<sup>417</sup> Mettius Carus's interrogation of Fannia, as described in Pliny's letters (7.19.5) shows that Herennius Senecio relied on the very primary sources, i.e. Helvidius's diaries, given to him by Helvidius's wife Fannia.

Because Suetonius fails to mention Senecio, Charles Murison argued that Herennius Senecio might not have been quite as prominent as the other senators who were condemned in 93.<sup>418</sup> Nevertheless, at least to Pliny and Tacitus, Herennius Senecio was someone who needed to be remembered. The deaths of Herennius Senecio and the other victims in the year 93 CE were hallmarks of the dire times that both Tacitus and Pliny had lived through. After

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<sup>414</sup> Herennius Senecio: Tac. *Agr.* 2, 45.1; Plin. *Ep.* 1.5, 3.11.3, 4.7.5, 7.19.5, 7.33; Dio 67.13.2; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> H 128; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 106 no. 127.

<sup>415</sup> Strunk, *History after Liberty*, 115.

<sup>416</sup> Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 741: Baebius Massa was a former procurator and supporter of Vespasian in the civil wars. He was promoted to the Senate and became proconsul of Baetica c. 91–92 CE. According to Juv. *Sat.* 1.35, he was one of Domitian's *delatores*.

<sup>417</sup> Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 87–8.

<sup>418</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 255–6.

drawing a backdrop of fear in the first chapter of the *Agricola*, Tacitus presented the executions of Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio as the "focal point" or a symbol of the savagery of the time, hostile to all virtues.<sup>419</sup> Away from Rome, Tacitus had read that capital punishments were imposed on Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio for writing eulogies for Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius respectively. Towards the end of his biography of *Agricola*, Tacitus recalled the many noblemen who had been killed or exiled and explicitly deplored the fact that Senecio had drowned senators in his innocent blood.<sup>420</sup> Pliny the Younger greatly boasted of his friendship with Herennius Senecio, who is mentioned in his letters around five times.<sup>421</sup> Early in 97, a few months after the death of Domitian, Pliny reported that Marcus Aquilius Regulus abused Herennius Senecio in such a foul manner (*intemperanter*) that even Mettius Carus, who had in fact prosecuted him, asked Aquilius: "What is your business with my dead men?"<sup>422</sup> Aquilius may have had his own reason to attack Senecio, as the latter had identified him in a twist on the famous words of Cato the Elder, as a wicked man unskilled at speaking.<sup>423</sup> Therefore, there could have existed hostility among the group of senators, including Herennius Senecio, who expressed their contempt for Domitian's *delatores*, who misused their oratorical skills to harm others.

Altogether, the possible reasons for Senecio's execution remain inconclusive. Whether it was his eulogy of Helvidius Priscus, his decision not to pursue a senatorial career after the

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<sup>419</sup> Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 76: "The fates of Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio constitute the focal point of his argument."

<sup>420</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 45.1: *nos innocenti sanguine Senecio perfudit.*

<sup>421</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.3: *cum septem amicis meis aut occisis aut relegatis, occisis Senecione Rustico Helvidio, relegatis Maurico Gratilla Arria Fannia*

<sup>422</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.3: *lacerat Herennium Senecionem tam intemperanter quidem, ut dixerit ei Mettius Carus 'Quid tibi cum meis mortuis?'*

<sup>423</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 4.7.5: *Orator est vir malus dicendi imperitus.*

quaestorship, or the possible hostility between the *delatores* and other senators, none of these provides a good enough explanation for Domitian's displeasure. To assume that combining the three arguments will make a better case is equally invalid. The only reasonable alternative that is left is to argue that the true reason for Senecio's execution is yet unknown.

### Junius Mauricus

Junius Mauricus was the brother of Junius Arulenus Rusticus, who lost his life in 93 CE for having written a eulogy of Thrasea Paetus.<sup>424</sup> What is known about Junius Mauricus before Domitian's death is that he had requested Nero's personal notes so that he could get more information for future trials in 70 CE.<sup>425</sup> His public career during Domitian's lifetime is not well-attested; Jones refers to Herbert Nesselhauf's speculation that Domitian might have awarded Junius Mauricus a suffect consulship, as he also did with his brother Arulenus Rusticus in 92 CE.<sup>426</sup> Nevertheless, there is no evidence about Mauricus's consulship to substantiate Nesselhauf's speculation. If Mauricus had indeed held a suffect consulship, Suetonius might not have missed the opportunity to convey Domitian's "autocratic sadism" to persecute two consular brothers not long after the climax of their senatorial career.<sup>427</sup> Likewise, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger refer to Mauricus several times, but they never identify what caused Domitian to punish him with exile. After Domitian's death, Nerva restored Mauricus from exile, and the latter maintained a warm friendship with Nerva (e.g. Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.4–6).

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<sup>424</sup> Junius Mauricus: Tac. *Agr.* 45.1; Plin. *Ep.* 1.5, 1.14 (addressee: Junius Mauricus), 2.18 (addressee: Junius Mauricus), 3.11.3, 4.22.3–6, 6.14 (addressee: Junius Mauricus); *PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 730; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 110 no. 168; Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 750.

<sup>425</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.40.4: *commentarii principales*.

<sup>426</sup> Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 44; Herbert Nesselhauf, "Review of Degrassi, 1952," *Gnomon* 26 (1954): 267, followed by Rebecciani, *Fragility of Power*, 50.

<sup>427</sup> "autocratic sadism": Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 240. See also Suet. *Dom.* 11 on Domitian's sudden and cunning display of cruelty.

Considering the difference in frequency of Mauricus's appearance in their writings, Pliny seemed to have a closer relationship with Mauricus than Tacitus. Pliny addressed at least three letters to Junius Mauricus, and both friends seemed to have relied on each other when circumstances required it. Early in 97 when Pliny was considering bringing a charge against Aquilius Regulus, he remarked that he had to wait until Mauricus's return from exile in order to take his advice.<sup>428</sup> Mauricus also asked Pliny to seek out a husband for his deceased brother's daughter, and, on another occasion, to recommend a tutor for his brother's children.<sup>429</sup> Their friendship seems to have continued into the reign of Trajan. Pliny described Junius Mauricus as the most steadfast and honest man who dared to speak to the emperor Nerva most courageously; if Catullus Messalinus, one of Domitian's henchmen, were alive, he would dine with them together.<sup>430</sup> If Mauricus had been capable of making a similar sarcastic comment to Domitian, it is possible that his freedom to speak his mind might have irked Domitian, in addition to him being the brother of the author of a eulogy for Thrasea Paetus. However, the indications in the ancient sources as to what Mauricus was guilty of are not very substantive.

### Gratilla

As opposed to Arria and Fannia, there is barely any information about Gratilla, the wife of Arulenus Rusticus.<sup>431</sup> She is possibly the daughter of a senator named Verulanus Severus, making her the same Verulania Gratilia or Gratilla who sided with the Flavians at

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<sup>428</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.10: *exspecto Mauricum*, 15: *dum Mauricus venit, exspecto Mauricum*; Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 14.

<sup>429</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.14 and 2.18.

<sup>430</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.3: *quo viro nihil firmitus nihil verius*; 4: *non minus fortiter*; 6: *Et Mauricus: 'Nobiscum cenaret'*.

<sup>431</sup> (Verulania?) Gratilla: Plin. *Ep.* 1.14.1; 3.11.3; 5.1.8 (*Gratillae amicitia et Rustici*); On the harmful effects that friendship with Gratilla and Rusticus could have incurred in *Ep.* 5.1.8, see Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 139–40.

Rome in 69 CE, when Rusticus was trying to mediate on the side of Vitellus (Tac. *Hist.* 3.69.3). Sherwin-White suggested that her protection might have saved Junius Arulenus Rusticus and Junius Mauricus around the 70s CE when Helvidius the Elder was executed under Vespasian.<sup>432</sup>

Setting aside Suetonius, who mentions only two of the victims of late 93 CE, thereby neglecting the other five, Pliny and Tacitus were also silent regarding the charges against Gratilla and Junius Mauricus. Even more puzzling is that Anteia, the wife of Helvidius Priscus the Younger, did not suffer any consequence, even though she was intimately connected with all the others. While Mettius Carus tried to implicate the aged Arria the Younger in his investigation of Arria's daughter Fannia,<sup>433</sup> he may have regarded Anteia as innocent of her husband's deeds or those of her in-laws.<sup>434</sup> As with the cases above, it is hard to discover the charges against Gratilla or to reconstruct what she did that made her a target for Domitian's displeasure.

### **Arria the Younger**

Arria the Younger was the daughter of Caecina Paetus and Arria the Elder and the wife of P. Clodius Thrasea Paetus.<sup>435</sup> When her husband was about to commit suicide in 66 CE, Arria the Younger wanted to join Thrasea in death, following the *exemplum* of her mother Arria the Elder who had killed herself with her father twenty-four years earlier.<sup>436</sup> Thrasea Paetus urged his wife to preserve her life and not to rob their daughter [Fannia] of her sole resort.

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<sup>432</sup> Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 243; Verulanus Severus: Tac. *Ann.* 15.3, Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 135 no. 525.

<sup>433</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.5.

<sup>434</sup> Anteia: Plin. *Ep.* 9.13.4; Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des Femmes*, no. 68.

<sup>435</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 16.34.2; Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.10; Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des Femmes*, no. 159; Jo-Ann Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 43–55.

<sup>436</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 3.16.6: *Paete, non dolet.*

There is no new information about Arria the Younger until we reach the year 93 CE, when Arria the Younger and her daughter Fannia were banished and her step-grandson Helvidius the Younger was executed. Pliny, more acquainted with Fannia than with Arria, described Fannia's effort to keep her aged mother, probably more than seventy years old by then, out of punishment.<sup>437</sup> Although her daughter's efforts were futile and there is no way to specify the nature of the charges against Arria the Younger, the mother and daughter returned to Rome in early 97 from their nearly three-year exile.

Unlike her mother Arria the Elder, there are no statements from her for posterity, and she was deterred from acquiring exemplarity because of her husband's recommendation not to kill herself. Nonetheless, Jo-Ann Shelton, who devoted a chapter entitled "Arria's family and the tradition of dissent" to her in *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, commended her for preserving and promulgating the accounts of the family's stalwart opposition to the emperors through several generations. As Fannia was later to provide information about her family to Herennius Senecio and Pliny the Younger, as Shelton stated, Arria the Younger must have raised Fannia that she had to carry on the task of promoting the family reputation.<sup>438</sup>

## **Fannia**

Fannia's original name is Clodia, the daughter of Clodius Thrasea Paetus and Arria the Younger and the wife of Helvidius the Elder.<sup>439</sup> Pliny, our primary source on Fannia, whose friendship he cherished the most consistently referred to her as Fannia (*Ep.* 7.19.7), so she is

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<sup>437</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.5; Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 53–4, raised the possibility that Pliny might not have been so familiar with Arria the Younger as he implied in his letters.

<sup>438</sup> Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 55.

<sup>439</sup> Clodia Fannia: Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.3, 3.16.2, 7.19.5, 9.13.3; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 118; Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des Femmes*, no. 259; Shelton, *Women in Pliny's Letters*, 55–69.

better known as Fannia. Before her husband's execution in the 70s CE, she was known to have accompanied her husband into exile twice (*Ep.* 7.19.4). She was relatively young at the time of her husband's death, probably around 30 years old, if she was born around 44 CE, and she survived her husband by more than 30 years.<sup>440</sup> Pliny was enthusiastic about making heroes of his friends who had been punished in the year 93 CE, and he seems to have much to offer about her than the other victims. This may be because Fannia, along with Junius Rusticus, survived the hard times in the end. Pliny and his surviving friends might have reinforced the darker aspects by sharing what each of them had suffered in the past.<sup>441</sup> Pliny praised his friend Fannia for having a strong mind and a spirit that made her worthy of her husband Helvidius and her father Thrasea (*Ep.* 7.19.3); he even lauded her, asking if there would be any woman after her whom they could use a model for their wives and to whom men could also look as an exemplar of courage (*Ep.* 7.19.7).<sup>442</sup>

Pliny also specified, or at least pointed to, what caused Fannia's exile. When Mettius Carus indicted Herennius Senecio for writing the biography of Helvidius the Elder, the latter defended himself by saying that Fannia, Helvidius's wife, had asked him to write it. Mettius Carus menacingly asked Fannia whether she had requested it, and Pliny had his friend speak in a first-person voice here. Fannia answered, "Yes I did." When Mettius Carus asked her whether she had handed over her husband's diaries, she said, "Yes, I gave them to him." In order to ensnare Arria the Younger as well, Mettius Carus asked Fannia whether Arria knew of

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<sup>440</sup> Shelton, *The Woman of Pliny's Letters*, 55 and 66.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 424, raised the possibility that the Vestal Virgin Junia whose care had been entrusted to Fannia, who got a disease after contacting Junia, could likely be a sister of the brothers, Junius Arulenus Rusticus and Junius Mauricus, to account for Pliny's description of Junia as Fannia's relative (*affinis*, *Ep.* 7.19.1).

<sup>442</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.3 and 7: 3 *Animus tantum et spiritus viget Helvidio marito, Thrasea patre dignissimus, 7 Eritne quam postea uxoribus nostris ostentare possimus? Erit a qua viri quoque fortitudinis exempla sumamus, quam sic cernentes audientesque miremur, ut illas quae leguntur?*

this. Fannia answered, "She did not know." Fannia's efforts to extricate her old mother were in vain, and her properties were confiscated. Still, she preserved and kept those books, and took the cause of her exile (i.e. the books) on the way to the place of exile (*Ep.* 7.19.5-6).<sup>443</sup>

Apparently, Fannia was the one who had cherished the glorious memory of her family, shattered from its foundations by the constant afflictions; she wanted to make the heroic acts of her family public knowledge.<sup>444</sup> Besides providing primary sources to Herennius Senecio for her husband's biography, Fannia appears to employ Pliny as a loudspeaker.<sup>445</sup> Pliny specified Fannia as his source in his introduction of the lesser-known stories about her grandmother, Arria the Elder. It was Fannia who also told Pliny about her mother, Arria the Younger.<sup>446</sup> As he waited for Junius Mauricus to return from exile to seek advice for his attack on Regulus,<sup>447</sup> Pliny also asked Anteia, Helvidius the Younger's wife, to consult Arria the Younger and Fannia, who had by then (early 97 CE) come back from exile, regarding his plan to avenge the death of Helvidius the Younger (*Ep.* 9.13.4-5). Both women promptly agreed with Pliny's plan to pursue revenge against the informers.<sup>448</sup>

### The "Philosophical," "Stoic," or "Intellectual" Opposition

In the third chapter and the previous section, the lives and the charges against the seven

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<sup>443</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.5–6: 5 *Senecio ... se a Fannia in defensione dixisset ... quaerente minaciter Mettio Caro, an rogasset respondit: 'Rogavi!'; an commentarios scripturo dedisset: 'Dedi!'; an sciente matre: 'Nesciente!'; 6 ... servavit habuit, tulitque in exsilium exsili causam.*

<sup>444</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.8: *domus ipsa nutare, convulsaque sedibus suis ruitura supra.*

<sup>445</sup> Similarly, Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 70.

<sup>446</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 3.16.2, 7.19.9, esp. 7.19.9: *tantae feminae matrem, rursus videor amittere, quam haec, ut reddit ac refert nobis.*

<sup>447</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.11 and 15.

<sup>448</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.13.5; Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 493 comments that Pliny might have needed Arria and Fannia as witnesses.

victims in the late 93 CE were examined. Like the inaccuracy of Suetonius's very tentative categorization of the consular victims in the *Life of Domitian*, there is no overarching charge under which to group the seven victims in the late 93 CE, other than Pliny's and Tacitus's references to them as a group. The victims mainly come from two families. Helvidius the Younger, Arria the Younger, and Fannia obviously shared a grudge against the emperors. Junius Arulenus Rusticus, Junius Mauricus, and Gratilla were one family, but the accusations leveled against the latter two remained unrecorded.<sup>449</sup> Herennius Senecio, who did not have any familial connection to the other victims, seems to have been targeted by Domitian's informers after he and Pliny prosecuted Baebius Massa in 93 CE. Fannia provided her husband's diaries to Herennius Senecio, who later divulged the fact, and as a consequence both were exiled. The only undisputed fact is that the three senators, namely Herennius Senecio, Arulenus Rusticus, and Helvidius the Younger, who wrote either laudatory writings about the previous critics of the Principate or mocked Domitian and Domitia publicly in a farce, were sentenced to death.

Because of the murky nature of accusations in late 93 CE, which nevertheless left a great imprint in the writings of Tacitus and Pliny, there has been insistent questioning as to whether or not praising the critics of regimes or satirizing the imperial couple (and possibly mocking the emperor's role as censor) amounted to the charge of *maiestas*. Samuel Rogers concluded his article about trials under Domitian by saying that the encomiums on Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius the Elder and the play *Paris and Oenone* were not grounds for indictment; they are no more than trivial incidentals in the trial of these seven defendants who must have stood clearly in a long line of rebels and conspirators. Therefore, Rogers stated that they must

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<sup>449</sup> Cf. Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 71, suggested that the connection between Thrasea's (and Fannia's) family and the Junii must have existed for several decades, at least back to the day in 66 CE when Arulenus Rusticus offered to use his tribunal veto to prevent the condemnation of Thrasea Paetus.

have been charged with treason.<sup>450</sup> As Shelton pointed out, however, none of our sources show that the victims in late 93 CE were charged specifically with plotting to overthrow or assassinate Domitian.<sup>451</sup> Richard Bauman also refuted Rogers's conclusion that the sources did not disclose the nature of the charges against those arraigned with Arulenus, Herennius, and Helvidius. As I also noted earlier, Pliny illustrated Mettius Carus's investigation of Senecio and Fannia, revealing the most serious part of the attacks against those two. Accordingly, Bauman defined the nature of the charges against the victims in late 93 as defamation, not necessarily *maiestas*.<sup>452</sup>

The most persistent misunderstanding of those seven victims, which has bolstered the negative image of Domitian's reign is the use of the label-"philosophical" opposition, often referred to as "Stoic," or "intellectual" opposition. The origin of such labels could be traced back to Dio Cassius, and possibly Suetonius as well. After dealing with the execution of Junius Arulenus Rusticus, Suetonius reported that Domitian banished all the philosophers from the city and from Italy.<sup>453</sup> Connecting the two cases with *cuius criminis occasione*, Suetonius implied the existence of a causal relationship between the case of Junius Rusticus and the banishment. Dio Cassius went further to define the basis for the charge against Junius Rusticus as his philosophizing and calling Thrasea Paetus holy. Herennius Senecio did not specifically receive punishment for any philosophy, but Dio added another reason that Suetonius did not mention. Along with his biography of Helvidius Priscus, Herennius Senecio had not stood for any additional office after his quaestorship, which might have been an additional charge that

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<sup>450</sup> Rogers, "Domitianic Treason-Trials," 23.

<sup>451</sup> Shelton, *The Women in Pliny's Letters*, 67.

<sup>452</sup> Bauman, *Impietas in Principem*, 162 n. 177; cf. Ulpian, *Dig.* 47.10.5.9–10.

<sup>453</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 10.3: *cuius criminis occasione philosophos omnis urbe Italiaque summovit.*

led to his condemnation. After this, Dio Cassius returned to many others who perished from the same charge of philosophizing; he went on to mention the result, the second banishment of the philosophers from Rome.<sup>454</sup>

Relying on Suetonius's and Dio Cassius's use of the word, "philosophy," Gaston Boissier initiated a discussion of the "Stoic martyrs" who resisted Nero's tyranny in his *L'Opposition sous les Césars* published in 1892. Tracing the origin of "martyrology" back even to Crematius Cordus who had no Stoic or any philosophical connections, Boissier called the actions of Thrasea, Helvidius Priscus, and Paconius Agrippinus as not quite political but rather moral.<sup>455</sup> Most likely influenced by Boissier, Gsell stated two years later that Domitian's reign of terror, which lasted for three years from 93 to the emperor's death, started with Domitian's persecution of the philosophers—for instance, the death of Herennius Senecio, whom Gsell called a senator and Stoic philosopher.<sup>456</sup> In his *Enemies of the Roman Orders: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* published in 1966, Ramsay MacMullen defined philosophy in Rome as a loose complex of ideas adaptable to the prejudices of various classes, which fortified them against risks but opened them up to criticism. Drawing a long line of succession of ideas from the tyrannicides to the opponents to Domitian in 93 CE, MacMullen defined the study of ethics and Stoicism as the most powerful driving force in the first (65–66 CE under Nero) and

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<sup>454</sup> Dio 67.13.2–3: 2 τὸν γὰρ δὴ Ρούστικον τὸν Ἀρουλῆνον ἀπέκτεινεν ὅτι ἐφιλοσόφει καὶ ὅτι τὸν Θρασέα ἱερὸν ἀνόμαζε, καὶ Ἑρέννιον Σενεκίωνα ὅτι τε οὐδεμίαν ἀρχὴν ἐν πολλῷ βίῳ μετὰ τὴν ταμείαν ἠτήκει καὶ ὅτι τοῦ Πρίσκου τοῦ Ἐλουιδίου τὸν βίον συνέγραψεν ἄλλοι τε ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ταύτης τῆς κατὰ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν αἰτίας συχνοὶ διώλοντο, καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ πάντες ἐξηλάθησαν αὐθις ἐκ τῆς Ῥώμης.

<sup>455</sup> Gaston Boissier, *L'Opposition Sous les Césars* (Paris: Hachette, 1892), 103; Toynbee, "Dictators and Philosophers," 43–4.

<sup>456</sup> Gsell, *l'Empereur Domitien*, 275; 279; Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors*, 175, also employed the concept of the philosophical opposition to the Flavian emperors.; cf. As noted earlier, Gsell's periodization does not follow Suetonius's claim of the so-called turning point of Domitian's cruelty to the year 89 but that of Pliny and Tacitus to whom the year 93 CE meant dire times full of terror. Gsell selectively employed the sources, but there are conflicts among ancient authors over how to assess one event or phenomenon—like the case of the victims in late 93 CE.

second (93–94 CE under Domitian) opponents to the throne.<sup>457</sup>

Despite Suetonius's and Dio Cassius's association between Arulenus Rusticus's condemnation and Domitian's decision to expel the philosophers, it is noteworthy that the aforementioned scholars, in search of the "philosophical," "Stoic," or "intellectual" opposition, neglected to notice that the main sources about the victims in late 93 CE, Pliny and Tacitus failed to draw the same conclusion. For instance, in his letter 3.11, in which Pliny discussed the philosopher Artemidorus and the seven victims in late 93 CE, Pliny did not allude to any specific connection between the banished philosophers and the seven.<sup>458</sup> The only connection was that Pliny lent help to both groups. Suetonius also did not make any connection between the acts of Helvidius the Elder and philosophy. Suetonius did not refer to Helvidius the Elder's philosophical beliefs as a cause of the latter's own death, nor did he create any impression that there was any correlation between Vespasian's expulsion of the philosophers in the early 70s CE and Helvidius's death.<sup>459</sup> After keeping in mind the discrepancies among ancient sources

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<sup>457</sup> Ramsey MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 56 and 62.

<sup>458</sup> The *delator* Aquilius Regulus was elated by the death of Arulenus Rusticus and later published what he recited. In the written version, Arulenus Rusticus is mocked as 'the ape of the Stoics (Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.2: *Stoicorum simiam*). This denigrating remark may testify that Arulenus Rusticus studied Stoicism and followed the Stoic lifestyle, but it does not necessarily mark Arulenus as one of the Stoics.; cf. Anthony R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 94, referenced a descendent of Q. Junius Rusticus and his influence on the emperor Marcus Aurelius in his Stoicism. Birley stated that "his very name was almost a political philosophy or programme in itself," but the only reason to attest that belief was that "he [Marcus Aurelius's friend, Rusticus] was a descendant, probably the grandson, of one of the martyrs to the tyranny of Domitian." Let alone lack of questioning the authenticity of the label of the "martyrs" of the "Stoic opposition" on Birley's part, this sentence shows the retrospective reasoning starting from Marcus Aurelius's Stoicism, via his twenty-year old senior Rusticus, to the latter's possible grandfather who was known to one of the members of the "Stoic opposition."

<sup>459</sup> Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 64–5; similarly Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 255; Cf. Toynbee, "Dictators and Philosophers," 47, refers to the case of Rubellius Plautus as the one who could have been killed for his Stoicism. Hated both by Nero's henchman Tigellinus and suspected by Nero, Rubellius Plautus was thought to have flaunted his imitation of the old Romans, assuming the arrogance of the Stoics (Tac. *Ann.* 14.57: *Stoicorum adrogantia*). Although Rubellius Plautus was taught by Musonius Rufus, it is hardly the case that Nero executed Rubellius Plautus simply for his Stoicism. Plautus was a distant relative of the Julio-Claudian family, and Plautus was suspected of having a connection to Corbulo and Barea Soranus, via his father-in-law, Lucius Antistius.

regarding philosophy or Stoicism in relation to the victims of 93 CE, to extract a group of devotees to Stoicism, who turned their doctrines into political reactions to the emperors, could not help but remain futile.

As early as 1950, therefore, before MacMullen's reinforcement of the mislabeled "philosophical" opposition, Chaim Wirszubski rejected the label "philosophical opposition" attached to Thrasea Paetus: "Thrasea is usually cited as an example of what is known as the philosophical opposition under the Early Empire. But, as his recorded words and deeds show, he acted primarily as a courageous and upright Roman senator who held Stoic views, not as a Stoic philosopher who happened to be a senator of Rome."<sup>460</sup> In Wirszubski's wake, Denis McAlindon also criticized the claims labeling philosophy as a revolutionary force behind the opponents of the emperor in the first century CE. Differentiating between the philosophers who were banished and the philosophy-inspired nobility, McAlindon denied any unity among philosophers to permit an alliance with the active opposition among the nobility.<sup>461</sup>

From his thorough examination of the ancient sources from the reign of Domitian, Brian Jones inferred that the term "philosophical" and "intellectual" opposition have sometimes been misunderstood, because none of the victims in late 93 CE were punished just because they were Stoics or intellectuals. As a rule, Domitian had no quarrel with the so-called Stoics or their sympathizers. For instance, Martial praised a certain Decianus for being a follower of the maxims of great Thrasea and Cato the perfect (Mart. *Epigrams* 1.8).<sup>462</sup> If Domitian had especially targeted those who admired Thrasea or Cato, Martial would not have gone unpunished. Domitian also gave 100,000 sesterces to Flavius Archippus, whom the emperor

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<sup>460</sup> Wirszubski, *Libertas*, 138.

<sup>461</sup> Denis McAlindon, "Senatorial opposition to Claudius and Nero," *American Journal of Philology* 77, no. 2 (1956): 131–2 n. 188.

<sup>462</sup> Martial, *Epigrams* 1.8.1: *Quod magni Thraseae consummatique Catonis*

himself called “a philosopher, an honest man, his character in accord with his profession.”<sup>463</sup> This description came from Pliny's *Letters* 10.58, and Pliny did not find any inconsistency with Domitian's benefaction to a Stoic.<sup>464</sup> If Domitian targeted Pliny's friends simply for their Stoicism, Pliny would have found fault with Domitian's hypocrisy in giving a reward to one Stoic at one time but executing others at another time. Moreover, Tacitus described the young Agricola's pursuit of philosophy, which was beyond what was deemed suitable for a Roman and a senator, as a passion extinguished by his mother.<sup>465</sup> As Tacitus employed Agricola as a rhetorical device, Agricola became a model of how senators should approach philosophy.<sup>466</sup> In a similar vein to Tacitus, Rutledge also defined the victims in late 93 CE as a political group bound by familial ties (and only in the second instance as one associated with Stoic sympathies).<sup>467</sup> Therefore, as Syme had already suggested, the link between the expulsion of philosophers and the victims in late 93 CE might be an invention of post-Domitianic sources to corroborate the official motivation for the indictment the latter group.<sup>468</sup>

The recent trend of lifting off the incorrect labels from the seven accused in late 93 CE seems to have gradually permeated scholarship; for instance, in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (2014), the editors reflected on the new trend in the entry for Pliny the Younger, which describes “heroic episodes of the political opposition to Domitian, with which

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<sup>463</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 10.58.6: *Archippum philosophum, bonum virum et professioni suae etiam moribus respondentem, commendatum habeas velim, mi Maxime, et plenam ei humanitatem tuam praestes in iis, quae verecunde a te desideraverit.*

<sup>464</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 121–5.

<sup>465</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 4.3: *ultra quam concessum Romano ac senatori*

<sup>466</sup> Cf. Petronius, *Satyricon* 71.12: *C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus hic requiescit. ... nec unquam philosophum audivit.*

<sup>467</sup> Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 131; similarly, Penwill, "Expelling the Mind," 360.

<sup>468</sup> Rebergiani, *Fragility of Power*, 53 citing Syme, *Roman Papers* vol. 7, 576.

Pliny liked to claim some connection.”<sup>469</sup> However, in the late 1990s and even in the twenty-first century, the specter of a philosophical opposition to Domitian has not been completely removed. For instance, Pat Southern employed the term “philosophic opposition” without questioning its validity. Birley, in his biography of Marcus Aurelius, also tried to find a connection between Marcus Aurelius and the victims in late 93 CE, especially Arulenus Rusticus.<sup>470</sup> Just as the false report that Domitian requested himself to be addressed *dominus et deus noster* is continually perpetuated,<sup>471</sup> misrepresentation of the victims in late 93 CE as Stoic martyrs who staunchly resisted the tyrant Domitian and lost their lives in the process will not be eliminated so easily. And yet, firm evidence in support of the claim is essentially lacking.

### Collective Guilt in the Works of Tacitus and Pliny

As noted before, Suetonius did not make an effort to have the group of seven victims in late 93 CE stand out as the target of a concerted attack. In contrast, those who were prosecuted in late 93 CE represented the culmination of Domitian’s terror in the works of two senatorial authors, Tacitus and Pliny. With Tacitus the more senior of the two by approximately five years, their political careers had a lot in common. Both were new men who owed their careers to the Flavian dynasty. Far from having been nonentities during Domitian’s reign, as Whitton writes, both also had to confront the same political and ethical dilemma to survive

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<sup>469</sup> Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth and Esther Eidinow, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 602; Just to name a few more recent works of scholarship to indicate the ineptness of the label: Christopher Whitton, "Let Us Tread Our Path Together: Tacitus and the Younger Pliny," in *A Companion to Tacitus*, ed. Victoria Emma Pagán (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 353: “a cachet preserved in their (misleadingly monolithic) modern designation, ‘the Stoic martyrs’”; Levick, *Vespasian*, 224: “Too much has been made of a ‘philosophical opposition.’”

<sup>470</sup> Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 114; Birley, *Marcus Aurelius*, 94: “The ‘Stoic opposition’ to the bad emperors in the first century, especially to Nero and Domitian, was an important force in shaping the character of the Antonine principate.”; cf. Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, 164, which describes Thræsea Paetus as “a Stoic by temperament and inclination.”

<sup>471</sup> E.g. The title of Lindsey Davis’s historical novel published in 2012 is *Master and God*.

Domitian's tyranny. This dilemma must have been shared by other members of the senatorial elite who survived, especially Domitian's successors, Nerva and Trajan.<sup>472</sup> Therefore, the underlying sentiments in Tacitus's and Pliny's recollection of the seven victims in late 93 CE contain a sort of common, collective or corporate guilt and eagerness or refusal to relate to the victims who had not submitted to the yoke.<sup>473</sup> Nonetheless, the representation of the victims varies because of the different literary genres of Tacitus's and Pliny's works. The main monograph in which Tacitus described the deaths of the victims in late 93 CE is the *Agricola*, the biography of the author's father-in-law; the main literary goal for Tacitus in the *Agricola* was to highlight the virtues of Agricola, who had wisely lived through Domitian's tyranny, therefore leaving little room for Tacitus to digress to other topics that might divert his readers' attention from Agricola. On the other hand, Pliny communicated his memory of the victims in late 93 CE in his own letters, which tended to take a more personal approach.

To start with Tacitus, the senatorial victims of late 93 CE appear in Tacitus's *Agricola* twice. First, in *Agr.* 2.1, Tacitus refers to Arulenus Rusticus and Thrasea Paetus in the context of the idiocy of the emperor's burning of the eulogies of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius the Elder, besides incurring the deaths of the writers. After unfolding the narrative about his protagonist and father-in-law, Agricola,<sup>474</sup> Tacitus recalled the names of Helvidius the Younger, Arulenus Rusticus, and Herennius Senecio, making a vague reference to the exiles of many of Rome's

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<sup>472</sup> Whitton, "Our Path Together," 346 and 353.

<sup>473</sup> Dylan Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13; "Collective guilt": Syme, *Tacitus*, 25; "Corporate guilt" in Tacitus's works, see Miriam Griffin, "Pliny and Tacitus," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 18 (1999): 146. cf. Labelling the sentiments that the alleged survivors, such as Pliny or Tacitus, felt toward their fellow senators who lost their lives with the term "collective guilt" around 1958 when he published *Tacitus*, Ronald Syme must have had in mind the concept of "German collective guilt" (*Kollektivschuld*) that all Germans were equally guilty of crimes, regardless of whether they had been actively involved in them. This term was coined by Carl Jung in 1945 to denote how the Germans felt about the Holocaust and the Second World War.

<sup>474</sup> Gn. Julius Agricola: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> J 126.

noblest ladies in the concluding chapters (44–5) to vividly illustrate the bloodshed Domitian created in the last three years of his reign. Agricola was blessed by his timely death, which spared him from seeing the *curia* beseiged, the Senate surrounded by soldiers, or the carnage (*strages*) of consular men.

As Sailor points out, Tacitus shows less enthusiasm for the victims in late 93 CE than Pliny or the authors of laudatory biographies would have shown in their works;<sup>475</sup> as noted earlier, this relative lack of enthusiasm could be ascribed to the genre of the *Agricola*, in which Tacitus already had an exemplary figure—Agricola, for whom Domitian served as a foil.<sup>476</sup> To Tacitus, even the emperor Domitian, irascible in his temper and more unfathomable, and more implacable in time of savagery (i.e., Domitian's reign), when virtues invited the surest destruction, was softened by the moderation and prudence of Agricola.<sup>477</sup> Sailor employed Tacitus's last sentence in *Agr.* 42.4 to show the contrast between Agricola and the victims in late 93 CE. Portraying Agricola as not seeking fame and fate, goaded neither by contumacy nor any empty boast of freedom, Tacitus added, "Let those whose habit is to wonder at forbidden activities know that in truth there can be great men under even bad *principes*, and that obedience and an unassuming manner, provided there be also hard work and spirit, attain the same degree of praise that others have—but most of these have taken a precipitous course that was of no utility to the *res publica* and have become famous through a self-seeking death."<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 12.

<sup>476</sup> Domitian and Agricola as a pair for contrast: e.g., Daniel J. Kapust, "Tacitus and Political Thought," in *A Companion to Tacitus*, ed. Victoria Emma Pagán (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), 520–521; cf. Thomas A. Dorey, "Agricola and Domitian," *Greece & Rome* 7, no. 1 (1960): 67, who saw the contrast between Domitian and Agricola as being rooted in very insecure foundations, concluding that Domitian and Agricola had a genuine friendly relationship.

<sup>477</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 2.1: *atrocius in urbe saevitum: nobilitas, opes, omissi gestique honores pro crimine et ob virtutes certissimum exitium*; 42.3: *Domitiani vero natura praeceps in iram, et quo obscurior, eo inrevocabilior, moderatione tamen prudentiaque Agricolae leniebatur quia non contumacia neque inani iactatione libertatis famam fatumque provocabat.*

<sup>478</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 42.4: *Sciant, quibus moris est illicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos*

According to Tacitus's description, it could be considered greater or more tactical to mollify a bad emperor's anger with moderation and prudence than to daringly risk one's life by crossing the shaky boundaries. Those who expressed resistance against bad emperors by inflicting death on themselves did not really ameliorate the situation. The forbidden acts or deeds that would provoke the emperor's ire would be, for instance, writing a farce where the imperial couple became the object of ridicule or eulogies of the critics of the emperor or the current political system. Nonetheless, borrowing Kapust's words, Tacitus himself also eschews extremes.<sup>479</sup> As Sailor also admits, if Tacitus were intent on disparaging the already enshrined martyrs who lost their lives in resistance in *Agricola*, Tacitus would exclude himself from the other senatorial friends upon their reading the biography, the first being Pliny the Younger. Hence, Sailor maintained a reserved stance that Tacitus took the safe criticism by deprecating the mode of the lives of the martyrs *as a category*, not necessarily attacking the individuals.<sup>480</sup>

Although the seven victims remain peripheral to the main theme of Tacitus's *Agricola*, Pliny emphasized his friendship with almost each of them throughout his letters.<sup>481</sup> To start with, letter 3.11 describes that Pliny was friends with all seven victims (*septem amicis meis*, *Ep.* 3.11.3) as well as with the philosopher Artemidorus. The letter begins with Pliny's reaction to Artemidorus's excessive expression of gratitude to himself. Artemidorus, son-in-law of

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*viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abrupta, sed in nullum rei publicae usum nisi ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt*; Translation is from Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 16; Whitton, "Our Path Together," 353; Victoria E. Pagán, "Distant Voices of Freedom in the *Annales* of Tacitus," in *Studies In Latin Literature and Roman History* (Collection Latomus), ed. Carl Deroux (Bruxelles: Latomus, 2000), 359.

<sup>479</sup> Kapust, "Tacitus and Political Thought," 518.

<sup>480</sup> Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 17; Emphasis in Italics is Sailor's.; Cf. Strunk, *History After Liberty*, 14–18, objects to drawing an arbitrary dichotomy between the moderate *Agricola* and the daring, extremist Helvidius Priscus. As Strunk construes Tacitus's intents in the *Agricola*, it was the servility of the Senate as a whole that drove the victims to death, not their truculence.

<sup>481</sup> For a detailed description of each friendship, see Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 69–71.

Musonius Rufus, was one of the philosophers who were banished in 93 CE. As a young man, Pliny loved and admired Musonius Rufus, and he got to know Artemidorus when he was a tribune in the army in Syria in 82 CE (*Ep.* 3.11.5).<sup>482</sup> Because of his long-standing friendship with the philosopher, Pliny even ventured to visit the philosopher in exile and lent him money without charging any interest. Pliny made it clear that his visit was more noteworthy, therefore more dangerous, because he was praetor then.<sup>483</sup> Pliny claimed that he took a risk to visit Artemidorus and support him financially when seven of his friends had already been executed or banished (3.11.3).

Creating a tenuous connection between his bravery to visit Artemidorus and his friendship with the seven victims, Pliny started his description of his friends. As Sherwin-White comments, Pliny might have gotten to be acquainted with the family of Helvidius only after his accidental association with Herennius Senecio in the trial of Massa; before then, Pliny's direct connection with the Helvidii seems to have been very casual.<sup>484</sup> On the one hand, Pliny's friendships with the Junii brothers and Artemidorus went back some time, given that Pliny himself referred to the past memories with the Junii brothers or how he had become acquainted with Artemidorus. Pliny only mentioned how he had admired the Helvidii, without mentioning any firsthand experiences with Helvidius the Younger or the family members that occurred before 93 CE. The heroic feats of Thrasea Paetus or Arria the Elder were known to Pliny via Arria the Younger.

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<sup>482</sup> Anthony R. Birley, *Onomasticon to the Younger Pliny: Letters and Panegyric* (München/Leipzig: Saur, 2000), 7.

<sup>483</sup> Cf. Rex Winsbury, *Pliny the Younger: A Life in Roman Letters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 103–5, presents a possibility that Pliny visited Artemidorus not once but twice, first in 89 or 90 when he was praetor and secondly when he was not praetor; Christopher Whitton, "Pliny's Progress: On a Troublesome Domitianic Career," *Chiron* 45 (2015): 8–9, also suggests that Pliny might have visited Artemidorus when the philosophers had been banished from Rome but not yet from Italy, or at least before the latter expulsion came into effect.

<sup>484</sup> Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 243.

Pliny provided the details how he helped the remaining families of the Junii brothers around 97 CE.<sup>485</sup> In his letter 1.14, dated to 97 CE, Pliny responded to Junius Mauricus, who had asked Pliny to look for a bride for his niece, the daughter of Junius Arulenus Rusticus. After promising his willingness to deal with the matter, Pliny added how much he had looked up to Arulenus Rusticus and loved him as the most outstanding of men. Pliny also referred to the old friendship between himself and Arulenus Rusticus, who had repeatedly encouraged the young Pliny.<sup>486</sup> In another letter 2.18, dated to mid-97 CE, Junius Mauricus asked for another favor from Pliny and this time it was to find a teacher for the children of Arulenus Rusticus. Pliny did not miss this chance to express his affection to the two brothers by accepting the request.<sup>487</sup> It was not only Junius Mauricus who made requests to Pliny,<sup>488</sup> while Arulenus Rusticus was still alive, he had asked Pliny to provide legal counsel on behalf of Arionilla in the Centumviral court, where Aquilius Regulus was on the opposing side.<sup>489</sup> Therefore, Pliny styled himself in relation to Arulenus Rusticus, as someone who had cherished his long-standing friendship with the latter, to whom Pliny had owed much when he was young, and returned those favors to the destitute family of the Junii in return. The friendship between Pliny

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<sup>485</sup> Shelton, *The Women in Pliny's Letters*, 70–1.

<sup>486</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.14.1: *Scis enim quanto opere summum illum virum suspexerim dilexerimque, quibus ille adulescentiam meam exhortationibus fovit, quibus etiam laudibus ut laudandus viderer effecerit*; translation from Peter G. Walsh, *Pliny the Younger: Complete Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16 with minor changes done by author.

<sup>487</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 2.18.4: *Debeo enim tibi, debeo memoriae fratris tui hanc fidem hoc studium, praesertim super tanta re.*

<sup>488</sup> Cf. Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 117. The source finds the reason for Junius Mauricus's repeated requests in his three-year long exile. He raised a possibility that Junius Mauricus might have considered Pliny, who was then widowed, as a suitable husband for his niece, though "nobody would then want to marry a ruined man's portionless niece."

<sup>489</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.5; Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 71, suggests a very tantalizing possibility that Arrionilla, whose identity is unknown, could be related to Arria. Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 97, commented that Arrionilla's husband, Timon, might have been one of Arulenus's philosopher friends, who might have married into the family of Thrasea and Arria.

and Junius Mauricus appears to have grown after 97 CE; Mauricus invited Pliny to his villa at Formiae (*Ep.* 6.14).

In January 97 CE, after the assassination of Domitian, just like Helvidius the Elder had attempted to avenge the death of Thrasea Paetus after the death of Nero, Pliny considered pursuing the *delatores* of the former regime.<sup>490</sup> They were heinous creatures who instilled mistrust and fear in their fellow senators with the tacit approval of the tyrant. Pliny's retrospective description of the Senate under Domitian was a pure pandemonium where a senator might have committed violence against a senator, a praetorian against an ex-consul, and a judge against a man on trial.<sup>491</sup> He considered attacking Aquilius Regulus, who was respected by many but feared by more. Regulus had fomented danger for Arulenus Rusticus and had expressed great joy at his death and that of Herennius Senecio. Because Pliny had to consult Junius Mauricus, who had not yet arrived from his exile, he did not prosecute Aquilius Regulus, who was hard to topple (*dyskathaireton*).<sup>492</sup> Pliny expressed his anger and pain that Regulus created, who in turn was very well aware of Pliny's enmity, if we may believe Pliny's letter 1.5.<sup>493</sup>

Contrary to his delay in prosecuting Regulus, Pliny did go after the prosecutor of Helvidius Priscus. Pliny's letter 9.13 provides his first-person description of his attempt to bring charges against Publicius Certus, who had prosecuted Helvidius Priscus the Younger. Pliny

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<sup>490</sup> On Pliny's revenge, see Whitton, "Tacitus and the Younger Pliny," 355–60.

<sup>491</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.33.2: *Porro inter multa scelera multorum nullum atrocius videbatur, quam quod in senatu senator senatori, praetorius consulari, reo iudex manus intulisset*; translation from Walsh, *Complete Letters*, 220.

<sup>492</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.15: *Nec me praeterit esse Regulum 'dyskathaireton'; est enim locuples factiosus, curatur a multis, timetur a pluribus, quod plerumque fortius amore est*; ; Whitton, "Tacitus and the Younger Pliny," 357, provides the meaning of *dyskathaireton*, a rare Greek word meaning literally "hard to topple" or "hard to bring down" (compounded from the verb *hairein*, "to catch").

<sup>493</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.5.1 *irascerer ... irascebar; 4 dolenter*.

began this letter as a response to his friend Ummidius Quadratus, who had read the speeches that Pliny had composed in vindication of Helvidius (*Helvidi ultione*) and requested more background information.<sup>494</sup> As Shelton points out, Pliny did not hide that taking vengeance against Aquilius Regulus or Publicius Certus advance himself as well.<sup>495</sup> Soon afterwards, as he often did, Pliny justified his acts by explaining that what ignited him more was not personal glory but the rights of the community, the outrageous nature of the deed, and the sense of setting a precedent.<sup>496</sup> Stating that he was a friend of Helvidius, Arria and Fannia, (and of Helvidius's wife Anteia), Pliny added another justification by saying that he had received the consent of Arria and Fannia, who had also just returned from exile, in prosecuting Publicius Certus.

The relationship between Pliny and the female members of the Helvidii family, Fannia in particular, seems to have been one of cooperation. As discussed earlier, both Junius Mauricus and Fannia were the survivors and the witnesses of the persecution in 93 CE, whose friendships Pliny cherished. As opposed to Junius Mauricus, who did not appear to have provided sources about his brother Arulenus Rusticus or himself, Fannia served as a sort of family archive for those who were interested in writing about her family. In 93 CE Fannia and Arria the Younger were exiled because Fannia provided her husband's diaries to Herennius Senecio. Given Herennius Senecio's unhesitant revelation of the identity of the person who provided the sources in the defense of himself, Fannia might be the one who instigated Herennius Senecio to write a biography of her husband.<sup>497</sup> Likewise, Fannia told stories about Arria the Elder and the Younger to Pliny, presumably expecting Pliny to publicize heroic stories of her family

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<sup>494</sup> Pliny mentioned this speech, which is now lost, in *Ep.* 7.30.5.

<sup>495</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.13.2: *esse magnam pulchramque materiam insectandi nocentes, miseros vindicandi, se proferendi*; Shelton, *The Women of Pliny's Letters*, 69.

<sup>496</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.13.3; translation from Walsh, *Complete Letters*, 220, with minor changes I made myself.

<sup>497</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.19.5–6.

through his letters.<sup>498</sup> In return, Pliny could also style himself as someone who attentively listened to the remaining family members of the victims, showing himself eager to retaliate against those who had prosecuted his friends. Bereft of Helvidius the Younger and with Anteia remarried after Helvidius's death, the two women, Arria the Younger and Fannia, might not have had any other way to communicate their sufferings to the public than through Pliny, who was willing to report the stories of the family.

Apparently, Pliny seems to have been better acquainted with the victims of late 93 CE than Tacitus. Whereas Tacitus did not portray himself as personally related to the victims, Pliny constantly represented himself as someone who had always stood next to the victims, observing with terror the fates that had befallen them.<sup>499</sup> In letter 3.11, Pliny himself made it clear that it was more notable, therefore more perilous for him, as a praetor, to visit Artemidorus in 93 CE. Having listed all the names of the seven victims, Pliny mentioned that he felt fear at the time by saying, “next time it could be me.” Pliny recalled that feeling scorched with all bolts of lightning, certain signs led him to assume that the same fate as that of his friends hung over him.<sup>500</sup> However, Pliny never disclosed the identity of the certain signs that the emperor had had his eyes on him, nor did he provide any ground to believe that his life was at danger.

Without mentioning his personal relationship with the seven victims, Tacitus might have also kept a low profile after observing the executions of Arulenus and Senecio, who had written laudatory writings about Thræsea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus the Elder. In their commentary of the *Agricola*, Woodman and Kraus find a link between 1.4 and 42.1. In the

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<sup>498</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 3.16, 7.19.

<sup>499</sup> Contrast between Pliny's and Tacitus's political attitudes, see Griffin, “Pliny and Tacitus,” 146–7; 149–51.

<sup>500</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.3: *tot circa me iactis fulminibus quasi ambustus mihi quoque impendere idem exitium certis quibusdam notis augurarer.*

opening chapter, Tacitus added an apologetic comment: “But, when I was now about to describe the life of a deceased individual, I required a reprieve which I would not have sought had I been about to criticize; an age so cruel, so hostile to virtues.”<sup>501</sup> As a representative of cruelty and hostility of the era, Tacitus mentioned Domitian's imposition of capital punishment on the eulogistic biographies of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius the Elder by burning, let alone the writers Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio. As he reached the end of the biography in *Agr.* 42, Tacitus described Agricola's moderation and prudence, which mollified even Domitian, who spared Agricola. Agricola's moderation and prudence were guided by learning from the warning (*consilium*) and the precedent (*exemplum*).<sup>502</sup> The year that Agricola was to be chosen by lot as proconsul of Asia or Africa was approaching, but, with the recent death of Civica Cerialis, Agricola did not lack any warning, nor did Domitian lack any precedent. However, it is hard to reveal the identity of the grave charge that incited Domitian to execute Civica Cerialis most likely without a trial.<sup>503</sup> Agricola took heed from the presumably summary execution of Civica Cerialis, deciding he would rather refuse the proconsulship. Moreover, a few experts who were familiar with reading Domitian's mind (*cogitationum principis periti*) approached Agricola, praising peace and a quiet life, therefore giving him a warning. Likewise, Tacitus must have taken the safe road by postponing the writing of Agricola's biography, which would be in nature eulogistic and therefore was likely to provoke Domitian; he had learned from the precedents of Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio.

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<sup>501</sup> Translation from Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 75.

<sup>502</sup> Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 298–9; *Tac. Agr.* 42.1: *Aderat iam annus, quo proconsulatum Africae et Asiae sortiretur; et occiso Civica nuper nec Agricolae consilium deerat nec Domitiano exemplum, 3: Domitiani vero natura praeceps in iram, et quo obscurior, eo inrevocabilior, moderatione tamen prudentiaque Agricolae leniebatur, quia non contumacia neque inani iactatione libertatis famam fatumque provocabat.*

<sup>503</sup> *Suet. Dom.* 10.2: *Civicam Cerealem in ipso Asiae proconsulatu.*

Notwithstanding the minor differences in their perception of the seven victims, both Pliny and Tacitus, and most likely Domitian's successors, Nerva and Trajan, must have shared the feeling of collective guilt toward the seven. As will be discussed in detail in the next section, all four persons owed their senatorial careers to Domitian and prospered even in the last phase of Domitian's reign—the period that Pliny and Tacitus described as full of cruelty and terror. As Epictetus aptly described it, the person who has become Caesar's friend is constantly insecure and nervous, because his whole life is dominated by the fear of doing something that could offend Caesar, which in turn would cost him his life.<sup>504</sup> All four persons would have become extremely furious if they had been called *amici Domitiani*; still, it is also true that they did not withdraw from public life like Thrasea Paetus had done.

In this difficult situation, in which survival was something to be welcomed but not to be advertised,<sup>505</sup> both Tacitus and Pliny expressed regret for their inactivity to repair the Senate, which had descended into mayhem. As Pliny described the continued nightmare in the Senate, in which a senator committed violence against a fellow senator,<sup>506</sup> Tacitus provided a similar description of the lurid ambience of the Senate that Agricola fortunately failed to observe by his opportune death. According to Tac. *Agr.* 45.1, the Senate house was besieged and surrounded by armed men. So many of the former consuls were killed in a single massacre, and so many of Rome's most noble ladies were exiled. The worse was still to come. Heinous creatures such as Mettius Carus, Messalinus, and Baebius Massa had yet to win their consummate victory, that is, the persecutions of the seven victims. At the time of Agricola's death, Mettius Carus had only scored one victory, Messalinus had only roared his verdicts

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<sup>504</sup> Penwill's summary of Epictetus *Dissertationes* 4.1.43–50, in "Expelling the Mind," 365–6.

<sup>505</sup> Whitton, "Our Path Together," 353.

<sup>506</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.33.2.

within the Alban fortress, and Baebius Massa was only a defendant. It would become much worse in the years after 93 CE. Tacitus continued, "It was not long before our hands dragged Helvidius to prison, before we gazed on the dying looks of Mauricus and Rusticus, before we were steeped in Senecio's innocent blood."<sup>507</sup> Although Tacitus might not have been present in the city of Rome when the trials of the seven victims were being held,<sup>508</sup> Tacitus's use of the first person plural *nos* three times in a single sentence showed his emphasis that the entire Senate should be held accountable for the deaths of Helvidius, Rusticus, and Senecio.

Although Pliny seems to have endeavored to portray himself as a trustworthy friend of all seven victims as a way of self-promotion, as Griffin points out, it was not always the case that Pliny tried to whitewash his conduct under Domitian.<sup>509</sup> Pliny had expressed regret and grief at being a member of the Senate in a time of servility. In letter 8.14, Pliny deplored that the senatorial procedures and expertise had fallen into disuse during the past days. According to Pliny, senatorial responsibilities had fallen into disuse because of the servile climate of the times; under Domitian the Senate was fearful and speechless, when it was dangerous to say what you wanted to say and pitiful to say what you were unwilling to say. Whenever the Senate met, it achieved nothing or engaged in some evil crime to become a laughingstock or an object of humiliation. Pliny went on, "Once we became senators, for many years we witnessed and endured the same evils in which we then took part, so that our talents were blunted, broken,

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<sup>507</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 45.1: *Non vidit Agricola obsessam curiam et clausum armis senatum et eadem strage tot consularium caedes, tot nobilissimarum feminarum exilia et fugas. una adhuc victoria Carus Mettius censebatur; et intra Albanam arcem sententia Messalini strepebat, et Massa Baebius etiam tum reus erat. mox nostrae duxere Helvidium in carcerem manus; nos Maurici Rusticique visus foedavit; nos innocenti sanguine Senecio perfudit.*

<sup>508</sup> Woodman and Kraus, in *Tacitus: Agricola*, 76–7, suggest that Tacitus might have been absent from Rome at the time of the trials of the seven victims, based on Tacitus's use of the word *legimus* in *Agr.* 2.1. Tacitus was absent from Rome at the time of Agricola's death on August 23, 93 CE (*Agr.* 45.4–5), and he might have been continuously away from Rome at the time of executions, which followed shortly after Agricola's death.

<sup>509</sup> Griffin, "Pliny and Tacitus," 152.

and bruised by them, affecting even our later days.”<sup>510</sup>

According to Syme, the feeling that Tacitus and Pliny experienced as a result of the fact that Domitian forced them to convict their fellow-senators was a sense of collective guilt; or, according to Griffin, it was corporate guilt.<sup>511</sup> As is the case with any form of repression, a feeling of collective guilt on behalf of the victims arose as a result of surviving the dangers that others were unable to escape. When Domitian was murdered and Nerva, also far from politically inactive in Domitian’s reign, was chosen as the next emperor, Tacitus initiated his task, the biography of Agricola, that he had postponed because of the era’s savagery. Pliny also left his correspondence that was exchanged between himself and Junius Mauricus or that dealt with the misery of the past days, prosecuting the accuser of Helvidius Priscus the Younger.

In this process, however, there is a fact that tends to be ignored. Although Pliny and Tacitus created the impression that the entire Senate shuddered in fear when Domitian displayed his cruelty, there must have been some senators who were not averse to cooperating with the emperor or receive honors and rewards from him. At any rate, those who had served as *delatores*, such as Aquilius Regulus, Publicius Certus, Catullus Messalinus, were themselves senators. While the reputation of the *delatores* had been compromised beyond measure, that of others seems to have been unaffected. In the final years of Domitian’s reign, Quintilian was made the tutor of the emperor’s adopted sons for which he was awarded the *ornamenta*

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<sup>510</sup> Translation from Walsh, *Complete Letters*, 198–200, with minor changes done by me. Plin. *Ep.* 8.14.8–9: 8 *idem prospeximus curiam, sed curiam trepidam et elinguem, cum dicere quod velles periculosum, quod nolles miserum esset. Quid tunc disci potuit, quid didicisse iuuit, cum senatus aut ad otium summum aut ad summum nefas vocaretur, et modo ludibrio modo dolori retentus numquam seria, tristitia saepe censeret?* 9 *Eadem mala iam senatores, iam participes malorum multos per annos vidimus tulimusque; quibus ingenia nostra in posterum quoque hebetata fracta contusa sunt.*

<sup>511</sup> Syme, *Tacitus*, 25; Griffin, "Pliny and Tacitus," 146; cf. Waters, "Character of Domitian," 76: "the evidence shows, in my contention, that the 'terror' is a myth; like the legend of Domitian's extreme sensuality and that of his repression by his father and brother, it arises from the guilt-complex of the senatorial group and their desire to cast as bad a light as possible on an emperor who failed to gratify their self-importance."

*consularia* in 95 CE. It comes as no surprise that Quintilian also praised Domitian as a great poet and a generous patron of literature.<sup>512</sup> Although we do not know whether Quintilian changed his opinion after the death of Domitian, as Martial had done in *Epigrams* 10.72, it is natural to assume that the Senate under Domitian displayed a wide spectrum of different opinions and attitudes: a few of the senators abhorred the emperor and dared to oppose him; those who did not have the courage to express their opinion out of fear to lose their lives but still empathized with the first group; and those who had no problems with associating themselves with the emperor and his policies. After Domitian was assassinated, the first group was not able to raise its voice mostly because they were executed; the second group took the initiative to write their version of events, arguing that they had been forced into submissive silence because of the atmosphere of terror that the tyrant had created. In this process, the third group had to either silence themselves or voluntarily join the second group to feign their “collective guilt,” just as the second group had been forced to feel fear or feign it during the tyranny.

### **Domitian’s Treatment of Potential Dissidents in the Senate**

If the Senate was a mixture of senators with various opinions of Domitian, the following questions may arise: Was Domitian aware of such diverse feelings toward himself? Known to be extremely paranoid and sensitive towards those who challenged his imperial authority, did he ever create a pool of potential dissidents and spy on them through his informers? If there was such a pool, were any of the seven victims in 93 CE in it or were any included in Suetonius’s list of consular victims?

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<sup>512</sup> Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 10.1.91–2; Dating Quintilian's publication of *Instituto Oratoria* to after Domitian's death, see William C. McDermott and Anne E. Orentzel, "Quintilian and Domitian," *Athenaeum* 57 (1979): 9–26.

To present the answer to the first question, Domitian does not appear to have excluded anyone listed in Suetonius's list of consular victims in the *Life of Domitian*, or the seven victims of the year 93 CE, from the consulship. As Rebggiani states, instead of targeting the senatorial families who suffered under his predecessors, from the outset of his rule Domitian did not begrudge them suffect consulships.<sup>513</sup> To follow a tentative chronological order, Salvadius Orfitus, who might have been well acquainted with the so-called opposition group because of his great-grandmother Vistilia, and because her father was executed by Nero, was awarded a suffect consulship before 87 CE. Helvidius Priscus the Younger, whose father Helvidius the Elder had been executed by Domitian's father Vespasian, held his consulship in either before 87 CE or in 93 CE. M. Annius Herennius Pollio, Helvidius the Younger's son-in-law, was also consul in 85 CE, with his own father P. Herennius Pollio as his colleague. After the revolt of Saturninus in 89 CE, the year marked out by Suetonius as the start of Domitian's rapid deterioration into cruelty, Domitian continued to appoint persons as suffect consuls and later execute them. For instance, Junius Arulenus Rusticus was a suffect consul in 92 CE, a year before his death.

As both Jones and Rebggiani emphasize, the career of Avidius Quietus is also helpful for understanding Domitian's stance toward the so-called opposition group or those who were close to it.<sup>514</sup> Avidius Quietus, who appeared in Pliny's letters more than twice, was known to a friend of Thrasea Paetus. He seemed to have maintained his friendship with Thrasea's family; later in 97 CE, he spoke in favor of Arria and Fannia during the prosecution of Publicius Certus, stating that those two women had the right to be heard as wronged parties.<sup>515</sup> Also known to

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<sup>513</sup> Rebggiani, *Fragility of Power*, 50.

<sup>514</sup> Avidius Quietus: Plin. *Ep.* 6.29.1, 9.13.15; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 99 no. 45; Jones, "Domitian's Attitude to the Senate," 85; Rebggiani, *Fragility of Power*, 50.

<sup>515</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 6.29.1: *Thraseae ... fuit enim familiaris*; 9.13.15: *iniquissimum esse querelas dolentium*

be friend of Plutarch, as the addressee of the latter's *On the delay of divine vengeance*, Avidius Quietus apparently prospered under Domitian. Having been appointed to the proconsulship of Achaëa around 91/2, Avidius Quietus was also awarded a suffect consulship in the year 93 CE, right before the trials of the seven victims.<sup>516</sup> There is no way to even conjecture how Avidius Quietus might have reacted to the capital punishment imposed on Arulenus Rusticus, who wrote a eulogy for Quietus's old friend Thræsea. As seen from his later actions in 97 CE, Avidius Quietus joined the group of senators who expressed their collective guilt only in retrospect.

It was not just those who were executed or relegated who owed their career to Domitian. The best-known survivors of Domitian's reign, namely Tacitus, Pliny, and Domitian's successors Nerva and Trajan, were far from political non-entities during the reign of Domitian. Given that Nerva and Trajan did not leave any accounts of their experience under their predecessor, I will deal with those who left their first-person account as senators under Domitian: Tacitus and Pliny.

In the opening chapter of the *Histories*, which he began to compose around 106 or 107 CE, Tacitus admitted that he owed his career to the Flavian emperors: "I cannot deny that my career was begun by Vespasian, augmented by Titus, and further advanced by Domitian."<sup>517</sup>

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*excludi, ideoque Arriae et Fanniae ius querendi non auferendum, nec interesse cuius ordinis quis sit, sed quam causam habeat.*

<sup>516</sup> Dating Avidius Quietus's consulship: see Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 169; 234, n. 32; a military diploma from an unknown provenance (*AE* 2008.1753) attests that he was consul in July together with Sextus Lusianus Proculus; that must be July of 93, and he must have been suffect consul from May to September.; It is worth noting that there is no official career indicated between Avidius Quietus's legateship in the *leg. VIII Augusta* around 82 CE and his proconsulship in Achaëa. There was a long interval between Helvidius the Younger's praetorship (dated before 79 CE) and his consulship in either 87 CE or 93 CE, thereby surmising that Domitian might have made a reconciliatory gesture toward those potential dissidents. Jones, in *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 44: The career of Q. Junius Arulenus Rusticus shows a long interval between his praetorship in 69 CE and his suffect consulship in 92 CE. Despite the need for further research on the implications of the intermittent careers of these individuals, for Jones's assumption that Domitian awarded suffect consulships to them as a reconciliatory gesture to be validated, it must be established that Domitian had created a pool of those senators who might become a problem.

<sup>517</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 1.3: *dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius provectam non abnuerim: sed incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est.;*

Then Tacitus added the well-known phrase, *neque amore sine odio*, almost as a declaration that those who profess uncorrupted truth should speak of everyone without partiality or hatred. Tacitus employed a similar phrase – *sine ira et odio* – in the opening chapter of the *Annals*, as he was about to discuss the last acts of Augustus and the reign of Tiberius. Tacitus declared that he would write histories without anger or partiality (*sine ira et studio*).<sup>518</sup> Nevertheless, his confession that he owed his career to the Flavian emperors as well as his manifesto to avow impartiality signify that Tacitus had to exert himself not to judge the emperors with hatred or anger, presumably Tiberius and Domitian in particular. Readers might have also expected to pay attention as to how Tacitus dealt with those emperors.

According to the fragmentary inscription *CIL* 6.41106, known as Tacitus's funerary record, Tacitus was probably *quaestor Augusti* around 81 CE. It was surely a mark of special favor to be one of the emperor's two personal quaestors. Because Domitian ascended to the throne after 13 September, this means that Tacitus served under Domitian for the final part of the year. As far as Tacitus's tenure as quaestor cannot be specified, there is no reason to assume that Domitian, who had just become emperor after his brother's sudden death, had chosen Tacitus as one of his imperial quaestors. Still, if Tacitus was indeed *quaestor Augusti* in 81 CE, he must have worked for Domitian during the last third of 81 CE. After his plebeian tribunate around 85 CE, Tacitus served as praetor and one of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* in 88 CE. Tacitus referred to his praetorship and priesthood in *Ann.* 11.11.1, stating that he was deeply involved in assisting in the organization of the Secular Games, which Domitian put on in the same year. Tacitus followed his remark that he held these positions with a qualification that he

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Tacitus's career: Syme, *Tacitus*, 59–74 and 210–6; Anthony R. Birley, “The Life and Death of Cornelius Tacitus,” *Historia* 49, no. 2 (2000): 230–47; Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 5–6.

<sup>518</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.1.3: *inde consilium mihi pauca de Augusto et extrema tradere, mox Tiberii principatum et cetera, sine ira et studio, quorum causas procul habeo.*

committed himself to the tasks at hand, not because he wanted to boast.<sup>519</sup>

Around the time of Agricola's death on 23 August 93 CE, Tacitus and his wife had been away from Rome for four years on official business, presumably a governorship (Tac. *Agr.* 45.5). It is most likely that Tacitus was not in Rome during the trial of Baebius Massa, because Pliny later sent a letter to Tacitus (dated to 107 CE; *Ep.* 7.33) to give information about his prosecution of Baebius Massa in 93 CE. He might have also missed the trials of the seven victims later that year. In 97 CE, around a year after the assassination of Domitian, Tacitus became suffect consul. The identity of the emperor who appointed Tacitus as suffect consul would offer a different interpretation of the relationship between Domitian and Tacitus. If it was Domitian, as Woodman and Kraus argue, the conclusion must be that Tacitus continued to enjoy Domitian's favor (e.g. his imperial quaestorship in 81 CE) to the end. If it was Nerva, one can take a more reserved conclusion that, despite his early favor of Tacitus, Domitian did not take Tacitus into consideration for consulship. At any rate, Tacitus embarked on his project of writing the *Agricola* during or immediately after his consulship.<sup>520</sup>

Whereas Tacitus was open about his political career under Domitian, Pliny attempted to hide his both in his letters and in the *Panegyricus*. In his letter 4.24, Pliny recalled the changes that he had undergone: "In my own case, how numerous the changes have been! My speech-making has brought me advancement, then, danger, and again advancement. My friendship with honorable men has benefited me, thwarted me, and now again benefits me. If you calculate the years, you would regard it as a short period, but if you survey the changes of

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<sup>519</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 11.11.1: *non iactantia refero*; cf. Thrasea Paetus also served as one of *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* under Nero.

<sup>520</sup> Anthony J. Woodman, *Tacitus: The Annals* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), x; Woodman and Kraus, *Tacitus: Agricola*, 5–6.

situation, it seems like a lifetime.”<sup>521</sup> At the end of his thanksgiving speech for his consulship in 100 CE, Pliny asserted in a similar tone: “If it is true that I advanced in my career under that most treacherous emperor before he admitted his hatred of good men, but I was halted in it once he had done so, I preferred a longer route when I saw what the short cuts were which opened the way to office; that in bad times I was one of those who lived with grief and fear, and can be counted among the serene and happy now that better days have come; that, finally, I love the best of emperors as much as I was hated by the worst.”<sup>522</sup> Summing up the two accounts, Pliny claimed that his career was halted under the most hideous emperor who hated the best men; referring to his friendship with those good men, Pliny created the impression that his friendship with the seven victims in 93 CE also inflicted hardship on himself.<sup>523</sup> As I already pointed out that Pliny’s friendship with the seven victims in late 93 CE might not have been as old as Pliny argued, there are some aspects that Pliny refused to mention with regard to his career. However, because his tone is suggestive of potential critics who would question the validity of his account that he was not politically active during the worst period of Domitian’s reign, the details of his career under Domitian need further examination.<sup>524</sup>

To start with Pliny’s earlier career, in *Ep.* 7.16 Pliny recalled his friendship with Calestius Tiro, with whom Pliny served in the army in Syria early in Domitian's reign. Both

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<sup>521</sup> Translation from Walsh, *Complete Letters*, 103; Plin. *Ep.* 4.24.4–5: 4 *Circa nos ipsos quam multa mutata sunt! Studiis processimus, studiis periclitati sumus, rursusque processimus: 5 profuerunt nobis bonorum amicitiae, bonorum obfuerunt iterumque prosunt. Si computes annos, exiguum tempus, si vices rerum, aevum putes.*

<sup>522</sup> Translation from Radice, *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, 545–7, with minor changes; Plin. *Pan.* 95.3–4: *si cursu quodam provectus ab illo insidiosissimo principe, antequam profiteretur odium bonorum, postquam professus est, substiti; quum viderem, quae ad honores compendia paterent, longius iter malui; si malis temporibus inter moestos et paventes, bonis inter securos gaudentesque numeror; si denique in tantum diligo optimum principem, in quantum invisus pessimo fui.*

<sup>523</sup> Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 303–4.

<sup>524</sup> The official career of Pliny: Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 72–82; Syme, *Tacitus*, 75–85; The obituary inscription from Comum (*CIL* 5.5262=*ILS* 2927), Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 732.

were military tribunes, and both were quaestors of Caesar (*quaestores Caesaris*). According to Sherwin-White, this is the only reference to Pliny's quaestorship apart from a mention in his inscription, which reads *quaestor imp.*<sup>525</sup> Another letter, 2.9, provides more background for the implication that Pliny served as *quaestor Caesaris* or had Pliny belonged to the *candidati Caesaris*, a group of candidates that the emperor used to recommend as his personal quaestors. Although the precise date of Pliny's quaestorship can only be calculated on the basis of his praetorship, because Pliny had initiated his official career under Domitian, Domitian was the emperor whom Pliny had served most closely as quaestor, whose duty was to read the emperor's notifications in the Senate. Therefore, Pliny owed his career to the most treacherous emperor (*ab illo insidiosissimo principe, Pan. 95.3*).

Once Pliny entered the Senate, he served as tribune of the *plebs* and was rapidly promoted to the praetorship, which is by the majority of scholars dated to around 93 CE. Having placed special emphasis on his perilous visit to the banished philosopher Artemidorus while he was praetor, Pliny consequently described the executions or banishment of seven of his friends, who were condemned in late 93 CE. Assuming that Pliny could have been responsible for the burning of books as praetor in 93, Miriam Griffin has suggested that Pliny may cover up an awkward situation which he omitted from his letters.<sup>526</sup> Of course, given that Pliny maintained his friendship with the Junii brothers as well as consolidated his new friendship with the female members of the Helvidii family, Pliny might not have been deeply involved in the condemnation of the seven victims or their books.

Much more controversial is Pliny's career after the condemnation of his friends in late

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<sup>525</sup> Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 419–20; Note that the *CIL* 6. 41106, known as Tacitus's funerary record, also has Tacitus as one of two quaestors of Domitian (*quaestor Augusti*).

<sup>526</sup> Griffin, "Pliny and Tacitus," 147; on the problems entailing the date of Pliny's praetorship, see Whitton, "Pliny's Progress," 5–9.

93 CE, because it may be questioned whether he reported about his career with honesty. As seen in Pliny's retrospective assertion in his letters and *Panegyricus* that his career was halted after his friends were convicted, Pliny did not refer to any offices that he held during the last three years of Domitian's reign. However, two of his *cursus* inscriptions referred to Pliny's tenure of the prefecture of the military treasury.<sup>527</sup> It is almost certain that Pliny was appointed *praefectus aerari militaris* by Domitian, whether he served for three years (94-96 or 95-97) or for some shorter term.<sup>528</sup> Therefore, it is evident that his career during the last three years of Domitian's reign does not support his later claim that, like his seven friends, Pliny was also hated by the worst *princeps* (*invisus pessimo fui, Pan. 95.4*).

Domitian's successors, Nerva (r. 96–98 CE) and Trajan (r. 98–117 CE), were also far from hated by their allegedly heinous predecessor. Already in his sixties when he ascended to the throne, M. Cocceius Nerva had been active in the Roman political arena for around four decades. Owing the start of his senatorial career to Nero, Nerva as praetor designate in 65 CE received a public statue and triumphal *ornamenta* from Nero for his role in detecting the Pisonian conspiracy (*Tac. Ann. 15.72*). The fact that he never gained military experience does not have an impact on his ability to survive the civil war after Nero's death; he became an regular consul in 71 with the emperor Vespasian as his colleague. According to Jones, who categorized Nerva as one of Domitian's *amici*, Nerva was one of only four senators in Vespasian's reign (apart from members of the imperial family) to be awarded a regular

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<sup>527</sup> *CIL* 5.5262(=*ILS* 2927, Comum) and 5667 (Vercellae); Whitton, "Pliny's Progress," 15–6; Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 74; Another example in his writings of Pliny's selective memory may be his omission of Helvidius the Younger's suffect consulship in *Ep.* 9.13.3. According to Pliny, Helvidius kept his fame and virtues concealed in retirement in fear of the times (*metu temporum . . . secessu tegebat*). Nonetheless, Helvidius was awarded a suffect consulship from Domitian in either 87 CE, or, less likely 93 CE.

<sup>528</sup> Whitton, "Pliny's Progress," 18–20; Stanley E. Hoffer, *The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger* (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1999), 111–2.

consulship, and the only person other than Titus to share a regular consulship with Vespasian.<sup>529</sup> In the reign of Domitian, Nerva also held a regular consulship with the emperor in 90 CE, a year after the revolt of Saturninus. There existed a belief based on Philostratus that Domitian sentenced Nerva into banishment in Tarentum after the year 93 CE. However, this tradition has been attested nowhere else other than in Philostratus. As Syme asserts, Nerva's ordeals after 93 CE might have been mere fiction. As Collins aptly points out, Nerva was the subject of flattering epigrams by Martial toward the end of Domitian's reign. The poet praises Nerva's power and genius (8.70) and his talent as a poet (9.26). As the dates of publication of Martial's Book 8 and 9 fall in 94 or 95, Martial's praise of Nerva suggests that Nerva kept his distance from the victims of 93 CE without any harm to himself.<sup>530</sup> The suggestion that Nerva might have been contacted by the assassins before their execution of the plan is highly unlikely, especially considering Nerva's past involvement in uncovering the Pisonian conspiracy.<sup>531</sup> Admittedly, Nerva was old and childless, and his health was poor, but his political authority from having held two regular consulships with Vespasian and Domitian respectively, might have added legitimacy to Nerva as the new emperor.<sup>532</sup>

Nerva's successor, Trajan was also far from an insignificant politician during Domitian's reign. Just as Nerva, Trajan's homonymous father, M. Ulpius Trajanus from Spain, had flourished under Vespasian. The father M. Ulpius Trajanus had leveraged his military career under Vespasian to receive a suffect consulship in 70 CE, a year before Nerva became the

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<sup>529</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 52.

<sup>530</sup> Andrew W. Collins, "The Palace Revolution: The Assassination of Domitian and the Accession of Nerva," *Phoenix* 63 (2009): 96.

<sup>531</sup> Philostratus *VA* 7.8; Syme, *Tacitus*, 3; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial order*, 4.

<sup>532</sup> John D. Grainger, *Nerva and the Roman Succession Crisis of AD 96–99* (London: Routledge, 2003), 28.

regular consul. His family was raised to patrician status before serving as governor of Syria in 73–77 CE and he became governor of Asia in 79 CE and of Baetica in 82 CE.<sup>533</sup> As his father had prospered under Vespasian,<sup>534</sup> Trajan the future emperor also flourished under Domitian, who was close in age to Trajan. Grounded in the military like his father, Trajan served as a military tribune to his father in Syria. After his entry into the Senate in 81 January as quaestor,<sup>535</sup> Trajan was promoted to the praetorship in presumably in 86 CE. Around 87 CE, Domitian appointed Trajan as *legatus legionis VII Geminae*. Around 88/89 CE, Trajan was sent to the Rhine area to quell the revolt of Saturninus. As a reward for his success, Trajan, who was then thirty-eight years old, opened the year of 91 CE as regular consul with Acilius Glabrio, one of the quasi-revolutionaries in Suetonius's list of consular victims in *Dom.* 10.2. During the last phase of Domitian's reign, Trajan might have been appointed *legatus Augusti* of Germania or Pannonia; but our sources, especially Pliny, are silent on the career of Trajan from the year 92 until Nerva adopted him as his heir.<sup>536</sup>

In a nutshell, Tacitus, Pliny, and Domitian's successors—Nerva and Trajan—all owed their senatorial career to Domitian.<sup>537</sup> They were likely to have been members of the inner circle of Domitian's regime from the beginning of their careers, and their careers did not halt

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<sup>533</sup> The careers of two Traiani: Mellor, "New Aristocracy," 92–3; Julian Bennett, *Trajan: Optimus Princeps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), viii–ix and 11–26.

<sup>534</sup> Edward Champlin argued that Trajan's mother was a Marcia, who could possibly have been the daughter of Barea Soranus and an elder sister of Marcia Furnilla, the wife of Titus in his 1983 article. See Edward Champlin, "Figlinae Marcianae," *Athenaeum* 61 (1983): 264. Following his suggestion, Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 59 and Bennett, *Trajan*, 12, suggest the marriage link between the Flavians and the family of Trajan might have helped Trajan's future career. Raepsaet-Charlier, *Prosopographie des femmes*, 93–4, disputed such a notion, however.

<sup>535</sup> Possibly as *imperatoris*, see Bennett, *Trajan*, 24.

<sup>536</sup> Bennett, *Trajan*, 43–6.

<sup>537</sup> Cf. Mellor, "New Aristocracy," 85, indicates that Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus, and Marcus Aurelius could all trace their ancestry to men promoted by Vespasian.

even during Domitian's "reign of terror." It is almost certain that Domitian did not create a list of potential dissidents and aim for their destruction, as is suggested by the sudden executions of the victims of late 93 CE, as well as the consular victims listed in Suetonius's *Life of Domitian*.

Another misinterpretation, this time based on a misreading of the primary sources, maintains that Domitian monopolized the consulship and thereby prevented senators from reaching the pinnacle of their careers.<sup>538</sup> In his praise of Trajan's magnanimity to allow others to have the honor of the consulship, Pliny criticized the previous emperors: "'O wretched ambition in those who sought to match their lifelong power with a perpetual consulship! Or perhaps not ambition so much as spiteful jealousy, to appropriate every year and pass on the official purple only when its luster was tarnished after use."<sup>539</sup> Similarly, Dio Cassius claimed that Domitian was elected consul for ten years in succession and made censor for life (67.4.3). Both claims are somewhat misleading; although Domitian assumed a perpetual censorship probably from 85 CE onward, he had never been a perpetual consul. Likewise, deducing seven consulships that he had held before his accession, Domitian held ten consulships during his reign but not in succession. Domitian was not consul in 89, 91, 93 or in 94.<sup>540</sup>

Of some significance is, as Jones demonstrates, Domitian's attitude to the consulship. Pliny's claim that Domitian appropriated the consulship for himself is a better fit for Vespasian and Titus, for they held almost all but six of the twenty-four regular consulships available. In

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<sup>538</sup> E.g., Gsell, *L'Empereur Domitien*, 42–3 n. 4.

<sup>539</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 58.4: *Miseros ambitionis, qui ita consules semper, ut semper principes erant! Quamquam non ambitio magis, quam livor et malignitas videri potest, omnes annos possidere, summumque illud purpurae decus non nisi praecceptum praefloratumque transmitter.;* Translation from Radice, *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, 457–9.

<sup>540</sup> Dio Cassius's confusion: Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 225; Domitian's consulships: Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 59–60.

the first two years of his reign, like his father, who had confined the available consulships mostly to the imperial family and his followers, Domitian held the regular consulships with two of his relatives, and three Flavian supporters were awarded consulships. However, from 84 to 88 CE, Domitian deviated from his father's practice, allowing Flavians to hold only five of the ten posts available. During the last eight years of the reign, Flavians held only four of the sixteen regular consulships, of which three went to Domitian himself and the remaining one to Flavius Clemens, the father of the two boys adopted by Domitian as his heirs. Pliny praised Trajan for allowing the grandsons of great men, the descendants of liberty, to be restored to their ancestral glory, by awarding them the consulship (*Pan.* 69.5); but this was exactly the same thing that Domitian had already done from the year 84 onward, as is illustrated well in the allegedly heinous emperor's award of the consulship to Pliny's friends or the persons who were to be executed later.<sup>541</sup>

Although Domitian had not appropriated the consulship for himself and the imperial family, Domitian's withdrawal from the consulship would have been also construed in a negative light by his detractors. Whereas Vespasian's appropriation of the consulship may even have regarded as a "Republican" gesture,<sup>542</sup> Domitian's not assuming the consulship might have been readily misconstrued as a token for his growing autocratic tendency and bitterness against the Senate. To his disadvantage, Domitian was not known for his diligence in attending meetings of the Senate. He was often away from Rome because of his five expeditions during his reign, he preferred to spend time outside Rome, especially in his Alban 'villa' (*in Albano*

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<sup>541</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 163–4.

<sup>542</sup> Mason Hammond, *The Antonine Monarchy* (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1959), 80: "he [Vespasian] may even have regarded its tenure as a 'Republican' gesture, which would show his respect for traditional forms." ... [Domitian] may even have given it up because he became more autocratic and bitter against the senate in the consequence of the revolt of Saturninus."

*secessu*, Suet. *Dom.* 19).<sup>543</sup> Domitian must have been aware of complaints about his absence from senatorial meetings. In Suet. *Dom.* 11.3, after urging the Senate to accept his motion that those found guilty of treason be allowed "free choice in the manner of death," Domitian added, "All will know that I was present at the meeting of the Senate."<sup>544</sup> Later, as a way to praise Trajan's accessibility, Pliny criticized Domitian's feigned reverence for the Senate in *Pan.* 76.5: "Maybe the Emperor put on an attitude of respect for the Senate in its presence, but once out of the House he was emperor again, throwing off all his consular obligations with careless contempt."<sup>545</sup>

Regardless of the authenticity of Domitian's disrespect for the Senate, at the turn of the so-called new era, as Southern describes it, all the survivors might have wished that at some point someone had stood up to Domitian and pointed out the injustice of the sentences in the presence of the tyrant.<sup>546</sup> The bitter truth was that those who stood up against Domitian were no longer with them in the new era, and those alleged survivors had to account for their survival if they wished to glorify the persecuted. Both Nerva and Trajan served as consuls under Domitian, and there is no evidence that they were involved in killing the tyrant. To blot out that stain on the legitimacy of their reigns, Nerva and Trajan engaged in creating, what Harriet Flower calls, the complex history of denigration and memory games that had been practiced throughout the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods.<sup>547</sup> Just as Pliny the Elder promoted the

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<sup>543</sup> Domitian's five expeditions: 82/3 (Rhine), 85 and 86 (Danube), 89 (Rhine and Danube) and 92 (Danube); Domitian's Alban estate: Dio 67.1.1; Tac. *Agr.* 45; Juv. *Sat.* 4.145: *arx Albana*.

<sup>544</sup> Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 22–8.

<sup>545</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 76.5: *Fortasse imperator in senatu ad reverentiam eius componebatur: ceterum egressus, statim se recipiebat in principem, omniaque consularia officia abigere, negligere, contemnere solebat*; Translation from Radice, *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, 503.

<sup>546</sup> Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 114.

<sup>547</sup> Harriet I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 263.

interests of Vespasian, who had also served bad emperors such as Caligula and Nero, Pliny the Younger performed the same role for Trajan by drawing an arbitrary but still powerful dichotomy between Domitian and Trajan in the *Panegyricus*. Given his suffect consulship in 97 CE under Nerva and proconsulship of Asia circa 112–3 CE under Trajan, Tacitus might have also engaged in the program of denigration of an emperor. On the one hand, he might have held his expectation of the new era; but on the other hand, Tacitus had his literary goal to create a contrast between Domitian who was jealous of virtuous men and Agricola, the main protagonist. Dio Chrysostom's philosophical writings or Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* also joined the group of hostile accounts about Domitian, along with those of the Christian writers who believed that Domitian had persecuted Christians just as Nero had.<sup>548</sup>

### **Creation of a Collective Memory of Domitian as a Fearful Tyrant**

Domitian was not always branded as a monstrous tyrant who loved to be feared by his subjects. Statius, who published the fourth book of the *Silvae* in 95 CE, a year, according to Pliny and Tacitus, full of fear and savagery, painted a picture of Domitian, which is different from that of Pliny and Tacitus, in his poems. Statius composed the second poem of the fourth book as a token of his gratitude for Domitian's invitation to a banquet held at his imperial palace.<sup>549</sup> At the grandiose banquet hall, Statius could not help but rise, struck in awe at the sight of the godly emperor, just like Jupiter among the stars; still, the very divine, godlike Domitian reclined, dining and drinking wine with other guests.<sup>550</sup> In another poem with a Saturnalian setting, Domitian, as a generous host, dined at the people's feast. Anyone there,

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<sup>548</sup> Penwill, "Expelling the Mind," 359.

<sup>549</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 4. praef. 6–7: *gratias egi sacratissimis eius epulis honoratus*.

<sup>550</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 4. 14–7.

rich or poor, could brag about their experience of dining with the leader.<sup>551</sup> Therefore, the Domitian seen through the eyes of Statius, a poet who did not share the senatorial embitterment toward the emperor, is a relaxed and accessible emperor who fulfilled the expectation of commensality, willingly dining with other guests.<sup>552</sup>

An emperor at a banquet, a spectacle, or in the theater was always on show to be observed.<sup>553</sup> Conscious of such gazes from the audience, an emperor tends to embody the image that he wants to present to the public; this is why Augustus had considered hiding Claudius from the imperial *pulvinar*, so mindful of the image of the imperial family before the public.<sup>554</sup> Hence, in a sense, Nero was not the only emperor who acted on the stage.<sup>555</sup> However, the superiority of the emperor at the pinnacle of the social pyramid is not something easily hidden or forgotten. Accordingly, no matter how vigilant Pliny was to construct the image of his new emperor as the most accessible and civil emperor in the *Panegyricus*, he included a sentence revealing the nature of the Principate of the best *princeps*: “You bid us be free, and we shall be free; you tell us to express ourselves openly, and we shall do so.”<sup>556</sup> Likewise, the public in Statius’s *Silvae* 1.6 unmasked the pretense of Domitian, who stooped to dining with the commoners in the Saturnalia, by calling him *dominus*. Statius might have staged the scene to show Domitian’s civility to ban such an inappropriate appellation for the Saturnalia as well as for a good *princeps*; however, just like Pliny, Statius also revealed the

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<sup>551</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 1.6, 46–50: *et tu quin etiam ... nobiscum socias dapes inisti. iam se, quisquis is est, inops beatus, convivam ducis esse gloriatur*; Newlands, *Poetics of Empire*, 262.

<sup>552</sup> Coleman, *Statius: Silvae IV*, 82: “a relaxed and accessible emperor”; Newlands, *Poetics of Empire*, 272.

<sup>553</sup> Newlands, *Poetics of Empire*, 242–4 and 267.

<sup>554</sup> Suet. *Claud.* 4.3.

<sup>555</sup> Cf. Plin. *Pan.* 46.4: *scaenici imperatoris*.

<sup>556</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 66.4: *iubes esse liberos: erimus; iubes quae sentimus promere in medium: proferemus*.

emperor's authority to be called in whatever way he wishes and the helplessness of the public who had to follow that will.<sup>557</sup>

Just as persistent as the superiority of the emperor would be the preconceived notion that each observer might have had about the emperor. Depending on perspective, an emperor may have multiple facets. To someone like Statius, sincerely gracious for the rare luck to be hosted at an imperial banquet and new to the palace, Domitian was a beneficent and majestic host who radiates like a god. No matter whether that godlike emperor stoops to mingle with the commoners, Statius might have found it difficult to approach the emperor because of the emperor's majesty, which the poet had already presupposed. Conversely, for someone like Pliny, the entire banquet where Domitian reclined together must have been an empty charade in which the hosts were to be observed by the emperor's "oppressive gazes."<sup>558</sup> As Braund aptly indicates, even though Domitian joins his guests at the *convivium*, spying on them from above, Domitian remains alone in his failure to psychologically join the guests on equal terms.<sup>559</sup>

Despite the existence of a few positive accounts about Domitian, the image of Domitian ossified after his death resembles that of a fearful tyrant in Pliny's or Tacitus's accounts. For instance, Dio Cassius presents the most terrifying and sadistic image of Domitian in the funeral-like feast (67.9), which is usually dated to sometime between 86 and 88 CE.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.81–4.

<sup>558</sup> Domitian's oppressive gaze: Shadi Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero and Hadrian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 33 and Tac. *Agr.* 45.2.

<sup>559</sup> Susanna Morton Braund, "The Solitary Feast: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 41 (1996): 46.

<sup>560</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 242, dates the nocturnal feast in Dio 67.9 to between 86 CE and 88 CE. As the tentative date of this nocturnal feast falls between 86 CE and 88 CE, there were attempts to connect this nocturnal feast with the report of thanksgiving made by the Arval brethren on September 22, 87 CE for the detection of the evil plans of villains (*ob detecta scelera nefariorum*); however, given the scant evidence about the identity of the event in 87 CE, as well as lack of context regarding Dio 67.9, this theory has

Domitian invited the foremost men among the senators and equestrians at night without their attendants. The location of the nocturnal feast, nominally to memorialize those who perished in the recent Dacian campaign, was a room where every side, wall, and corner were all painted black; beside the couches with the similar dark color, a slab shaped like a gravestone, bearing the names of guests and a small lamp of a type that would hang in tombs were placed. After the dance of naked boys, also painted black, the guests received all the things that were commonly offered at the sacrifices to the dead; they were also in the dishes of a dark color. As every single guest here feared and trembled and was kept in constant expectation of having his throat cut the next moment, they were all dead silent, as if they were already in the realms of the dead. Only Domitian conversed on the subject related to death and slaughter. Before he dismissed the guests, Domitian had first removed their slaves, who had awaited their masters, and gave the guests in charge of other slaves, whom they did not know, on escort to each one's home. Because of this, the guests were captivated by far greater fear. Upon their arrival, a messenger from Domitian was sent to the guests who were expecting their death at this time. Instead of the news of their supposed death, they were given a silver slab and the other materials, including the dishes used in the dinner. Lastly, the boys formerly painted black at the dinner were sent now washed and adorned to them. Dio Cassius stated that after having passed the entire night in terror, the guests received the gifts.<sup>561</sup>

This nocturnal banquet in a funerary setting demonstrates Domitian's "autocratic sadism," in which he enjoyed watching his subjects terrified by allusions to death.<sup>562</sup> Tacitus

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not been validated.

<sup>561</sup> Translation from Earnest Cary, *Dio Cassius: Roman History, Books 61-70* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982), 335, with minor changes.

<sup>562</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 240; Dio Cassius (67.9.3) also used the word ἐναγισμοῦς for the dishes served to the guests at the behest of Domitian. The rarely attested word, ἐναγισμός, means the offering to the dead.

also recalls the senators in horror in the presence of Domitian, whom the historian describes a degraded Nero. Even Nero used to turn his eyes away from the atrocities that he ordered; yet, with Domitian, the essence of the miseries that the senators suffered was to see the atrocities afflicted upon their fellow senators and to be seen by the emperor Domitian who even recorded the sighs of the senators.<sup>563</sup> Suetonius also portrayed Domitian's cruelty as something not only excessive but also sneaky and unexpectedly sudden (*magnae ... callidae inopinataeque saevitiae, Dom. 11.1*).<sup>564</sup> The way that Domitian manipulated hope and despair of the steward and Arrecinus Clemens exemplifies what Suetonius explained in *Dom. 11.2* that Domitian never pronounced a dreadful sentence without a preliminary declaration of clemency, so that the persons at stake would not get any indication of a cruel death. The only difference between the guests invited to Domitian's nocturnal feast and the victims in Suetonius is that the former survived after having suffered from extreme terror. Given the presumed date of this episode as sometime between 86 and 88 CE, this episode also suggests that Domitian seems to have constantly had a dark sense of humor; there would be no decisive point of degeneration to open the so-called reign of terror.<sup>565</sup>

Domitian always kept some physical and mental distance from his subjects. This inaccessibility, combined with his unfathomable personality, must have made some of his aristocratic subjects intimidated and terrified, with their expectation of civil *princeps* having been betrayed long ago. Nevertheless, Domitian's subjects were not the only one inflicted with

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<sup>563</sup> Tag. *Agr. 45.2*: *Nero tamen subtraxit oculos suos iussitque scelera, non spectavit: praecipua sub Domitiano miseriarum pars erat videre et aspici, cum suspiria nostra subscriberentur, cum denotandis tot hominum palloribus sufficeret saevus ille vultus et rubor, quo se contra pudorem muniebat.*

<sup>564</sup> Dio Cassius's description of Domitian holding a feast at night seems to contradict Suet. *Dom. 21*. According to Suetonius, Domitian usually ended banquets early; he never protracted the banquets beyond sunset.

<sup>565</sup> *pace* Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, 120, who dates the macabre turn in Domitian's character to the aftermath of the revolt of Saturninus.

insecurity; Domitian himself was continuously harrowed by a fear of assassination. Given that young Domitian had been foretold what would eventually befall him, his lifelong mental unrest rendered him so paranoid that he employed phengite stone in his colonnades so that they would reflect everything behind his back. His famous saying that the lot of the emperors was the most unhappy because no one believed them when they discovered a conspiracy unless they had been killed, also reflects the pestering fear of assassination that all emperors must have harbored.<sup>566</sup> Although Domitian's peculiar sense of humor was never fully appreciated, Domitian and his subjects might have reciprocated fear of each other. The accounts written out of a combination of hatred, fear, and belated collective guilt, dominated memories of the condemned emperor, muffling other voices depicting him in a positive light.

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<sup>566</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 14 and 21.

## EPILOGUE

### Domitian's Legacy

Suetonius starts his description of the assassination of Domitian on the 18th of September 96 CE, to which subject he devoted four chapters: "Because of these [the atrocities that Domitian committed described in Suet. *Dom.* 10–13] Domitian became the object of terror and hatred to all (*terribilis cunctis et invisus*), but he was overthrown at last by a conspiracy of his friends and favorite freedmen, to which his wife was also privy."<sup>567</sup> No matter how Pliny expressed his belated embitterment toward the dead emperor and the atmosphere of terror that Domitian had created, Suetonius's account does not mention any senatorial involvement in the conspiracy, in turn implying that the remaining members of the imperial family, Domitian's friends, and the courtiers were provoked because Domitian expanded his terror and hatred to the people in his palace.<sup>568</sup> For instance, Suetonius reported that Domitian put his *a libellis* Epaphroditus to death so that anyone in his household (*domestici*) would not venture to kill him (Suet. *Dom.* 14.4; Dio 67.14.4). In the following chapter, when Domitian put to death his own cousin, Flavius Clemens, the father of the two sons whom Domitian adopted, Suetonius comments that Domitian hastened his own death by this deed.<sup>569</sup> Though Suetonius does not examine the responses of the remaining imperial family members or Domitian's courtiers, it is reasonable to assume that they might have suffered from the same sort of fear that senators such as Pliny had experienced after observing the deaths of the victims in late 93 CE: 'I might be next in line'.

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<sup>567</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 14.1: *Per haec terribilis cunctis et invisus, tandem oppressus est insidiis amicorum libertorumque intimorum simul et uxoris.*

<sup>568</sup> Collins, "The Palace Revolution," 74, attributes Suetonius's reticence in his statements about the identities of the plotters to contemporary politics.

<sup>569</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 15.1: *Quo maxime facto maturavit sibi exitium.*

Those who executed the plot were some of Domitian's freedmen courtiers, namely Stephanus, a freedman of Domitian's niece, Domitilla; Maximus, a freedman of Parthenius; Satur, a decurion of the chamberlains. There were also those who were not Domitian's freedmen; Clodianus, a *cornicularius* and an unnamed gladiator.<sup>570</sup> If we trust the accounts of ancient authors, as Collins has maintained, Domitian's assassination was a "well-planned but small palace conspiracy in the imperial court" without any foreknowledge of the aristocracy.<sup>571</sup> A sense of fear seems to have pervaded everyone's mind, but there is no evidence to prove the involvement of anyone among Domitian's closest friends in the plot, and that also applies to his immediate successor, Nerva.<sup>572</sup> Therefore, enthusiasm of the senatorial aristocracy followed only after the news of Domitian's death. According to Suetonius, the responses of the people, soldiers, and senators were far from uniform; the people were indifferent, but the soldiers were deeply grieved, and later some of them demanded the execution of Domitian's murderers. In contrast, the senators were so overjoyed that they rushed to fill the *curia* and passed the decree to execute *damnatio memoriae* that Domitian's inscriptions should everywhere be erased and all record of him be obliterated.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Dio 67.14–8; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 193–196; Suetonius: *Domitian*, 115–37; Collins, "The Palace Revolution," 76–7; Whether Domitian's chamberlain, Parthenius, was involved: Collins, "The Palace Revolution," 79–80. Collins emphasizes the need to discern those who plotted the assassination (to whom Parthenius would belong) from Domitian's assassins; Whether Domitia was involved in the conspiracy as Suetonius suggests in *Dom.* 14.1: Collins, "The Palace Revolution," 83–5; see also Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, 116; Dio 67.15.2, describes Domitia as unaware of the plot in the first place. Then, Dio added that Domitia had acquired a list of people Domitian suspected (her own name being included) and had given it to the conspirators, who accordingly moved their plans forward.

<sup>571</sup> Collins, "The Palace Revolution," 73.

<sup>572</sup> Grainger, *Roman Succession Crisis*, 12–5, argues that the second consulships of Sex. Julius Frontinus, L. Julius Ursus, Cn. Domitius Tullus, and Vestricius Spurinna in 98 were a reward from Nerva for their involvement in the plot against Domitian. This has been rejected by Collins, "The Palace Revolution," 90, in that Frontinus and Ursus were presumably rewarded for their services during the previous year when Nerva adopted Trajan.

<sup>573</sup> Suet. *Dom.* 23.1: *Occisum eum populus indifferenter, miles gravissime tulit ... quod quidem paulo post fecit expostulatis ad poenam pertinacissime caedis auctoribus. Contra senatus adeo laetatus est, ut repleta certatim curia non temperaret, ... novissime eradendos ubique titulos abolendamque omnem memoriam*

More than a decade after the assassination of Domitian, Juvenal wrote his fourth satire,<sup>574</sup> which is a parody of Statius's epic poem titled *de Bello Germanico*, which commemorated the campaign against the Chatti in 83 CE.<sup>575</sup> In this satire, an imaginary meeting of Domitian's *amici* held in his Alban villa is depicted. As Richard Talbert comments, the greatest honor for a senator was to be asked to sit on the emperor's private *consilium* as one of his *amici*, consisting of a small nucleus of senators, equestrians, and a few freedmen.<sup>576</sup> An emperor's *consilium* was never institutionalized, but an emperor was able to turn to a group of confidants when he needed advice. Therefore, when attempting to fill the new emperor Vespasian's council with the senators whom Helvidius Priscus had in the highest esteem, the latter stated that there could be no more effectual instrument of good government than good friends.<sup>577</sup> It is with great pride and joy that Pliny refers to the fact that he was invited to join Trajan's *consilium* at his estate in Centum Cellae (*Ep.* 6.31.1). Pliny adds that he took delight in the first-hand experience of observing Trajan's sense of justice, but also to be part of his more relaxed lifestyle away from the capital. Just like Trajan, Domitian was poring over legal and other issues in his country estate in Juvenal's fourth satire. Juvenal's main objective was to ridicule Domitian and therefore he imagines the emperor to have taken his vices with him to

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*decerneret.*

<sup>574</sup> Date of the first book of Juvenal's satires: Courtney, *Satires of Juvenal*, 1.

<sup>575</sup> John G. Griffith, "Juvenal, Statius, and the Flavian Establishment," *Greece & Rome* 16, no. 2 (1969): 137–138. The surviving lines of Statius's poems are as follows: *lumina, Nestorei mitis prudentia Crispi/et Fabius Veiento: potentem signat utrumque/purpura, ter memores implerunt nomina fastos;/et prope Caesareae confinis Acilius Aulae*. On Juvenal's fourth satire in general, see William S. Anderson, *Essays on Roman Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982): 232–44.

<sup>576</sup> Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome*, 73; Composition of *consilium principis*: John Devreker, "La Continuité dans le Consilium Principis," *Ancient Society* 8 (1977): 224.

<sup>577</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4.7: *nullum maius boni imperii instrumentum quam bonos amicos esse*; likewise, Suet. *Titus* 7.2: *Amicos elegit, quibus etiam post eum principes ut et sibi et rei publicae necessariis*; Devreker, "Consilium Principis," 224.

Alba Longa.<sup>578</sup>

When the last of the Flavians was in the process of destroying a world that was only half-alive and Rome was slave to a bald Nero (Juv. *Sat.* 4.37–8), a fisherman caught a huge turbot in Ancona and brought that monstrous fish to the *pontifex maximus*, that is, the emperor. As the fisherman arrived at Alba, the crowd gaped at the exceptional appearance and size of the turbot. While the fisherman was admitted to the court, the senators, who were still shut out, had to observe the entry of the fish. This scene, in which the senators were humiliated by Domitian's decision to allow an audition to a fish, but to prohibit them from being in his presence, captures the sentiment prevalent in the works of Pliny and Tacitus.<sup>579</sup> Because there was no dish large enough to serve such an enormous fish, Domitian summoned his privy council, allowing Juvenal the opportunity to introduce the counsellors one by one. After each counsellor has been introduced, paired with Juvenal's vicious criticism, the reader is allowed to hear the voice of Domitian once, only toward the end of the poem: "So what do you recommend? Cut him in pieces?" The meeting of the council ends with Montanus's proposal to manufacture a dish large enough to fully envelop the fish. Juvenal concluded the satire with wishful thinking: "How much better, had he spent on these silly amusements all those savage years when he plundered Rome of her noblest and most distinguished souls with none to avenge or punish!"<sup>580</sup>

Juvenal successfully portrayed a snapshot image of Domitian, something that we already saw in the writings of Pliny and Tacitus. Shunning the Senate but surrounded by his

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<sup>578</sup> The contrast between Juvenal's fourth satire and Plin. *Ep.* 6.31 is pointed by Edwin S. Ramage, "Juvenal and the Establishment: Denigration of Predecessor in the 'Satires'." *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.33.1 (1989): 696.

<sup>579</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 4.64: *exclusi spectant admissa obsonia patres.*

<sup>580</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 4. 149–50; Translation from Niall Rudd and William Barr. *Juvenal: The Satires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29–30.

most fawning *amici*, the tyrant lurked like a hideous monster in his Alban villa away from Rome and only opened his mouth to decide the fate of a fish. On the other hand, Juvenal's listing of Domitian's *amici* provides a valuable glimpse into the composition of Domitian's *consilium*, consisting of jurists, soldiers, a diplomat, aged and venerable counsellors; therefore it was a most respectable and capable body.<sup>581</sup> Trajan is known to have admitted the quality of Domitian's *amici*, stating that Domitian was the worst of the emperors but had good *amici*.<sup>582</sup>

Another fact that the poet or Domitian's successors would adamantly refuse to admit can be inferred from Juvenal's list of Domitian's *amici*: a continuity between Domitian's court and those of Nerva and Trajan. The latter two, as was discussed in the fourth chapter, had never been excluded from Domitian's court, and they even employed the same persons in their court. Instead of discussing all of Domitian's *amici*, who themselves were vilified as the emperor's informers,<sup>583</sup> I will focus on the two individuals, namely Aulus Didius Gallus Fabricius Veiento and Lucius Valerius Catullus Messalinus, whom both Juvenal and Pliny mention together as emblematic of the savagery of Domitian's reign.<sup>584</sup>

In a letter written around a decade after Domitian's death, Pliny praised the constant courage of Junius Mauricus, the brother of Arulenus Rusticus who himself had been sent into exile in 93 CE and was pardoned after Nerva's accession.<sup>585</sup> Pliny recalled one occasion when

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<sup>581</sup> John A. Crook, *Consilium Principis: Imperial Councils and Counsellors from Augustus to Diocletian* (Cambridge University Press, 1955), 51.

<sup>582</sup> *SHA*. Alex. 65.5: *Domitianum pessimum fuisse, amicos autem bonos habuisse*.

<sup>583</sup> The possible candidates for Domitian's *amici* including Domitian's successors, Nerva and Trajan, see Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 50. Statius named Glabrio, Veiento, Messalinus, and Crispus in the *De Bello Germanico*, and Juvenal added six more – Pegasus, Montanus, Pompeius, Rubrius, Fuscus, and Crispinus.

<sup>584</sup> Collins, "The Palace Revolution," 90, provides a plausible list of imperial *amici* around 96 CE: 1. M. Acilius Aviola 2. T. Aurelius Fulvus 3. M. Cocceius Nerva 4. Fabricius Veiento 5. Sex. Julius Frontinus 6. L. Julius Ursus 7. A. Lappius Maximus 8. (T. Julius) Montanus 9. Q. Rutilius Gallicus 10. (Plot)ius Pegasus

<sup>585</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.4: *Constanter, inquis, et fortiter; quidni? sed hoc a Maurico novum non est. Idem apud imperatorem Nervam non minus fortiter*.

Nerva dined with a few people, including Veiento, who, in Juvenal's fourth satire, entered the Alban villa together with Messalinus.<sup>586</sup> Pliny expressed his contempt for Veiento by only mentioning his name and leaving out a characterization, implying that the name in itself was bad enough. When someone raised the name of Catullus Messalinus, Pliny added another tirade against him, even though he was no longer alive. Claiming that his loss of sight only increased his cruelty, Pliny stressed that Domitian employed Messalinus as a missile aimed at honorable men. As all were discussing the dead man's wickedness and his murderous decisions, Nerva asked: "If he had gone on living, what do we think would have befallen him?" Mauricus answered: "He would be dining with us."<sup>587</sup>

Veiento,<sup>588</sup> whom Juvenal first described as prudent (*prudens*, *Sat.* 4.113) but soon satirized his flattery of the emperor, might not have been one of Domitian's *delatores*.<sup>589</sup> Nonetheless, his prudence might have made Veiento subject to attacks that he had shrewdly served the emperors from Nero to Nerva. He held two consulships in 72 CE and 80 CE, and the Flavian emperors' favor is demonstrated well in the priesthoods which were bestowed upon him.<sup>590</sup> It is almost certain that Domitian also awarded him another suffect consulship,

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<sup>586</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 4.113: *cum mortifero prudens Veiento Catullo*

<sup>587</sup> Translation from Walsh, *Complete Letters*, 101-102, with minor changes made by me.

<sup>588</sup> A. Didius Gallus Fabricius Veiento: Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.4; 9.13.13, 19-20; Tac. *Ann.* 14.50; Juv. *Sat.* 3.184-5; 4.113, 123-9; 6.82-114; Dio 61.6.2; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 91; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 104 no. 107; Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 229-32.

<sup>589</sup> Veiento's dubious status as *delator*: William C. McDermott, "Fabricius Veiento," *American Journal of Philology* 91, no. 2 (1970): 132, demonstrates that Tacitus might not have considered Veiento one of the *delatores*; both Tacitus and Veiento were fellow members of the *XV viri sacris faciundis* in charge of the *ludi saeculares* in 88; therefore, Tacitus must have known Veiento well, but he did not exhibit great hatred of his colleague in *Ann.* 14.50. See also Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 49; Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 53-4.

<sup>590</sup> The four priesthoods that Veiento held in *CIL* 13.7253 (Mainz)= McCrum and Woodhead no. 155: *XV vir sacris faciundis*; *sodalis Augustalis*; *sodalis Flavianalis*; *sodalis Titialis*; Cf. In his *De Bello Germanico*, Stadius called Veiento Fabius rather than Fabricius. Accordingly, Braund, *Juvenal: Satires, Book I*, 261, and Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 53, ascribe Juvenal's characterization of Veiento as *prudens* to Fabius Maximus Cunctator.

probably in 83 CE.<sup>591</sup> Therefore, it seems appropriate for the tribune Murena at the trial of Publicius Certus in 97 CE to call Veiento "the most distinguished" senator.<sup>592</sup> Despite a lack of evidence regarding Veiento's involvement in the prosecution of senators, Pliny appears to have developed a strong hatred of him at least since the trial of Publicius Certus in 97 CE, but perhaps even as early as 93 CE. Because Fabricius Veiento was among the five persons who defended Certus in *Ep.* 9.13, Pliny's refusal to offer a characterization of Veiento in *Ep.* 4.22 is well accounted for. However, there is no evidence to identify Veiento as one of Domitian's informers, even though it is clear that there was no friendship lost between him and Pliny. Pliny made Veiento appear to be a decrepit senator, but the emperor Nerva had been also a venerable senator. Moreover, it might have been onerous for Nerva to let Pliny pursue the accusers of the victims in 93 CE, the acts that might cause unnecessary political instability to Nerva's new reign.

There was not enough evidence to categorize Veiento as one of Domitian's informers; likewise, the authors, such as Juvenal, Pliny, and Tacitus, who heaped criticism upon the already deceased Messalinus,<sup>593</sup> did not provide the names of victims that Messalinus had prosecuted and condemned. Calling Messalinus the one who brings death (*mortiferus*, *Sat.* 4.113), Juvenal portrays Messalinus as a great and remarkable monster even in those dire times, a blind adulator and abominable henchman.<sup>594</sup> As noted earlier, Pliny attacked Messalinus's cruelty, which led to his denunciation of Domitian, who himself was notorious for his cruelty,

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<sup>591</sup> Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 104.

<sup>592</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.13.19: *vir clarissime Veiento*.

<sup>593</sup> L. Valerius Catullus Messalinus: Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.5–6; Tac. *Agr.* 45.1; Juv. *Sat.* 4.113–122; *PIR*<sup>1</sup> V 41; Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 274–5.

<sup>594</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 4.115–116: *grande et conspicuum nostro quoque tempore monstrum,/ caecus adulator dirisque satelles*.

employing such a detestable person as Messalinus. Recalling the hard times that Agricola had managed to avoid by his timely death, Tacitus selected Messalinus as one of the three most hated persons at Domitian's court, whose decisions hummed inside the Alban citadel.<sup>595</sup> Therefore, Pliny and Tacitus would agree with Juvenal's list of *monstra* of the age, starting from the prodigious turbot and going on to include Crispinus, Messalinus, and even the emperor Domitian himself.<sup>596</sup>

Even though Messalinus did not outlive Veiento, he outshone the latter in terms of his senatorial career. He was obviously the favorite of the Flavian emperors, especially Domitian. He held his first regular consulship in 73 CE with Domitian, who later, in 85 CE, awarded another consulship to Messalinus. Still short of the honors given to Nerva, who served his regular consulship in 71 CE with the emperor Vespasian and later another regular consulship with Domitian in 90 CE, it was an exceptional honor for Messalinus to have held the regular consulship with the emperor's son. At any rate, only six out of twenty-four regular consulships between 70 CE and 81 CE were awarded to those who did not belong to the Flavian family. After his consulship in 85 CE, Messalinus does not appear to have been responsible for any prosecutions in the Senate; nor was he given any further senatorial honors that we know of, besides his role as one of Domitian's counsellors.<sup>597</sup> The abeyance in Messalinus's senatorial career may have been due to his blindness, though it is unknown when he lost his sight. Though Pliny claimed that Messalinus's blindness must have intensified his cruelty, Domitian might have enjoyed Messalinus's daring acts and words.

Mauricus's witty remark that if Messalinus were alive, he would dine with them, tacitly

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<sup>595</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 45.1: *intra Albanam arcem sententia Messalini strepebat*; The other two are Carus Metius and Baebius Massa.

<sup>596</sup> *monstrum* in Juvenal's fourth satire: 2 (Crispinus), 45 (turbot), 115 (Messalinus).

<sup>597</sup> Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 274–5.

criticized the emperor in two respects: not removing the collaborators in Domitian's tyranny first, and Nerva's past service to Domitian. This criticism gained more authority because it came from the survivor of Domitian's tyranny, Junius Mauricus. Pliny did not let his readers know how Nerva or Veiento further responded to Mauricus. In the case of Nerva, his reign was somewhat sudden and makeshift, as can be seen from the fact that most of his statues had begun as Domitian and were hastily altered.<sup>598</sup> On the other hand, Nerva's successor, Trajan, whom Nerva adopted as his successor in October 97 CE, had been one of two regular consuls of the year 91 CE.<sup>599</sup> Trajan was to reign for almost nineteen years, and had someone like Pliny who zealously praised him as the best emperor; at any rate, Pliny was in the same boat as Trajan, with regard to their past dishonorable service to the tyrant. Less than two years after Trajan's accession, thus not enough time to assess an emperor as good or bad had passed, Pliny blatantly created the dichotomy between Domitian and Trajan as the worst and best *principes* respectively.<sup>600</sup> Notwithstanding this arbitrary dichotomy, Trajan did not shun away from the ex-consuls or senators who had served under Domitian like himself. Let alone Pliny's service as *legatus Augusti* in the province of Bithynia-Pontus or that of Tacitus, who was in charge of the province of Asia, three of the lesser-known suffect consuls appointed by Domitian became proconsuls of Africa or Asia during Trajan's reign.<sup>601</sup> Because it is claimed in the late biography of the emperor Severus Alexander that Trajan held the *amici* of Domitian in high esteem, Trajan might not have felt any qualms about employing the bad emperor's good

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<sup>598</sup> Grainger, *Roman Succession Crisis*, x; Nerva's reuse of Domitian's images: Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 115–22.

<sup>599</sup> The motifs behind Nerva's adoption of Trajan: Grainger, *Roman Succession Crisis*, 96–100.

<sup>600</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 92.4: *qui principem abstulit pessimum, dedit optimum, meliorum optimo genuit.*

<sup>601</sup> Aquilius Proculus, L. Albius Pullaienus Pollio, and L. Cornelius Pusio; Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 36–7.

advisers. If they had been efficient under a bad emperor, they could perform even better under a good emperor. Therefore, Kenneth Waters, who called Trajan *Domitiani Continuator*, noted the great degree of continuity in the sphere of imperial advisers and other prominent administrators in the transition from Domitian to Trajan.<sup>602</sup>

During the reigns of Nerva and Trajan, there seems to have been discrepancies between propaganda concerning the memory of the condemned emperor and the execution of his obliteration. Despite the time lapse of almost two millennia, the countries that suffered harsh colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had also suffered similar complexities in dealing with the past. After liberation, there tends to arise the issue of how to punish the collaborators with the colonial governments; however, to determine the appropriate punishment for them, there must be a solid yardstick to categorize the level of collaboration, which is hardly feasible to achieve. Those who had zealously collaborated with the colonial government are likely to be punished as examples; however, to root out every single collaborator would place a burden on whoever was in charge of the new government. While the process of demonization of the colonial government and the collaborators is underway, the same people would continue to live without incurring any punishment.

Nerva and Trajan faced the same dilemma with regard to the treatment of those who served under Domitian, especially the notorious *delatores*. Among them, there must have been a fear of revenge. For instance, Publicius Certus, who had prosecuted Helvidius Priscus the Younger in 93 CE, was prosecuted by Pliny. Pliny laid out the details of the trial in *Ep.* 9.13, and he also included some parts of his speeches in the letter. Reminding that Certus was still one of the prefects of the treasury of Saturn, Pliny stated: "The reward which he received from

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<sup>602</sup> Waters, "Traianus Domitiani Continuator," 388-390; cf. Trajan's reuse of Domitian's images: Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*, 122-4.

the worst of emperors he should relinquish under the best."<sup>603</sup> Publicius Certus seems to have felt pressure from the trial, or he might have fallen ill before the trial. Before receiving his sentence, Certus was found dead. Pliny added that he was told that Certus was plagued by a vision of him threatening him with a sword (*Ep.* 9.13.35).<sup>604</sup> It is significant to mention that Publicius Certus was not punished; he had to give up his post as prefect of the treasury of Saturn and the consulship that he expected to hold was instead given to Vettius Proculus, his colleague as prefect of the treasury of Saturn.

As noted earlier, elated at the news of the assassination of Domitian, the senators rushed to the *curia* where they brought ladders to demolish the shields and images of Domitian; they eventually passed a decree of *damnatio memoriae* on Domitian's inscriptions as well as on all his records. However, Domitian ruled for fifteen years and his inscriptions, images, and any artefacts conveying his memory must have been scattered throughout the vast Roman Empire. Among the 400 surviving texts and inscriptions that mention him, approximately 40 percent were erased, and the majority of the erased inscriptions are from Rome, Spain and the eastern half of the empire.<sup>605</sup> Like any Roman emperor, Domitian had multiple titles and powers, some of which he included in his imperial titulature: *Augustus, pontifex maximus, pater patriae, Germanicus, censoria potestas, censor perpetuus*.<sup>606</sup> As Harriet Flower indicates, it

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<sup>603</sup> Translation from Walsh, *Complete Letters*, 223; Plin. *Ep.* 9.13.23: '*Reddat praemium sub optimo principe, quod a pessimo accepit.*'

<sup>604</sup> Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, 499, aptly points out that Pliny did not mention the fact that Pliny benefitted from the death of Certus. Nerva appointed Pliny to the prefecture of the treasury of Saturn, which was left vacant due to the death of Certus.

<sup>605</sup> Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*, 132 and n. 184, and Jones, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order*, 4; Geographic distribution of the execution of *damnatio memoriae* of Domitian: Paillet and Sablayrolles, "Damnatio Memoriae," 16–17.

<sup>606</sup> Domitian's titulature: Alain Martin, *La Titulature Épigraphique de Domitien* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987); Paul Bureth, *Les Titulatures Impériales dans les Papyrus, les Ostraca et les Inscriptions d'Égypte (30 a.C.-284 p.C.)* (Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1964), 41–45; Buttrey, *Flavian Titulature*, 28–39; Ian Carradice, and Theodore V. Buttrey, *Roman Imperial Coinage, vol. 2* (London:

was very rare to chisel out the entire inscription, especially if it was reused.<sup>607</sup> However, the titles such as *ensor perpetuus*, referring to the perpetual censorship that Domitian had assumed in 85 CE, must have been a sure sign that the inscription concerned Domitian and no other emperor. But the inscriptions, which referred to Domitian as *ensor perpetuus*, were not completely chiseled out.<sup>608</sup> Moreover, whether to erase the transliterated titles such as Γερμανικός or Σεβαστός must have been a highly vexing issue for those who had to execute the *damnatio memoriae*.

An example which illustrates such difficulties is provided by one of his obelisks, which is known as the Pamphili Obelisk, still standing in the Piazza Navona in Rome.<sup>609</sup> Darwall-Smith calls this obelisk highly unusual among the obelisks in Rome because it bears a new hieroglyphic inscription composed especially for Domitian; all of the other obelisks previously transported to Rome were either uninscribed or bore ancient inscriptions from Pharoanic times, which were hardly legible even for Egyptians, let alone Romans. According to his English translation of the inscriptions, *Caesar Domitianus* is named in the hieroglyphs at least four times.<sup>610</sup> The scholars who studied this obelisk ascribe the survival of the inscriptions bearing the autocratic (and even theocratic) message at the heart of Rome to the incomprehensibility of

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Spink & Son, 2007), 237–331.

<sup>607</sup> Harriet I. Flower, "A Tale of Two Monuments: Domitian, Trajan, and Some Praetorians at Puteoli (AE 1973, 137)," *American Journal of Archaeology* 105, no. 4 (2001): 627; Alain Martin, "La condamnation de la mémoire de Domitien - état de la question." in *Mémoire et Histoire: Les procédures de condamnation dans l'Antiquité romaine*, ed. Stéphane Benoist (Metz: Centre Régional Universitaire Lorrain d'Histoire, 2007), 63: there was even a text from Olympia, where the name of Domitian is partially preserved.

<sup>608</sup> Buttrey, *Flavian Titulature*, 37–38; 52–56.

<sup>609</sup> The Pamphili Obelisk: Grenier, Jean-Claude, "L'Obélisque Pamphili: un témoignage méconnu sur l'avènement de Domitien," *Mélanges de l'École Française* 99 (1987): 937–61 and "Obeliscus Domitiani," *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* 3 (1996): 357–8; Robin Haydon Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1996), 145–50; Newlands, *Poetics of Empire*, 11–3; 265; Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*, 134, also discusses the continued display of Domitian's images at a theater in Aphrodisias.

<sup>610</sup> Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, 145–6 and 148.

hieroglyphs in the cartouches.<sup>611</sup> Notwithstanding the illegibility of the hieroglyphs, the figurative descriptions of the reliefs on the pyramidion would hardly be tolerated. In the reliefs, the Egyptian gods make obeisance to Domitian; therefore, whoever viewed those reliefs might have understood the pictorial message of Domitian's sacred superiority.<sup>612</sup> There is another interpretation by Susan Sorek that the pyramidion depicts Domitian worshipping the Egyptian gods. In that case, unlike the arguments by Grenier and Newlands, Domitian might have adapted the image of himself as someone capable of paying due respect to the gods.<sup>613</sup> Whether the message intended by Domitian in the obelisk was his autocracy or modesty, the existence of the Domitianic obelisk at the heart of Rome remains an enigma for those who, based on the senatorial hatred toward Domitian, expected the complete obliteration of Domitian's memory.

Instead of endeavoring to erase all memories of Domitian from the entire empire—hardly a feasible task, it must have been more efficient for Domitian's successors, especially Trajan, to create positive images of their reigns through literary media. The best example of such a literary achievement of presenting a colorful contrast between the evil predecessor and the best, blissful emperor is Pliny's *Panegyricus*. As noted earlier, Pliny's praise of Trajan as the best emperor in the *Panegyricus* seems premature because only a year and a half had passed since his ascension. Nonetheless, Pliny's detailed definition of what qualities make an emperor appear good or bad must have served as guidance for Trajan. In this literary scheme, Domitian

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<sup>611</sup> Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, 150; Newlands, *Poetics of Empire*, 11–3; Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*, 132 n. 184; Newlands, *Poetics of Empire*, 11, on the ideological reading of the inscription on the Pamphili obelisk: Grenier, "Obeliscus Domitiani," 357, reads this inscription as a hymn of praise to Domitian and the Flavian dynasty; Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, 148–149, expresses skepticism about Grenier's ideological interpretations in that they were in conformity with Egyptian standards and styles for inscriptions. Focusing on the concept of a ruler's divinity set within a Roman concept but written in hieroglyphs, Newlands sides with Grenier.

<sup>612</sup> Newlands, *Poetics of Empire*, 13.

<sup>613</sup> Susan Sorek, *The Emperors' Needles: Egyptian Obelisks and Rome* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2010), 79.

was summoned by Pliny as an antithesis to Trajan several times; toying with the title *dominus* that Domitian allegedly assumed, Pliny stated that Trajan was not a master for his household slaves, but a *princeps* and emperor for the citizens of Rome.<sup>614</sup> Pliny also criticized Domitian's assumption of perpetual censorship. People learn better from examples because the examples themselves prove that others could imitate them. Trajan only needed to continue being who he was because his conduct as an emperor has the same effective power as a true, perpetual censorship. Without explicitly naming Domitian, Pliny added that fear was not a trustworthy teacher of morals.<sup>615</sup> Linking perpetual censorship, the unprecedented office that only Domitian had assumed, to fear was definitively meant to criticize Domitian, who executed his will through fear. According to Pliny, unlike Domitian, who was not able to tolerate the presence of others near him, only offering his hand for kisses from the senators who had to grovel at his feet, Trajan was more amenable to welcome any conversations with the senators who did, in turn, endear the emperor. This is because, in opposition to Domitian, who was flattered as master and god, Trajan was one of the senators; according to Pliny, it was the most excellent virtue of Trajan, who never forgot that he himself was a man while reigning over men.<sup>616</sup> In sum, the aftermath of the assassination of Domitian is the moment when memory of Domitian was in the process of crystallization in a negative light, while some positive aspects of Domitian's reign were forgotten. Simultaneously, the years after the death of Domitian were also the moment when memory of Trajan as the best emperor was in the making.

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<sup>614</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 7.6: *Non enim servulis tuis dominum, ... sed principem civibus daturus es imperator.*

<sup>615</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 45.6: *Nam vita principis censura est, eaque perpetua: ad hanc dirigimur, ad hanc convertimur: nec tam imperio nobis opus est, quam exemplo. Quippe infidelis recti magister est metus. Melius homines exemplis docentur, quae in primis hoc in se boni habent, quod approbant, quae praecipiant, fieri posse.*

<sup>616</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 24; 2.3–4; Trajan as the new example that one cannot surpass: Gowing, *Empire and Memory*, 120–31, esp. 123–4; Daniel J. Kapust, *Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 161–2.

The essence of the Principate as a political system had never been anything other than a monarchy. Yet, as Pliny illustrated, the decisive factor to assess an emperor as a good ruler more than a century after the establishment of the monarchy remained whether the emperor had fulfilled the expectations to treat the Senate with due respect and made efforts to not be seen as a monarch. In the Roman imperial historiography written by aristocratic authors, the only two emperors, who had accomplished such a difficult task, were the most fortunate *princeps* Augustus, and the best *princeps* Trajan.<sup>617</sup> The first emperor Augustus was fortunate because he had artfully walked a very thin line by masking himself as *civilis princeps* to the successful establishment of the Principate; however, as noted earlier in the first chapter, Augustus left the illusion of *civilis princeps* as his legacy to both his successors and their senators. The emperors should act as the first among equals (*primus inter pares*), those equals being the senators.

Despite the torrent of criticism that they heaped upon the dead Domitian for his alleged suppression of the Senate, therefore deviating from the *exemplum* of *civilis princeps*, both Tacitus and Pliny appear to have been aware of the incompatibility of two political bodies, the emperor and the Senate.<sup>618</sup> For instance, Tacitus had the emperor Galba advise Piso, whom he was about to adopt as his heir, as follows: “You are going to rule the men who can endure neither complete slavery nor complete liberty.”<sup>619</sup> Without doubt, those men who were unable to tolerate either slavery or liberty were the senators. In the arbitrary contrast between Trajan and Domitian, Pliny inadvertently admitted the limit of senatorial liberty: “You order us to be

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<sup>617</sup> Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 8.5.3: *Huius tantum memoriae delatum est, ut usque ad nostram aetatem non aliter in senatu principibus adclametur, nisi "Felicior Augusto, melior Traiano". Adeo in eo gloria bonitatis obtinuit, ut vel adsentantibus vel vere laudantibus occasionem magnificentissimi praestet exempli.*

<sup>618</sup> E.g., Tac. *Agr.* 3.1: *Nerva Caesar res olim dissociabilis miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem*

<sup>619</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.4: *sed imperaturus es hominibus qui nec totam servitutem pati possunt nec totam libertatem.*

free, and we shall be free; you tell us to express what we think openly, and we shall do so.” Though the ambiance of terror and fear that Domitian might have created had forced Pliny and his fellow senators into cowardice, the senatorial freedom, which Pliny and his fellow senators were now indulged in, was made possible, just because the best emperor gave his permission, or even ordered it.<sup>620</sup> The full-blown senatorial *libertas* under an emperor was a mere myth that some senators anachronistically held onto.

Domitian did not discriminate against the Senate, as I have demonstrated in the third and fourth chapters. The list of consular victims in Suetonius’s *Life of Domitian* signifies that they owed their consulships to Domitian before they were condemned. Domitian did not keep his eyes on the descendants of the senators who had challenged the imperial authority of his predecessors. Just as Nerva and Trajan later had to employ whoever had worked in the administration of Domitian, Domitian had to work hand-in-hand with the senators, whether they were the descendants of the senators who had challenged the imperial authority of his father or hated the emperor’s personality and autocratic stance. This is the political system of the Principate, which Augustus had designed in the first place as an amalgamation of two irreconcilable elements, monarchy and oligarchy; all emperors were bound to the system itself, even when the Senate lost its authority over time.<sup>621</sup>

As was seen in the exclamation in the fourth century that still named Augustus and

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<sup>620</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 66.4: *Iubes esse liberos; erimus. Iubes, quae sentimus, promere in medium: proferemus. Neque enim adhuc ignavia quadam et insito torpore cessavimus: terror, et metus, et misera illa ex periculis facta prudentia monebat, ut a republica (erat autem omnino nulla respublica) oculos, aures, animos averteremus;* Mark P. O. Morford, "Iubes Esse Liberos: Pliny's Panegyricus and Liberty," *American Journal of Philology* 113, no. 4 (1992): 585: "the practical mode of displaying *libertas* was that of *obsequium* and *moderatio*."

<sup>621</sup> Cf. Mason Hammond, "Composition of the Senate, AD 68–235," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 47, no. 1/2 (1957): 76, points out that after the reign of Septimius Severus, senators were rare whose rank went back more than one or two generations. During the third century the Senate came to contain almost exclusively men raised from the equestrian rank or the sons of such men, and for the most part these persons were of provincial origin.

Trajan as the *exempla* of the fortunate and best emperor,<sup>622</sup> the literary scheme that senatorial authors had established to assess an emperor proved its persistence to the later period,<sup>623</sup> and the tendency to dichotomize the emperors as good or bad continued into late antiquity.<sup>624</sup> The senators in the fourth and fifth centuries CE also regarded the rapport between the Senate and the *princeps* as the key element in the success of a ruler. Thus, Symmachus stated: “How rarely in this state, o conscript fathers, has it happened that the emperors wanted the same, decided the same as the Senate.”<sup>625</sup> The rare case of maintaining justice and harmony between the emperor and the Senate was, again, Trajan.<sup>626</sup>

In contrast to the blessed fate of his successor becoming the paragon of good emperor, Domitian joined the other line of bad emperors upon condemnation of his memory. Besides Juvenal’s well-known mockery of Domitian as a bald-headed Nero (*caluo ... Neroni, Sat. 4.38*), Pliny also referred to Nero and Domitian in the same passage in the context of exemplarity. Praising Trajan for allowing criticism of bad emperors with impunity, Pliny pointed out that bad emperors may well become examples: “I set our freedom to avenge ourselves daily on the evil emperors of the past, and to warn by example all future ones that there will be neither time

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<sup>622</sup> *Eutropius, Breviarium*, 8.5.3: *Felicio Augusto, melior Traiano.*

<sup>623</sup> Massimiliano Vitiello, “Blaming the Late Republic: Senatorial Ideology and Republican Institutions in Late Antiquity,” *Classical Receptions Journal* 7, no. 1 (2015): 31: “The memory of the Republican Senate was still strong in late antique Rome, when the Senate was weakened by the intensified conflicts of power and ideas with the imperial court.”

<sup>624</sup> Diederik Burgersdijk and Alan J. Ross, “Introduction,” in *Imagining Emperors in the Later Roman Empire: Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean*, eds. Diederik Burgersdijk and Alan J. Ross (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 7; The “antimonarchic patterns” in the *Historia Augusta*, Matthias Haake, “In Search of good Emperors: Emperors, Caesars, and Usurpers in the Mirror of Antimonarchic Patterns in the *Historia Augusta* - Some Considerations,” in *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*, ed. Henning Börm (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), 273–5. See also the list of good emperors in SHA *Aur.* 42.4.

<sup>625</sup> *Symm. Or.* 4.5: *Quam raro huic rei publicae, patres conscripti, tales principes contigerunt, qui idem uellent, idem statuerent quod senatus.*

<sup>626</sup> The harmony between the *princeps* and the Senate in imperial historiography in late antiquity: Vitiello, “Blaming the Late Republic,” 34–8.

nor place for the shades of disastrous rulers to rest in peace from the execrations of posterity."<sup>627</sup>

To Pliny's disappointment, posterity appears not to have learned enough from the examples of bad emperors, such as Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, as more names were to be added to the list of bad emperors. As Domitian was depicted as another Nero, the later emperors known as tyrants or bad rulers were often compared to Domitian.

The first emperor who was compared to Domitian in imperial historiography was Hadrian. By refusing to answer the public request of restoration of Palfurius Sura to the Senate during the Capitoline competition, Domitian even made a crier bid the public be silent (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1). Dio Cassius, certainly mindful of this incident, located Hadrian in a similar setting of spectacles (69.6.1–2). At gladiatorial games, the public asked Hadrian something upon which Dio did not elaborate. Instead of granting the request, Hadrian asked the herald to proclaim "Silence!" just as Domitian had done. Luckily for Hadrian, the public did not hear the word, because the herald silenced the spectators by raising his hand. Hadrian gave the herald an award for not uttering such an arrogant order. Thanks to the herald, Hadrian barely evaded the danger to be remembered on a par with Domitian by following the *exemplum* of the tyrant.<sup>628</sup>

The next notorious emperor, who, according to Edward Gibbon, marked the end of the blissful period of the Five Emperors, Commodus, was compared to both Nero and Domitian. Commodus was assassinated by his prefect Laetus and his chamberlain Eclectus, with the help of his mistress Marcia, on New Year's Eve in 192 CE. On New Year's day in 193 CE,

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<sup>627</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 53.3–6: 3 ... *quam quod insectari malos principes tutum est ... 6 ... Quare ego, Caesar, muneribus tuis omnibus comparo, multis antepono, quod licet nobis et in praeteritum de malis imperatoribus quotidie vindicari, et futuros sub exemplo praemonere, nullum locum, nullum esse tempus, quo funestorum principum manes a posterorum execrationibus conquiescant.* Translation from Radice, *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, 443.

<sup>628</sup> Birley, *Hadrian*, 100; cf. the assessment of Hadrian in the *Vita Hadriani*: Haake, "In Search of Good Emperors," 276.

Commodus had originally planned to kill the new regular consuls and open the year himself, coming forth from the gladiatorial barracks as a victorious gladiator-emperor (Herodian 1.16–7; Dio 73.22).<sup>629</sup> In the resentful acclamation of the Senate after the death of Commodus in SHA *Comm.* 18–19, the senatorial decree enumerated all the heinous crimes of Commodus, vilified as a murderer and gladiator, who had killed senators and employed informers. In decreeing the condemnation of the memory of Commodus, the senators acclaimed that Commodus was "more savage than Domitian, more foul than Nero (*saevior Domitiano, impurior Nerone*, SHA *Comm.* 19.2)."

Caracalla, another emperor remembered as a tyrant, was not directly compared to Domitian in ancient sources. However, based on the hypothesis that Dio Cassius was actually writing during the reigns of Caracalla, Macrinus and Elagabalus,<sup>630</sup> Charles Murison lists the striking similarities between Caracalla and Domitian in Dio's books 66 and 67. Presuming that Dio might have envisaged Domitian as a precursor of all the worst aspects of Caracalla, Murison points to the alleged enmity that Domitian and Caracalla had held toward their brothers, Titus and Geta, respectively, their inability to love anyone, their unsuccessful campaigns, and their hypocrisy. The aftermaths of their deaths were also similar. After the murder of Domitian, his nurse Phyllis stole his corpse and buried it in the Temple of the Flavian family (Dio 67.18.2; cf. Suet. *Dom.* 17.3); the body of Caracalla was cremated and buried in the tomb of the Antonines (Dio 78.9.1).<sup>631</sup> The relationship between Caracalla and the Senate

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<sup>629</sup> Olivier Hekster, *Commodus: An Emperor at the Crossroads* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 2002), 80, points out that Herodian's description of the final conspiracy against Commodus is strikingly similar to the story of the death of Domitian in Dio 67.15.3-5; the commonalities of Commodus and his bad predecessors, see Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation*, 251–2.

<sup>630</sup> The value of Dio Cassius as an eyewitness observer of much of Caracalla's reign: Andrew G. Scott, "Cassius Dio, Caracalla, and the Senate," *Klio* 97, no. 1 (2015): 159.

<sup>631</sup> Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction*, 23–7; Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation*, 252; Caillan Davenport, "Cassius Dio and Caracalla," *The Classical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2012): 796–7, also indicates the similarity between the reigns of Domitian and Caracalla in their increasing autocratic attitude. In a

was also marked by hostility. Dio Cassius reported that Caracalla killed 20,000 men and women, including imperial freedmen, soldiers, and senators. Like Domitian, whom Juvenal depicted allowing entry into his court only for the enormous fish but not the senators in the fourth satire, Caracalla also kept the senators waiting to see him outside until noon or even the evening.<sup>632</sup> When Dio Cassius followed Caracalla as his personal *amicus* in Nicomedia during the winter of 214/215 CE, he observed the emperor's extensive use of informers.

In the long run, the efforts of Pliny and Tacitus to besmirch Domitian's reputation were a complete success. In the battle of memory, the tacit collusion of Domitian's immediate successors, Nerva and Trajan, who had served as consuls in Domitian's court, must also have helped to silence the voices of those who remembered Domitian otherwise than the regime required. The poets who had praised Domitian during his reign do not seem to have won the minds of the new emperors. Despite his changed stance in declaring that he would never say *dominus et deus* (*dicturus dominum deumque non sum*, *Epigrams*, 10.72.3) under the new *princeps*, Martial apparently failed to gain the favor of the new emperors and left the city of Rome for Spain in 98 CE. Nor was Statius offered the chance to experience the new reign: he died in 96 CE. Over time, Tacitus and Pliny have acquired literary authority as reputable ancient sources, which led scholars who initiated the study of Domitian's reign in the late nineteenth century to take the senatorial accounts about Domitian without any grains of salt. By attaching to it such a misleading label as the "reign of terror," the early scholarship intensified and reinforced the aura of fear surrounding Domitian's reign, for which the much-hated emperor has been notorious since antiquity.

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similar vein, Pieter J. J. Botha, "The Historical Domitian - Illustrating Some Problems of Historiography." *Neotestamentica* 23, no.1 (1989): 50, calls Domitian "Caracalla in disguise."

<sup>632</sup> Scott, "Cassius Dio, Caracalla, and the Senate," 162–7.

Despite his ultimate success, Pliny's somewhat naïve expectation that later emperors would learn from critical accounts about bad emperors such as Domitian was soon destroyed. Like Nero, Domitian became another example of a tyrant for later authors, who juxtaposed Commodus and Caracalla with Domitian to magnify these emperors' vices in their works. It could hardly be the case that Nero, Domitian, Commodus, and Caracalla were all startlingly similar in reality.<sup>633</sup> These emperors appear to resemble each other because they were assessed using the same metric—the same that had been in use to judge emperors since the establishment of the Principate. In essence, the dichotomy between good and bad emperors reflected whether the emperor performed the role of *civilis princeps*, treating the Senate respectfully without disclosing the true, monarchical nature of the Principate.

Measured by that standard, Domitian met the qualifications to be remembered as a bad emperor. Although he did not discriminate against the Senate as a whole, he did let the people address him *dominus et deus noster*; this appellation embodies the superiority of the *princeps*, therefore revealing the monarchical nature of the Principate. If Domitian had wished to imitate the example of Augustus as *civilis princeps*, he ought to have expressed great horror at such a detestable address and prohibited its use either in private or public. Deviating from the path that Augustus had set, Domitian did not attend the senatorial meetings on a regular base and instead preferred to keep his own company in his Alban villa or the newly built palace. He killed some senators under the law of *maiestas*, thereby creating an ambience of fear among the senators that they could be killed next time. As the last Flavian emperor, he had failed to leave an heir to protect his reputation, and his memory after his death fell easy prey to the

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<sup>633</sup> Similarly, Michael Charles, "'Calvus Nero': Domitian and the Mechanics of Predecessor Denigration," *Acta Classica* 45 (2002): 19: "Although reconstructed personalities of Nero and Domitian show marked differences, analysis of the ancient literary record of both emperors reveals a great number of similarities."

senators—such as Pliny and Tacitus—who recalled the hard times of his reign in their writings. Therefore, the reputation Domitian left in Roman historiography was that of a fearsome tyrant who was not to be emulated.

The only two emperors whose reputation remained unscathed by such judgment were Augustus and Trajan. Augustus, the first emperor to devise the hardly feasible amalgam of two political systems, monarchy and oligarchy, had performed his role successfully to become the *exemplum* of the good and civil emperor. Like Augustus, who must have kept the assassination of his adoptive father Julius Caesar in mind and endeavored not to meet the same fate as his father, Trajan had the example from the recent past of an emperor who did not cater to senatorial expectations and who did not care to hide the monarchical nature of his reign. Therefore, the one who learned how to not to be remembered as a bad emperor in history was, ironically, Trajan, who was to be remembered as the *optimus princeps*. It was only in 114 CE when the Senate officially voted to call Trajan *optimus princeps*;<sup>634</sup> nevertheless, Pliny had frequently referred to Trajan as such in the *Panegyricus* addressed to the Senate in 100 CE,<sup>635</sup> which demonstrates that the Senate was already willing to assess Trajan in a positive light in the early phase of Trajan's reign. Trajan did not betray the Senate's expectations; he deigned to pay courtesy to the Senate to perform the role of *civilis princeps* and kept his accession oath by refraining from trying any senators for *maiestas*.<sup>636</sup> Pliny committed to writing a wish that was later to be fulfilled: "Just as the name of Augustus reminds of us of the man to whom it was decreed, so this title of Optimus will never return to the memory of man without recalling you."<sup>637</sup> Yet the very fact that there was no emperor whose name became synonymous with

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<sup>634</sup> Bennett, *Trajan*, 212.

<sup>635</sup> esp. Plin. *Pan.* 88.4–10.

<sup>636</sup> Bennett, *Trajan*, 106–9.

<sup>637</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 88.10: *Etenim, ut nomine Augusti admonemur eius, cui primum dicatum est, ita haec*

good rule after Augustus and Trajan suggests the partiality innate in the senatorial assessment of emperors, which has only two options, good or bad.

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*Optimi appellatio nunquam memoriae hominum sine te recurret, quotiesque posteri nostri Optimum aliquem vocare cogentur; toties recordabantur, quis meruerit vocari.* Translation from Radice, *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, 531–3.

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