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Domitian and the City of Rome:

Imperial Self-Portrayal in Monuments and Buildings

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Preface

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Summary

This Master Thesis explored how Domitian, the eleventh Roman emperor, presented himself through his monuments, buildings, and imagery. Domitian's legacy was marred by hostile sources, written after his death, and consequently he has been regarded among the bad "tyrant" emperors. Modern historical research has contextualized and create a more comprehensive image of Domitian and his reign, and this master thesis attempts to contribute to this process. This thesis first considers the sources on Domitian and the autocratic nature of his rule and his strained with the aristocracy and senate of Rome. It then considers some examples of Domitianic buildings, monuments, and imagery. Among these we find his imperial palace in Rome. Domitian's palace was not simply an opulent home for the emperor, but rather a palace like those of absolutist monarchs. It was the architecturally impressive heart of imperial Roman government, and it remained so after Domitian's assassination. The palace is perhaps one of the best examples of how Domitian the autocrat presented himself to Rome and her citizens. Through the palace and other buildings and monuments, Domitian discarded the pretense of republicanism that previous emperors had relied upon and presented himself as the undisputed sovereign of Rome and the empire, rather than as "first among equals".

At the same time as much of Domitian's self-presentation presented him as a sovereign standing above his subjects, his investment in entertainment and venues for entertainment presented a more nuanced image. While the autocratic aspects of self-presentation certainly remain in these, we also see Domitian reveal some of his own personal passion in the buildings and the entertainments they hosted. Particularly his interest in Greek sports and entertainment, which was not nearly as popular as traditional Roman entertainment such as gladiatorial shows, show that Domitian was not only motivated by political needs and the realities of autocratic imperial government in his buildings or his self-presentation.

The most significant results of this thesis's examination of Domitianic self-presentation are that his presentations were nuanced, but in a very large part served to present Domitian as the sovereign ruler of Rome, who was supported by the gods and who upheld and protected Roman traditions, values, and religion. At the same time, he showed himself not only as a stern autocrat, but also an emperor who took his duty to the citizens seriously, entertainment in particular. And through this he showed some of his personal passions and interests, and we see a glimpse of a more human Domitian.

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Introduction

Domitian's legacy can kindly be described as less than ideal, and his reputation endured much abuse after his death. Men considered among the greatest historical writers produced by ancient Rome spent much time and ink disparaging Domitian and his rule as that of an archetypical "evil" emperor. Despite the legacy of tyranny and the damning of his memory, Domitian's life remains remarkably well-documented, if by biased sources. He is the last emperor documented by Suetonius in his imperial biographies, and he features in the works of Tacitus and others. We need not go further than his immediate successors for the source material to become significantly thinner. Modern scholarship has worked hard to contextualize and understand Domitian as something more than the caricature that is often portrayed. Both the context of Domitian's own rule and the context of his successors are important factors to consider when examining the last Flavian emperor. Much of the animosity towards Domitian was the result not only of his autocratic style of rulership, but also his poor relationship with the Senate. Understanding the wider context of Domitian's rule and his legacy gives us a more nuanced image of him, and with that we can examine other aspects of his reign.

Beyond the legacy as an evil tyrant, Domitian must be considered among the great builder-emperors of Rome. The great fire of 80 AD left much of Rome in ruins and gave Domitian the opportunity to significantly affect the architecture and topography of Rome. His relatively long reign of fifteen years also meant that he could not only initiate new building programs and project, but he also lived to see many of them finished. His projects involved many aspects of the city, from rebuilding destroyed temples to the imperial palace on the Palatine. Domitian's monuments, buildings and imagery were intersections where the emperor and his subjects "met", and in these intersections we can get an impression of how Domitian tried to present himself to the Romans. This self-presentation is perhaps more interesting because of Domitian's approach to the emperorship. His preference for openly autocratic rule as opposed to the Augustan model of veiling the emperorship with pretenses and allusions to a republic gone by. In his rule Domitian acted more like we would expect from later Roman emperors and medieval monarchs than a man removed just seven decades from Augustus. Yet for the autocratic nature of his reign, we find architectural projects such as the Stadium of Domitian where different associations than the traditionally Roman spring to the fore, so an examination of Domitian's self-presentation must consider many different factors.

This thesis will focus on how Domitian presented himself to the citizens of Rome

through his monuments, buildings, and imagery. The central question to be answered is thus: *How does Domitian present himself through his architecture, and why?*

This thesis will limit itself to Domitian's reign from 81 to 96 and to the city of Rome. Where outside events are relevant for the context of the thesis they will be discussed as appropriate, but events in Rome and Domitian's building projects there will be the focus. In order to contextualize this, certain events before and after Domitian's reign will be considered. Thematically the thesis will chiefly consider Domitian and his relationship with Rome, naturally the emperor and wider events cannot be wholly separated, and context will demand certain themes be approached regardless.

It is my belief that a thesis such as this can be of some value. The early Roman empire has undoubtedly received much attention through the centuries, and much attention has been given to emperors like Trajan and Augustus, who have come to exemplify successful Roman emperors. Further examination of emperors not considered among the greats, and indeed those who have long been considered among the worst, and their agendas is important to further our understanding of the period as a whole and of Domitian in particular. Furthermore, the examination of Domitian and his architecture provides a look at how his relationship with the city and his self-presentation affected the urban topography of Rome, and in certain places this can still be seen in the modern city.

State of Research

The past century or so has seen Domitian extensively reevaluated by modern scholarship, much helped by the work of the spade and common sense, as Ronald Syme wrote.¹ The evolution of history as an academic discipline has seen sources reevaluated and new ones considered, though Domitian himself has not always been the specific subject of study or reevaluation, the simple change in how sources are considered and interpreted has benefitted his legacy. In 1992 Brian W. Jones published his biography on Domitian, *The Emperor Domitian*, the first biography of the emperor since the work of Stéphane Gsell from 1894. As Jones points out in his introduction, a new biography was overdue. Following Jones, Pat Southern published her own biography on Domitian in 1997, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*. Southern builds on the work of Jones, but in her book she explores more of Domitian's personal and psychological aspects, and through them attempts to construct a more human Domitian, with all the flaws that entails. Both of these biographies serve as the foundation of

¹ Syme, "Imperial Finances", p. 55

this thesis, and without them this work would have been immeasurably more difficult. Beyond these biographies, studies on the literature, culture, and images of the period, such as Nauta's *Poetry for Patrons*, have advanced the understanding of the Flavian period.

Sources

The primary sources of this thesis can be divided into literary and archeological sources. The literary sources for Domitian and his emperorship this thesis will make use of are primarily contemporary or near contemporary sources. Suetonius and Tacitus feature as the most prominent historical literature I will make use of here. In part because they write about events and Domitian himself, and perhaps more importantly because they lived through Domitian's reign and produced their works not long after. In addition to Suetonius and Tacitus, Pliny the younger's letters and panegyric are also important sources to Domitian, and he was also contemporary with the emperor. All of these were contemporaries of Domitian, but they produced their histories, biographies, letters, and speeches after Domitian had been killed and under the auspices of a new imperial dynasty. This, in addition to the authors inherent biases combine to produce literature that does not favor Domitian, and much of his poor reputation has its origin in these authors. Besides these we will make use of the more pro-Domitian work of the poets Statius and Martial, who largely operated during Domitian's reign and were recipients of his favor. In these we see a rather different and positive presentation of Domitian, but just as we must be wary of the biases of post-Domitianic sources, we must be equally wary of the poets who sing his praises. These ancient sources must be understood and interpreted in light of their context, their literary genres, and the rhetoric they use.

The archeological sources will feature prominently in this paper, which is only natural in a thesis focused on Domitian's self-presentation through his buildings and monuments. As one of the great builder emperors Domitian left a rich legacy of buildings and monuments that succeeding emperors usurped for their own benefit. Smaller monuments may have been destroyed, but with his larger structures this was simply unfeasible, and his successors instead edited them and attempted to divest Domitian from his buildings. Domitian's building program was intensive, and he had a significant impact on Rome and her topography, but over the millennia much has been lost or gone to ruin, which increases the difficulty of assessing some of his impact and presentation. Despite this, we can still see Domitian's impact in modern Rome, particularly in one of the city's most remarkable instances of urban continuity. The Stadium of Domitian may largely have disappeared physically, but its shape remains in the urban topography in the Piazza Navona, which follows the Stadium's shape

almost exactly. In this thesis we will consider a number of Domitian's buildings, among them his Palatine palace, his Stadium, some of his temples and the Colosseum (not strictly his). Beyond these we will also consider some of Domitian's imagery, which also provides insight into how he presented himself. The imagery we will consider are his coinage, the Cancellaria Reliefs, and his Equestrian Statue.

This thesis will begin with an examination of the literary sources, followed by an examination of Domitian's relationship with the senate, how it was affected by his style of rulership and how it affected Domitian's reputation after his death. In the 3rd chapter we will examine Domitian's palace and how he presented himself through it, in the 4th chapter we will look at his imagery and what he presented through that. In the 5th chapter we will explore Domitian's religious expressions through his temples and finally in chapter 6 we will explore his approach to entertainment and buildings for that purpose, and the presentation through them.

Chapter 1: The Literary Sources

The authors and literature of the late 1st century are often grouped together in what is called the Silver Age of Latin literature. In this silver age we find such noteworthy writers as Tacitus, Suetonius, and the Pliny the younger, and poets like Martial and Statius. Those who wrote the history of emperors, or unflattering poetry, tended to do so well after the emperor in question had met his demise. Tacitus, Suetonius, and their contemporaries were no exception, it was far safer to write history about a dead emperor, than a living one. The new emperor would color the literary works concerning their predecessor, for better or worse. By the time Suetonius wrote his biography of Domitian, a literary tradition depicting the deceased emperor as a paranoid tyrant had been established, helped along by the new imperial dynasty. Yet, glimpses of a more realistic depiction of Domitian can be seen in the texts and between the lines. These glimpses can often give us an impression of both Domitian the emperor, and Domitian the man. This chapter will situate the authors' context through a brief description of the authors' lives, their relationship with the emperors and their regimes, their style of writing and the literary genre they operate within. We will begin with Suetonius, and from there move on to Tacitus and Pliny the younger, followed by the poets Martial and Statius.

Suetonius

Suetonius is a natural starting point, his biographies of the Caesars make up a significant portion of the literature we have on the first emperors. In addition to recounting their lives, he

provides personal information and anecdotes about them, though these are often unverifiable and improbable tales of imperial debauchery and terror. Unsurprisingly, it is far easier to relay the lives of emperors than it is to relay the life of the biographer himself. We are able to construct an image of Suetonius' life, though not without gaps. Suetonius himself is not overly forthcoming with personal details, but some are scattered throughout his writings.² Evidence can also be found elsewhere, for example in the correspondence of Pliny the younger.³

Suetonius was likely born in the year AD 69, around the defeat of Otho and the ascension of Vespasian. Born into the equestrian class, his father served as a military tribune under Otho. His grandfather had been indirectly in contact with the court of Caligula, and so their experiences and stories would aid Suetonius when he wrote his biographies of the Caesars. Suetonius' birthplace is also a topic of discussion, an inscription found in the ancient town Hippo Regius, located in modern Algeria, seem to indicate that this was his place of birth.⁴ Regardless of the actual location of his birth, many of his formative years were likely spent in Rome and the city remained at the center of his universe.

There he attended schools for both rhetoric and grammar, receiving a standard Roman education. Details on his early life are scarce, but we can glean some from his writing. He describes himself as adolescent when a false Nero makes an appearance in 88.⁵ Elsewhere he recalls that when he was young, he was part of the audience at the examination of an old man, to determine whether he was a Jew.⁶ He was a teenager and young adult during the reign of Domitian, who was the first emperor he would have taken any significant notice of. The record of his public career is also spotty, though the inscription at Hippo and the letters of Pliny gives us some insights. Suetonius himself probably expected to pursue a legal career. In a letter to Pliny from the end of the 1st century he begs that a legal case be postponed, as he had a dream that indicated an unfavorable outcome.⁷ Pliny also helped Suetonius in securing a small estate where he could pursue his scholarly interests, and when Suetonius neared his first major publication, Pliny was there to encourage him to proceed with it.⁸ Suetonius was not alone in being mentored by Pliny, he belonged to a wider circle of centered on Pliny. In

² Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 3

³ Baldwin, *Suetonius*, p. 1

⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 5; Baldwin, *Suetonius*, p. 28-29; Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1409

⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 3; Suetonius, *Ner*, 57.2

⁶ Suetonius, *Dom*, 12.2

⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 4; Baldwin, *Suetonius*, p. 10-11

⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p.4; Baldwin, *Suetonius*, p. 10-11

this group we find one Septicius Clarus, whom both Pliny and Suetonius would dedicate literary works to. Suetonius and Clarus rose together under Trajan, and after Pliny's death both held higher offices under Hadrian.

The Hippo inscription provides further information on Suetonius' career, though it merely records formal titles and positions, with little context. He was a member of jury panels under the emperor Trajan and held some honorific priesthoods.⁹ The apex of his career was the appointment to the position of *ab epistulis* to Hadrian. However, he fell out of favor with Hadrian, alongside Septicius Clarus. They were both charged with being more familiar with the empress Sabina than court etiquette would allow, and so were relieved of their positions. At least according to Marius Maximus, whom Wallace-Hadrill states "[...] made much of Hadrian's petty jealousies".¹⁰ The incident could be exaggerated, emperors replaced officials with some regularity, and it may not have been anything but an ordinary change of staff. If Suetonius had any further public career beyond this point, it is not known to history. He presumably wrote until his death around 130.¹¹

Having looked at Suetonius himself we will now look at style and traits of his biographies. As Wallace-Hadrill points out, they bear the hallmarks of ancient scholarship, with all its flaws. He also emphasizes three stylistic choices that indicate a scholarly style: Use of technical vocabulary, admission of Greek, a foreign language, and verbatim citation of documents and sources.¹² Suetonius' biographies are also devoid of many of the flourishes of ancient historical writing.¹³ Suetonius seeks to inform the reader with concise and unadorned sentences. His aim is precision, not fine style, or elevated reading.

Suetonius appears to have had access to a variety of source materials, at least for the first volumes of his biographies. These sources ranged from witnesses to official imperial correspondence and archives. For many of the emperors, most notably Augustus, the personal writings, autobiographical material, and correspondence, of the emperors served as primary sources when available.¹⁴ Sadly, for Suetonius, and posterity, not all the emperors were inclined to write their own literary works. In particular, the post-Julio-Claudian emperors largely ceased to be men of letters, as Baldwin writes.¹⁵ The Flavian emperors had varying

⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 5-6; Baldwin, *Suetonius*, p.31

¹⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 6

¹¹ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1409

¹² Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 20

¹³ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 19

¹⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 63

¹⁵ Baldwin, *Suetonius*, p. 188

interests in the literary arts. Vespasian seems to have enjoyed the arts as a patron, rather than practitioner. Titus was well educated enough that he could throw off verses in Latin and Greek. Domitian seemed to have had a talent for writing and an interest in poetry, though this is alleged to have been part of a façade to conceal his tyrannical tendencies. The emperors involved in the civil wars of 68/69 had little time for literary pursuits during their short tenures on the throne.

In the first biographies, Suetonius cites sources and documentation well, but this declines through the volumes on the Julio-Claudians. The biographies remain substantial, but the citation of original sources is largely confined to the parts of their lives that fell under Augustus reign. The last six biographies are by far the shortest and weakest in terms of details and sources cited. While documents by the emperors themselves were lacking, there were other sources Suetonius could have used such as living witnesses and other historic literature. Wallace-Hadrill argues that the answer lies in how Suetonius approached his project. When Suetonius decided to write about the Caesars, he read the literary works of the Caesars.¹⁶ Beyond these Suetonius made use of historians and based himself on the standard histories of the principate, but to him these were not particularly exciting sources and his use of them is distinctly lacking.¹⁷ The same goes for oral sources and eyewitnesses, which there must have been plenty of, at least for the Flavian emperors. He does not seem to have made particular use of these sources, beyond rumors and orally circulated stories.

In style Suetonius lacks pretension and makes a conscious effort to “avoid” artistry. His works are in the style of other technical literature of the early empire, such as treatises on architecture and legal theory.¹⁸ Thematically, Suetonius goes out of his way to avoid producing a “historical” work. He avoids this by reducing the historical elements of his biographies to a minimum. War and politics are often brushed aside, described in a few sentences. Wallace-Hadrill exemplifies this with Suetonius’ cursory descriptions of Caesar’s gallic conquests and the mere listing of Augustus’ military successes and reverses, without any sort of narrative.¹⁹ The same goes for many important political events, including civil wars. They are consigned to short paragraphs and sentences, where their occurrence and outcomes are briefly summarized before moving onto the various aspects of the imperial person. The public and private aspects of an emperor were proper subjects of a biography and

¹⁶ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 62

¹⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 64

¹⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p.22

¹⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 16

so these were usually handled as two separate items, though Suetonius did not always keep them distinct.²⁰

Suetonius' biographies all follow a similar structure. He usually starts the biography by discussing the ancestry and family of the emperor in question and describing their place of birth. A description of the pre-imperial career of the subject then follows. He also includes personal details such as physical appearance, style of living, characteristics, and intellectual pursuits. The details vary, but groups of personal details appear in every biography and include either all of the details above, or a selection of them.²¹ Suetonius also lists the positive and negative traits of the emperors. A recurring theme for the "bad" emperors is the contrasting of their pre-imperial and early imperial careers, where their good traits are on display with their later imperial career, when the role of emperor has taken its toll, or their true cruel natures have been revealed. The content naturally varies by emperor, their activities, and personalities. Ultimately the biographies end with the subject's death, followed by summaries of his character, accomplishments and failings, vices, and virtues. Suetonius rarely offers personal commentaries, though he may relate information he was present for, such as the aforementioned inspection of an elderly man. And he often comments on the validity of the information he relates, but he keeps himself and his opinions off the center stage, though some bias is to be expected.²²

Who was meant to read Suetonius' biographies? The biographies were constructed along scholarly lines and resemble literary works on more technical subjects. The biographies were not specifically aimed at a senatorial audience, nor at the average man in the street, though representatives of both groups read his works.²³ Perhaps they were meant as a sort of instructive text for the future rulers of the empire, to provide examples of both good and bad emperors. Or perhaps it was written for the expanding equestrian bureaucracy, to give them an idea of the rulers they served. It is, however, difficult to envision either of these as the purpose of the biographies. If this were the case, Suetonius would probably have exaggerated further, and emphasized and contrasted the important points, and likely have come across as far more "preachy" than they are. Certainly, the biographies could serve as instruction to future emperors and anyone who read them, but as a side effect, rather than their intended

²⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 17

²¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 68

²² Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 23-24

²³ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 24

purpose. The biographies seem to have been written to inform those who were interested in the emperors, rather than instruct, or titillate.²⁴

Tacitus

Unlike Suetonius, Tacitus dabbled in biography, but he excelled at history. His two historical works, the *Annals* and *Histories* are considered among the great works of Latin literature and much like his friend Pliny predicted, have become immortal.²⁵ Tacitus was born in southern Gaul around 55, into an equestrian family. In his youth he received an education in rhetoric and grammar. He made himself noticed practicing law and marrying the daughter of Agricola, of whom he would produce a remarkable biography. Under Titus he served as questor and entered the senate, and under Domitian he was praetor, before becoming suffect consul the year after Domitian's assassination, perhaps nominated by the dead emperor.²⁶ In 112-13 he held the proconsulship of Asia. We do not know when he died but it is unlikely to have been before 118. Tacitus repeatedly rails against Domitian, claiming that he lost fifteen years to his tyranny. Considering his career under the Flavians, this may simply be an effort to distance himself from Domitian. His relationship with Domitian shaped his view on how the relationship between emperor and senate should and should not be.²⁷

Five of Tacitus' literary works survive to this day, The *Histories* and the *Annals* are his major historical works, which together are meant to cover the history of the Roman empire from the death of Augustus to the death of Domitian. In addition, Tacitus also produced smaller, more focused works. The *Agricola*, a dialogue on oratory and the book *Germania*, which has been listed among the hundred most dangerous books ever written.²⁸ We will not examine his work on oratory nor the *Germania* here. The *Annals* is relevant as a historical work, but we will focus on the *Histories* and touch upon the *Agricola*.

He likely began writing the *Agricola* in late 97, possibly while he was still consul. We are fortunate in that a great deal of the younger Pliny's correspondence with Tacitus survives, though it is only Pliny's letters that survive.²⁹ Unlike the biographies of Suetonius, the biography of Agricola is a far less critical work, at least where Agricola himself is concerned. Domitian is not afforded the same treatment, he is briefly mentioned early in the book, at that point as an eighteen-year-old and returns to be contrasted against the hero Agricola near the

²⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, p. 25

²⁵ Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, p. 76

²⁶ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1426

²⁷ Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, p. 78

²⁸ Krebs, "A Dangerous Book", p. 280

²⁹ Woodman, "Tacitus and the contemporary scene", p. 31

end of the book. The book naturally details the life and virtues of Agricola, but it particularly tells the story of his military achievements in Britain, contrasted by Domitian jealous of his accomplishments.³⁰ The biography ends with Tacitus declaring that Agricola would live forever in the hears of men, through the ages.³¹ The *Agricola* is partly a biographical work honoring his father-in-law, and partly a book that shows that even in the worst circumstances, men could be great, and great in the service of Rome. Likely the work is not only a tribute to Agricola, but a defense of himself and his actions during the reign of Domitian.

The *Agricola* was followed up by the *Histories*. It is the history of Tacitus' own age, the Flavian dynasty and how it shaped Rome and her empire. It begins on the first of January 69, and continues through to death of Domitian in September of 96.³² Tacitus provides a small introduction to his work, explaining the purpose of the book. Here he also remarks upon history at Rome, which had been free in the happy days of the republic, but withered during the empire, due to the political inexperience of writers and their bias.³³ He goes on to say that the historian must tell the truth, with neither favor nor malice toward anyone. Whether or not Tacitus managed this is another matter. Originally consisting of twelve books, only the first four have survived. These cover 69 and the first months of 70, a nearly unmatched level of detail for one year in a Roman historical work.³⁴

For Tacitus there were several advantages in writing about recent history, first and foremost there would have been living witnesses and fresh source material at hand, besides that which had been destroyed when the senate damned the memory of Domitian. But there were also challenges to overcome. One is related to the fact that there were many who had a personal stake in whatever was written, and of whom Tacitus' work was not particularly flattering.³⁵ Furthermore this particular challenge carried with it the potential for censorship by the emperor. Though Tacitus avoided this particular pitfall. Tacitus' use of sources did not begin nor end with living witnesses, he spent much time researching written materials as well, letters, speeches, biographies and so on.³⁶ There is little doubt he consulted a wide array of sources. Tacitus' historical works have a firm grip on the political sphere of history, he had after all been a politician long before he ever became a historian. As such, one of the recurring subjects

³⁰ Birley, "The *Agricola*", p. 50

³¹ Tac. *Agricola*. 46.4; Mellor, *Tacitus' Annals*, p. 14

³² Syme, *Tacitus*, p. 145

³³ Syme, *Tacitus*, p. 145; Tac. *Hist.* 1.1

³⁴ Master, "The *Histories*", p. 85

³⁵ Ash, "Fission and Fusion", p. 87

³⁶ Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, p. 89-90; Syme, *Tacitus*, p. 177

of Tacitus' writing is the senate and matters related to the senatorial class.³⁷ The power of the senate had waned as the power of the emperor waxed. Yet the senatorial class did not lose all relevance, they were still the political elite of Rome, and as such retained both influence and importance. As such, the emperor needed the support of senators and that support was dependent on the emperor allowing sufficient political freedom.³⁸

Tacitus' style is affected by his education and political career. Like all Roman aristocrats he received rhetorical training, which was the basis for all literary and intellectual pursuits in Rome. In his works this is often reflected by the speeches made by historical characters, speeches were a staple of historical writing in both Rome and Greece.³⁹ In addition to the speeches Tacitus makes use of other literary devices, such as digressions and parallels. He also makes use of devices from Greek tragedies like omens and dramatic pauses. Beyond the literary devices Tacitus writes history with dramatic flair, creating drama with both major and minor characters. Tacitus further enhances the texts with colorful details that bring life to the events he is recording.⁴⁰ Both the *Histories* and *Annales* followed in the annalistic history tradition, though much evolved and expanded.

Tacitus own experiences as a senator and politician informed his views on the relationship between emperor and senate, and this relationship became central in his historical writing. For Tacitus, this relationship was often dictated by the tyranny of the emperor. This tyranny restrained political liberty, and by extension the freedom of speech. And so, the freedom of the historian to write the truth diminished with the rise of Augustus and declined rapidly over the 1st century AD.⁴¹ Yet for all of Tacitus' resentment, he was tempered by realism. He resigned himself to the fact that the principate was a necessary evil to maintain peace and stability, and that a benevolent emperor willing to cooperate with the senate was for the best. In writing of tyranny Tacitus grapples not only with the historical facts of the principate but also the condition of those who live and endure tyranny to varying degrees. He provides records and analysis of themes that retain their importance to this very day, freedom of speech, political paranoia, and the corruption of power.⁴²

³⁷ Oakley, "*Res olim dissociabiles*", p. 184

³⁸ Oakley, "*Res olim dissociabiles*", p. 185

³⁹ Levene, "Speeches in the *Histories*", p. 212; Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, p. 105

⁴⁰ Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, p. 106-7

⁴¹ Mellor, *Tacitus' Annals*, p. 83 & 85

⁴² Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, p. 109

Pliny the younger

Pliny the younger, differs from our other literary sources in that he is known neither as biographer nor historian. Rather Pliny is remembered chiefly for his letters, which he published in nine volumes, and a tenth volume containing his correspondence with the emperor Trajan, published after his death. Like Tacitus, Pliny was of provincial and equestrian origin. His father was a landowner and equestrian. Pliny was born in 62, and was raised by his uncle, Pliny the Elder, himself a notable writer and official, who adopted him in his will.⁴³ Pliny received an education appropriate to his rank and attended the schools of famous professors of literature and rhetoric, including Quintilian.⁴⁴ He trained to become a lawyer, and it is in the courts he distinguished himself. He practiced law throughout his life, notably conducting prosecutions against provincial governors charged with extortion. Early in the reign of Domitian he is found doing his military service in a Syrian legion, though he seems to have served in an administrative role and saw little action.⁴⁵

Partly through his own talents in court and the help of influential family friends and patrons, Pliny climbed the social ladder. He held the quaestorship which admitted him to the senate, thus becoming a “new man”, the first senator in his family. He followed the *cursus honorum*, unimpeded, and perhaps aided by Domitian. He became praetor in 93. The same year he participated in the prosecution of Baebius Massa, a provincial governor charged with extortion by the people of his province. The prosecution was successful, a remarkable achievement, though later some of his acquaintances, including his co-prosecutor in the trial, were condemned in *maiestas* trials. Pliny would make much of this connection after the death of Domitian, as evidence that he had been in danger too.⁴⁶ After his praetorship Pliny held the prefecture of the military treasury and later prefecture of the public treasury. In September of 100 he attained the rank of suffect consul and in 110 he was sent to take up the governorship of Bithynia.⁴⁷

Pliny is chiefly remembered for his letters. They begin in 97 and continue into 108, after which he took up his post as governor of Bithynia. His active correspondence did not cease when he assumed the governorship, and in particular he maintained an active correspondence with Trajan while he was governor. Pliny’s letters are about affairs of the moment, advice, requests, news etc. but they are composed in a deliberate manner, written in

⁴³ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1162

⁴⁴ Sherwin-White, “Pliny, the Man and His Letters”, p. 76

⁴⁵ Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny*, p. 72-73

⁴⁶ Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny*, p. 75

⁴⁷ Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny*, p. 80-81

style as it were. The products of a societal elite with considerable literary education and the spare time to exercise it.⁴⁸ In language Pliny seems to have intended that the letters should be a mix of relatively simple language and poetic vocabulary, though influenced by his education and experience as a lawyer.⁴⁹ The letters are composed following certain restrictions, rarely broken. They mostly stick to one theme or subject per letter, the length being appropriate to the subject.⁵⁰ They are, usually, just as long as they need to be, written using the sharp, powerful, colorful, or emotive language of the rhetorical schools, according to what was appropriate to the subject.⁵¹

In addition to his letters we also have Pliny's panegyric to Trajan. The panegyric was an oration delivered in the senate by Pliny on the occasion of attaining the *suffect consulship* in 100 AD. It is an homage to the emperor Trajan, and a "vote of thanks" by Pliny for receiving the consulship.⁵² In the late republic there were also orations held by newly elected consuls, by the imperial period these evolved into a speech of thanks to the emperor, who was now the source of favor and dictated, subtly or not so subtly, who attained the consulship. In style the panegyric differs from his published letters. Where the letters are concise and detail offered where relevant, the panegyric is long winded and full of detail and elaborate rhetoric.⁵³ The panegyric follows a roughly chronological structure, which fits the theme of contrasting Trajan with Domitian.⁵⁴ In the panegyric Pliny emphasizes sincerity and a lack of flattery, he makes a point of Trajan's modesty and refusal of private praise, and in this way underscores the truthfulness of the virtues he assigns to Trajan, and, by extension, the truth of the accusations leveled against Domitian.

It is important to note that the panegyric Pliny published is a revised and expanded version of the speech he delivered, and it is longer than the original. It is a homage to Trajan, but it is also Pliny's expression of how a good emperor should act. In his own words the speech was delivered so that good rulers should recognize their own (good) deeds, and bad ones learn what theirs ought to be.⁵⁵ Naturally, the emperor must not be tyrannical, for this will ensure that good and honest men do not partake in politics nor government. To those that

⁴⁸ Sherwin-White, "Pliny, the Man and His Letters", p. 76-77

⁴⁹ Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny*, p. 5

⁵⁰ Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny*, p. 3-4

⁵¹ Sherwin-White, "Pliny, the Man and His Letters", p. 77

⁵² Roche "Pliny's thanksgiving", p. 1; Radice, "Pliny and the Panegyricus", p. 166

⁵³ Radice, "Pliny and the 'Panegyricus'", p. 169-70; Roche "Pliny's thanksgiving", p. 3

⁵⁴ Innes, "The *Panegyricus* and rhetorical theory", p. 78

⁵⁵ Plin. *Pan.* 4.1

can least endure tyranny, a good emperor like Trajan is most welcome.⁵⁶ The panegyric tells us what Pliny, and by extension the senate, expects from a good emperor, and praising Trajan for doing just those things. The panegyric specifies how Trajan is a good emperor, contrast is provided by using the deceased Domitian as an example of a bad emperor. The Domitian described by Pliny is far from an honest representation of the emperor, he is constructed to contrast.⁵⁷ And the Domitian Pliny presents is not a flattering figure.

The panegyric emphasizes the differences between the tyrant Domitian and the “perfect prince” Trajan. A clear effort is being made to support the story and legitimacy of the new dynasty after they came to power in the wake of Domitian’s assassination. They wanted to show that they were different from him and they were to renew Rome. At the same time as discontinuity is argued, there was continuity and connectedness between the dynasties, particularly in the public monuments built by the Flavian emperors. While smaller monuments had been destroyed when Domitian’s memory was damned, this was simply unfeasible with the larger ones. Thus, the new imperial dynasty made concerted efforts to divest the buildings and monuments of their Domitian associations and imbue them with the qualities of the new regime. Pliny’s panegyric and the treatment of monuments in the speech plays a role in this process.⁵⁸

The Poets

The poets Martial and Statius present us with a rather different problem than Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny do. Where the three aforementioned authors must be considered in a post-Domitian context, where discrediting Domitian was the fashion. The poets produced much of their literature during the reign of Domitian and presents us with almost a polar opposite, praising Domitian and his works, rather than disparaging them. When considering these poets and their works, one must keep in mind the dynamics of Roman patron-client relationships and how they affected the poetry produced, especially when the patron was the emperor.⁵⁹ Before Domitian became emperor, his own literary productions were remarked upon, among these productions were some poetry. Domitian abandoned his poetry after he became emperor but continued to cultivate a literary identity.⁶⁰ As emperor he encouraged literary productions through both personal and community patronage. Both Statius and

⁵⁶ Plin. *Pan.* 45

⁵⁷ Roche “Pliny’s thanksgiving”, p. 10-11

⁵⁸ Roche, “The *Panegyricus* and the Monuments of Rome”, p. 45-46

⁵⁹ Newlands, *Statius’ Silvae*, p. 29

⁶⁰ Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons*, p. 327

Martial shared in the imperial patronage to varying extents, and in part depended upon it for their success. In this section we will review both poets and take a brief look at the structure and nature of their poems.

Stattus

The little we know of the poet and his origins comes from his own poems. He hailed from Naples and was the son of Stattus the elder. His father was also a poet, and it is likely that Stattus learned the craft from him. Stattus composed a poem lamenting his father's death, which provides us with some background for him and his family. His father originally hailed from Velia, an ancient Greek colony. It is likely that the family belonged to the local aristocracy but were not of Roman equestrian rank.⁶¹ The elder Stattus became a professional Greek poet in Naples and participated in the wide circuit of Greek poetry contests in the Mediterranean, competing successfully in both Italy and on the Greek mainland. Later he became a teacher of Greek poetry, educating the children of well-born families, first in Naples and later in Rome.⁶² While in Rome he established a connection to the Flavian family when he composed a poem as a reaction to the burning of the Capitoline in 69, the poem was praised by Domitian.

Stattus was likely born sometime between 45 and 50, in Naples before his father moved the family to Rome in Stattus' teens. Stattus himself did not take up a career as a Greek poet nor teacher. He instead became a Latin poet, and was successful, holding recitals for senatorial audiences when he was still young.⁶³ Later recitals of his epic poetry were considered great social successes. He won the poetry competition at Domitian's Alban games, likely in 90, but did not follow up on this success in the much more prestigious Capitoline games, probably held later that same year. Little is known of Stattus material status, though he owned an estate at Alba Longa, which might have been given to his father by Domitian.⁶⁴ Stattus returned to Naples, likely in 95, and died the same year. He published his epic work the *Thebaid* in 91-92, and four volumes of occasional poetry known as the *Silvae* over the period 93-95. Another volume of the *Silvae* was published after his death along with his unfinished second epic, the *Achileid*.⁶⁵

The poems of the *Silvae* are so-called occasional poems, composed in the heat of the

⁶¹ Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons*, p. 198-99

⁶² Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons*, p. 200; Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1397

⁶³ Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons*, p. 203

⁶⁴ Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons*, p. 202

⁶⁵ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1397

moment. Statius claims that none of the poems took more than two days to compose.⁶⁶ This should be taken with some skepticism, in part because the poems were published as books. They might have been inspired in the moment, but they likely went through an editorial process before they were published. Possibly the poems were first recited and evaluated and revised before publication.⁶⁷ The thirty-two poems of the *Silvae* are each dedicated to a patron, six of them being dedicated to Domitian. They are dedicated to a wide variety of individuals, the majority were not major public figures. Among them we find rich men who had stepped back from public life, imperial freedmen, and Neapolitans.⁶⁸ Statius' poems address a wide range of people, both public and private, and the poet ran the risk of offending someone when praising a friend, particularly dangerous if said friend was the target of imperial displeasure.⁶⁹

Martial

Martial, was born in March, between 38 and 41, in the town of Bilbilis in Spain, near modern Zaragoza. Bilbilis had received status as *municipium* during the reign of Augustus, which meant that magistrates and their families received Roman citizenship. Martial's parents were native Spaniards, and his father was likely a magistrate which ensured the citizenship for his son and the means to provide him with a standard Roman education in grammar and oratory.⁷⁰ In his early twenties Martial moved to Rome, arriving in 64. He was likely introduced to the social circle of Seneca, another noteworthy Spaniard. The circle included members like Calpurnius Piso, who was a generous patron by all accounts, and the poet Lucan. Unfortunately for Martial, a conspiracy to replace Nero with Piso was suppressed in 65, which left the social circle in ruins and Seneca and Lucan dead by their own hand.⁷¹ In the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy Martial had to rely upon other, less generous patrons to support himself.

Martial spent the next fifteen years mustering what wealthy patrons he could, maintaining his Spanish connections, including the widow of Lucan. He likely received his estate north-east of Rome as a gift from Seneca or Seneca's heirs.⁷² He continued to practice his poetry and material from this period may have been of great use when began publishing

⁶⁶ Newlands, *Statius' Silvae*, p. 33

⁶⁷ Newlands, *Statius' Silvae*, p. 33

⁶⁸ Nauta, *Poetry for Patrons*, p. 206; Newlands, *Statius' Silvae*, p. 28

⁶⁹ Newlands, *Statius' Silvae*, p. 21-22

⁷⁰ Sullivan, *Martial the Unexpected Classic*, p. 2; Howell, *Martial*, p. 10

⁷¹ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 904

⁷² Sullivan, *Martial the Unexpected Classic*, p. 4

collections of his epigrams around 83-85. After Nero's death and the civil war of 69, Martial worked his way into the good graces of the Flavians. Martial's earliest extant book, the *Liber Spectacolorum*, was written in celebration of the opening of the Colosseum in 80 and may have earned him the favor of Titus. Titus gave Martial the privileges normally afforded men who had three children, Martial was himself unwed and childless.⁷³ Domitian later confirmed the privileges after he became emperor and at some point, Martial was given an honorary tribunate, making him an equestrian.

In 86 Martial published his first two of twelve books of epigrams. These books reveal that Martial was well-established with a wide circle of close and influential friends and patrons. The publishing of his books opened his poems to a far wider audience. In 87 he published the third book, from the town today known as Imola. After this third book the tone in Martial's epigrams change, taking on greater political and historical awareness. In these works, Martial becomes more aligned with the emperor and the Flavian dynasty, there are fewer satiric epigrams and more epigrams addressed to Domitian or alluding to him.⁷⁴ Among the new patrons present in the book is Domitian's chamberlain and later assassin, the freedman Parthenius.

His support for Domitian continues through book IX, which was likely published in early 95. The original book X was likely published late in 95, but the copy left to us is a revised edition published in mid-98. It is not difficult to imagine why Martial revised it after the assassination of Domitian in 96. Similarly affected was book XI, which was published in December of 96, only three months after the death of Domitian. Large portions of the book must have been thrown out, poems in honor of Domitian not being in demand anymore. The opening poem of the book is addressed to Parthenius, Domitian's chamberlain and later assassin, who was still influential and a friend to Martial, but his execution by the praetorian guard in 97 put an end to that relationship.⁷⁵ The revised book X was published late in 98, just before Martial returned to Bilbilis. Politically the book is an attempt to ingratiate himself with the new dynasty, but Martial was aware that he stood little chance of regaining his former position as court poet. His retreat to Spain was prudent given the political climate in Rome. Martial's final book, book XII, was published from Spain in 101, three years after the previous book. The book reveals that Martial had become disillusioned with life in the provinces and he complains about the lack of a stimulating literary society. By 104 Martial

⁷³ Howell, *Martial*, p. 16

⁷⁴ Sullivan, *Martial the Unexpected Classic*, p. 33

⁷⁵ Sullivan, *Martial the Unexpected Classic*, p. 46

was dead.⁷⁶

Martial is rightly famous for his epigrams, a genre he stuck to studiously. He makes clear his dislike for the pretentious and hypocritical, and the epigram allowed Martial to avoid falling into that trap.⁷⁷ Martial's epigrams are defined by his wit, pointedness, and satire. And his style has more or less come to define the genre. As Sullivan writes: "Martial is the heir and, in many ways, the culmination of the long tradition of Greek and Roman epigram writing."⁷⁸

Chapter 2: Rulership and Senatorial Relations

The death of Domitian at the hands of his own courtiers and servants ended an imperial dynasty just short of its thirtieth anniversary. Domitian left no clear line of succession, and his death could have plunged the empire into another bout of civil wars. Instead, the senate rallied around their shared dislike of Domitian and proclaimed the elderly Nerva as emperor, simultaneously damning Domitian's memory. The accession of Nerva and the new imperial dynasty, succession secured by means of adoption, saw the new emperors spend time and effort discrediting and disparaging the reign of the last Flavian, in order to legitimize themselves and their usurpation of power. And through distancing themselves from Domitian they also sought to maintain a far better relationship with the senate and societal elite than Domitian had.

In the act of distancing itself from Domitian, the new dynasty quickly established the appropriate ways of remembering him and sowing the seed for a literary tradition that would almost utterly condemn Domitian as a bloodthirsty tyrant. This imperially endorsed biased in the literary sources muddles the waters and makes a fair assessment of Domitian all the more difficult. This chapter will explore the context of Domitian's rule and his relationship with the senate, and contrast how Domitian interacted and worked with the senate with how other emperors managed it.

The pretense of Republicanism.

One of the most defining features of Domitian's reign and approach to rulership was its undisguised autocratic nature. In ruling Domitian relied almost entirely on his court and his own micromanagement of affairs, excluding the senate from any real or meaningful contribution to government. To better contextualize how this broke with how previous

⁷⁶ Howell, *Martial*, p. 31-2

⁷⁷ Howell, *Martial*, p. 49

⁷⁸ Sullivan, *Martial the Unexpected Classic*, p. 78

emperors operated, it is pertinent to look at Augustus's relationship with the senate and government, before again focusing on Domitian. Augustus established much of the precedent later emperors worked with, particularly in his efforts to disguise the monarchical nature of his reign with the pretense of Republicanism and successful relationship between himself and the senate.

Augustus stated aim during the civil wars was to restore the republic and to "right the ship", so to speak. And while this all made for fine stirring rhetoric, Augustus had no intention of returning Rome to the status quo ante bellum. He had installed himself as the leading man in Rome and aimed to keep it that way. Augustus went about this with far more tact than most other autocrats and veiled his autocracy in a cloak of republican imagery and tradition.

Among the things Augustus did to entrench himself further and to "restore" the republic was to reform the senate. During the last century of the republic the senate had grown, accumulating more than a thousand members. For Augustus, some measure of control over the senate, however veiled that control was, was central to his power, and a large body of senators was inherently less controllable than a smaller one. The first reduction occurred in 29-28 BC, when those who were clearly unfit were removed, bringing its number down to around eight hundred.⁷⁹ Further cuts were made a decade or so later, when the number was brought back to the Sullan size of six hundred. Eligibility for membership after Augustus' pruning was based on wealth, Senators now needing a fortune of at least one million sesterces. Augustus also realized that many worthy candidates for the Senate would be rendered ineligible by the new rules. And he was quick to aid many of these fulfill the requirement, by way of generous donations, putting them in his debt and further strengthening his position.

Augustus' relationship with the senate remained good throughout his reign, many aspects contributed to this. Importantly, he involved the senate and the traditional offices of the republic in the administration and governing of the empire. Some offices were expanded in number, some were reduced. From 5 BC the system of suffect consuls was introduced, meaning that the ordinary consuls, who took office in January, relinquished their posts, usually around July, and two new consuls were installed. This effectively doubled the number of consuls per year. While the power of the consul was effectively halved, it also meant that

⁷⁹ Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, p.80-81; Talbert, "The Senate and Senatorial and Equestrian Posts", p. 324-25

more senators attained the office and the prestige and privileges that brought.⁸⁰ Throughout his reign Augustus enacted policies to make the senate a central part of government and empowering it further. At the same time, he attempted ensure his own and his successors position as the effective head of state. Essentially, he ensured that any real decision-making process lay with him. It is unlikely that weakening the senate was a central part of his plan to make himself indispensable, indeed, the evidence argues against it. All positions with any power were left in the hands of senators. Every provincial governor in charge of legions came from the ranks of the senate. The only exception being the Egyptian prefecture.⁸¹ The Senate was responsible for extensive legislating and its resolutions were recognized as law without any of Rome's traditional assemblies ratifying them.⁸² Despite empowering the senate, the body declined as initiators of policy or suggestions of policy. More and more the senate followed Augustus' lead, rather than taking the initiative.⁸³

In summary, Augustus and the Senate got along well, and his interactions with this body in many ways provided the blueprint for successful interactions between emperor and senate. But it is also important to remember that Augustus benefited from the ravages of civil war in his relationship with the senate. Much of the old, hardline, republican senate had died over the course of the conflicts. And those who remained of the old guard were tired of war and like many Romans, welcomed the stability Augustus brought. Those who were discontent or actively worked against Augustus were few in number, and many were culled from the senate. Augustus firmly established himself and his legacy, though this did not render him immune to criticism after his death. Suetonius both praises and criticizes the first emperor. But for all the criticisms levied against him after his death, Augustus was never portrayed as the evil tyrant, who lusted for power and delighted in cruelty. He was, for his flaws, the hero who saved Rome from itself and the disastrous political machinations of the late republic that had brought Rome to the brink. Augustus' successors took steps to cement Augustus' legacy as *Pater Patria*, a luxury that Domitian was never afforded.

Domitian's Autocracy & Relationship with the Senate

There is difficulty in fairly assessing Domitian and his legacy, given that our primary sources are so firmly biased against him. However, an attempt must be made if we are to understand the new emperors' efforts of disassociating their reigns with Domitian's, and the effort they

⁸⁰ Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, p. 84

⁸¹ Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, p. 86

⁸² Talbert, "The Senate and Senatorial and Equestrian Posts", p. 331

⁸³ Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, p. 87

went to in discrediting him. Domitian's relationship with the aristocracy deteriorated steadily through his fifteen years as emperor. The senate as a body had declined in relevance and political power through the first century of imperial rule, Domitian was not responsible for this decline, but he accelerated it and made little attempt to disguise the fact.

It appears that Domitian generally bore no ill-will towards senators as a class. However, he did not involve the senate, as an institution, in the government of the empire, on any more than on a superficial level. Even in cases where the senate easily could have been consulted without the outcome being appreciably altered, Domitian instead chose to bypass the senate and expedite matters himself. Southern uses a matter of land delineation in Cyrene, as an example of this. The matter was not immediately pressing and could have been discussed by the senate without much issue or significant delay. Instead, Domitian wrote directly to the proconsul of Cyrene, which expedited the issue but consequently left the senate ignored and with a sense of irrelevance.⁸⁴ Over the course of his reign Domitian made little secret of his autocratic view. He held numerous of the ordinary consulships, in many instances giving up the office before the month of January was out. And he had himself made censor for life, granting him further control over the senate and the senatorial class.⁸⁵

Domitian relied far more on his court in matters of governance than the senate. Jones writes that Domitian focused on the development of a group of men to aid in the governance of the empire. These men were not chosen purely on merit or from the senatorial ranks. They were chosen by Domitian because he believed he could trust and depend on them, and they came from both the ranks of the equestrian and senatorial orders. From the start, Domitian did little to conceal the autocratic nature of his rule.⁸⁶ And as emperor Domitian demanded respect and obeisance from his subjects.⁸⁷ He used titles and offices to reinforce the point and the majesty of his imperial personage, more reminiscent of the latter Roman emperors and medieval monarchs. This is not to say that Domitian completely ignored other patricians and senators. Concessions were made, often in the form of allowing senators to hold the consulship. Charges are levied against Domitian, and the Flavians in general, that they held the ordinary consulship far too often and allowed nobody else to hold the prestigious office. In the first years of his reign, Domitian followed in his father's footsteps and held the ordinary consulship alongside relatives. During the same years Flavian supporters held

⁸⁴ Southern, *Domitian*, p.49

⁸⁵ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 162

⁸⁶ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 161; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 45

⁸⁷ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 45-46

suffect consulships.⁸⁸ From 84 to 88 Flavians held only half of the ordinary consulships. And in the last eight years of his reign Domitian and his family held only four out of sixteen ordinary consulships, three of them being held by Domitian himself. By comparison, during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, members of the Flavian family had held all but six of the ordinary consulships. Augustus had held the consulship every year between 31 BC and 23 BC, but he was exceptional. Claudius had been consul five times, one of those before he became emperor and Nero held the consulship five times as well, in 58 the Senate proposed that Nero hold the office indefinitely, but this was turned down.⁸⁹ During his 19-year reign, Trajan held only four consulships.⁹⁰ This is generally seen as part of Trajan's deliberate efforts to distance himself from Domitian. Domitian did hold the ordinary consulship more times than other emperors, but he was far more generous with the office than his father or brother had been.

A further problem for relations between Domitian and the senate may have been his censorship. Established in the early republic, the office of censor carried with it no imperium and was not entitled to an escort of lictors. It did however come with significant authority and influence, and in the republic, it was considered the highest office on the *cursus honorum*, only ex-consuls were eligible to hold it. Naturally, the censors were responsible for the census of Roman citizens, and in this capacity, they were also responsible for the membership rolls of the senate. After the republic fell, censors ceased to be elected and the emperors assumed responsibility for their functions.⁹¹ While previous emperors had held the censorship for a period, Domitian assumed the censorship in perpetuity. Little is known of how he used the censorship, but it empowered him to supervise the senate, its finances, and morals, and to dismiss members and induct new ones.⁹² After Domitian the powers of the censor became embedded in the emperorship, and his successors used them without holding the office.⁹³ This perpetual control over the senate may have caused more resentment against Domitian and served as a further reminder of his power and the impotence of the senate as a body. Domitian perpetual censorship may also be seen in conjunction with his other titles, of which there were many. The titles he adopted brought with them a certain amount of gravitas and created a certain distance between him and his subjects. Southern argues that Domitian's use

⁸⁸ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 164

⁸⁹ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 207; Wiedemann, "Tiberius to Nero", p. 240, 246

⁹⁰ Griffin, "Nerva to Hadrian", p. 103-4

⁹¹ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 296

⁹² Southern, *Domitian*, p. 49

⁹³ Eck, "Emperor, Senate and Magistrates", p. 216-17

of titles may be related to his own insecurities that required reassurance, and that the titles provided that. She also writes that Domitian, with his need for solitude and privacy, felt that he could not operate successfully without this distance.⁹⁴ We may see some of the same reflected in how he presents himself in his buildings, where he creates a distance between himself and the rest of society, by portraying himself as closer to the gods. Domitian's supposed use of the title *Dominus et Deus* may have stemmed from the same insecurity and need to create distance between himself and others. Though Jones argues that Domitian did not insist on the use of the title, being intelligent enough to know that he was not a god, and committed to traditional Roman religion, but that he did not actively discourage flatterers who made use of it.⁹⁵

The early years of Domitian's reign were marked by efforts to satisfy the senate with both ordinary and suffect consulships. But as his reign matured positions of power, however little actual power they wielded, were increasingly given to men Domitian considered reliable or at the very least not dangerous. Actual governance was concentrated in the hands of Domitian's "power set".⁹⁶ The imperial court and this "power set" was not an innovation on Domitian's part, it had been a fact of imperial rule since Augustus. But Domitian made little effort to conceal his exclusion of the senate from power.⁹⁷ The focus on these men excluded more and more senators from the administration of the empire.⁹⁸ And while Domitian evidently made concessions to individual senators, the senate as an institution wielded no practical power. Senatorial decrees were proclaimed, among these decrees that the emperor was not to execute anyone of his own order. Such decrees carried little practical force and were all but ignored by Domitian. He also spent considerable time outside of Rome, bringing his court and the center of power with him when he went. He held court at his countryside residence and brought the court with him when he went on campaign. The emperor's travels also included logistical considerations, rituals, and vows and prayers for the emperor's safe return. The elaborate preparations and rituals surrounding these imperial journeys were reminders to the senate that the government of the empire could be separated from both the senate and Rome itself.⁹⁹

Domitian was not alone in travelling, practically every emperor did so at one time or

⁹⁴ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 36

⁹⁵ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 108-9

⁹⁶ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 192

⁹⁷ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 22

⁹⁸ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 197

⁹⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 27

another, but his failure to maintain a cordial relationship with the senate and involve them, at least superficially, in government further strained the relationship. And exaggerated the fact that the emperor was the center of power, and it travelled with him, leaving the senate and Rome behind. Domitian spent considerable amounts of time away from the city, perhaps as much as a fifth of his reign was spent outside Rome and Italy.¹⁰⁰ Augustus had travelled extensively, but other Julio-Claudians had depended on deputies while they remained at Rome or in the vicinity. Famously Tiberius retreated to Capri, but Sejanus remained as his proxy in Rome. Trajan also spent considerable time on campaign, but the absence of him and his court may not have been as keenly felt due to his efforts to maintain cordial relations with the body. In this arrangement the senate entrusted affairs of the state to the princeps, in return Trajan accepted that the fiction that the senate remained the source of legal power in Rome.¹⁰¹

In the reign of Domitian, like the reigns of the previous emperors, the court was the heart of imperial government and politics, and it was here that policy was made, and decisions taken. This also meant that the decision-making process, which in the republic had been practiced in the open spaces of the Senate and on the Forum, now became a private affair. Access to the court was possible via two avenues: connections to one of the powerful families which currently enjoyed imperial favor, or through one of the emperor's freedmen. Who, through their offices, controlled access to the emperor.¹⁰² The court was not made up of a cabinet of ministers with permanent positions, it was a body in constant flux. This is in sharp contrast to the Senate, in which membership was a legal status and with formal procedures.¹⁰³ The imperial court was usually associated with the imperial residence on the palatine hill, but it was not limited to this specific location, as we saw above, when Domitian and other emperors travelled, they brought their courts with them. Thus, the court and the center of power went wherever the emperor went, though it did not necessarily bring all the members of the court with it.

The prominent members of the court were the imperial *Amici*, the emperor's friends. These served as advisers and consultants for the emperor, on matters they were well versed in. They were soldiers and politicians, many of them senators, several equestrians and some were even freedmen. These friends and advisors did not hold any official office nor position

¹⁰⁰ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 27

¹⁰¹ Bennet, *Trajan*, p. 108

¹⁰² Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 23; Wallace-Hadrill, "The Imperial Court", p. 284

¹⁰³ Wallace-Hadrill, "The Imperial Court", p. 286

as *amici*, though they may very well have held other offices or titles.¹⁰⁴ The services and expertise of the *amici* were called upon when needed. These men close to emperor's often had a knack for continuing their service after the death of their original benefactor, and among Domitian's *amici* we find men inherited from his brother, though not every advisor survived or retained their influence. Some managed to maintain their presence at court through successive regimes. Many of Domitian's *amici* survived the transition and continued their services to the emperor after the accession of Nerva. Trajan was notably one of these survivors.¹⁰⁵

While Domitian failed to maintain good relations with the senate and exacerbated this with his open admission of the monarchical nature of imperial rule, his relationship with the army was better. Like most emperors he realized that the legions were the best source of power in the empire and that their allegiance was vital. His first act after Titus died was to secure the loyalty of the praetorians with a large donative and they hailed him as imperator.¹⁰⁶ He also raised the soldiers' pay by a third, which must have endeared him to the troops.

Domitian's relationship with the senate was not helped when in the latter part of his reign, Domitian changed his policy regarding informers, and came to rely upon them more. When he first came to power he had, like many other emperors, denounced overzealous informers and attempted to keep them in check by penalizing false accusations.¹⁰⁷ The accusations of informers often had disastrous consequences for the accused, and could result in banishment, death, and seizure of property. Both Cassius Dio and Suetonius level charges of senatorial executions against Domitian and Suetonius provides a list of consular victims.¹⁰⁸ These men were charged with a variety of crimes. Three were charged with revolution, one with atheism, the rest with trivial charges.¹⁰⁹ It is likely that the charges against the ex-consuls were downplayed by senators and writers, to emphasize the tyranny of Domitian. Even if the charges against them were related to us with complete honesty, it is not unlikely that some of the senators expressed or behaved in ways that seemed suspicious or treasonous to any autocrat, not just Domitian. For Domitian, and every other emperor, plots were very real and genuine threat to their lives, and many found it better to be safe than sorry.

The final years of Domitian's reign were marked by increasing suspicion and a

¹⁰⁴ Southern, *Domitian*, p.39; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 50

¹⁰⁵ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 40

¹⁰⁶ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 35; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 20-21

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 180-81

¹⁰⁸ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 182-88

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 188

lessening inclination to explain himself and his actions. When Domitian finally met his end on September 18th, 96, the senate spared little time in proclaiming Nerva as emperor. The plot to assassinate Domitian was not carried out by the senate. In the end it had been members of his own court that killed him. His poor relationship with the senate ensured his bad legacy. As swiftly as the senate hailed Nerva as emperor, they condemned Domitian's memory and went to work erasing him from the historical record. Or at the very least, paint him as villainously as they could.

The New Dynasty

The accession of Nerva marked a new beginning for the senate. Nerva was not the obvious candidate for the imperial throne, neither exceptional statesman nor general. But several qualities recommended him to the senate, he was one of their own and they were confident that he would not turn on them. Secondly, he had long experience with the politics of the empire, though he does not appear to have held any senior post nor served as governor. Though he was ordinary consul twice under the Flavian emperors.¹¹⁰ And perhaps most importantly, he was old and childless. Unlikely to rock the boat whilst alive nor plunge the empire into another civil war when he died. Nerva's reign contrasted with Domitian's exactly the way the senators had hoped. Men charged with treason were released and exiles brought home. Political liberty was "restored". Not everyone was equally pleased with the murder of Domitian, and though it did not materialize immediately after his death, soon enough the praetorians demanded the assassins' heads. Nerva was forced to comply and thank them for it afterwards. Nerva was never meant as a permanent solution, but his elevation postponed the problem and averted civil war, no one wanted a repeat of 69. The question of succession was solved with Nerva's adoption of Trajan, a man with a distinguished career and popularity among the soldiers.¹¹¹ Trajan succeeded Nerva in 98.

Nerva and his successors, were determined to maintain a better relationship with the senate than Domitian, or at least the pretense of involving the senate in matters of state. They followed through with the condemnation of Domitian and stuck to the senatorial line. Equally important was legitimizing their rule and the usurpation of power. The new dynasty encouraged the unfavorable depiction of Domitian and quickly established "guidelines" for how the tyrant was to be portrayed. Had they been a flash in the pan, lasting no longer than Nerva, Domitian's reputation would likely not have suffered nearly as much. But this was not

¹¹⁰ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1010

¹¹¹ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1011

to be, Nerva adopted Trajan as his heir, who subsequently adopted Hadrian and so the adoptive emperors kept the line alive for a century, until the death of Commodus. By Hadrian, Domitian's reputation was firmly established along with a literary tradition that placed listed him with emperors like Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero. He was depicted as a callous, paranoid, and bloodthirsty tyrant, exhibiting the worst character traits an emperor could possess. The authors who wrote the histories and biographies of Domitian rose to prominence and flourished under the new regime. Many of them were close to the imperial power structure, Pliny the younger for example served as provincial governor and maintained an extensive correspondence with Trajan. And Suetonius served as secretary to Hadrian. The bias against Domitian is firmly established in the works of men like Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius, though with varying degrees of intensity.

Having looked at both Domitian and Augustus' relations with the senate, it is also prudent to consider Trajan's relationship with the body more closely. By the time Trajan became emperor the senate had been in decline for more than a century. It had ceased to have any real political power, though it retained importance in matters of disputed successions and in selecting a princeps. But after having selected a candidate, the body had no way to control or check the emperor. In effect, with his control of the army and a variety of powers and imperium invested in him, the princeps was in effect an absolute monarch. The perception of this only held in check by the emperor's decorum and willingness to at least maintaining the appearance of involving the senate in government.¹¹² The power of the princeps and his relationship with the senate was thus built more on traditions and norms than precise formulations and laws. Trajan took steps to formalize the relationship. Bennet writes that the appearance of the inscription "SPQR OPTIMO PRINC" on coins minted in Trajan's reign, implied that the supreme authority of the princeps was granted to him by both the people and senate of Rome. These were after all the source of all legitimate authority in Rome, or at least, that was what the princeps wanted to present.¹¹³ Thus Trajan was given a free hand to reign, while keeping the senate happy by recognizing them as the source of legitimate power and their rights in the governance of Rome.

In reality, Trajan remained in control and through nominations to the consulships and the strategic placement of trusted individuals in important magistracies and offices ensured that he got his will. The agreement between Trajan and the senate was little more than a

¹¹² Bennet, *Trajan*, p. 107

¹¹³ Bennet, *Trajan*, p. 108

political nicety and a tacit acknowledgment that the emperor was in charge. Regardless of the actual political situation, Trajan maintained respect for the senate and its dignity, abstaining from ruling by decree and orders.¹¹⁴ Trajan also took efforts to project an image of humility, prompting Pliny to describe him as “one of us”.¹¹⁵ In contrast to the Flavians, Trajan only held the consulship four times during his nineteen years as emperor, two of those times directly connected to his wars against the Dacians. Furthermore, Trajan acknowledged the senate’s traditional role in war and foreign policy and insisted that the defeated Dacians send envoys to the senate to ratify the terms of the peace treaty. In the subsequent second Dacian war, Trajan had the senate declare the Dacian king an enemy of Rome before going to war.¹¹⁶ Trajan further encouraged the senate to share in the burden of caring for the empire, and he participated in the curia and its proceedings.¹¹⁷ Perhaps most importantly Trajan refused to try any senators for *maiestas*. Like his predecessors he swore an oath to not kill any senators, Trajan also swore to not exile any nor disenfranchise them. His oath had one important provision however, and that was that it was his personal oath, which allowed the senate itself to bring forward *maiestas* charges and penalties if they saw fit.¹¹⁸

Trajan’s relationship with the senate was defined by his civility towards it, even though all actual power had been concentrated in his hands. His openness and avoidance of confrontations helped maintain this positive relationship. Trajan’s legacy was firmly cemented as good because of how he acted towards the senate, avoiding openly authoritarian rule, instead ruling through suggestion, and making his wishes known through consuls and his *consilium*.¹¹⁹ Combine Trajan’s successful relationship with the senate, his popularity among the people and his distinguished military career, and you have an emperor who would be remembered by the title afforded him early in his reign, *Optimus*.

Domitian’s way of governing was not markedly different from his predecessors nor his successors, Trajan was no less an autocrat than Domitian. Where they do differ is in their efforts to maintain the appearance of the senate’s relevance and positive relations with the body. The senate had declined in power since Augustus, despite efforts to shore up the body’s part in governance and administration. Attempts by for example Tiberius to have the Senate participate more in government failed, in part due to the autocratic nature of imperial reign,

¹¹⁴ Bennet, *Trajan*, p. 109

¹¹⁵ Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian”, p. 103

¹¹⁶ Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian”, p. 105

¹¹⁷ Bennet, *Trajan*, p. 109; Griffin, “Nerva to Hadrian”, p. 103

¹¹⁸ Bennet, *Trajan*, p. 110

¹¹⁹ Bennet, *Trajan*, p. 213

despite the concealment of said autocracy. Trajan relied as much on his court and councilors as Domitian, but he was willing to be civil towards the senate and expressed humility towards it. It cost him little to play nice and keep up the appearances of involving the senate in government, furthermore Trajan was helped by being the second in a near century long line of successful and stable imperial reigns, and his legacy was cemented by his successors. Had Domitian died under natural circumstances and been succeeded by an heir of his own, it is not unlikely his reputation would have been better.

Chapter 3: Domitian and the Palatine

The palace complex Domitian built on the palatine hill remains his most enduring architectural achievement. Construction of the palace likely began when Domitian became emperor in 81 and was finished in 92. The palace became the definitive imperial residence in Rome and despite what his senatorial contemporaries and imperial successors said of him, they retained the use of Domitian's palace and never substantially altered it. The ruins of the palace still make for impressive viewing in the heart of Rome. The ruins give us an impression of the grandness of the palace and how it felt to look upon the home of the emperor. The palace's imposing presence in the city can give us an idea of how Domitian wished to present himself and his emperorship. In this chapter we will delve deeper into Domitian's palace and what it means for how Domitian presented himself to the populace of Rome. To achieve this, we will look at the history of the Palatine, the palace itself and its layout and how it featured in the literary works of both writers patronized by Domitian and his detractors, writing after his death.

In exploring Domitian's palace, it is worthwhile to look at the history of the imperial residences on the palatine hill, and some of the history of the hill itself. According to some of the Romans' oldest traditions and legends, Romulus had his residence, a hut, on the southwestern corner of the Palatine. Archeological finds on the hill support some of the ancient traditions surrounding the hill. The remains of 9th century BC huts and several tombs have been found on the Palatine.¹²⁰ Over the centuries the hill became increasingly settled as Rome expanded. In the republican period, with the city spreading over a wider area, the Palatine became home to Rome's wealthier and politically powerful citizens. Various houses dating to the republican period have been found underneath the palace ruins and on the slopes of the hill.¹²¹ In the last centuries of the Republic, politicians built their residences on the Palatine,

¹²⁰ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 125; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 133-34

¹²¹ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 133

bringing them close to the political heart of Rome. They built their houses on the side of the hill facing the forum and on the summit. Examples of prominent Romans who made their residence on the hill include the Gracchi brothers and their father. The orator L. Licinius Crassus and later his pupil, Cicero, and the man who had Cicero murdered, Mark Anthony.¹²²

By the end of the Republic the citizens of Rome would have become accustomed to the grandees of the republic making their homes on and around the Palatine. Augustus' decision to make his home on the hill was the most important development in its history, and this cemented the Palatine as the home of the Princeps. Augustus' decision to make his home where previously the republic's most powerful men made theirs was in line with how he projected himself. The Palatine hosted a concentration of republican statesmen and leaders, and Augustus' decision to make his home there furthered his association with republican leadership and traditions. Beyond the association with republican leadership, the association with Romulus was also of great importance to the first emperor. The association with Rome's first king and the divine approval for his reign was a legend Augustus was keen to associate himself and his position as Rome's leading man with.¹²³ Over the course of his reign, Augustus came to possess the majority of the hill. And while the Palatine's association with Rome's leadership persisted, its republican ties faded. Despite possessing the majority of the hill, Augustus never made any deliberate effort to reshape the Palatine in his image, so to speak. By far the most prominent structure Augustus erected on the hill was his Temple to Apollo, which lies close to the House of Augustus and House of Livia on the southwest corner of the hill.¹²⁴ Augustus' Palatine residence was never a comprehensive, purpose-built palace complex, but rather made up of several republican buildings annexed together. It consisted of two parts, one meant for public functions and one private residence.¹²⁵

The House of Tiberius, or *Domus Tiberiana*, was supposedly the imperial residence constructed by Augustus' successor on the western part of the hill. The *Domus Tiberiana* is not fully understood, the area is today covered by surviving parts of a garden complex (the Farnese gardens) from the 16th century.¹²⁶ The *Domus Tiberiana* was enlarged by Caligula, but it did not assume its monumental form before Domitian restored it at the same time as he was building his own palace complex.¹²⁷ In addition to expanding the house of Tiberius,

¹²² Claridge, *Rome*, p. 125

¹²³ Wiseman, *The House of Augustus*, p. 87-88

¹²⁴ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 135

¹²⁵ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 144

¹²⁶ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 144; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 129

¹²⁷ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 144

Caligula, according to Suetonius, built a bridge over the forum, linking the Palatine and the Capitoline hills as well as attempting to turn the temple of Castor and Pollux into an antechamber for the palace.¹²⁸ Claudius does not seem to have made any substantial changes to the existing palace nor undertaken any ventures to build a new one in his reign.

Nero's work on the palatine and his palaces were an important evolution in the building of imperial residences in Rome, and part of his legacy was the construction of his Golden House. But the Domus Aurea was not Nero's first palace and he spent time and money on construction projects on the Palatine as well. As well as extending the Domus Tiberiana, he erected his own Domus Transistoria on the Palatine, a project that likely began in 60 AD.¹²⁹ Like its name implies, the palace connected imperial properties on the Palantine with those on the Esquiline hill, the building stretching all the way across, according to Suetonius.¹³⁰ Both the Domus Tiberiana and the Domus Transitoria fell victim to the great fire of 64, leaving us little in the way of evidence, at least for the latter building. The silver lining of the great fire for Nero, much like the fire of 80 was for Domitian, was that it left room in the city for ambitious architectural projects. Nero had the misfortune to be blamed for the fire of 64, but there is little evidence that supports this. But his ruthless acquisition of land for his new palace complex in the aftermath of the fire did not help his legacy.

Nero's Golden House was a large and ambitious undertaking, dwarfing the existing imperial residences on the Palatine. The majority of the complex did not lie on the hill, but rather in what we now call the Colosseum valley. The new palace complex covered some 50 hectares, and the complex stretched from the northern part of the Palatine to the Velia, along the south flank of the Esquiline hill to the garden of Maecenas, back down across the valley to the western end of the Caelian hill, including the temple of Claudius.¹³¹ The complex included a massive fountain, fed by aqueduct, from which water ran off into an artificial lake built in the bottom of the valley. A wing of the golden house was built near the Esquiline, which was full of dining rooms and fountains, and which also likely included some baths mentioned by Suetonius.¹³² There is some uncertainty surrounding the fate of the Golden House after Nero's suicide in 68. The short-lived emperors of 69 treated the grandiose project differently. Otho is supposed to have approved a loan of some five million sesterces to ensure the completion of the project. While Vitellius supposedly found the palace to be

¹²⁸ Suet. *Calig.* 22.2 & 4

¹²⁹ Beste and von Hesberg, "Buildings of an Emperor", p. 322

¹³⁰ Suet. *Ner.* 31.1

¹³¹ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 301; Beste and von Hesberg, "Buildings of an Emperor", p. 324

¹³² Claridge, *Rome*, p. 301-02; Suet. *Ner.* 31.2; Beste and von Hesberg, "Buildings of an Emperor", p. 325

inadequate.¹³³ What is certain is that after Vespasian's victory in the civil war and the ascension of the Flavians, the new emperor moved swiftly to distance himself from both Nero and his Golden House. Vespasian made his home elsewhere and commissioned the construction of a vast amphitheater, the Colosseum which covered parts of the area the golden house had covered. The temple of the divine Claudius was completed, the baths were remodeled and opened to the public, now known as the baths of Titus. The area was transformed, turning into a space in large part dedicated to the public and their entertainment and leisure, rather than a monument to Nero's vain ambition. While Nero's main efforts were concentrated in the Colosseum valley, the Palatine was not outright abandoned and the Domus Tiberiana remained in use, presumably restored after the fire. Three of the emperors of 69 used the residence, Galba travelled from it to his death on the forum, Otho's banquet there was interrupted by soldiers and Vitellius was caught hiding there after his unsuccessful attempts to negotiate a surrender with Flavian forces. Vespasian does not seem to have made use of the house, preferring to live in the gardens of Sallust, though Titus may have made use of it.¹³⁴

Domitian's Palace

Domitian was the emperor that most drastically changed the topography of the Palatine hill and Rome with the construction of his palace complex. Over the course of his reign the Palatine was transformed, the new imperial residence covering the entirety of the southeastern part of the hill. The palace's main body took its orientation from an earlier Neronian building on the hill. Domitian's palace is generally divided into three sections which we know as the *Domus Flavia*, the *Domus Augustana* and the *Stadium*. The domus Flavia was the official palace while the domus Augustana served as the private quarters of the emperor. Other than form and function, this division has little basis in history, the name *Domus Flavia* is pure invention, and the section names are the product of modern scholars rather than ancient Romans. Likely the entirety of the palace was known as the *domus Augustana*, the house of the Augustus. Wiseman contends that this may be a wrongful modern interpretation, and that it was simply named for Augustus himself, much like the *domus Tiberiana* was named for Tiberius. And while this may very well be the case, a structure named for Augustus himself rather than the title still evoked the first emperor, and

¹³³ Beste and von Hesberg, "Buildings of an Emperor", p. 324-25

¹³⁴ Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, p. 182

continued association with legitimate imperial continuity.¹³⁵

However, the palace also became known simply as the *Palatium*, after the hill it occupied. It is from this name we get our word “palace”, which indicates just how defining Domitian’s palace was as imperial residence. The palace was never replaced, some restoration and enlargement were undertaken over the centuries. But the structure persisted as the definitive imperial palace until the end of the empire in the west.¹³⁶ The palace is a benchmark in architectural history and the history of Rome. It brings the functions and needs of the emperor and imperial government in a single structure, and it expresses the truly monarchical nature of the Principate.¹³⁷ The emperor, no longer content to make his home in a mix of old buildings annexed together or smaller buildings, commissioned the construction of the impressive palace to be his home in the city and the heart of his government while he was there.

The palace was built between 81 and 92, and was designed by the architect Rabirius, one of very few ancient imperial architects we can still recognize. While the construction of the palace itself may have finished in 92, study of brick stamps show that work continued on the Stadium to the end of Domitian’s reign in 96.¹³⁸ The west side entrance of the palace leads into an octagonal vestibule (See Appendix, Fig. 1:1), which is flanked by several waiting rooms with complex floorplans. Beyond the vestibule lies the First Court, which went by the name “Sicily”.¹³⁹ The court was enclosed on all sides by a portico made from columns of Numidian yellow marble. The better part of the court’s open area was taken up by a pool, with a large octagonal island in the center, which would have had fountains. All the surfaces of the court would have been veneered in marble. On the northern corner of the peristyle lies the Basilica. The basilica stands around 16 meters tall today, but this is only equivalent of the building’s first floor. At the time of construction, it would have stood taller, and would have towered above the courtyard, along with the other buildings surrounding the courtyard.¹⁴⁰ The basilica may have served as a meeting room for the emperor’s council. The apse at the southern end of the hall certainly indicates that this hall was intended for functions in which the emperor was a central component.

The basilica is one of two smaller halls flanking the enormous central hall, dubbed the

¹³⁵ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 145; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 146; Wiseman, *The House of Augustus*, p. 34-35

¹³⁶ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 147

¹³⁷ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 153

¹³⁸ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 147

¹³⁹ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 145; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p.147

¹⁴⁰ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 145; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 147-48

Aula Regia by 18th century excavators, now also known as the Audience Chamber. The hall is huge, measuring 38 meters long by 31 meters wide, with three-meter-thick walls with niches on the inside to house eight large statues. Two of the statues were discovered in the 18th century, one portraying Hercules and the other Bacchus. The statues are three and a half meters tall and carved from green Egyptian Bekhen stone. Columns of purple Phrygian stone are projected on plinths in front of the niches, and were surmounted by further colonnades, supporting the ceiling some 30 meters above. The hall's dimensions and the thickness of its walls makes a vaulted ceiling unlikely according to Coarelli, but the vaulted ceilings of the palace's halls were supposed to have been one of the palace's most remarkable features. The vaulted ceilings were supposed to have needed additional support by the time of Hadrian's reign.¹⁴¹ Perhaps Rabirius simply had been too optimistic in the planning of the vaulted ceilings. The structure is aligned towards a monumental porch on the northern side, which looked directly down on the palace forecourt, the *area Palatina*. The emperor would appear on the porch to receive those performing the *salutatio*.¹⁴² The hall itself likely served similar functions, where the emperor could hold audiences. There are remains of a large apse on the south-western wall, where we can imagine the emperor stood, facing the crowd. The apse serves to focus the attention of the room on the sole figure of the emperor, highlighting him and isolating him in a space different to that occupied by mere mortals.¹⁴³ To the east of the audience chamber lies a chamber called the Lararium. The name itself lacks credibility, and its function remains uncertain. Coarelli suggest that this room may have housed the praetorian guards responsible for protecting the main entrance of the palace.¹⁴⁴

On the southwestern side of the first courtyard is the banquet hall. The hall is estimated to be as tall as it is long, around 31.6 meters. Entrance to the banquet hall was through a colonnade of grey granite columns, and the interior was lined with three orders of superimposed columns. Literary evidence from Statius indicates that the lower order of columns was of Numidian yellow marble, the middle of Phrygian purple and the upper of pink-grey stone from Chios or greenish Carystian marble.¹⁴⁵ From inside the banquet hall the guests could look out onto the first courtyard and its fountain, or onto the smaller fountain courts that flanked the hall on the western and eastern sides, through windows between the interior columns. Of these two fountain courts, only the western has been uncovered

¹⁴¹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 95

¹⁴² Claridge, *Rome*, p. 148; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 148

¹⁴³ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 153

¹⁴⁴ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 148

¹⁴⁵ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 150-51; Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.25-30

completely. This court was originally surrounded by two stories of yellow Numidian columns and the fountain was of a tiered, oval design.¹⁴⁶ The windows between the banquet hall and the fountain courts were glazed during the reign of Hadrian, and heating was added beneath the floor of the hall. Both the first court, the banquet hall, and its flanking fountain courts are hallmarks of Rabirius' designs, which made great use of water, colored marble, height and space.¹⁴⁷ The great banquet hall was clearly designed for public functions. A hall where the emperor could entertain a large number of guests and awe them with the splendor and size of his palace. The sheer size of the hall meant that it could house a vast number of guests, more than a thousand could likely be entertained in comfort there.

To the east of the first court lies the Second Court, which was possibly intended for more private occasions, though it is connected to the first court and is readily accessible from there (Appendix Fig. 1:3). The *Domus Augustana*, the less public part of the palace, is arranged around this second peristyle. Despite the notion that the *Domus Augustana* and the *Domus Flavia* were two distinct sections of the palace with distinct functions, public and private, the parts are not as neatly divided as one might expect. Coarelli suggests the theory that only the southern part of the palace, facing the Circus Maximus, was the truly private residence of the emperor.¹⁴⁸ If this is the case, it stands to reason that the northern part also served public functions, but perhaps in a smaller or more exclusive way than the grand halls of the southern *Domus Flavia*. The second court is similar to the first court, featuring colonnades and a large pool with an island in it. This island was a small temple, approachable by a small bridge or causeway in the pool. Coarelli speculates that this may have been a temple to Minerva, Domitian's favored deity.¹⁴⁹ On the north-eastern side the court backs up against a wide concrete foundation, and beyond it lies some partly exposed foundations. Plans drawn in the 16th century says that the area once was occupied by another trio of halls, similar to the "reception" suite of the first court. But the poor state of the remains makes it difficult to tell what it may have been.¹⁵⁰ On the southern side of the court lies a suite of rooms centered on a semicircular hall, the rooms have wide doors, giving them a clear view of the pool of the second court. The other side of the block looks out over the third courtyard. The third courtyard has two levels and a more private character than the other two. The rooms and forecourts of the upper level lets light into the lower level of the court. The lower

¹⁴⁶ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 151; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 148-49

¹⁴⁷ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 145

¹⁴⁸ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 150

¹⁴⁹ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 150; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 152

¹⁵⁰ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 152; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 152

level is ten meters below the upper floor, and organized around the square courtyard, at the center of this court lies a fountain, designed around four curvilinear shields.¹⁵¹ To the south the courtyard opens onto an exedra or gallery that faces the Circus Maximus and forms part of the palace's façade.¹⁵²

The third part of the palace is the Stadium, which extends along the eastern flank. The Stadium is so named because of its resemblance to racetracks. The structure is in the form of a circus. It lies at the same level as the sunken courtyard, ten meters below the main palace, and measures 184 meters by 50 meters. The southern end is curved, and the northern end squared off. Like other Roman circuses it features a divider in the middle, around which charioteers raced. However, the stadium is too small for races, where size of 80 meters by 400 was the norm.¹⁵³ It is generally agreed that the stadium was used as a garden rather than for racing, though perhaps it could have featured footraces, the stadium being of a similar length to the traditional *stadion* of Greek athletics (ca. 200 meters). A two-story portico runs along the inner perimeter of the stadium, the upper level serving as both balcony and corridor, connecting with most of the surrounding palace. The lower level served as a promenade. A semicircular exhedra is centered on the eastern side of the stadium, consisting of three levels, one for the garden, one opening off the gallery and the upper a belvedere on top of the structure's semi-dome.¹⁵⁴ Construction continued on the stadium until the end of Domitian's reign, as evidenced by brick stamps.¹⁵⁵

There is more to the palace than what we have outlined, but the components we have explored give us an idea of the palace's scale and the impression it would have had. The palace is a crucial sign of the evolution of the principate. Domitian's palace was in no unclear terms the home of the Emperor, the sole leader and ruler of Rome, and here the business of governing the empire and its subjects was conducted. Architectural features were used to present the emperor as something more than a mortal man, a ruler that stood above the common masses and bore closer resemblance to the gods than common men. The Flavians in general often associated their rule with Jupiter, but Domitian took it further. Jupiter featured prominently on Domitianic imagery and the link between the god and the emperor emphasized, Domitian being portrayed as Jupiter's warrior-regent.¹⁵⁶ And the palace furthers

¹⁵¹ Claridge, *Rome*, p.153; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 152

¹⁵² Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 152

¹⁵³ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 96

¹⁵⁴ Claridge, *Rome*, p.154

¹⁵⁵ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 152-53

¹⁵⁶ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 99-100

such comparisons, projecting the authority and power of the emperor.

Beyond the remains of the palace, some of it and Domitian's, legacy is handed down to us through our literary sources. Both Statius and Martial composed verses on the palace, painting a literary image of the palace and Domitian himself. After Domitian's assassination Pliny and Suetonius both mention the palace and consciously presents the palace differently depending on the occupant. We will examine the relevant passages of these sources to give us a more comprehensive image of the palace and imperial representation through the structure.

Statius

We begin with the poems of Statius, bearing in mind the nature of Statius relationship with Domitian. Statius mentions the construction of the new palace in passing in the third book of the *Silvae*. The book was likely published in 91, the year before the palace was finished. But it must have nearly reached its completion by the time the book was published, though the composition of the poem may predate its publishing date substantially. In the poem he tells of Domitian's boy eunuch, Flavius Earinus, sending the first clippings of his hair as an offering to a temple in his hometown of Pergamum.¹⁵⁷ The poem describes Venus taking the boy to serve Domitian in Rome, flying him in her winged chariot to his fate. They fly to Rome and it is mentioned that Germanicus (Domitian), "Father of the world", is adorning the Palatine hill with new masonry which reaches the topmost stars.¹⁵⁸ While the poem offers little in the way of actual description of the palace, it does tell us that the palace project is ambitious and even before completion the subject of praise and admiration. Domitian being titled "Father of the world" and that his palace reaches the topmost of the stars impart an Olympian impression of both emperor and palace. That a goddess brings Domitian one of his favored servants also underlines the continuing theme of associating Domitian with the divine.

We meet the emperor and the palace again in Statius' poem about a banquet held by Domitian, which likely took place not long after the palace's completion.¹⁵⁹ The poem is the source for some of the details about the palace's banquet hall, in particular Statius details the columns of the hall's interior, listing the origin of the stone used to make the columns.¹⁶⁰ The poem opens with Statius asking how he can possibly do Domitian and his banquet justice in his thanksgiving and that he is unequal to the task at hand. He follows this by writing that though he is in the banquet hall of the palace, it feels as if he is "[...] reclining with Jupiter

¹⁵⁷ Stat. *Silv.* 3.4

¹⁵⁸ Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.45-50

¹⁵⁹ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2

¹⁶⁰ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.25-30

among the stars.”¹⁶¹ Once more we see the comparison being made between Domitian and the divine. The comparison between Jupiter, and Domitian, emperor of the Romans, remains a common theme. Despite the obvious hyperbole, an impression of awe is imparted on us by Statius. Awe of both Domitian himself and the banquet being thrown in the palace. Through the poem Statius will continue to impress upon us the splendor of his surroundings and the man responsible for them and the banquet. Statius goes on to describe the palace as a vast and august edifice, with enough columns to hold up the world if Atlas were to let go of his burden, once more invoking divine association. From the neighboring temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, Jupiter looks on the palace with amazement and the gods rejoice that Domitian has finally been installed in a residence equal to that of the gods.¹⁶²

The description of the palace continues, emphasizing its size and splendor, the great amount of space in its vast halls and beneath its tall roofs, “[...] bracing much of heaven within its shelter.”¹⁶³ The palace is only lesser than Domitian himself, who’s presence fills the palace and gives it purpose. The size of the palace is made a central component of its impressiveness, which is entirely natural, the size and complexity of Roman buildings continues to impress to this day. But the palace’s sheer size allows for enormous spaces within, the audience chamber and banquet hall being prime examples of just how large their dimensions were and how vast they must have seemed from the inside. Hyperbole aside, they must have been impressive for the citizens of Rome, even those accustomed to grand temples and their own impressive homes. Statius writes that one had to strain one’s eyes to even see the roof of the banquet hall, once more emphasizing the size.¹⁶⁴ The poem goes on praising Domitian and his calm countenance, radiating majesty and his modesty. Remarking that even barbarian enemies and “races unknown” would recognize Domitian upon seeing him.¹⁶⁵ Generally the rest of the poem is taken with comparing Domitian favorably with the gods.¹⁶⁶ The poem concludes with Statius offering up a prayer to the gods, wishing that Domitian may live much longer than his father, “[...] send established deities skyward, give temples – and live in your home.” Often open the year as consul and often repeat the quinquennial Capitoline games.¹⁶⁷ In essence, wishing that Domitian may live long, and prosper.

¹⁶¹ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.1-15

¹⁶² Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.18-22

¹⁶³ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.23-25

¹⁶⁴ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.30-31

¹⁶⁵ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.43-45

¹⁶⁶ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.46-56

¹⁶⁷ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.57-62

The poem presents both palace and emperor as awe inspiring, and that the palace is awe-inspiring because of the emperor. The palace projects and amplifies the power, prestige, and authority of its emperor. The poem includes many elements one would expect to see in a poem explicitly meant to praise the newly finished palace of the emperor. The splendor and magnificence of his residence rivals the grandest temples and outstrips lesser ones. Statius does not shun the comparisons between Domitian's palace, and Domitian himself, and the homes and temples of the gods. Martial does this as well, the comparison of Domitian and Jupiter is recurring in the works of both poets. The gods looking with approval upon the palace and Domitian, almost welcoming him into their ranks. The poem presents the palace and through it Domitian as more than a man, and his home takes on an Olympian quality.

Martial

Martial's epigrams are mostly of a less serious nature than Statius poems, and characterized by Martial's sharp wit. But when his poems address Domitian himself or persons and things directly associated with him, the poems take on a less witty tone, becoming works of praise, and sometimes a vessel for the poem to beg money from Domitian. The emperor's home and the palatine are mentioned in the earlier books, but the epigrams do not feature them as a main subject until the books published after the year 90. This makes sense given the timeline of the palace's construction. After 90 construction neared completion and the palace was taking on its finished shape. We will begin with an epigram addressed to the palace's architect, Rabirius.

In this epigram Martial states that Rabirius has comprehended the stars and the skies, and that he has built Domitian's ambitious palace with wonderful skill.¹⁶⁸ He goes on to say that if Pisa shall prepare to give Jupiter a worthy shrine, they will ask Domitian to lend them Rabirius and his skills. Not much is said directly of the palace itself here, but it is made clear that it was an ambitious undertaking which demanded a skillful architect to accomplish. Martial alludes to Domitian as the Romans' own Jupiter. This along with Rabirius comprehending the "stars and the skies" once more imparts a divine impression of the palace and emperor, i.e., that their "Jupiter" has received his palace.

A longer epigram praises the palace specifically and makes it out to be the greatest building made by human hand in the world. The epigram begins with an appeal to Domitian to laugh at the pyramids and works of "barbarous" Memphis.¹⁶⁹ The clear meaning being that

¹⁶⁸ Mart. *Epigrams*, 7.56

¹⁶⁹ Mart. *Epigrams*, 8.36

while the ancient temples and pyramids of Egypt may be impressive in their own right, they are laughably inferior to Domitian's palace, and little can challenge the palace. Martial continues, writing that the palace is the most impressive thing the sun can see in the world, and that it reaches higher than the two mountains (Pelion and Ossa) giants piled on top of each other when they tried to reach heaven. The height of the palace is further emphasized by the claim that the palace pierces the clouds and that it is the first thing struck by sunlight, even before the island of Circe. Clearly exaggerations, but this emphasis on the height of the palace conveys how both the palace and Domitian stood above the city and the world. If not in actuality, at least in the image Domitian projected of himself to his subjects. Martial concludes this epigram by stating that while Domitian's great palace reaches the stars and is equal to heaven, it is still less than its august master.

Praise of the palace continues a few epigrams later. This epigram is shorter and focuses on the size of the palace, stating that while there previously had not been a place large enough to fit Domitian's banquets, there now was. The new palace was a place where Domitian could fittingly drink sacred nectar mixed by Ganymede.¹⁷⁰ The epigram continues with Martial wishing that it may be long before Domitian dines with Jupiter, essentially wishing him a long reign. The poem finishes with an appeal to Jupiter, that if he cannot wait to dine with Domitian, let him come to the palace instead. Much like Statius poem on a banquet thrown by Domitian, the focus of this epigram is likely the banquet hall. The short epigram does not convey the impressiveness of the banquet hall in the descriptive way that Statius does, but it does give the impression that the hall is large and richly decorated enough that it was fitting for both emperor and gods to dine there. A later epigram in the ninth book continues on a similar note, in it Martial states that he would rather dine in the palace with Domitian than with Jupiter in heaven, even if the heavens were closer.¹⁷¹

Martial's epigrams concerning the palace are in the same vein as those of Statius, heaping praise on Domitian and his place, favorably comparing it to the wonders of the world and to the heavens themselves. The gods and the divine are frequently mentioned in relation to the palace and that it is very much an edifice worthy of both the heavenly Jupiter and their own earthly Jupiter, i.e., Domitian. The poems praise for the palace and, by extension and directly, the emperor reflects the impressiveness of the palace. Martial like Statius makes liberal use of hyperbole and exaggeration, were one to interpret his poems literally the palace

¹⁷⁰ Mart. *Epigrams*, 8.39

¹⁷¹ Mart. *Epigrams*, 9.91

becomes a skyscraper. None the less this hyperbole tells us that the palace must have been impressive in size and height, and that in ways soared above the populace of the city. If not in reality, it may at least have done so in the minds of those who looked up at the palace and saw the home of the most powerful man in their world and a defining feature of the city's topography.

Suetonius and Pliny the Younger

Having considered the works of poets supportive and flattering of Domitian, we move on to his detractors. We will begin with Suetonius, who does not leave much mention of the palace in his biographical work about Domitian. Suetonius writes that early in his reign Domitian spent much time in seclusion, stabbing flies with a sharpened stylus.¹⁷² The truthfulness of the tale is dubious at best, but there were certainly indications that Domitian preferred to keep his own company rather than spend time in public. An introvert, in modern parlance. The layout of the palace indicates that this desire for solitude was taken into consideration during its planning and construction. The southern part of the palace being more secluded than the other sections of the building. Suetonius does write that towards the end of his reign, and as his paranoia grew, Domitian had the walls of the colonnades he walked, presumably in the palace, lined with reflective stone so that he could see what went on behind him in the reflection.¹⁷³ While it may have been to observe what went on behind him, the inclusion of fine reflective stone may just have been further decoration of the palace. Suetonius also mentions omens towards the end of Domitian's life, among these several lightning strikes which struck various objects and buildings connected to Domitian and the Flavians. Among these buildings is the palace.¹⁷⁴ While the lightning strikes may be pure invention on the part of Suetonius, lightning striking Domitian's palace is a powerful omen. The implication of this strike against the palace is a strike against Domitian himself, and his power, authority, and prestige, which the palace must have been a symbol of, in the eyes of the Romans.

The palace of Domitian recurs several times in Pliny the younger's panegyric delivered to Trajan. In the panegyric Pliny uses the palace to provide contrast between the good new emperor Trajan, and the dead bad emperor Domitian. Trajan's adoptive father, Nerva, is supposed to have declared the palace an "open house", giving the public access to what had been a "stronghold of Tyranny".¹⁷⁵ Pliny goes on to say that this would have been

¹⁷² Suet. *Dom.* 3.1

¹⁷³ Suet. *Dom.* 14.4

¹⁷⁴ Suet. *Dom.* 15.2

¹⁷⁵ Plin. *Pan.* 47.4

meaningless if Nerva had not adopted a man so well suited to life in the public eye as Trajan. He continues by describing the palace as being open and accessible, and that it is no longer a maze of obstacles and doors to keep people out, taking up the theme that Domitian was a paranoid recluse.¹⁷⁶ Further along in the text Pliny writes that those summoned to the emperor or merely visiting no longer fear the halls they meet him in, and that they no longer rush away as soon as they can. Trajan's very presence and person has transformed the palace from a house of horrors, where the monster Domitian had lurked to plot massacres and lick the blood of murdered relatives, to a home they shared with the emperor.¹⁷⁷ What Pliny is trying to convey is that there is a fundamental difference between the persons of Trajan and Domitian, and that Trajan's character is able to transform the palace from a house of horrors to the welcoming home of a noble and modest sovereign. Pliny's writing is part of a greater effort by the new imperial dynasty to divest the hated Domitian from his monuments and buildings and grafting themselves onto them. The new emperors made great efforts to usurp both the buildings themselves, but perhaps more importantly their associations with imperial power and prestige. And as a part of legitimizing their own usurpation of the throne. While Domitian's memory may have been banned it was a nearly impossible to disassociate him from his greatest architectural projects by decreeing it. And tearing down a building like the palace was an unfeasible solution. Even if the palace had been built by Domitian, it remained a potent symbol of imperial authority and power.

The Palace, an imperial symbol

We have considered the history of the Palatine hill and its associations, from Romulus and his hut to the construction of Domitian's palace. The palace was an important evolution in both the political history and architectural history of Rome. Previous emperors had contented themselves with a mix of buildings from the republican era annexed together or relatively modest (for an emperor) residences. Even Nero's golden house likely took on the shape of a villa placed in the center of Rome, rather than a comprehensive palace complex built with imperial government in mind. Domitian's palace was a purpose-built complex intended not only as a residence for the emperor, but also a place for Domitian and his government to conduct the business of empire. The building of the palace is symbolic of the evolution of the principate and imperial government. Domitian made no pretense of republicanism and embraced autocratic rule, and the palace is representative of this. Power was concentrated in

¹⁷⁶ Plin. *Pan.* 47.5-6

¹⁷⁷ Plin. *Pan.* 48.2-4

this building and with the man who lived there. Decades had passed since public elections had stopped or been moved to the senate. The important decisions of state were increasingly made by the emperor with little influence from the senate as a body. Domitian made little pretense of republicanism and rarely involved the senate as a body in important, or even ordinary, matters of state. With the construction of his palace the heart of imperial government was irrevocably moved to the imperial residence, and the senate house would forever look up at the palace and lie (more metaphorically than factually) in its shadow.

The business of government would now be undertaken in the great halls of the palace. The grand audience hall where the emperor faced his subjects, and smaller (a relative term) halls like the Basilica where his council may have met to engage in governing the empire. Furthermore, the palace includes elements important for the emperor as a public person. The audience hall and its adjacent porch, from where the emperor could face a vast number of persons and clients partaking in the morning rituals of Roman patron-client relationships. The public spaces of the palace became important meeting points between Domitian and later emperors and the people of Rome. The architectural design of the palace focused attention the emperor at the center of these ceremonies, making him stand out and appear as more than a mortal man. Its location on the Palatine hill works towards the same purpose. The impressive size of the palace perched on top of the hill must have given it, and by extension the emperor, a potent presence in the cityscape of Rome and consequently the minds of Rome's citizens. With the construction of his palace Domitian dramatically altered the topography of Rome and redefined the Palatine hill.

How did Domitian present himself through his palace, what was the building meant to convey? The simple answer is that the palace projected the power, authority, and majesty of the emperor. In many ways the palace appears to us as a very conventional expression of imperial power and authority, and it could be listed among similar architectural expressions of imperial rule later in history. But in the context of early imperial Rome, it is a benchmark for the evolution of imperial rule. There is more to the palace than expressing authority however, or rather, there is more to the expression of authority. Domitian's embrace of autocratic rule does take on religious aspects. Parallels being drawn between Domitian and Jupiter are not uncommon, and the king of the gods features heavily in Flavian propaganda in general. As we saw in the poetry of Statius and Martial, referring to Domitian as their own Jupiter or god recurred frequently. With this in mind the palace and the Palatine may have served as a sort of "Olympus" to Domitian, or at least meant to give the impression of it. It is impossible to tell whether or not Domitian believed himself a divine, but he certainly

projected divine associations with his regime. Certainly, the poets when describing the palace often referenced the divine, particularly that the gods themselves approved of the palace and thought it a fitting home for Domitian. These religious associations serve to support what was likely the main expression of authority, majesty, and power. His detractors clearly got some of the same impressions from the palace, though they portray it as the palace of an eastern despot when Domitian inhabits it. But when Domitian is disposed of and Nerva and Trajan make it their residence, its nature changes, to that of an open and welcoming home.

Through the palace Domitian presented himself to the people of Rome as the sole ruler of the city and the empire. His authority undisputed and supported by the divine, his power and majesty reflected in his palace atop the Palatine. And the palace became such an integral symbol of the emperor and his authority that in the wake of Domitian's assassination, his successors went to great lengths to divest Domitian from his palace and change its association to the new emperors.

Chapter 4: Imagery

We have explored and discussed Domitian's palace complex on the Palatine, and its presence in the urban landscape of Rome. We now move to more personal depictions of Domitian himself. This chapter will briefly consider a few examples of how Domitian was portrayed on images and statues, and the style of presentation. And what these presentations may have meant to convey. How Domitian presented himself to Rome and the world through his imagery may give us an idea of what aspects were deemed important to project to those who saw the emperor's image. The examples we will explore are the Cancelleria reliefs, some examples of Domitianic coinage and the equestrian statue described in Statius' *Silvae*. As the equestrian statue present a unique problem in that it no longer exists, we will begin with it.

The Equestrian Statue

In 89 the Senate voted to honor Domitian by erecting a massive equestrian statue in the Forum. The statue was to commemorate Domitian's victories in his campaigns against German tribes and the Dacians. Early in his reign Domitian had embarked on a campaign against the Chatti in Germany, crossing into Germany in 82 or 83.¹⁷⁸ Little record of the war has survived to us, and we know next to nothing of battles fought or victories won. But seemingly enough was done for Domitian to be satisfied with the campaign, and he returned to Rome, likely in 83. The campaign had not been one of expansionist conquest, and its main

¹⁷⁸ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 128; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 79-80

accomplishments were the establishment of lines of communications and defenses on the Rhine front that allowed Domitian to strengthen the forces on the Moesian front, and east of the Rhine.¹⁷⁹ The Chatti were not conquered outright, but Domitian's goals were accomplished, and a victory was won, achieving Domitian military glory, and bringing him slightly closer to Vespasian and Titus' military reputations. Once back in Rome he celebrated a triumph with all accompanying pomp and ceremony and took the title *Germanicus*, which he used for the remainder of his reign. While the campaign against the Chatti helped sate Domitian's desire for military glory, the conflicts with Dacians and Germanic tribes along the Danube shifted the weight of Rome's military attention to the north-eastern frontier, the Rhine and Britain declining in priority. In the winter of 84/85 (there is some debate regarding the dating of the conflict), the Dacians crossed the Danube in the province of Moesia, killing the governor and wreaking havoc. The death of the governor and the defeat of two legions was a disaster, and Domitian hurried to the scene. Pushing the Dacians back across the river was an arduous task that demanded great effort and bloodshed.¹⁸⁰ With the Dacians driven back, Domitian returned to Rome and may have celebrated a triumph.¹⁸¹

In 86 (or later) the commander Domitian had left in charge, Cornelius Fuscus, embarked on a punitive expedition across the Danube which ended in disaster. Fuscus and his army were destroyed in Dacia and a standard was captured. The loss was perhaps not as disastrous as that of Teutoburg forest some eight decades earlier, but the optics were certainly bad for an emperor intent on portraying himself as a successful military leader. Domitian spent the remainder of 86 and the whole of 87 preparing a new expedition, remaining patient and avoiding rash punitive expeditions. Domitian selected a new commander, Tettius Julianus, and likely supervised preparations of the campaign from Rome. In 88 Julianus crossed the Danube and decisively defeated the Dacians. Any plans to complete the subjugation of the Dacians the following year were interrupted by the revolt of the governor of Upper Germany.¹⁸² Domitian rushed to the scene from Rome, but the revolt was swiftly put down by the governor of Lower Germany and his army.¹⁸³ Much has been written about the revolt of Saturninus, but this is hardly the place to recount it in detail. Sufficed to say the revolt likely shook Domitian's faith in the army and he may have suspected the revolt to be part of a larger conspiracy in which senators may have been involved. The year 89 continued

¹⁷⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 131

¹⁸⁰ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 138

¹⁸¹ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 98; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 139

¹⁸² Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 142-3; Southern, *Domitian*, p.99-100

¹⁸³ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 144

with Domitian once again turning his attention the Chatti, the governor who had put down the revolt commanded the campaign against the Germans, and they were once more defeated. Domitian made peace with the Dacians, vary of fighting on multiple fronts, and made his way to Pannonia and campaigned against the Marcomanni and Quadi, before returning to Rome to celebrate his double triumph over the Dacians and Chatti. It is likely that the Senate voted the equestrian statue at the same time as Domitian returned and held his triumphs to honor the emperor for his victories over the barbarians.

Having established the historical context of the statue we move on to the monument itself, or rather Statius' description of the monument. Domitian's equestrian statue suffered the fate of so many of his monuments after the senate damned his memory in 96 and was likely one of the first statues to be molten down. Statius' description is rife with exaggeration, but it does give us a decent idea of the statue's appearance. The statue must have been big, the opening line of Statius' poem describes the horse as a mass in the forum and that its size is doubled by the colossus (Domitian) on its back.¹⁸⁴ The poet also describes the statue's head surrounded by "pure air" and looking down on the temples around it.¹⁸⁵ An obvious exaggeration, but we can infer that if one were to look at the face of the statue from street level, the onlooker would have to crane their neck to look up at it. The statue's face gazed towards the new palace being built on the Palatine hill. The figure of Domitian on the horse is armored, wearing a great bronze cuirass that supposedly exhausted the mines of Temese to produce, again an exaggeration but the statue's armor likely made for impressive viewing. The statue is also described wearing a cloak, and a great sword hanging sheathed at its side.¹⁸⁶ The statue's right hand is extended in a gesture that "bans battles", proclaiming Domitian has brought peace to Rome and the empire through his military exploits.¹⁸⁷ The statue's left hand serves a plinth to a miniature figure of Minerva, which holds out the severed head of Medusa "as to spur the horse onwards" and ward of any harm that may come to Domitian.¹⁸⁸ The horse itself appeared to be tossing its head and "threatened gallop", its hooves trampling a personification of the Rhine, and by extension a personification of the Germanic tribes Domitian had fought.¹⁸⁹ The statue as described by Statius is a colossal representation of a victorious Domitian, who has brought peace to Rome and has conquered

¹⁸⁴ Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.1

¹⁸⁵ Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.31

¹⁸⁶ Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.40-45

¹⁸⁷ Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.37; Thomas, "(Re)locating Domitian's Horse of Glory" p. 27

¹⁸⁸ Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.38-45

¹⁸⁹ Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.51; Thomas, "(Re)locating Domitian's Horse of Glory" p. 27

the barbarian Germans. The inclusion of Minerva in the statue imparts a feeling of both divine support for Domitian's reign in general, and that Minerva specifically is the emperor's protector.

We do not have any specific measurements for the size of the statue, nor do we know exactly where on the forum it was located. Excavations in the early 20th century found what they believed to be the massive concrete foundation (ca. 12 by 6 meters) of the statue, but this assumption was questioned during examinations of the area in the '70s and '80s.¹⁹⁰ Statius' poem provides some descriptions of temples and features in proximity to the statue, including the temple of Vespasian, giving us some idea of where it might have stood. The statue must have been somewhere on the Forum Romanum, despite Statius' never explicitly mentioning it, his descriptions of the surrounding buildings and statues leave little doubt. Regardless of exactly where on the forum the statue stood, its size likely dominated the space, its sheer size was central to its presentation, and it invited comparison to other statues in its proximity. Naturally, the size of the statue is central part of Statius' poem describing it, and Statius makes comparison to other statues and monuments on the forum in order to emphasize this. Indeed, Statius makes direct comparison between the statue and an equestrian statue bearing Julius Caesar's likeness. This equestrian statue was originally one of Alexander the Great, but which had its head swapped with Caesar's.¹⁹¹ The near mythological story of Alexander the Great and his extraordinary feats remained prominent in Roman culture and their collective memory. Likewise, Caesar also occupied a prominent place in the collective memory of Rome, as both statesman and general, and dictator turned deity. By making his statue bigger, Domitian presents himself as greater than both Caesar and Alexander. Domitian's desire to be seen as a successful general and military emperor was extensively derided after his death. His accomplishments in the field were equally derided, and Domitian generally described as an aggressive glory hound, instigating wars with little provocation (hardly a fair assessment). But Domitian's lust for military glory is hardly surprising. The value placed on military accomplishments by Roman society infused the desire for military glory in its members and directly tied it to political success. And in the case of Domitian the military reputation and accomplishments of both his father and brother only exaggerated the martial ambitions ingrained into him by Roman culture. While his opportunities for military experience were limited in his youth, when he became emperor there were less obstructions to his ambitions.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas, "(Re)locating Domitian's Horse of Glory", p. 28-29

¹⁹¹ Henderson, "Par Operi Sedes", p. 239; Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.85-90

Domitian's desire to portray himself as a successful military emperor, like his father and brother, and as Rome's guardian is hardly mysterious or difficult to understand.

Assessing the true impact and image of Domitian's equestrian statue is difficult for the simple reason that it no longer exists, and we are reliant upon the hyperbolic descriptions by Statius and limited numismatic evidence. We can however determine that the statue was massive and featured prominently in what had been the political heart of Rome for centuries. But a century of imperial rule transformed the forum into a far more ritualized and monumentalized space, decorated with monuments dating from the days of the republic through the succeeding emperors. Less the political heart of Rome and more shrine to the triumphs of Rome and the great men she had produced. The Flavians, much like their predecessors, also wanted to make their mark on this public space. Domitian's statue placed him among the monuments and statues of the great men of Rome, and by dint of its sheer size attempted to elevate him above them all. The statue served as an unmistakable presentation of Domitian as victorious general and, much like his palace on the Palatine, of his authority as emperor and "Pater Patriae". To the passersby in the forum, it may have conveyed that here was their victorious emperor, blessed by the gods, Rome's benevolent ruler and guardian. A paternalistic message of imperial authority to the citizens of Rome.

The Cancellaria Reliefs

The reliefs discovered beneath the Palazzo della Cancelleria in the 1930s have elicited much discussion as to their origins and where they belong. The reliefs were not discovered mounted on any monument, but rather stacked or piled in what may have been a stonemason's yard or some manner of storage area for superfluous art or material.¹⁹² The location has no connection to whatever monument the reliefs were originally mounted on, leaving historians and archeologists to make educated guesses as to what they may have decorated. The reliefs are damaged, entire chunks missing, but despite the portions that have broken off they are in remarkably good shape. Arms and faces are still clear and distinguishable, and as Henderson writes: "[...] scarcely a nose chipped."¹⁹³ The reliefs themselves are made of marble and measures ca. 2 meters tall and are thought to have been ca. 6 meters long when whole. Stylistically the friezes differ significantly from the iconic Flavian friezes on the arch of Titus. Their style is reminiscent of Augustan carvings, rather than Flavian ones. Despite this evidence points to them being Flavian, or more specifically Domitianic. The most obvious

¹⁹² Last, "On the Flavian Reliefs", p. 9

¹⁹³ Henderson, "Par Operi Sedes", p. 245

evidence of this being the depictions of scenes including both Domitian himself and Vespasian, and the botched recarving of Domitian into a long necked Nerva, with a head completely out of scale.

The first frieze, frieze A, depicts, from left to right, a winged victory, of whom only the wing and shoulder survive, a lictor, Mars and Minerva. Then follows what originally was Domitian, but with the aforementioned botched recarving into Nerva. Following Nerva is the goddess Roma, bare breasted with a shield. Then comes a figure representing the senate and another representing the people. The background and final figures on the frieze are lictors and soldiers.¹⁹⁴ The scene is thought to depict Domitian departing Rome for a military campaign. What campaign is being undertaken is unclear, but it may depict Domitian leaving for Gaul in 70, before he became emperor or perhaps the first Chatti war, there is little evidence to indicate which particular conflict Domitian is off to. The conflict of 70 seems more likely given the depictions of Frieze B. Last presents the argument that the frieze depicts a reluctant Domitian taking the field, urged on by the gods and people of Rome. He does not want to leave the city, but realizes that duty, Rome, and the gods themselves compel him to go, so go he must.¹⁹⁵

Frieze B depicts, again from the left, a public servant and the goddess Roma enthroned in the background. Then follows five vestals, three lictors, and a representation of the senate in the background. The centerpiece of the frieze is the figures of Domitian and Vespasian, with a representation of the people in the background. The last figures of the frieze are a winged victory (most of which is lost) holding a laurel wreath over the head of Vespasian, a lictor and a figure holding a scroll. The relief shows Domitian meeting his father, presumably when he returned to Rome as emperor in 70. Domitian's tenure as the leading member of the imperial family in Rome received much criticism after his death. Domitian's behavior at the time allegedly involved him scheming, sulking or generally reaching beyond his station as the younger son of an emperor.¹⁹⁶ Tacitus makes Domitian's supposed behavior one of, if not *the* reason that Vespasian decides to return to Rome in 70.¹⁹⁷ The frieze clearly does not depict Vespasian admonishing Domitian, which would have been a truly bizarre motif for a piece of Domitianic propaganda. The face of Vespasian may look like it is scornful, but it generally seems to be in keeping with other depictions of him, though

¹⁹⁴ Last, "On the Flavian Reliefs", p. 9

¹⁹⁵ Last, «On the Flavian Reliefs», p. 13

¹⁹⁶ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 21

¹⁹⁷ Tac, *Hist.* 4.51

some minor rework may have been done to make him look angrier than usual. Perhaps a more subtle attempt at recarving than the giraffe-like Nerva on frieze A. The scene appears to show Vespasian arriving in Rome to be greeted by his son, and for Vespasian to compliment his son on a job well done in his absence. Last argues that the frieze is not meant to be an exact record of the event portrayed, but rather that it shows that relations between Vespasian and Domitian were good, and that Vespasian was pleased.¹⁹⁸

The reliefs depict two scenes from Domitian's life that show him both as a reluctant, but dutiful soldier, and as a dutiful son who has done his father proud as his proxy in Rome. The second frieze tie Domitian closer to his father and reinforces his place as a member of the dynasty. The first frieze once more underlines Domitian's presentation of himself as a military man, and his moral character. Again, his favored deity Minerva is included, alongside Mars, both urging him to take up arms on behalf of Rome. Furthermore, the depictions on the friezes are all idealized, both the gods and the representative figures. This may have been part of Domitian's tendency to place himself apart from the rest of Roman society, nearer the gods. This created a distance between himself and the rest of society he may have felt necessary for his rule to be successful.

The lack of context for where the reliefs were placed hampers our attempt to understand their wider meaning, and any part they may have played in a monument's greater impact is lost to us. What we can infer from the reliefs is Domitian's desire to present himself once more as a military man and dutiful son of proper moral standing, admired by the gods and people of Rome and approved of by his deified father.

Coinage

Perhaps the most commonly accessible imagery of a Roman emperor was his portraits on the coins minted during his reign. The use of their own image on the obverse of the coinage and another symbolic representation on the reverse ensured that the emperor could project a certain impression to the masses who used and handled the coinage. Before we consider examples of the coinage minted under the auspices of Domitian, it may be useful to consider Domitian's reforms of the coinage, which distinguishes his coins sharply from those of his predecessors. His policies regarding the coinage may also speak to aspects of his character and his reign, and how he approached administration of Rome and the empire.

The amount of valuable metal in the coinage had dropped sharply sometime between the death of Nero and 82, the year of Domitian's first coinage reform. The Neronian standard

¹⁹⁸ Last, "On the Flavian Reliefs", p. 11-12

had been abandoned and the coinage had been debased.¹⁹⁹ Neither Vespasian nor Titus addressed the issue of devaluation. After his victory in the civil wars Vespasian focused his efforts and his reign on stabilizing the empire and legitimizing his rule and the establishment of the Flavian dynasty. In the aftermath of Nero's massive expenditures and the economic cost of the civil war, Vespasian was faced with the pressing issue of fixing the financial health of the empire. Vespasian asserted that four billion sesterces (reported as 40 billion by Suetonius, but four seems a more likely number.²⁰⁰) were needed to make the state solvent and maintain adequate government and immediate security.²⁰¹ As part of the efforts to resolve the empire's financial issues and pressed by the related financial constraints early in his reign, Vespasian resorted to devaluing the coinage, reducing the silver content while maintaining the Neronian weight.²⁰² Through his reign Vespasian acquired a reputation for fiscal zeal and rapacity, likely as a result of his fiscal policies. As a result of Vespasian's pragmatic fiscal policies, Titus inherited a healthy treasury and sound imperial finances. Titus was markedly more liberal with funds than his father had been, and his generosity did not limit itself to Italy, but extended through the empire.²⁰³ His generosity was at least partially caused by the twin disasters of the eruption of Vesuvius and the great fire in Rome, in 79 and 80, respectively. Two large scale disasters so early in his reign were hardly auspicious and Titus spent money to mitigate the damage and to shore up morale and faith in his principate. Titus' brief reign did not allow him to make serious impact on neither fiscal policy nor to address the devaluation of the coinage.

It fell to Domitian to address the debased coins, which he did after ridding himself of the fiscal secretary, one Tiberius Julius, he had inherited.²⁰⁴ In 82 Domitian initiated his first reform of the coinage, increasing the silver content of the coinage dramatically, bringing them back to a standard not seen since the reign of Augustus.²⁰⁵ The increase of silver content may not have meant much to the general public, but it certainly sent a message that Domitian desired the coinage to be "proper" after the standards of Augustus. In addition to the increased silver quantity, the fineness and quality of the minting were of noticeably higher standard than previous coinage. Much of Domitian's administration reflect this desire for

¹⁹⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 75

²⁰⁰ Suet. *Vesp.* 16.3

²⁰¹ Launaro, "The Economic Impact of Flavian Rule", p. 197; Levick, *Vespasian*, p. 95

²⁰² Launaro, "The Economic Impact of Flavian Rule", p. 199

²⁰³ Launaro, "The Economic Impact of Flavian Rule", p. 200

²⁰⁴ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 60

²⁰⁵ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 60; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 75; Launaro, "The Economic Impact of Flavian Rule", p. 201

things to be done “properly”, something indicated by his personal involvement and management of his administration. The new high standard of currency was maintained until 85. The expenditure of the past years and the wars in Britain and against Germanic tribes put enough pressure on the finances of the empire to demand action. Domitian saw himself forced to reform his coinage again and debasing it was the solution. The coinage still retained a higher silver content than those of his father and brother, reverting to the Neronian standard of 64 and maintained its high quality.²⁰⁶ Indicating that while Domitian was willing to make pragmatic financial decisions, he was unwilling to sanction a return to lower quality coins or a radically lower precious metal content.

The imagery featured on Domitian’s coinage reflects some of the aspects we have already seen in both statues and carvings. The image of his favored deity and personal protector Minerva became the dominant design on denarii during his reign.²⁰⁷ The designs of Minerva often feature the goddess wielding a thunderbolt, symbolic of Jupiter. This allusion to Jupiter is a repetition of the divine associations we see in the poetry of Martial and Statius. The coinage projecting the image that Domitian is a representative of Jupiter and reigns on his behalf, or at the very least that his reign is supported and underpinned by the divines. The portrait of Domitian himself features him wearing the laurel crown with an expression of “critical disdain”, giving him the appearance of a stern ruler.²⁰⁸ Featuring Minerva on the coinage also evokes the emperor’s dedication to the traditional gods of Rome in general, and in particular Domitian’s personal devotion to Minerva herself. The portraits of Minerva on the coins feature her as a martial goddess, portraying her with her shield, helmet, and spear. In the coinage we see the reoccurring martial theme of Domitian’s self-portrayal, celebrating his campaigns and victories over the barbarians beyond the frontier. The use of the name Germanicus on the coinage further emphasizes his desire to portray himself as a military emperor and conqueror. We see this reflected in other designs featured on his coins as well. Coins celebrating his victory over the Chatti in 83 feature designs of barbarian captives, often kneeling and bound, with their weapons thrown down, or displayed. These design of the figures and the weapons makes the barbarians easily identifiable as Germanic tribes.²⁰⁹ Much like the figure of the Rhine being trampled beneath the equestrian statue, the images of captive and defeated barbarians evoke Domitian’s victory and subjugation of the Chatti, and

²⁰⁶ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 76; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 61

²⁰⁷ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 75; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 61

²⁰⁸ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 60

²⁰⁹ Cody, “Conquerors and Conquered on Flavian Coins”, p. 112

later other Germanic peoples. The imagery of the coins, much like that of the Cancelleria reliefs and the description of the equestrian statue, evoke associations of martial success, divine support, and the personal piety of Domitian. The greater impact of Domitian's coinage from a historical perspective is the persistently high standard of production, which they retain from his first reform to the end of his reign. They are indicative of Domitian's personal attention to the administration of his coinage and his insistence that things be done properly, this is reflected not only in the coinage but in his interest in the minutia of his administration as well.²¹⁰

The imagery of Domitian's statues, artwork and coinage all evoke similar themes of martial prowess, the support of the gods for his reign and the moral character of Domitian himself. The equestrian statue emphasizes Domitian's military qualities and his success as a general, and through sheer size makes it known that he is greater than both Caesar and Alexander. While the horse is described by Statius as tossing its head and trampling a figure of the Rhine beneath it, Domitian's demeanor on the statue emanates control and authority, he brings peace to Rome and the empire, his gesture "forbidding war". The statue includes Minerva as Domitian's personal protector, but also as a token representing the divine support for the emperor. In the Cancelleria reliefs we see much of this repeated. On one frieze Domitian is urged to war by the gods Mars and Minerva, his favored deity, and the god of war himself. The gods demanding that he do the right thing. But the frieze also portrays the city of Rome, the senate and the people urging him on, to do his duty. The second frieze also evokes the themes of duty and moral character, depicting Domitian greeting Vespasian on his return to Rome. Hugh Last argues that the frieze is meant to depict Vespasian approving of how his son handled affairs while being the sole member of the new imperial family in Rome, and in this Domitian has fulfilled his filial duties as the emperor's son. The background of the scene is decorated once more with representations of Rome, her people, and the senate, giving Domitian support and endorse his actions in Rome. Lastly the coinage, which is the smallest of the imagery but without a doubt that which reached the largest audience. Again, we see Domitian emphasis his victories on the field and his position as Jupiter's warrior-regent. Inscriptions featuring his title Germanicus and decorations of subjugated barbarians on the coins being direct references to the multiple wars fought against Germanic tribes during his reign. The inclusion of Minerva speaks to both his personal piety and the aforementioned divine support for his reign. Perhaps the most interesting thing about

²¹⁰ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 197-98

the coinage is not the imagery itself but their standard of production and the personal interest Domitian took in the minting of high-quality coins. It speaks to Domitian's character and the close personal attention he paid to the administration of the empire, and his desire that the administration should be executed properly. By and large the imagery used by Domitian serves many of the same purposes the imposing new palace on the Palatine did, they reinforce his position and authority as emperor, emphasizing his military exploits and relationship with the gods. They present an image of a stern emperor, who protects his subjects from the ravages of barbarians. At the same time, they project his authority, and that while he may be their protector, he is also the emperor and sole ruler, he will brook no challenge to his authority, may it be from treasonous governors, senators with ideas above their station or an unruly mob.

Chapter 5: Religion

While Domitian's palace on the Palatine was one of his most enduring architectural achievements, it was far from the only one. Much of his building program encompassed structures for the Roman public, and he invested much time, effort, and money into the construction of temples and entertainment venues. Like with so many aspects of his administration, Domitian likely involved himself in the minutiae and details of entertainment and religion. In matters of religion particularly he desired a return to Augustan standards. Like Augustus, Domitian saw himself as the upholder of Rome's religion and morals. There is little reason to believe that he did not consider his other duties to Rome in a similar way. As emperor he was dutybound to ensure the wellbeing of Rome's population, if only for the sake of domestic peace. Domitian knew better than most how it felt to be on the wrong end of an angry mob baying for blood. For Domitian it may have lightened the burden some that he himself took interest in, and pleasure from, many parts of the games and festivals he arranged. His interest in gladiatorial combat for example is attested in both the hostile and more friendly sources. These next chapters will examine some of the buildings and monuments that were constructed for these purposes, their functions in entertainment religion, the ideas, motivations, and history behind their construction. Many of the structures are located on the Campus Martius, but we would be remiss if we did not examine some of the structures associated with Domitian located elsewhere in the city. Discussing Domitian's temples, both restorations and new constructions, and his motives and personal connections to them is difficult without visiting the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus or the temple of Jupiter Custos on the Capitoline. Similarly, we would be remiss in discussing any Flavian

emperors relation to entertainment without considering the Colosseum.

This chapter will examine of some of Domitian's temples, both original constructions and restorations. The temples to Jupiter on the Capitoline provide us with examples of how Domitian acted and presented himself in the role as keeper of Rome's traditional gods and defender of the ancient customs. The temples to Minerva, both on the Forum Nervae/Transitorium and the Campus Martius give us insight into Domitian's personal devotion to Minerva and how he expressed that devotion through the monuments. The temples dedicated to his family, most notably the Templum Divorum show Domitian honoring his deified father and brother and underscoring his legitimacy and imperial authority through it. Further the temples to Isis and Serapis on the Campus Martius sees Domitian diverge from the traditional Roman gods and the imperial cult, and act on his own interest for foreign cultures, and personal and familial interest and bonds with the eastern Mediterranean. The next chapter will continue on to consider the buildings and monuments Domitian constructed for entertainment and the games and festivals associated with them.

The Capitoline and Jupiter

Domitian is credited with restoring, repairing, and building a number of temples in the city over the course of his reign. Among these he completed the restoration of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline. The origins of the temple dated back to the reign of the kings, having been vowed by Tarquinius Priscus during his war with the Sabines.²¹¹ The original was likely constructed during the 6th century BC, and was supposedly finished by Tarquinius Superbus, but dedicated in the first year of the republic.²¹² The temple was dedicated to the Capitoline triad, Jupiter Juno, and Minerva, and was Rome's most important cult center. Over the course of the republic the temple received refurbishments and repairs, but the temple burnt down in 83 BC, leaving little behind. Reconstruction of the temple was undertaken by Sulla and managed by one Q. Lutatius Catulus. The reconstruction of the temple took nearly fifteen years to finish, likely due to the political instability of the period. The temple was dedicated in 69 BC, and the name of Catulus was inscribed over the entrance, remaining there for a century.²¹³ This temple was built on the foundations of the original and the only significant difference was the more expensive materials used in its construction.

A century later the temple burned again when the Capitoline hill was stormed during the civil war. Domitian had a front row seat to the violence that ensued, and barely escaped.

²¹¹ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 221

²¹² Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 530

²¹³ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 223; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 34

The storming of the Capitoline and the burning of the temple was described by Tacitus as the most deplorable and disgraceful event in the history of Rome, a sign of Rome's moral decline.²¹⁴ The temple was restored by Vespasian following his victory. Again, the restoration followed the foundations and plans of the predecessor, but the structure was made higher and there were some changes in style and decoration.²¹⁵ The restoration did not last long. The temple was consumed by fire again during the fire of 80, the conflagration reducing much of the city to ash alongside the temple.²¹⁶ Restoration of Rome's most important temple likely began as soon as possible after the destruction, presumably initiated by Titus. His early death however, left the remainder of the restoration and the rededication to Domitian. The restoration offered Domitian an opportunity to display his piety to the traditional gods of Rome. The temple was, in all its iterations, central to the religious and political practices of the Romans. It was the finishing line for triumphal processions and the location where consuls and emperors offered sacrifices to Jupiter. The restoration of the temple also served to emphasize the importance of the relationship between Jupiter and the Flavian emperors, and particularly underscoring the presentation of Domitian as Jupiter's regent. It was only fitting that Domitian construct a temple truly fit for Jupiter. And so, the restoration was undertaken at great expense. The new temple outshone its predecessors, it had columns of Pentelic marble, the doors were plated with gold and the roof tiles were gilded bronze. Domitian supposedly spent twelve thousand talents on the gilding alone, an indication of how costly the project was. The temple was considered the finest in Rome, and like the palace it remained one of Domitian's lasting architectural legacies. The temple began to decline in the 5th century, when the gold plates were taken off the doors, the gilded roof tiles were taken during the sack of 410. Despite this the structure remained impressive, but it fell into further ruin in the 6th century.²¹⁷

In addition to the temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Domitian built another temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline, this one of a more personal nature. To understand the temple's origins, it is pertinent to return to the events of 69 and Domitian's role in them. In December 69 it became abundantly clear to both sides of the civil war that Vespasian would be victorious, one way or another. His generals had marched their armies into Italy and by November they had reached Cremona, clashing with Vitellian troops there. The Vitellians

²¹⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 3.72

²¹⁵ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 223

²¹⁶ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 92

²¹⁷ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 223-24

were defeated, and the remainder of Vitellius' army was routed at Carsulae in mid-December. Vitellius accepted the inevitability of his defeat and prepared to abdicate the throne, and hopefully save his own life.²¹⁸ A meeting with the Flavians in the city, led by Sabinus, Vespasian's brother and Domitian's uncle, was held. They agreed that in exchange for abdication and surrender, Vitellius' life would be spared, and he was offered a pension. Following the meeting Vitellius summoned his followers announced his intention to surrender and transfer power to Vespasian. The crowd did not receive the news well, Vitellius lost any control he might have had, and violence erupted.²¹⁹

Sabinus, Domitian and other Flavian supporters fell back onto the Capitoline, which was besieged by the Vitellian mob. Sabinus sent an emissary to protest the violence and breakdown of negotiations, not realizing that Vitellius no longer had any control over his followers. They were now a headless, angry mob intent only on violence. The vanguard of the Flavian army outside Rome tried taking the city by surprise, but the assault was driven off. The Vitellians then attacked the hill. The Flavians on the Capitoline were outnumbered, few were military men, and they were swiftly overrun. Many who resisted were killed, and others were taken and executed, among these Sabinus, and the great temple to Jupiter was set ablaze.²²⁰ Accounts differ in detail as to how Domitian escaped the Capitoline and evaded the manhunt afterwards. But both Suetonius and Tacitus write that Domitian was helped by a temple attendant, who concealed him in their lodgings and helped Domitian disguise himself in a religious costume. Suetonius specifies that he disguised himself as a follower of Isis and hid among her followers, while Tacitus merely writes that he disguised himself as a religious devotee and hid among similar acolytes.²²¹ Afterwards he made his way to the house of a schoolmate according to Suetonius, or to the home of one of his father's clients according to Tacitus. Either way he hid until Flavian troops entered the city. The chaos of that night and his brush with death left a lasting impression on Domitian. He attributed his narrow escape to divine intervention. And as thanks, he built a shrine to Jupiter Conservator on the spot of the temple attendant's house, during the reign of his father. The marble alter of the shrine was decorated with scenes depicting his escape.²²² After he became emperor Domitian enlarged the shrine into a temple proper, dedicated to Jupiter Custos. The temple contained a statue of Jupiter with Domitian in his arms, again emphasizing that divine intervention saved him from

²¹⁸ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 17

²¹⁹ Levick, *Vespasian*, p. 57

²²⁰ Levick, *Vespasian*, p. 57-58; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 17

²²¹ Tac. *Hist.* 3.74; Suet. *Dom.* 1.2; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 14; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 17-18

²²² Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 88

the Vitellians.²²³ A concrete platform was unearthed in 1896, and this has been identified with the temple, though some argue that this is improbable.²²⁴

Like so much of Domitian's life, the episode on the Capitoline was used to portray him in a poor light after his death. Neither Suetonius nor Tacitus make any mention of Domitian participating in the defense of the Capitoline, both stating that he either hid or was already hiding when the hill was stormed.²²⁵ Domitian personally ascribed great importance to the event. The erection of the first shrine and the enlargement some thirteen years later speaks to the fact that even more than a decade after the fact, he still considered the episode significant. Domitian himself composed a poem on the event, though this is lost to us. Martial makes mention of it in an epigram addressed to one Sextus, a librarian at the Palatine library, asking that his "little books" be placed somewhere near the "heaven-inspired lay of the Capitoline-war". In a later poem where Martial praises Domitian and his deeds in general, he writes that Domitian waged his first war as a boy, in defense of Jupiter. While this may be poetic hyperbole meant to flatter the emperor, it is not improbable that Domitian aided his uncle in the defense of the Capitoline. Certainly, Domitian himself would have endorsed such a retelling of the events, which again portrays him as a dutiful Roman, facing fearful odds for the temples of his gods, as it were.²²⁶ The events of December 69 also put Domitian face to face with an angry mob. He experienced firsthand the violence such a mob was capable of, and how the passion and fury of the mob could wrest control away from its nominal leader. Southern argues that this made a dual threat in rebellions and revolts apparent to Domitian. The leader was himself a threat, but the mob could grow beyond its leader, or its anger might survive the leader's death or removal.²²⁷

Both temples to Jupiter served to strengthen Domitian's connection to Jupiter and emphasized his public position as defender and upholder of Roman traditional religion. Domitian aspired to follow in the footsteps of Augustus and saw himself as the supervisor of laws and morals.²²⁸ Perhaps the best examples of Domitian's uncompromising attitude towards religion and religious law is how he handled two separate incidents involving the Vestals. The first was early in his reign, when three of the vestals were accused of breaking

²²³ Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 218; Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 518

²²⁴ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 218

²²⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 1.2; Tac. *Hist.* 3.74

²²⁶ Martial, *Epigrams*, 5.5 & 9.101

²²⁷ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 18

²²⁸ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 99

their vows and committing incest.²²⁹ They were found guilty, their lovers were exiled and Domitian leniently allowed the Vestals to choose how they died, rather than be buried alive as tradition dictated.²³⁰ The second time he approached the issue with far less “leniency”. Around the middle of his reign the senior vestal was accused and found guilty of incest. She was punished according to the ancient laws and was buried alive. Her lovers also suffered traditional punishments, and were beaten to death, except for one who confessed his guilt and was exiled.²³¹ These events alongside the construction of his temples to Jupiter are indicative of Domitian’s public presentation of his faith and his adherence to the traditional laws and values of Rome.

Templum Divorum

The Templum Divorum was a large complex, located on the Campus Martius, east of the Saepta Julia. The complex is known from the Severan Marble Plan and from excavations in 1925.²³² Constructed by Domitian after the fire of 80 left much of the Campus Martius in ruins, the complex was built to honor his father and brother, who had both been deified. The complex measured some 192 by 75 meter, and featured a porticus in the north, often called the Porticus Divorum because of it. As depicted on the marble plan the complex was rectangular in shape and framed by colonnades (See Appendix, Fig. 2). It was entered through the porticus, which was a monumental triple arch, flanked by two smaller temples on the inside. These temples were dedicated to the deified Vespasian and Titus, respectively. Two other buildings flanked the arch, but it is unclear what purpose these served. The open area of the complex is shown covered by regularly spaced dots, which may represent trees. Near the south end of the structure the marble plan shows a square structure with steps at the front and the back, and with columns at the corners.²³³ The Divorum seems to have replaced the Villa Publica, and so incorporated the altar of Mars into the complex.²³⁴ Domitian may have chosen to build the complex on this site because it was there Vespasian and Titus had begun their Judean Triumph in 71.

Like every other emperor, Domitian realized the importance of the role played by the imperial cult in underlining his own imperial authority and legitimacy. A title such as *Divi*

²²⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 101

²³⁰ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 101; Suet. *Dom.* 8.3-4

²³¹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 102; Suet. *Dom.* 8.3-4; Plin. *Epist.* 4.11

²³² Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 87; Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 111

²³³ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 111; Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 304

²³⁴ Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 111; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 291

Filius carried weight, and Domitian was not only the son of a god, but also the brother of one. Domitian himself may or may not have believed in the actual divinity of his family, but he certainly knew the benefits their deification brought. The Divorum was not the only temple or shrine Domitian established to honor his family. He built a temple, and dynastic mausoleum, to the Flavian *Gens* where his father's house had stood.²³⁵ The building was richly decorated according to Martial, evidently covered in marble and gold.²³⁶ He also included other relatives, Titus had already deified their sister Domitilla, and Domitian deified his niece Julia after she died. The deified Flavians had their own priesthood, or priesthoods. There are multiple inscriptions referring to three separate colleges of priests associated with the Flavian cult. There might have been only one priesthood originally established upon the death and deification of Vespasian, and that the name changed as more Flavians were deified and included in the cult.²³⁷ Domitian thus had multiple deified relatives, and honored all of them in a familial temple, and he is credited with establishing the Flavian cult throughout the empire. But Vespasian and Titus received further attention with the construction of the Divorum, in close proximity to several of Domitian's other architectural projects on the Campus Martius.

Iseum et Serapeum

Despite Domitian's dedication to Rome's traditional gods, he did not exclude nor prosecute the cult of Isis. Indeed, Domitian, like his father and brother, supported and endorsed the Egyptian cults in Rome. Both cults had returned to the city sometime after the death of Tiberius, whom had had banished both devotees of Isis and Jews in 19.²³⁸ After the Flavians ascended to the emperorship, the Egyptian cults would enjoy unprecedented imperial support, the likes of which they would not see again until the end of the next century.²³⁹ Flavian support for the cults had its roots in Vespasian's campaigns in the eastern Mediterranean. He had spent considerable time there during the reign of Nero, and established connections and supporters there. It was with his troops and the eastern provinces' support Vespasian launched his successful bid for the imperial throne. During the civil war, while his armies marched on Rome, Vespasian made his way to Alexandria. Control over the city meant control over Rome's vital grain supply, strengthening his position. While Vespasian stayed in

²³⁵ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 46; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 87 & 162

²³⁶ Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.20

²³⁷ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 46

²³⁸ Suet. *Tib.* 36.1; Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, p. 80

²³⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 100

Alexandria several wonders or miracles reportedly occurred. When he first arrived in Alexandria, he was greeted by a lavish reception, arranged by the prefect of Egypt, who had led his troops in proclaiming Vespasian emperor. In the city he was received as the New Serapis, and as such was approached by two native Alexandrians, one blind the other lame. They sought that Vespasian heal them on behalf of Serapis. Vespasian, naturally hesitant, made the attempt after some persuasion, and Suetonius relays that he was successful.²⁴⁰ A second wonder occurred when Vespasian spent time alone in a sanctuary of Serapis, where he received a vision of a man, who conferred upon Vespasian objects associated with Ptolemaic royalty, a coronation of sorts, through Serapis.²⁴¹ Beyond indicating the support of Serapis, such a coronation-miracle also made Vespasian out to be the Ptolemies' successor, which tied Vespasian to the legend of Alexander the Great, ever present in the cultural memory of Rome and the Mediterranean. Titus had his own experience when on his way home from Judea he participated in the consecration of the bull Apis in Memphis.²⁴²

Accounts of Vespasian's wonders stem largely from later sources, Suetonius, and Tacitus. Josephus, who accompanied Vespasian to Alexandria in 69, makes no mention of the miracles he performed. Josephus may have been reluctant to report the miracle workings of a faith contradictory to his own, or perhaps more likely, he omitted them because the wonders were not publicly emphasized in the early years of the Flavian dynasty.²⁴³ While invoking the legend of Alexander may have benefited Vespasian, a strong connection to an eastern deity was unlikely to do him much good in the minds of the Roman elite back west. It may have made matters worse, drawing comparisons with Nero or Mark Anthony. However much Vespasian himself believed that he had Serapis on his side, he realized the importance of portraying himself as Nero's opposite, which precluded extensive portrayal of eastern divine approval. He was politically shrewd enough to recognize that sticking to more traditional Roman themes would meet with more success. When Vespasian finally became emperor, he, and Titus, chose to focus on their victories in Judea, presenting Rome with a far more traditional Roman image. Vespasian and Titus chose to celebrate their triumphs for the Judean War together. The two Flavians supposedly spent the night before the triumph in the temple of Isis, though Coarelli argues that they likely spent it in the Villa Publica.²⁴⁴ If Vespasian and Titus did spend the night in the temple of Isis it was a remarkable show of

²⁴⁰ Suet. *Vesp.* 7.2-3; Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire", p. 78-79; Takács, *Isis and Serapis*, p. 96

²⁴¹ Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire", p. 79-80

²⁴² Suet. *Titus*, 5.3

²⁴³ Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire", p. 81

²⁴⁴ Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, p. 141; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 291

support for the deity. And a nod to their relationship with Egypt and her gods.²⁴⁵

While his father and brother had their own connections to Egyptian deities, Domitian himself became attached to Isis, nearly at the same time as his father supposedly experienced his miracles. We have already explored the events of late 69 and Domitian's escape from the Capitoline. Suetonius recounts that Domitian disguised himself as a member of the cult of Isis in order to make his escape. If true that he disguised himself thusly (Tacitus makes no mention of what particular group of religious followers he disguises himself amongst), it is no wonder that Domitian attributed his survival partly to Isis, as well as Jupiter. There is some skepticism to the story of Domitian disguising himself as worshipper of Isis, particularly the point is made that there were no Isiac festivals assigned to the date when he escaped the Capitoline.²⁴⁶ While there may not have been any scheduled festivals on that date, the unrest in Rome and the approaching Flavian army may have prompted the cult to arrange a more impromptu affair. Furthermore, Domitian stood to gain little in Rome from associating with the cult of Isis, and perhaps even less by inventing the account. Of course, Suetonius himself may have invented the story of the Isiac disguise but given the Flavians' fairly public association with Egyptian deities, it seems more probable that the story is true. It is not unlikely, as Jones writes, that Domitian (and the other Flavians, and Romans in general) equated the Egyptian deities with Roman ones, in this instance seeing parallels between Jupiter and Serapis, and Isis and Minerva.²⁴⁷ The equation between Minerva and Isis is particularly compelling in the case of Domitian, given his veneration for the former as his guardian deity. It is also worth noting that while the Romans may have considered both Isis and Serapis entirely Egyptian deities, by the time Augustus annexed Egypt into the empire, the gods had been subjected to three centuries of Hellenic influence during the reign of the Ptolemies. Serapis in particular was a product of Greek influence and the work of the Ptolemies.²⁴⁸ As such these deities may have had considerably more appeal to a Roman than a "pure" Egyptian deity, even if the Romans themselves considered both entirely Egyptian.

We are by now familiar with the fire of 80, which gave Domitian ample opportunity to rebuild much of Rome and its temples and monuments to his own preference. The temple to Isis was no exception. Jones argues that Domitian's reverence for Isis likely was genuine, and that as Jupiter's chosen regent, he was due the support of Isis as well. The Flavians'

²⁴⁵ Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire", p. 84

²⁴⁶ Takács, *Isis and Serapis*, p. 99-100

²⁴⁷ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 101

²⁴⁸ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1317

support for the Egyptian deities in general, and Domitian's support in particular, distinguished by the restoration of the temple, was unlikely to win them much support among the elites of Rome. And while Rome itself was cosmopolitan in makeup, courting the cult of Isis may not have won them much among the general population either. Courting support from adherents of eastern deities was best done in the eastern portion of the empire, rather than in the capital. That said, Domitian did attempt to bind the eastern provinces of the empire closer to Rome and the center of power through his reign. He brought as many as twenty-four Easterners into the Senate, a greater number than either Vespasian before him, or Trajan after him.²⁴⁹ This inclusion of eastern senators may have been motivated both by the revolt of Saturninus, and the appearance of a false Nero. Domitian sought to shore up the loyalty of the eastern provinces by including them in government, insofar as he actually included the senate in government, and weaken the position of western senators who he may have feared were involved with, or sympathetic to Saturninus.²⁵⁰ And while these eastern senators may have appreciated Domitian's commitments to eastern culture and religion, they represented a small portion of the senate. If Domitian's aim was to court senatorial support, he would have been better off avoiding all things Egyptian. The restoration of the temple was therefore unlikely a politically motivated move, but rather one motivated by his own belief that he in part owed Isis for his survival, and his own interest in Egyptian culture and religion. Outside of Rome he expanded the temple to Isis at Beneventum, going so far as erecting a statue of himself portrayed as a Pharaoh.²⁵¹ The motivation for the restoration was likely far more personal than political, and restoration of the temple was aimed at encouraging the support of, showing reverence for Isis, and satisfying his own appetite for eastern culture.²⁵²

The cults of Isis and Serapis had a long history in the Campus Martius. In 43 BC the then triumvirs had voted a temple to Isis and Serapis. Presumably, this was built, but repressive measures against the cults followed, beginning when civil war broke out between Augustus and Mark Anthony. With Mark Anthony situated in the east alongside the last of the Ptolemies, targeting Egyptian culture and religion became part of Augustus' effort to smear him. Repressive measures continued with Tiberius, who banished the followers of the cults in 19. He also supposedly destroyed a temple to Isis located on the Campus Martius,

²⁴⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 171-73; Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire", p. 86

²⁵⁰ Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire", p. 86-87; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 170-2; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 112

²⁵¹ Luke, "A Healing Touch for Empire", p. 87

²⁵² Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 101

throwing the cult statue into the Tiber.²⁵³ The cult was welcomed back into the city after Tiberius' death, and if the temple had been destroyed, a new one was built. This temple was lost to the fire of 80, and so Domitian took it upon himself to restore it. Archeological discoveries of obelisks and Egyptian sculptures, alongside evidence from the Severan marble plan places it between the Piazza del Collegio Romano, the apse of S. Maria sopra Minerva and S. Stefano del Cacco. In the 1st century the temple was located next to the Saepta Julia, between it and the temple of Minerva Chalcidicia, and the Templum Divorum.²⁵⁴ The temple was a twin temple, consisting of both an Iseum and a Serapeum. The Severan plan refers to it simply as the Serapeum.

As depicted on the Severan plan (See Appendix, Fig. 3) the Serapeum lay south of the Iseum and they were connected by a broad doorway, divided into bays by three columns. What remains of the Iseum on the plan shows a colonnade adjoined to the wall at the south end and widely spaced columns along the sides. The temple itself probably stood towards the north end. The Serapeum is depicted as a large rectangular building, running from west to east. It has large entrances from both the Saepta to the west and the square, featuring the temple to Minerva, in front of the Divorum. On the southern wall a broad doorway leads to a semi-circular colonnade. The temple itself is likely the larger feature projecting north and south in the middle of the semi-circle.²⁵⁵ Several obelisks have been discovered in the vicinity of the temple. These were likely brought to Rome in the 1st century and decorated the temple's entrance. Among these are the obelisk of Piazza della Rotonda, which is displayed in front of the Pantheon. The obelisk stems from the reign of Ramses II and was imported to Rome from the Temple of Ra at Heliopolis.²⁵⁶ The obelisk in the Piazza Navona was long believed to come from Domitian's restoration of the temple, but this now doubted, but it is related to Domitian.²⁵⁷

Domitian's endorsement and support of the cult of Isis, and the restoration and embellishment of their chief temple in the city was unlikely to win him much support with traditional Roman elites. But it does offer us an insight into his likely genuine belief in both the Roman gods and the Egyptian deities that had also seemingly favored his father and brother. It also offers a concrete example of Domitian's interest in Egyptian culture and

²⁵³ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 91-92; Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 510; Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 211

²⁵⁴ Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 510; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 90-91

²⁵⁵ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 211-212

²⁵⁶ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 274

²⁵⁷ Claridge, *Rome*, p.237; Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p.275

religion in Rome. Particularly Domitian's adoption of Egyptian symbols of power and authority and presenting them in public is worth noting. Though Rome had become the capital of a vast empire, and peoples and cultures from across the empire congregated in the city, Domitian may not have expected many to partake in, or necessarily appreciate his investment in Egyptian culture and religion. Certainly, they may have appealed to easterners living in the capital. But this may have been secondary to his own desire to incorporate eastern culture into the capital and the allusions the Egyptian monuments and temples made to his father's successful bid for power, which had begun in the east.

Minerva

While Domitian publicly associated himself and his regime strongly with Jupiter, privately he was devoted to Minerva. Which is not to say that worship of one excluded the other, but much like Augustus had personally favored Apollo and Caesar had attached himself to Venus, Domitian acted along similar lines. Not only venerating the goddess but also claiming to be her son. And as part of the ancient Capitoline triad, alongside Jupiter and Juno, she was as much a part of traditional Roman religion as Jupiter or Mars. Domitian's devotion to Minerva seems to have been genuine and may, as Southern argues, have had its origins early in Domitian's life.²⁵⁸ Suetonius writes that the emperor worshipped the goddess with superstitious veneration, and that Domitian believed her to be his guardian deity.²⁵⁹ While he dedicated both shrine and temple to Jupiter for his survival in 69, he likely believed that both Jupiter and Minerva were involved in preserving his life.²⁶⁰ Domitian kept a shrine to Minerva in his bedroom, and may have had another larger one installed in one of the palace's courtyards. Further evidence of his devotion to the goddess can be found in the naming of a legion raised early in his reign. The legion was named after the goddess, rather than after himself or his family.²⁶¹

While Domitian was personally devoted to Minerva, it does not mean it was private in the modern sense of the word. He incorporated the goddess into much of his imagery, and erected and restored more than one temple to her. Martial praises Domitian's largess in restoration and construction of temples in general, and in an epigram, he describes that if all the gods were to repay Domitian for the expenses incurred in glorifying them, they would be left penniless. Martial makes an exception in the poem however, stating that Minerva's and

²⁵⁸ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 10

²⁵⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 15.3

²⁶⁰ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 121

²⁶¹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 100

Domitian's interests are the same.²⁶² He made his devotion to her obvious to the public through her inclusion in imagery, the construction (and restoration) of temples and in games partly or wholly dedicated to her. Given the way Suetonius writes of Domitian's devotion to the goddess, we can safely assume that the public was fully aware of Domitian's relationship with, and reverence for, the goddess.

The temple of Minerva Chalcidica is listed among the buildings of Domitian as one of his original structures rather than a restoration of a previous temple.²⁶³ Neither temple nor ruins remain to us, but evidence of the temple can be found on the Severan Marble Plan of Rome. The temple was located on the Campus Martius, north of the aforementioned Divorum and east of the Serapeum, which today means that it lay between the Piazza del Collegio Romano, Via di Santo Stefano del Cacco and Via della Gatta. The depiction on the marble plan is supplemented by a renaissance drawing by Onofrio Panvinio. This drawing however shows a far more elaborate circular structure than that depicted on the marble plan, though the notes, location and measurements given by Panvinio identifies the drawing as the temple of Minerva Chalcidica. This may mean that the temple was rebuilt or changed after the marble plan was finished, or that Panvinio found the ruins of a circular building and completed it with evidence from another source.²⁶⁴

On the marble plan the temple is depicted as a circular structure with an arrangement of four radial flights of steps narrowing inwards (See Appendix, Fig. 4). The steps leading to a circular platform with a rectangular shape in the middle, likely the base for a colossal statue.²⁶⁵ There are different views on where the epithet "Chalcidica" stems from. It may simply mean that the temple's statue came from Chalkis in Euboea. Coarelli however, writes that the name (meaning doorkeeper) is explained by the temple's position, located on the square in front of the Divorum and the Iseum et Serapeum.²⁶⁶ The placement of a temple to Domitian's favored deity in close proximity to his deified relatives, as a sort of gatekeeper or guardian is a compelling explanation for the temple's location. Connecting Minerva with his deified father and brother. His deified relatives supporting, and supported by, his own guardian deity. The orientation of the presumed statue base depicted on the marble plan

²⁶² Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.3

²⁶³ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 88

²⁶⁴ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 256; Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 66 & 68 (Fig. 755)

²⁶⁵ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 256; Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 66

²⁶⁶ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 291

complicates the idea of Minerva as gatekeeper for the Divorum. As depicted on the marble plan, the logical orientation of the statue would have been either facing northwest or southeast. With the Divorum located to the south of the temple, it seems odd that the statue would be facing either direction if it were to be a gatekeeper. More difficulties arise in that we know nothing of what the statue looked like nor what its composition was. It may not have been oriented any of the ways that seem most obvious. The temple's position between both the Divorum and the Iseum and Serapeum is highly unlikely to be coincidental. Domitian's attention to the minutiae of administration leads us to believe that he likely also involved himself in the details of his architectural projects, which lends further credence to the three temples being arranged in proximity to each other as part of larger design idea. The location of the Iseum and Serapeum was likely determined by the location of the previous temple, and the location of the Divorum may very well have been motivated by the starting point for Vespasian and Titus' triumph in 71, and perhaps even as the starting point of Domitian's own triumphs later. But the placement of the temple of Minerva between the temples dedicated to his father and brother, and the Egyptian deities both they and Domitian himself had some sort of relationship with can hardly be coincidental. Certainly, the proximity to the theater of Pompey, Agrippa's Pantheon and the baths of Agrippa, and Nero, may have played a considerable part in attracting Domitian to the area, beyond the fact that it was ripe for restorations and new projects. To leave his own mark on a space already featuring the monumental structures of other emperors and great Romans was probably tempting. The temples were not the only structures he erected in the area either. But we are left with temples dedicated to gods Domitian had intimate relationships with. Minerva as his guardian deity, placed between his deified father and brother, and Isis, who played a part in his survival in 69, and indeed may have been equated with Minerva as well. The lack of material evidence for the appearance and composition of the temples and their decorations makes it hard to draw definitive conclusions, but we are left with deified family, foreign and Roman deities in close proximity to each other, all of whom were connected to Domitian by bonds both mortal and divine. Gathered together, honored by the emperor they had supported and continued to support.

The temple was not the only one dedicated to Minerva that Domitian built or restored. He also included a temple dedicated to her on his own imperial forum, today known as the *Forum Transitorium*, or the *Forum Nervae*. The forum was built and all but finished by Domitian, but his assassination in 96 precluded his inauguration of it, and the damning of his memory meant his name would never be attached to it. Instead, both temple and forum were

inaugurated by Nerva in 97, and thus it became the *Forum Nervae*. It derives its other name *Transitorium* from its position between the old Forum Romanum and the newer imperial fora. The forum connected the old forum and the new, and joined the Subura district to the forum, replacing the first portion of the Argiletum road. It thus served as a thoroughfare and traffic artery, and the planning of the forum would have had to account for the heavy flow of traffic.²⁶⁷ Its location ensured that the forum was long and narrow, measuring some 120 meters long by 45 meters wide. It took on the shape of a long rectangle, the long sides lined with colonnades. The long walls appear to have been dotted with doorways giving access to the Forum Augustum and Julium on the western side, and to the temple of peace on the eastern side.²⁶⁸ On the south eastern wall a pair of adorsed columns survive, including some of the entablature and attic. The attic contains a sculptured relief of Minerva, and the frieze below depicts women at work with their handicrafts, which Minerva was patron of.²⁶⁹ The short sides were gently curved, the northern curve interrupted by the temple of Minerva. The size of the forum and temple meant that it was unfeasible to construct a proper porticus for the temple, and so a large colonnade was substituted. The space constraints also meant that the temple abutted with the north-eastern hemicycle of the Augustan forum. All that remains of the temple today is the scant ruins of the podium, exposed during excavations in the early 30s. Luckily the temple appears on a fragment of the marble plan, giving us some information on its layout. The temple was on a high podium, approached via frontal stairs leading up to the colonnade. The colonnade consisted of six columns, running three bays deep. The temple's interior was a nave flanked by colonnades, with an apse at the far end.²⁷⁰ Much of the temple remained standing until the early 17th century.

The restorations and constructions of temples dedicated to Minerva served to further present Domitian as a staunch upholder of traditional Roman religion, devoting time, effort, and money to temples appropriate for a member of the Capitoline triad. At the same time, the temples were expressions of Domitian personal veneration of, and piety towards Minerva. The genuine faith of the emperor reflected in the impressive architecture he commissioned on her behalf. The temples dedicated to her once again showing that he had the support of both her and Jupiter. The theme of divine support for both Domitian himself and his regime as emperor is persistent and repeats itself in imagery and literature produced during his reign,

²⁶⁷ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 113-15; Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 167; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 128; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 85

²⁶⁸ Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 168-69

²⁶⁹ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 113; Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 168

²⁷⁰ Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 168

and so unsurprisingly he repeats the point through the construction and restoration of temples, and shrines to the traditional gods of the city. The temple of Minerva on his forum, though neither temple nor forum would bear his name, placed his deity, and by extension Domitian himself, in close proximity to the temple of his father and the temples of Rome's other emperors and great men. Alongside such monuments as his equestrian statue, this firmly embedded Domitian alongside Rome's finest, displayed on the fora. The proximity of the temple of Minerva Chalcidica to the shrines of his deified father and brother also emphasized the divine support of not only the gods but of his deified family. His deified kin further connected both Domitian and the Flavians as a whole to the other deified emperors of Rome, legitimizing the Flavians. Who had after all come to power, not because of any legitimate claim to the throne, but through force of arms. Furthermore, the temple's proximity to the Iseum and Serapeum should not be overlooked. The positioning of the temple between both the deified kin of Domitian and the goddess amongst who's followers Domitian escaped near certain death, collects the divinities Domitian himself must have believed were invested in supporting and protecting him. It also reinforces the array of gods any dissident or rebel would have to face if they challenged Domitian.

In Domitian's temples we see him present himself in the role as the guardian of Rome's traditional values and gods. A loyal son who gives his deified father and brother the honor they are due, both as emperors and as gods. He gives proper reverence and respect to the gods who protected him and ensured his survival, at the same time he indulges in his own love for eastern culture and honors a foreign deity associated both with his family and with his own survival in the face of an angry mob. With his temples Domitian also presents himself and his reign as divinely supported and protected. Gods, foreign, traditional and mortals ascended are arrayed against any, enemies foreign and domestic, who would do him, Rome, and the empire harm. The divinities reinforce his imperial authority as Jupiter's chosen regent and Minerva's favored son. His predecessors watch over him and mark him out as the legitimate successor to the Flavian and imperial legacy. Even the deities of distant Egypt favor him, like they favored his father and brother before him, and Alexander the Great before them. The temples are both monuments to Domitian's personal piety as man and emperor, and to the support and protection of the divines who endorse his reign and underscores his authority, who stand arrayed against all contenders, rebels, traitors, rioters, and enemies.

Chapter 6: Entertainment

Beyond upholding the traditional morals and religion of Rome, Domitian also invested in the city's entertainment. The games and festivals of Rome had important religious aspects, but perhaps more importantly they allowed the emperor to put on impressive shows that both glorified him, and kept the population happy, or at least content. Domitian inherited the most enduring symbol of entertainment in ancient Rome, the Colosseum. His father was responsible for initiating the construction of it, but both Titus and Domitian involved themselves in the project. Titus was responsible for the grand opening of the Colosseum, but it was Domitian who laid the finishing touches on it. Domitian ensured the continuation of preexisting shows and games, and also organized new ones, such as the Capitoline games, modeled on Greek games, like the Olympics, and the games of Nero. Domitian's games honored the Capitoline triad, chiefly Jupiter, but Juno and Minerva were included. To host these new games properly Domitian had two venues built on the Campus Martius. These were his Stadium and Odeon. The buildings themselves are largely gone, but the stadium in particular remains in the urban topography of the modern city, in the shape of the Piazza Navona. This chapter will explore these structures and their associated games and festivals, and how Domitian presented himself through them.

The Colosseum

The Flavian Amphitheater, better known as the Colosseum, is undoubtedly the Flavians' most enduring legacy and Rome's most defining monument. It is perhaps therefore ironic that it is known by the name "Colosseum. For the more popular name of the building came from the colossal statue located next to it, which originally depicted Nero, but was later turned into a sun god.²⁷¹ The building has captivated people for the better part of two millennia, first as the premier amphitheater in the Roman empire, and afterwards as a monument to both the architectural achievements and bloody entertainment of Roman civilization. While the famous amphitheater may not have been one of Domitian's own projects, any exploration of structures and entertainment during the reign of a Flavian would be remiss to ignore it. In part because of how much Domitian himself made use of it. Vespasian was responsible for initiating the ambitious project, following his victory in the civil wars of 69. During the reign of Nero an older amphitheater had been destroyed, and only replaced by a temporary wooden structure. Vespasian, deciding to kill two birds with one stone, made the decision to begin construction of a massive new amphitheater on the grounds which Nero had appropriated for

²⁷¹ Hopkins & Beard, *The Colosseum*, p. 35; Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 7

his Domus Aurea. More specifically Vespasian chose to build the Colosseum on the site of Nero's artificial lake, which Suetonius describes as a sea.²⁷² Placing the Colosseum in the valley between the Palatine, Esquiline, and Caelian hills. In doing so Vespasian put his own mark on the city, but also wiped away the "stain" of Nero, with a building dedicated not to the emperor alone, but to the citizens of Rome and their entertainment.²⁷³ The construction of the amphitheater was likely funded with the spoils of Vespasian's Judean campaign.²⁷⁴ After the location was chosen, Vespasian had the watercourses that fed the lake diverted, and turned them to public use. The lake was then drained, and a concrete foundation was laid.

Vespasian carried out the first dedication of the amphitheater before its completion and his own death. By that time, the construction had reached the third tier of seating, and the second order of columns on the exterior.²⁷⁵ Vespasian's death left Titus to complete it. Titus celebrated the building's completion in 80 with inaugural games that lasted for a hundred days, Suetonius claims five thousand animals were put to death on a single day.²⁷⁶ Cassius Dio gives a more conservative estimate of nine thousand animals killed in total, caveating that it is almost impossible to know the true number for they tended to be inflated.²⁷⁷ Titus did not live long enough to see the finishing touches applied. This fell to Domitian, who oversaw the final touches and likely the completion of the subterranean levels of the building.²⁷⁸ The building received further reparations, maintenance, and additions through the next five hundred years. Nerva and Trajan made changes and additions to it, and Antoninus Pius restored it. In 217 it was struck by lightning which rendered it unusable for several years. Reparations were undertaken but likely went on into the reign of Gordian III, the Colosseum being operable again sometime around 240.²⁷⁹ In the middle of the 3rd century, it was restored after another lightning strike, before being damaged again during the earthquakes of 442. The Colosseum hosted gladiatorial contests until 435, but animal hunts continued as late as 523. Damage reduced the Colosseum over the centuries, and by the 14th century it looked more or less like it does today. Like most ruins in Rome, the Colosseum was pilfered for building materials, until conservation efforts started in the late 18th

²⁷² Suet. *Nero*, 31.1

²⁷³ Hopkins & Beard, *The Colosseum*, p. 31

²⁷⁴ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 314; Hopkins & Beard, *The Colosseum*, p. 32-34

²⁷⁵ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 164; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 312

²⁷⁶ Suet. *Titus*, 7.3

²⁷⁷ Hopkins & Beard, *The Colosseum*, p. 42

²⁷⁸ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 164; Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 7

²⁷⁹ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 312

century.²⁸⁰

The Colosseum is by far the largest amphitheater the Romans ever built. The outer ring is 50 meters tall, the long axis of the ellipse measures 189 meters, the short 156. The perimeter would have measured 545 meters when it was intact. It is estimated that the outer perimeter required 100 000 cubic meters of travertine, with 300 tons of iron clamps to hold the blocks together.²⁸¹ The outermost ring is built entirely of travertine and is four stories tall. The first three stories are composed of arches framed by semicolumns. Each story featuring a different order of columns. The first story is decorated on the exterior with Tuscan columns, the second Ionic, the third Corinthian. The fourth story is a sort of attic and is partitioned by Corinthian pilasters. Every other partition features a square window. Above the windows there were installed brackets. These supported poles on which a large, segmented awning was attached, which protected the spectators from the sun. A contingent of sailors from Misenum were responsible for the operation of the awning, and they were lodged in barracks near the Colosseum.²⁸²

On the ground floor there are five corridors following the shape of the building (See Appendix Fig. 5). The two outermost form a double arcade around the entirety of the structure. The innermost is interrupted by four entrances, which gave access to processions, performers, high ranking, and other special guests. The two on the long axis were likely intended for processions and performers, while the two on the short axis gave access to the imperial box, probably on the north side, and magistrates on the opposite side. Eighty arches provided access to stairs leading to the seating area. Spectators were provided with tokens that featured numbers (including the number of the entrance they were meant to use) meant to get the spectator to their seat in an orderly fashion, much like tickets for modern sporting venues.²⁸³

Ancient sources give the Colosseum a capacity of 87 000 spectators, modern estimates reduce this to about 50 000. The seating area was divided into five superimposed sections, in which the spectators were arranged after social status. The first section was a podium, raised only about four meters above the arena, reserved for distinguished spectators. Above this the emperor had his own box, which he shared with the Vestals. Ranged around this box ran the first level, which seated the senators. The senatorial section featured marble

²⁸⁰ Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 8; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 321-313

²⁸¹ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 164; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 312

²⁸² Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 164-65; Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 8-9

²⁸³ Richardson Jr. (Ed.) *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 8-9; Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 165; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 314

seating and the names of senators were inscribed on the first rows of seats adjacent to the arena. These names seem to have been replaced fairly often as Senators died, were replaced, or otherwise had their seat moved. The only names left to us are the last ones, dating from the 5th century.²⁸⁴ The equestrians were seated on the level above the senators, Suetonius notes that Domitian restored the equestrian to their seats at the theatres which had been occupied by the general public. And Martial produced some epigrams to the same effect, praising the emperor for restoring the proper seating arrangements. The same epigram includes a humorous story about a man praising Domitian for restoring the equestrians' dignity, before being removed from the section, as he is not actually an equestrian.²⁸⁵ The renewed enforcement of the seating arrangements can be seen as another instance of Domitian desiring things be done properly and according to the law. Ordinary citizens were seated on the level above. Sections were set aside for specific groups, soldiers on leave received their own section, as did scribes, heralds, foreign dignitaries, schoolchildren, public slaves and likely a host of other categories. The topmost level was for the poor, slaves, and women. This level had only standing room, while the three other had seating.²⁸⁶

The arena itself is an oval, measuring 83 meters long and 48 meters wide. The floor of the arena was made of planks covered with sand, covering the complex substructure which is visible today. When Titus inaugurated the arena, he is supposed to have filled the arena with water and presented swimming animals and a naval battle. A nearby aqueduct could easily have provided the water for such a show, but as it stands now there is no easy way to make the structure watertight. One explanation may be that when Titus held the inaugural games before construction of the basement had begun.²⁸⁷ They may have filled the unfinished basement with water as long as that was viable. The basement was installed no earlier than Domitian, and likely received upgrades and refurbishments through the centuries, in particular after the fires which ravaged the building on occasion. The basement was the logistical backbone of the amphitheater. It served as a staging area for the shows, including storage for weapons and the animals for the shows. It housed elevator systems that could hoist gladiators and animals to the arena, as well as cranes, catapults and machinery for special effects, including bringing new scenery to the arena. On both ends of the basement there are subterranean entrances, the eastern one opens into a gallery that communicated with

²⁸⁴ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 168; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 315

²⁸⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 8.3; Martial. *Epigrams*, 5.8

²⁸⁶ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 314-15

²⁸⁷ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 315-16; Hopkins & Beard, *The Colosseum*, p. 43; Futrell, *The Roman Games*, p. 79-80

the gladiatorial barracks nearby, the Ludus Magnus (See Appendix, Fig. 6).²⁸⁸ Domitian built four gladiatorial schools in the city, the Ludus Magnus being the principal and directly connected to the Colosseum. The others were the Gallic and the Dacian schools, and a fourth called Matutinus, where fighters probably were trained for animal-hunting shows.²⁸⁹

The Colosseum provided the Flavian emperors and their successors with an arena where they could present both themselves and their games to the Roman public. Much has been written about the inability of modern people to understand the entertainment value of the violence that was on display in the arenas of Rome. Yet physical contests remain some of the most popular entertainment today. Boxing, and other martial contests still draw crowds and contact sports like American football are among the most televised events of any given year. The popularity of video games depicting violence is testament to the entertainment value of these bloody affairs. Common to all forms of violent sport is the presence of rules and a designated area within which the violence takes place. Fagan compares the difference between a fistfight outside of Madison Square Garden in New York to that of a boxing match inside it. While the fight outside is its own kind of spectacle it is subject to popular disapproval and punishment by the law. The fight inside is the opposite, where the presence of rules and rituals make the fight into something more than a brawl.²⁹⁰ The shows of the Roman arenas are similar. The arenas themselves were purpose-built stages for the violent contests, there were rituals and rules to the fights. The shows in the Colosseum provided a thrill that would not be unfamiliar to a modern audience. The value in providing this sort of spectacular thrill was not lost on the emperors, the public was entertained, and the entertainment reflected on the man responsible for providing them. The games were given by individuals, not the state, and as such games could win a man popularity and political influence. By the time of Domitian, it had become the sole purview of the emperor to arrange and present games in Rome. He could let a relative or magistrate present games on his behalf, but the important part was that the emperor's name was attached, and the glory was his. Outside of Rome the emperor's permission was needed to arrange gladiatorial shows.²⁹¹ Gladiatorial entertainment had been monopolized by the emperor.²⁹²

Beyond entertainment, the arena allowed the emperor and his subjects to interact with

²⁸⁸ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 166-67; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 317; Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 10

²⁸⁹ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 170-72; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 319

²⁹⁰ Fagan, "Gladiatorial Combat as Alluring Spectacle", p. 467

²⁹¹ Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 617-18

²⁹² Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, p. 8; Hornblower (Ed.) et Al. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 617-18

one another in a far less restrained way than usual. The emperor in his box was prominent in the architecture of the Colosseum and spectators could communicate with him. This communication went beyond roars of approval. The Colosseum was more than just an arena for violence, it was a political arena where the emperor lavished the spectators with spectacular shows, at the same time the spectators could make themselves heard, for better or worse. The upper rungs of Roman society may have used the arena as a place to meet their colleagues and discuss business, alliances, contracts and all the other things they may have had to discuss. The common people had the opportunity to address and petition the emperor, not only as individuals but as a group. In the amphitheater they enjoyed greater freedom of expression, make their approval or disapproval, their needs and desires on a wide range of issues known. In the Colosseum (and other venues) their petitions were far more likely to receive an immediate response, and the emperor had to consider the impact approval or denial would have on both his public image and the mood of the audience. Rejection is often met with anger and presenting reasonable arguments for denial over the shouts of some fifty thousand people may have been a difficult prospect.²⁹³

That said, the emperors did not walk into these encounters hoping for the best. Their appearance at the shows involved carefully managed stagecraft, and they would do their level best to ensure that the crowds reacted favorably. In part by ensuring the shows were spectacular in the first place and by giving gifts to the spectators.²⁹⁴ In a poem Statius describes shows being given by Domitian at the end of the year. He describes some of the contestants in the arena, but he also includes passages describing Domitian's largess during the show, and the food and gifts he gives to the crowd.²⁹⁵

Domitian like most other emperors realized the importance of putting on shows in the Colosseum, but he seems to have enjoyed the spectacle as well. He invested in new gladiatorial schools and spent heavily on his own games. In addition to presenting his own games, he revived the custom of games presented by the quaestors (they presumably credited him, while bearing the financial burden, at least partially, themselves), and he showed up for these as well. He also seemingly let the spectators call upon two pairs of his own gladiators and brought them on at the end of a show, perhaps as the gladiatorial equivalent of a concert's encore.²⁹⁶ He had his own taste in gladiators, bearing particular ill-will towards the

²⁹³ Hopkins & Beard, *The Colosseum*, p. 40-41; Futrell, *The Roman Games*, p. 38-39

²⁹⁴ Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, p. 14-15

²⁹⁵ Stat. *Silv.* 1.6

²⁹⁶ Suet. *Dom.* 4.1; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 105

Thracian style gladiators.²⁹⁷ Suetonius states in his biography of the emperor that Domitian gave frequent, elaborate, and expensive shows, both in the amphitheater and elsewhere.²⁹⁸ Suetonius also writes that Domitian organized naval battles in the Colosseum. We have already discussed the difficult logistics of this, so we may again presume that this happened before the complex subterranean levels were installed. Domitian seems to have enjoyed these naval battles and gave them frequently enough that it warranted building a specialized venue for them. Domitian's Numachia was located near the Tiber and was large enough to accommodate battles with fleets of an almost regular size, according to Suetonius.²⁹⁹ Beyond the naval battles Domitian also presented gladiatorial shows in the evening or at night, illuminated by torchlight. He included women and dwarves among the gladiatorial contestants, presumably also including them in these "midnight-special" shows. Statius describes a show featuring both women and dwarves in his *Silvae*. Likely, he is describing one of the games held in December.³⁰⁰ Statius writes that "the sex untrained and ignorant" takes their place in the arena, daring to take part in manly combat. He offers up a comparison of the fighting women to the fabled Amazons. Brunett speculates that the women may have been dressed as Amazons, to further emphasize the point for the audience.³⁰¹ The women appear to have been engaged in combat with one another, rather than fighting traditional male gladiators or the dwarves that were presented at the same show. The reasoning is simple, if the women were to fight the dwarves, they would have swept the floor with them. While watching armed women butcher the dwarves may have elicited some humor among the audience, it was unlikely to have been a very entertaining show. Furthermore, the women's battle is presented as a far more serious affair than that of the dwarves. As described, the dwarves appear more like a comic act than a serious gladiatorial contest.³⁰² The dwarven fighters appear to be unarmed, and are fighting each other and a flock of cranes, who are puzzled by the "unusual ferocity" of their opponents. The dwarves fighting each other, and a flock of birds must have been entertaining to the spectators, Statius writing that both Mars and Virtue were brought to laughter by the spectacle.³⁰³ The animal shows were also used by poets as a vehicle for praising the emperor, both Statius and Martial produced poems on

²⁹⁷ Suet. *Dom.* 10.1; Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.68 & 14.213; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 124

²⁹⁸ Suet. *Dom.* 4.1

²⁹⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 4.2

³⁰⁰ Stat. *Silv.* 1.6

³⁰¹ Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.52-55; Brunett, "Women with Swords", p. 480

³⁰² Brunett, "Women with Swords", p. 480

³⁰³ Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.57-64

animals in the arena, lions, and hares more specifically. Statius poem seems more intended to evoke the dignified death of a tame lion, which faces his violent demise admirably, provoking the sympathy of the spectators, even touching “Great Caesar’s countenance”.³⁰⁴ Martial’s poems take on a different note. Epigrams depicting lions who consider hares far too small to be worthy prey, declining to harm them, feature often in the first book of his epigrams. He writes that the hares are safer in the lion’s jaw than elsewhere and that the tiny animals need not fear the lions.³⁰⁵ Without delving too deep into poetic interpretation, Martial may have intended that the hares should be interpreted as himself, and other “lesser men”, while the lions are representative of the emperor and his power.

After his death Domitian received criticism for his behavior at the shows. Suetonius writes of an incident where Domitian reacted badly to man who said that the Thracian was a match for the Murmillo, but not for the one giving the games, i.e., Domitian. The man seemingly favored the Thracians, whom Domitian despised, and blamed Domitian for his loss, essentially claiming that the match had been rigged by Domitian. Domitian was furious and had the man dragged from his seat and thrown into the arena, to be mauled by dogs, wearing a placard saying, “A favorer of the Thracians who spoke impiously”.³⁰⁶ Pliny recounts the same event in his panegyric, adding that the man was burnt alive. Pliny further writes that Domitian used the theater to collect charges of high treason and felt scorned if people did not like his gladiators, taking criticism of them to be criticisms of himself.³⁰⁷ Likely the account is exaggerated, but that someone could interpret criticism of their favored contestant as criticism of themselves is hardly an alien concept. The accusation of cheating and rigging likely smarted more than somebody simply disagreeing on what sort of gladiator was best. After all, the quality of the shows reflected directly on the emperor and being accused of rigging the games would have tarnished both the entertainment and Domitian himself.

Domitian’s self-presentation through the Colosseum was colored by the fact that the building was not entirely his own project. He inherited it from his father and was only responsible for applying the finishing touches. The Colosseum is remarkable for its architectural unity despite the initial construction being overseen by three different emperors and reparations and additions being overseen by numerous others. The Flavian Amphitheater

³⁰⁴ Stat. *Silv.* 2.5

³⁰⁵ Martial. *Epigrams*, 1.6, 1.14, 1.22, 1.60 & 1.104

³⁰⁶ Suet. *Dom.* 10.1

³⁰⁷ Plin. *Pan.* 33.3-4

is however the biggest monument to the Flavian family in the city, and despite Domitian “merely” finishing it, he inherited much of the symbolism of the structure. Most importantly Domitian kept using the arena as a public venue. If he had acted like Tiberius, who was reluctant to give games, he would have lost the opportunities afforded him by one of the biggest public venues in Rome.³⁰⁸ Furthermore, if the Colosseum were left unused, it would have been no better than Nero’s golden house, a massive monument to the Flavians, and little else. Domitian was aware of the importance of entertaining the populace, and that providing spectacular shows were far more likely to bring positive results than negative ones. The PR value of the entertainment alone made the investment worth it, add to it the fact that it could function as a social safety valve. Though this function may have been diminished, Domitian’s tolerance for shouting masses is unlikely to have been particularly high, even if they were in a place where they were “allowed”. It is certainly implied by both Suetonius and Pliny that Domitian’s behavior at the arena contributed to his assassination.

A part of an emperor’s duty was to keep the populace entertained. Domitian’s dedication to governing properly, if nothing else, compelled him to perform this duty. But Domitian also seems to have taken genuine pleasure in arranging the spectacles and watching them, going so far as to build four new gladiatorial schools and being more than willing to bring out his own gladiators at the behest of the crowd. An emperor who had little interest in the gladiators was unlikely to be accused of having a man killed over a disagreement over which gladiator was best. It is hard to imagine Domitian whopping and shouting from the imperial box like Claudius is supposed to have done, but he likely took pleasure in presenting and watching the spectacle. Perhaps his enjoyment of the arena waned towards the end of his reign as his paranoia and suspicion increased. The accusation that he collected treason charges in the arena is likely exaggerated by Pliny and Suetonius, but Domitian may have paid increasing attention to the senators and knights talking in the stands and any motion or look in his direction may have fueled his paranoia further.

Domitian’s presentation of himself through the Colosseum was primarily that he showed the citizens of Rome that he would not neglect his duty to entertain. At the same time Domitian’s appearance at the shows and the genuine pleasure he took from them presented the audience with a different view of him. This, perhaps unintentionally, gave spectators a glimpse of the man behind his imposing array of titles and imperial authority. A more relatable emperor than the stern-faced autocrat Domitian usually presented himself as. At the

³⁰⁸ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, p. 23

same time, he must have been aware that his every move in the arena would be scrutinized. His appearance in the Colosseum likely involved carefully managed stagecraft, and he likely attempted to manage his own reception. He likely moderated himself, ensuring that he maintained a respectable composure. Though as the ancient sources would have it, capable of both bursts of anger and emotional reactions to noble displays. The spectators could get a glimpse of Domitian the man, but no more.

The Stadium, Odeon, and the Capitoline Games

Domitian inherited the Colosseum and continued presenting shows much like emperors had before, but he also invested time and money in arranging new games and festivals, and in venues to hold them. In 86 Domitian instituted the Capitoline games, which were based on Greek games such as the Olympics, and the cancelled Neronian games. The institution of these new games demanded venues appropriate to them and Domitian, once again taking advantage of the destruction from the fire of 80, built two buildings specifically for these games, the Stadium of Domitian, and Odeon.³⁰⁹ Neither of these buildings have survived nearly as well as the Colosseum, and little of them are left to us. While the Odeon has more or less wholly disappeared, the Stadium remains clearly visible in the modern urban topography of Rome. When viewed from above, the Piazza Navona clearly follows the shape of what used to be the stadium, making it a remarkable instance of urban continuity in the city. Both structures were erected for Domitian's new Capitoline games which featured traditional Greek athletics, but also included musical and poetic competitions. The Stadium was erected to hold the athletic competitions, while the Odeon served to house the performative parts. With the Capitoline games and their venues, Domitian deviated from the more traditional Roman festivals and games and embraced Hellenic culture in the capital. We will begin by exploring the Stadium.

The Piazza Navona is one of Rome's largest piazza, and it, as mentioned, retains the shape of the Stadium (See Appendix, Fig. 7). Like the Colosseum and many other large Roman structures, the Stadium was used for different purposes, such as housing, after the Roman period. The Stadium also became the foundation for new buildings, and the buildings surrounding the piazza were built on the ruins of the Stadium's seating areas. Some of these ruins were exposed during a project to create a vista to the river in the late 30's and these are visible today.³¹⁰ The preservation of the shape gives us rough estimates for the Stadium's

³⁰⁹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 103

³¹⁰ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 237

dimensions. The building would have been about 275 meters long and 106 meters wide, a long rectangular shape with a curved end in the north, the southern end was squared off. The external façade of the Stadium was composed of arches rising on travertine piers, with engaged Ionic columns, similar in style to the Colosseum. The stadium was two stories tall, mandating a second order of columns which may have been Corinthian, if a similar pattern to that of the Colosseum was followed.³¹¹ The main entrances were located on the center of the Stadium's long sides, a further entrance stood at the center of the curved side, featuring a porticus. This is the section exposed during the excavations. The northern entrance was likely mirrored on the center of the straight southern end. The seating section consisted of two superimposed sections and are estimated to have seated between 15 000 and 30 000 spectators.³¹² The shape of the piazza is also helpful in determining the dimensions of the Stadium's arena or running track. The arena conforms to the dimensions of similar Greek tracks (ca. 200m long) and the one Domitian built in his palace, measuring some 192 meters long by 53 meters. Being a stadium rather than a circus, the Stadium of Domitian did not feature a spina or any partition in the middle.

The obelisk that stands in the Piazza Navona today is of Domitianic origin but has no relation to the Stadium itself. It was commissioned by Domitian, quarried in Egypt, and then transported to Rome. It is made of Aswan granite and stands sixteen meters high. The hieroglyphs on the obelisk were likely cut by a Roman stonecutter and commissioned by Domitian himself. The hieroglyphs use the formulaic language of Pharaonic dedications but offer up a hymn of praise to Domitian and the Flavian dynasty. They proclaim Domitian king and divine ruler, ascribing traditional values in Egyptian ruler cult, such as military prowess, worldwide glory, and divine birth. The deification of Vespasian and Titus are also mentioned on the obelisk. In the obelisk we see Domitian appropriate the symbols of Egyptian royalty.³¹³ Whether the claim of divine birth reflects a desire to be a sort of living god, or his claim that he was the son of Minerva (a more acceptable Roman concept) or is merely the adoption of Pharaonic language wholesale is uncertain and near impossible to determine. Regardless of the inscription's intent, the more absolute nature of Egyptian and Hellenic monarchical traditions, and their symbols, must have been appealing to an autocrat like Domitian. Where the Obelisk originally stood is a matter of some debate. It was long thought that it was part of the decoration of the Iseum et Serapeum, but it is now thought it might

³¹¹ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 295; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 237

³¹² Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 295; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 86-87

³¹³ Newlands, *Statius' Silvae*, p. 11-13

have decorated a more secular building. In the 4th century Maxentius had the obelisk moved to his circus outside the city. In the middle of the 17th century, it was moved from the circus by Pope Innocent X and incorporated into the design of Bernini's fountain on the Piazza Navona.³¹⁴

The Stadium remained in use through the rest of the Roman period. After the Colosseum burned in 217 it was used as a substitute for gladiatorial shows. It was renovated in 227 by Alexander Severus when he restored the nearby baths of Nero and thus came to be known by his name. It remained one of the city's most impressive structures in the 4th century and was regarded as such by the emperor Constantius when he visited the city.³¹⁵ The arcades of the Stadium, much like those of the Circus Maximus, became infamous hangouts for prostitutes, which, if nothing else, is indicative of the amount of traffic to, or in the vicinity of, the Stadium. St. Agnes is supposed to have been martyred in one of the Stadium's brothels.³¹⁶

Domitian's Odeon was located south of the Stadium and was also built with the Capitoline games in mind. Unfortunately, even less of the Odeon remains than the Stadium. Some of the curvature of the building is preserved in the Palazzo Massimo. This and a large column in front of the Palazzo's rear façade is all that remains of it. Ammianus Marcellinus lists the Odeon alongside the Stadium as one of the structures Constantius was impressed by upon his visit. Ancient sources give the Odeon a capacity of some 10 600 spectators, so a number somewhere between five and ten thousand is probable.³¹⁷ Hardie argues that the Odeon was most likely roofed, otherwise it was unlikely to have been admired as one of the city's most impressive buildings. He further argues that Constantius was unlikely to have been impressed by an open-air theater with a capacity of somewhere between five and ten thousand.³¹⁸ If roofed the Odeon might have had a dome-like roof (perhaps a half Dome), which would have made sense given the acoustical advantages domes provide. The almost complete lack of physical evidence of the building makes it impossible to draw any conclusions on the exact appearance and construction of the Odeon. It may have been open air after all, and just so impressively built and decorated that it impressed Constantius. The Odeon was also considerably larger than most other odeia, which generally had a capacity of

³¹⁴ Richardson Jr. (Ed.), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 275; Parker, "Narrating Monumentality", p. 197-202

³¹⁵ Amm. Marc. 16.10.14

³¹⁶ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 295; Claridge, *Rome*, p. 237

³¹⁷ Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p. 295-96

³¹⁸ Hardie, "Poetry and Politics at the Games of Domitian", p. 131-32

somewhere between 750 and 2000, with larger examples fitting between 3000 and 5000.³¹⁹ Size and elaborate decoration may have combined to make it impressive, rather than a roof.

When Domitian instituted his Capitoline games in 86, he both followed in the footsteps of previous emperors and statesmen, and broke new ground. Greek style athletic contests were not new to Rome, and had been presented, likely since the early 2nd century BC. The Greek style contests held during the Republican period were usually put up by Roman generals who had campaigned successfully in Greece or other Hellenic areas. Here the Greek athletics were usually included as part of a wider program.³²⁰ An attempt at arranging a festival wholly Greek and on the model of the Olympics was made by one L. Anicius Gallus, in celebration of a victory in Illyria in 166 BC. The festival included specifically Greek participants, including musicians. A theater was set up for the musical competition, but it swiftly devolved into a riot, likely due to the Roman crowds' impatience with the Greek musical contests.³²¹ In 80 BC Sulla celebrated his victory over Mithridates with games that included athletic contests, supposedly robbing the Olympic games of every contest except a race, as all the athletes had been called to Rome. Ancient sources indicate that Sulla went further than this, and simply moved the celebration of the Olympics to Rome, rather than arrange his own games.³²² A constant peril for Roman commanders who arranged Greek games during the republican period was the perception that they acted more like Hellenic kings, and that the games they hosted were expressions of their monarchical ambitions. This sort of dangerous association with Greek culture did not disappear with the empire, Nero being the prime example of philhellenism run rampant in Rome. During the Republic, particularly the period when Rome was frequently in conflict with Hellenic states, this perception may have been counterbalanced by the impression that the Greek athletes were akin to prisoners paraded in triumphs. Trophies, and celebrations of Roman victories over the Greeks.³²³

The last century of the Republic saw more games and festivals where Greek elements were included alongside more traditionally Roman ones. When Pompey Magnus dedicated his new theater on the Campus Martius he held musical contests and Greek competitions in it, he also featured horse races and animal-hunts in the Circus Maximus. Unlike other venues used for Greek sports during the republic, the theater was a permanent stone structure, though

³¹⁹ Hardie, "Poetry and Politics at the Games of Domitian", p. 131-32

³²⁰ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 24-25; Lee, "Greek Sports in Rome", p. 535

³²¹ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 26; Lee, "Greek Sports in Rome", p. 535

³²² Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 26; Lee, "Greek Sports in Rome", p. 535

³²³ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 26; Spawforth, "Roman Emperors and Greek Agōnes", p. 384

Greek sports were hardly its intended function. The size of Pompey's theater limited the athletic events to boxing, wrestling and pankration. These were probably more palatable to a Roman audience given their violent physical nature, though the Greek tradition for competing in the nude probably detracted from their appeal.³²⁴

With the advent of the empire Greek sports and competitions gained more support, particularly from Augustus himself. Outside of Rome Augustus founded permanent Olympic style festivals. The first in 29 BC, *Actia*, founded to commemorate his victory over Mark Anthony at Actium in 31 BC, and held in Augustus new city near the battlefield, Nikopolis. The *Actia* included athletic games, equestrian and musical contests, and even a regatta. The *Actia* were added to the Greek circuit of games and continued until the late 3rd century. Later in his reign Augustus founded another festival at Neapolis, called the *Sebasta*. Augustus' founding of a Greek style athletic festival in Italy likely went over better because of Neapolis' Greek culture. These games outside Rome were quadrennial like the Olympics, and were considered Isolympic, despite the inclusion of musical and dramatic contests.³²⁵ In Rome itself Augustus held three sets of Greek games, as recorded in his *Res Gestae*. The first of these were the Actian games of 28 BC, once again held in celebration for his victory at Actium. A wooden stadium was built in the Campus Martius to hold the athletic events. The presence of a temporary stadium rather than theaters or more improvised locations implies that these games featured more than just the boxing and wrestling contests. The second set of games were the Augustalia of 19 BC, and the third may have been the games held in 12 BC to celebrate Augustus becoming Pontifex Maximus. In a very Augustan effort to maintain public morals, he banned women from spectating the Greek games, due to the nudity of the participants.³²⁶ Neither Augustus nor his immediate successors attempted to instate any sort of permanent Greek games at Rome. Augustus' heirs did hold games in the city, Caligula in AD 38 and 39, Claudius in 44, but none of them permanent nor with dedicated and permanent venues. It was not until Nero instated his *Neronia* that Rome got a quadrennial Olympic style intended to be a permanent fixture. It consisted of gymnastic, equestrian, and musical events. At the same time as the games were introduced Nero dedicated a new gymnasium and the Baths of Nero. He did not commission a permanent venue for the contests, instead making use of the Saepta, which was more than large enough to substitute a stadium. Controversially Nero decided to participate in the musical competitions himself, something that did not go

³²⁴ Lee, "Greek Sports in Rome", p. 535

³²⁵ Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle*, p. 281-82

³²⁶ Lee, "Greek Sports in Rome", p. 536

over particularly well with the Roman elite and likely detracted substantially from the people's respect for him. The institution of the Neronia likely went hand in hand with Nero's contemporary philhellenic exploits, including his tour of Greece where he participated as both singer and charioteer in the four Panhellenic festivals.³²⁷ The Neronia did not survive the death of their namesake, and after his death Nero became the prime example of an emperor seduced and corrupted by eastern cultures.

Domitian's establishment of the Capitoline games in 86 was not then without precedent. He could look back to a number of emperors and statesmen who had arranged Greek style festivals with varying degrees of success. Nero and his Neronia was perhaps the best example of both what to do, and what not to. The Sebasta in Neapolis also provided an important example of a Greek festival in Italy that had endured nearly nine decades by the time Domitian introduced his own games. The status of Neapolis as a Greek city with a festival included it in the wider circuit of Greek games, which drew athletes from around the Mediterranean to the city. Here Domitian had an example of a successful Greek festival in Italy, and ready access to a pool of competitors already willing to make the trip to Italy.³²⁸ Domitian's Capitoline games were named for the Capitoline Jupiter and celebrated in his honor. The naming of the festival and its dedication to Jupiter and the Capitoline Triad was already an important difference from Nero's self-named festival. The games may have been Greek, but they were held in the name of Rome's chief deity, rather than bearing the name of Domitian himself. The games themselves were divided into three classes of competitions: Musical, Equestrian and Gymnastic. Suetonius elaborates that there were prizes given for competitions in both Greek and Latin poetry, and lyre competitions, both solo performers and bands, with and without singing. Suetonius does not mention every competition held during the games, but we can assume the whole gamut of Greek athletic competitions were included. Suetonius explicitly mentions that races with female competitors were held in the Stadium.³²⁹ As the games were modelled on Greek athletic festivals, they also presumably included an opening ceremony of sorts, likely a procession led by Domitian to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, where sacrifices would be made to the Capitoline triad.³³⁰

The games receive attention from both Statius and Martial. In a poem lamenting the death of his father, Statius also laments his loss at the Capitoline games, expressing that if he

³²⁷ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 28-30

³²⁸ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 31

³²⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 4.4; Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, p. 223

³³⁰ Hardie, "Poetry and Politics at the Games of Domitian", p. 129-30

had won, his victory may have lent his father strength.³³¹ Martial wrote an epigram to one Collinus who won at the Capitoline games, and while he offers some praise to Collinus the majority of the epigram is dedicated to reminding Collinus that he is still mortal, despite his prestigious victory. A kind of literary Memento Mori.³³² Both of these poem give us an impression of the game's prestige and that winning may go to the victor's head or drive the loser into depression. Particularly Statius' poem on his loss is indicative that the imperially sponsored festival was prominent to those familiar with the Greek festival circuit. While Statius himself wrote his poetry in Latin, his father had been successful as a Greek poet on the festival circuit, and Statius' spent considerable time in Neapolis and must have been influenced by the city's own cultural scene, and its connection to Greek culture as a whole. Another of Martial's epigrams provides more evidence of the Capitoline's games place in the world of Greek Olympic-style festivals. In the epigram Martial addresses one Diodorus and his wife, who made a vow for Diodorus safe return when he set out for Rome to compete at the Capitoline games.³³³ While the epigram conveys a humorous story, it also tells us that the games attracted competitors from beyond the shores of Italy. They also attracted competitors from closer to home, and younger participants, as evidenced by one Q. Sulpicius Maximus, who participated in the Greek poetry event of the games in 94. The boy lived at Rome with his parents as Roman citizens. His tomb was discovered in the city, in 1871, and it is decorated with the boy dressed in a toga, flanked by inscriptions of the poem with which he won at the games of 94.³³⁴ The games were also used to defame Domitian after his death. In his panegyric, Pliny denounces Domitian's games as lax and dissolute, destroying the manly spirits of the Romans, as opposed to the gladiatorial shows which Trajan put on, which inspired them to face honorable wounds and look upon death with scorn.³³⁵ Pliny is here representative of those among the Roman elite who disdained Greek sports and culture, convinced that they were destroying the moral fiber of Rome.

While Domitian himself had written poetry, he limited his participation in the festival, no doubt aware of the disastrous results of Nero's insistence on participating and the inevitable comparison he would draw if he partook in the competitions, but he did take on an important role at the center of the games none the less. Domitian presided as president of the games, and judge. While that was the extent of his participation, he certainly meant to play

³³¹ Stat. *Silv.* 5.3.227-33

³³² Martial, *Epigrams*, 4.54

³³³ Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.40

³³⁴ Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 371

³³⁵ Plin. *Pan.* 33.1

the part properly. At the games he appeared in half-boots, wearing a purple toga in the Greek style. This was a version of the dress worn by the president of similar Greek games. On his head Domitian wore a crown featuring the images of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. His garments were distinctive enough for Suetonius to make note of them, and likely evoked some reactions from the Romans. Yet it was not a wholly Greek costume, for Domitian once again tied the games (and himself) to the three gods of the Capitoline triad, which again makes the point that these games were not merely the whim of a philhellenic emperor, but intrinsically tied to Rome and her gods. Domitian and the Flavian's relation to the games was further enhanced by the presence of the priests of the Flamen Dialis and the Flaviales. They too wore crowns featuring Domitian's image in addition to the image of the Capitoline triad.³³⁶ The inclusion of Domitian on the crowns and the presence of the Flaviales indicates that at least the Flavian cult played some role in the games and using games as a vehicle for a ruler cult was hardly unusual in the eastern Mediterranean. The authority afforded to a living god type of ruler, such as a pharaoh, was appealing to Domitian. But it is unlikely that he used the games as a vehicle to present himself to Rome as a living god or Hellenic monarch, an act that probably would have killed his games just as fast as Nero's. But including himself and the Flavian cult in honoring the Capitoline Jupiter connected the celebrations to the Flavian dynasty in general and emphasized Domitian's connection to Jupiter and the Capitoline more specifically. The festival was not dedicated to himself, but it retained an indirect focus on Domitian and his family.

Despite the opposition from men like Pliny, the Capitoline games endured, unlike the games of Nero. The games did not only survive Domitian, but they also thrived, becoming an important stop on the Greek festival circuit. They seem to have survived into the 5th century, and their endurance may in part be attributed to Domitian's decision to not name them after himself, nor participate. Secondly the games may have been more popular among Romans than previously realized. It has long been held that Greek athletics never really caught on with the citizens of Rome, but they may have been more popular than previously assumed. The hostility shown towards Greek games by authors such as Tacitus, Seneca, Cicero and both Pliny the elder and younger plays a part in this perception. And more often than not Greek athletics were connected with moral decline and corruption of Roman virtue by Greek culture.³³⁷ Yet the games endured for three centuries after their original patron had passed.

³³⁶ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 32

³³⁷ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 38-41

The Capitoline games and similar Greek festivals never achieved the same popularity as the traditional Roman chariot races and gladiatorial shows in Rome. But they may have provided an interesting and different sort of entertainment now and again. The citizens of Rome were not flooded with a deluge of Greek entertainments replacing the shows of the Colosseum or the races of the Circus Maximus, but every four years they got something different. The games quadrennial nature may thus have contributed to their survival.

Domitian's motivation for the games was likely multi-faceted. In the first place they, like more conventional Roman entertainment, allowed him to present Rome with elaborately arranged entertainment, and show his generosity through something different than the "ordinary" shows. The Capitoline games gave the city its own Greek games and let the citizens indulge in Greek culture, the fruits of empire as it were.³³⁸ Another motivation for the games were the religious aspects. We have already explored Domitian's seemingly genuine gestures towards the gods, and the effort to present his, and the Flavians', reign as supported by Jupiter. The Capitoline games was another part of this continuous effort to present himself as devoted to Rome's god, and their support of him. The inclusion of Minerva among the gods honored at the games was likely another expression of Domitian's particular reverence for her. Dedicating the games to Jupiter and the Capitoline triad allowed Domitian to present Jupiter as supportive of his regime, and honor him as the chief Roman deity, but also satisfy his own desire to honor Minerva.

Furthermore, Domitian may have had political motivations for instating the games. We have already established the Flavian dynasty's connections to the eastern Mediterranean and its largely Hellenic cultures. Vespasian and Titus had close personal connections in the east as a result of their campaigns there. While Domitian in part inherited these, through his reign he felt the need to shore up support from the eastern provinces, we have already touched upon his induction of eastern senators as a part of this. Particularly the appearance of two false Neros during his father's and brother's reigns may have prompted Domitian to take measures to ensure the eastern provinces continued support for the Flavians. The establishment of the Capitoline games tied Rome to the Greek world by placing the city within the Greek festival circuit. The festival circuit of the Hellenic world permeated local civic, cultural, and religious life. Domitian's new festival included Rome in that circuit and advertised imperial support for Greek cultural life.³³⁹ While it may have been politically

³³⁸ Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World*, p. 33

³³⁹ Hardie, "Poetry and Politics at the Games of Domitian", p. 126-127

expedient to use Greek culture to bind the eastern provinces tighter to him, Domitian's personal philhellenism almost certainly played some part in his decision to institute the Capitoline games. Domitian's philhellenism and concern for Hellenic culture is well attested. Outside of Rome he held honorary titles and positions, and he invested much of his own money in architectural projects in the eastern Mediterranean, including the restoration of the temple of Apollo at Delphi at his own expense. He also seems to have made significant contributions to the development of urban life in Asia Minor.³⁴⁰

Domitian's philhellenism may have been more than enough motivation for him to establish his own Greek games in Rome, but this philhellenism was intrinsically tied to his appreciation of literature and poetry and may very well stem from it. Domitian's appreciation for poetry and literature likely came from his education, and it has been speculated that he may have received tuition from the father of Statius, though this is by no means certain.³⁴¹ Regardless of who, Domitian was likely tutored in Greek by a Greek. This tutor may very well have imprinted an appreciation for the Greek festivals and their poetic components. In addition to his tutor, Domitian grew up in Nero's Rome, where enthusiasm for musical and literary performances were encouraged among the upper class.³⁴² As a teenager Domitian may have witnessed the second Neronia held in 65 and been enamored by it. The sources hostile to Domitian dismisses his interest in literature as a sham, meant to mask his true nature as a tyrant in waiting. Suetonius writes that Domitian made a remarkable pretense of modesty and interest in poetry, and that Domitian gave public readings. This interest was, according to Suetonius, later despised and rejected.³⁴³ Tacitus similarly describes that after the Batavian rebellion of early 70, Domitian was in Lugdunum, where he first conspired to revolt against his father. When that failed, he gave up on all functions of government he had exercised and pretended to simple and modest tastes. He supposedly wrapped himself in feigned reserve and affected devotion to literature and poetry, attempting to conceal his true character.³⁴⁴ During his reign Domitian's interest in poetry received praise from the poets that operated during his reign and he supposedly composed some poetry himself. Martial refers to a poem Domitian composed about the storming of the Capitoline in 69.³⁴⁵ According to

³⁴⁰ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 112

³⁴¹ Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 12-13; Southern, *Domitian*, p. 11

³⁴² Hardie, "Poetry and Politics at the Games of Domitian", p. 126-127

³⁴³ Suet. *Dom.* 2.2

³⁴⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 4.85-6; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 16

³⁴⁵ Martial, *Epigrams*, 5.5

Suetonius he also wrote a book on hair care.³⁴⁶

Domitian abandoned his own literary pursuits when he became emperor, putting it aside so that he could focus on the task of governing the empire.³⁴⁷ It is difficult to believe the charge that Domitian feigned all interest in poetry, it seems far more likely that he genuinely enjoyed literary culture. If anything, the accusations by Suetonius and Tacitus reinforce that impression. Suetonius relates that at the start of his reign Domitian neglected the liberal arts, but that he restored libraries that had been destroyed by fires at great expense. Domitian procured copies of the works lost to the fire, seeking everywhere for them. He then sent scribes to Alexandria to transcribe and correct the texts, presumably comparing them to the more authoritative versions at Alexandria. In the same passage Suetonius also states that Domitian never took any pains to acquaint himself with history or poetry.³⁴⁸ Domitian's education and personal interest in poetry seems to contradict the latter statement, and Domitian's expensive and time-consuming restoration of the libraries hardly seem like the actions of a man uninterested in literary culture. The effort expended in acquiring authoritative replacements for the lost copies suggests genuine concern.³⁴⁹ Domitian likely enjoyed the literary arts, but as emperor he can hardly have had much time to sit down and compose a verse or two, particularly as Domitian seemingly micromanaged as much as he could. Suetonius also accuses Domitian of not writing his own speeches, but one wonders how many other emperors did all of their own writing.³⁵⁰ It is probable that Domitian's appreciation of poetry and literary arts played a part in his motivation for the establishment of the Capitoline games.

The venues and the games let Domitian present himself to the citizens of Rome in a different way than he did through his palace or the temples and his role as religious and moral supervisor. In the games he played a ceremonial role, likely leading whatever ceremonies, rituals, and religious sacrifices connected to them. With Domitian's noted penchant for doing things properly and paying attention to the details, the Capitoline games likely adopted ceremonies attached to games like the Olympics, while adapting them to Roman gods and a Roman audience. It also fell to Domitian to crown the winners, rewarding them with the coveted oak-leaf crown and all the glory that came with it. In this context Domitian must have appeared less of a stern autocrat and moralizer than he usually did. Like the gladiatorial

³⁴⁶ Suet. *Dom.* 18

³⁴⁷ Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, p. 224-25

³⁴⁸ Suet. *Dom.* 20.1

³⁴⁹ Augoustakis, "Literary Culture", p. 379

³⁵⁰ Southern, *Domitian*, p. 11-12

shows, a certain amount of stagecraft must have been involved in his appearance at the games, and again it is unlikely that he would be seen whooping and shouting, his dignity would not have allowed it. Hostile authors would have run away with any stories of such behavior. In the role as president of the games and judge, Domitian could participate in the games, but without compromising his dignity as emperor by competing like Nero had.

Through the Stadium and the Odeon, and the games held in them, Domitian presented Rome with both a different sort of entertainment, and perhaps a version of himself that was less the stern emperor, and more an emperor caring about entertaining his subjects, and a man sharing something he himself enjoyed, with the citizens of Rome. As to why he chose to present himself this way, when his usual self-presentation was that of the stern autocrat and moral supervisor we may speculate. Much of his other architectural work presented Domitian as a divinely supported and mighty emperor, but through the Colosseum, Stadium and Odeon, he showed the population that he did not only enforce his rule, law, and order, but also provided for the city and the empire. Through his entertainment he presented his munificence and his devotion to all the aspects of an emperor's duty. And through this he gained, if not the adoration of the crowds, perhaps some goodwill and gratitude. He achieved this through the Colosseum, and in part he achieved the same through the Capitoline games and the Stadium and Odeon. But through these Greek games he opened himself up for more direct comparisons to Nero and criticism for the philhellenism he put on display. If his only motivation had been to provide entertainment, sticking to the traditional Roman forms would have been far safer. Through the Capitoline games and its venues Domitian also presented himself as a patron of Greek culture. He could have achieved this elsewhere, but without the significant prestige inherent in arranging games at the capital of the empire. Domitian's motivation to sponsor a Greek style festival at Rome and present himself as a philhellene and lover of literature combined the factors above, and his own philhellenism and interest in literature and poetry. Through his games Domitian presented himself as all of this, and he shared his passion for Greek culture, literature, and poetry with Rome.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This paper set out to explore how and why Domitian presented himself to Rome through his buildings and monuments. In order to do this, we explored not only the structures themselves, but also the literary sources that document both Domitian and his monuments, the relationship between Domitian and the senate, and the political context of Domitian. In the 1st chapter we explored the literary sources for Domitian, the lives and context of the authors and

context and genres of their literary works. We looked at how their biases created very different impressions of Domitian and his reign. In chapter 2 we further explored the political context of Domitian's reign and particularly his poor relationship with the senate. Here we saw how Domitian's openly autocratic rulership poisoned the senators against him, and how that affected his legacy after his assassination and the succession of Nerva and Trajan. Domitian was not the only emperor to rule as an autocrat, they were all guilty of that, but his downfall, reputation wise at least, was his unwillingness to compromise, involve the senate and veil his autocracy behind a pretense of republicanism.

Domitian's palace on the Palatine was the subject of chapter 3, and it is one of his most enduring architectural achievements. Domitian's palace was a remarkable political and architectural evolution and with it he redefined the idea of the imperial residence in Rome. The palace was no longer just the home of the emperor, but also the heart of his government, here he held court and audiences, and the decisions of empire and governance was made here. The choice of the Palatine as the spot for Domitian's palace was hardly coincidental. The hill had long been home to the residences of Rome's leaders and statesmen, stretching back to Romulus and the city's founding. The palace was as clear an expression of Domitian's autocratic style of governing as anything. Through his palace Domitian presented himself as the undisputed ruler of Rome, the size and grandeur of the building reflecting the authority and power of the emperor. The simplest explanation as to why Domitian presented himself this way through his palace is that it served to reinforce his position and authority as emperor. As both residence and government building, the Palace had many of the features expected from it, halls for audiences, council meetings and banquets and impressive courtyards. But it also featured a stadium structure, far too small for conventional Roman chariot races, and likely used as a garden. Though this may not have been Domitian's intent. The stadium may be an expression of Domitian's philhellenism, and could have been meant for the display of Greek athletics in the emperors home, being of an appropriate size.

The palace underscored the perception that Domitian stood above the rest of Roman society, occupying a place closer to the gods than the people, the palace was in a way his very own Olympus, and the architecture emphasized the unique position of the emperor. Whether or not Domitian believed himself a god and insisted on being addressed as one, he certainly wanted to create distance between himself and those he ruled, and the perception that he was more than human aided in that. And while the palace may not have been a fortress or castle in the conventional sense, it is likely that it conveyed a feeling that Domitian and his authority was unassailable.

In chapter 4 we explored the imagery of Domitian's Equestrian Statue, the Cancellaria reliefs and his coinage. In the imagery we see more direct personal portrayals of Domitian. These images feature themes of military accomplishment, imperial authority, divine support, and the moral character of Domitian. The military themes are perhaps most obvious in the statue, though it did not itself survive, Statius' pome describing it gives us a decent idea of it. Reflecting his victories over Germanic tribes, it also portrayed Domitian as bringing peace and order through his military victories. At the same time portraying Domitian as greater than both Caesar and Alexander the great, by dint of the statue simply being bigger than theirs. Domitian's motivation for portraying himself as a military man are easily understood. Born into a society that valued military accomplishment highly, and where the ultimate expression of personal success was intrinsically tied to military success. And in Domitian's case he likely felt the need to live up to Vespasian and Titus' military reputation. Similar martial themes are repeated in the Cancellaria reliefs, alongside themes of divine support and filial piety. In the friezes Domitian presents himself as the dutiful son of both Rome and Vespasian, going to war and fulfilling his duties in his father's absence. At the same time the style of the Cancellaria reliefs places Domitian alongside idealized versions of gods and representations of Rome and her citizens, which may have been a part of Domitian's tendency to portray himself distanced from common folk, and nearer to the divine.

Domitian's coinage was by far the smallest of his imagery, but also had the furthest reach, its audience stretching well beyond Rome. His coinage is remarkable because of its high quality and the amount of valuable metal in them. Early in his reign Domitian enacted his first monetary reform, returning the coinage to the Augustan standard. Economic realities later forced him to debase them, but he refused to debase them any further than the Neronian standard of 64. The quality of his coinage is testament to Domitian's insistence on governing properly. The designs of Domitian's coinage featured imagery of Minerva often wielding a thunderbolt, symbolizing the relationship between both her and Jupiter, but also Domitian's position as Jupiter's regent. The inclusion of Jupiter and the divine was a constant feature of Flavian imagery in general and Domitian's specifically. His presentation on the imagery emphasized his martial success, the divine approval and support and his own good character. All of this ties into many of the same themes we find in the palace, and they underscore his legitimacy as emperor and his own strength, and strength of character.

The 5th chapter devoted itself to Domitian's religious building projects. In these we see the theme of divine support continued, and the presentation of Domitian as a staunch defender and upholder of traditional Roman religion. Particularly his temples to Jupiter and

Minerva emphasize the traditional Roman religion and the gods support for Domitian. Their protection of him through Minerva as his guardian, and the legitimacy of the Flavian emperors through the support of Jupiter.

His restoration of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was a classic expression of traditional Roman religion, though influenced by the new imperial order, which by Domitian's reign was more than a century old. The temple retained its traditional shape, but vast sums were spent on decorating it and quite literally making the temple shine with gold. Domitian was willing to spend lavishly on Jupiter, whom he, and his family, closely associated their imperial reigns with. Domitian also chose to emphasize his personal connection with Jupiter with a shrine and later temple to Jupiter as thanks for his survival during the final days of Vitellius' emperorship. In these two temples we see Domitian's relationship reflected both as the head of state, and as an individual.

Domitian's personal relationship with the gods and relationship with them as emperor is further blended in his architectural projects devoted to Minerva. There is little doubt over Domitian's devotion to the goddess and his conviction that she was his special protector. She features prominently in his imagery as we have already looked at, often depicted with a thunderbolt, signifying in part that she acts as the instrument of Jupiter in defending Domitian against any who would raise arms against him or his regime. She featured prominently on his forum though Domitian did not live to inaugurate neither the forum nor the temple on it. While the temple and forum were traditional architectural projects for an emperor, they still reveal Domitian's desire to manifest his veneration for Minerva in grandiose architectural statements, and to present to the inhabitants of Rome his devotion to Minerva and that he had her favor. In relation with the traditional gods of Rome, Domitian presented himself as the defender of these ancient traditions, the chosen regent of Jupiter and the favored son of Minerva. This also projected the idea that opposition to Domitian, particularly violent opposition, was opposition to the gods themselves.

Through the *Templum Divorum* Domitian presents not only Rome's traditional gods but also his deified father and brother and the cult surrounding them. The strengthening of Flavian and Domitian's legitimacy and authority through the imperial cult was not something Domitian would forego. The deification of his family tied the Flavian dynasty to other deified emperors, it also once more emphasized the gap between Domitian and ordinary people, that as emperor he stood closer to the divine. In his temples we also see Domitian's personal devotion to the gods, Minerva in particular, and so they served more than one purpose. They were certainly part of Domitian's presentation of his reign as divinely supported, but they

were also genuine expressions of Domitian's faith in the gods. The restored Iseum et Serapeum in particular stands out from the others in this regard, for here we see not only Domitian's likely genuine reverence towards a foreign god, but also an expression of his own interest in Egyptian culture and their symbols, and the decision to present them in the capital. The restoration saw Domitian adopt the symbols of Egyptian monarchy as his own, particularly the erection of several obelisks, imported from Egypt, and at least one commissioned by Domitian specifically

Finally in chapter 6 we tackled Domitian's self-presentation through public entertainment. While the Colosseum may have been the combined work of all three Flavian emperors, Domitian was certainly the one who got the most use out of it. Through the Colosseum we see Domitian present himself to the population of Rome not only as a stern autocrat, successful general, supported and protected by the gods, but also as an emperor interested in the welfare and happiness of Rome's citizens. Through lavish entertainments in the world's largest amphitheater, Domitian presented the proverbial carrot as well as the stick. In part this presentation and the entertainment themselves were motivated by a desire to keep the populace happy and docile, but Domitian himself seems to have enjoyed the shows himself, and so he could kill two birds with one stone. He kept the population happy, and he indulged himself in extravagant and expensive entertainment.

But we also explored Domitian's more unusual entertainment venues and the games he presented through them, namely his Stadium, Odeon, and the Capitoline games. Again, we see Domitian deviate from the traditionally Roman. The venues themselves were impressive pieces of architecture and examples of the investment Domitian was willing to put into public entertainment, but the choice of Greek games is more puzzling. Through his Capitoline games Domitian could achieve much of what he achieved through more conventionally Roman games, but Greek entertainment was never as popular the more traditional gladiator shows and the chariot races. Some have argued that Greek sports and entertainment may have been more popular in Rome than previously supposed, and this should certainly be taken into consideration. But the image Domitian presented of himself through the Greek entertainment differed from the image as stern autocrat, showing Rome an enthusiastic if restrained philhellene. He had learned from the mistakes of Nero, and so did not compete in the games himself, and he adapted the Greek games to a Roman audience. But if his goal had been to keep Rome happy and avoid the risks associated with an emperor presenting himself as a philhellene, it would have been far safer to avoid something like the Capitoline games altogether. Domitian's motivation for arranging the Capitoline games, buildings its venues

and openly presenting himself as a philhellene cannot be seen only in the light of how he wished to present himself. In these games Domitian's own philhellenism and love of literature and poetry must have played a part. These factors combined with the power, influence, and wealth he wielded as emperor gave him the chance to put on Greek games in the greatest city in the world, and he took that chance. The adaption of the games to be more acceptable to a Roman audience by dedicating them to Jupiter and not naming them after himself and the decision to limit his participation to ceremonial roles mitigated some of the risks and more dangerous comparisons to Nero. He was still criticized for them after his death, but the games themselves survived, the first permanent Greek games at Rome to do so.

Domitian's self-presentation through his monuments was in large part motivated and influenced by his approach to, and ideology of, imperial rulership. The undisguised nature of his autocracy necessitated the adaption of more traditional imperial presentation. The themes of divine approval and support are almost ubiquitously present in his architecture and imagery. The presentation of himself as a strong leader and upholder of religion and tradition is not unique to Domitian as emperor, but without the pretense of republicanism it becomes more reminiscent of later emperors and autocrats and presentations of "divinely ordained" rulers through the ages.

Domitian's self-presentation also attempt to portray him as something more than just a man. The presentations often associate him more with the divine world than the mortal, creating a gap between the princeps and his subjects. In my opinion he likely did not think of himself as divine but presenting himself as something more than human strengthened the appearance of his rule as just, and his position as unassailable, as a kind of Jupiter on earth. In part this presentation was motivated by his ideology of rulership, but also his own insecurities and his experience with politics, civil war, and riotous unrest. This ideology of rulership accounts for much of his presentation through imagery and monuments, but in certain structures it takes the back seat to other motivations. Through the gladiatorial entertainment of the Colosseum this presentation is augmented by presenting himself as not only a stern paternalistic ruler, but also one that cares for his subjects and fulfills his duty to entertain them. That Domitian himself enjoyed the gladiator shows likely played a part in him lavishly spending on them and other traditional entertainment projects. But in his Stadium and Odeon and the Capitoline games Domitian's own philhellenism and love of poetry and literature seem to have been more important motivations than any need to entertain the citizens of Rome. While the Stadium, Odeon and associated Capitoline games may have contributed to

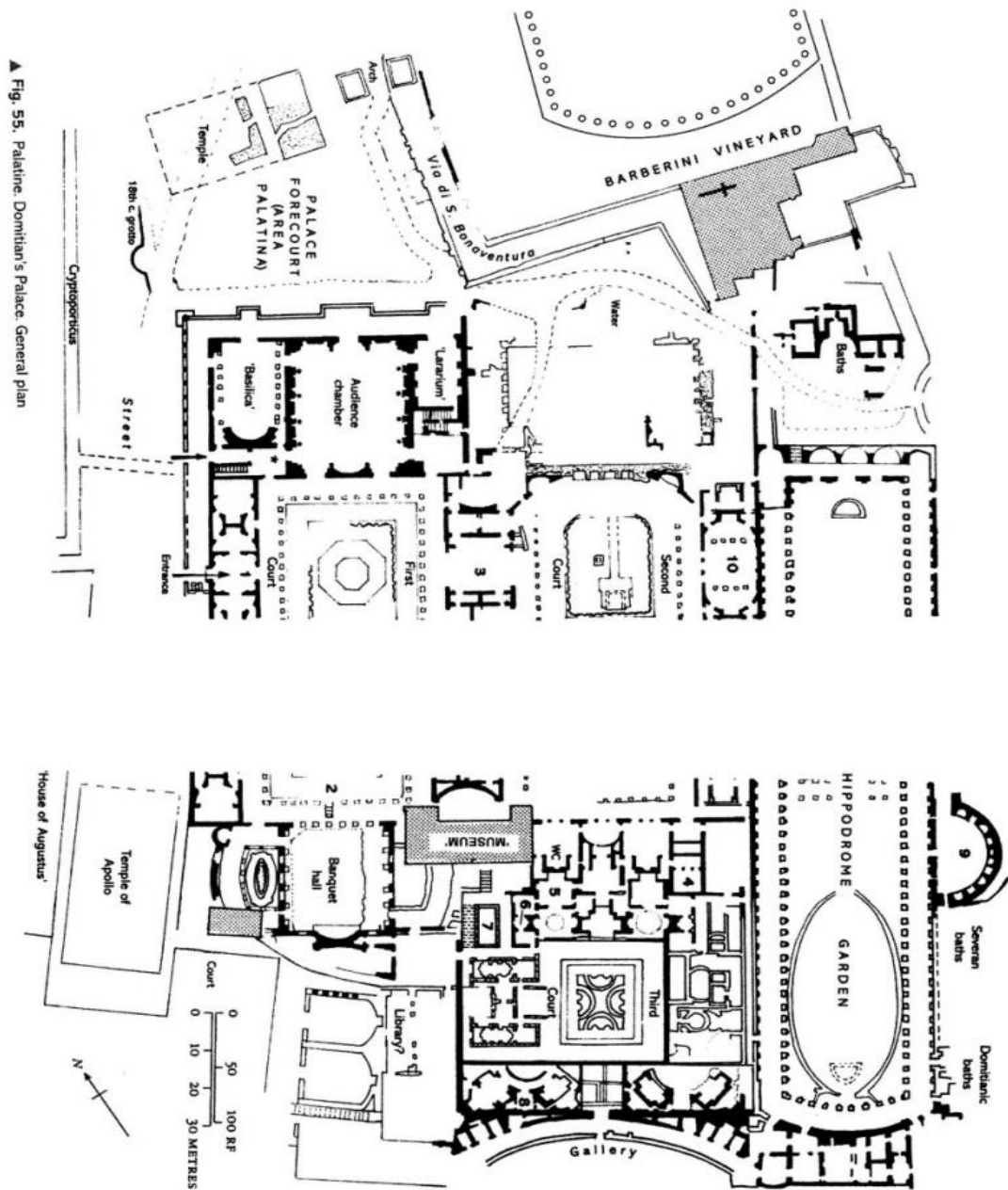
both political relationships with the Greek world and provided Roman citizens with an alternate form of entertainment. They also left Domitian open to harmful Neronian comparisons and further alienating Rome's political elite. If Domitian had wanted to simply experience a set of Greek games, there were ample opportunities to do so. Domitian's motivation for founding his own set of games and build the accompanying venues, despite the risks to his reputation, was likely borne out of a personal desire to host, participate and enjoy a Greek festival. It may not have been a decision made through cold logical calculation, but rather one borne out of Domitian's own desires.

In the end much of Domitian's decisions to present himself the way he did through his buildings were motivated by political needs and the realities of imperial government. Domitian made little effort to disguise his brazenly autocratic style of governing, and we see this reflected in his self-presentation in monuments and buildings, even in the entertainment venues where his own philhellenism and passion for literature played into the buildings. Even here Domitian presents himself apart from the rest, though perhaps less sternly. Domitian discarded the presentation that the princeps was only *primus inter pares*. Domitian's reign and presentation saw the emperor not as the first among equals, but as the *First*. He was the emperor, and he stood above and beyond the rest, the sovereignty of the emperor was unquestionable, and the relics and remnants of the republic was largely cast aside, ignored, or made subservient to the emperor.

But beyond the undisguised autocracy, Domitian's own personal faith, self-image and passions also affected his decisions and self-presentation. His own efforts to present himself as something more than a man succeeded to an extent and combined with the hostile treatment he received after his death, makes it easy to think of him as something more than human. But through his self-presentation in monuments and imagery, we see glimpses of a more human Domitian. Not the blood thirsty tyrant described by ancient authors, or the superhuman emperor he himself presented, or just an administratively efficient autocrat. But a man, motivated by his own fears, passions, and ideas of rulership.

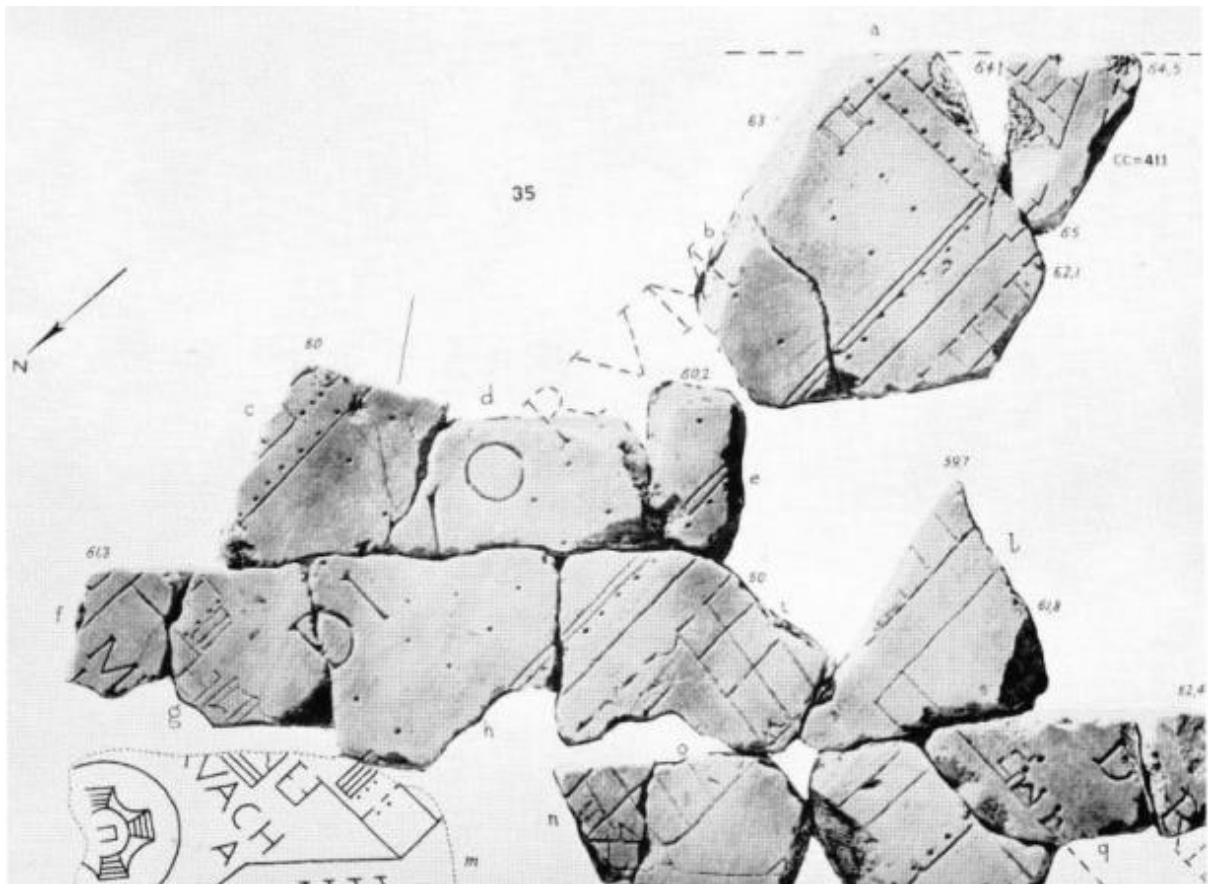
Appendix

Fig. 1: Floor Plan of the Palace ruins.³⁵¹



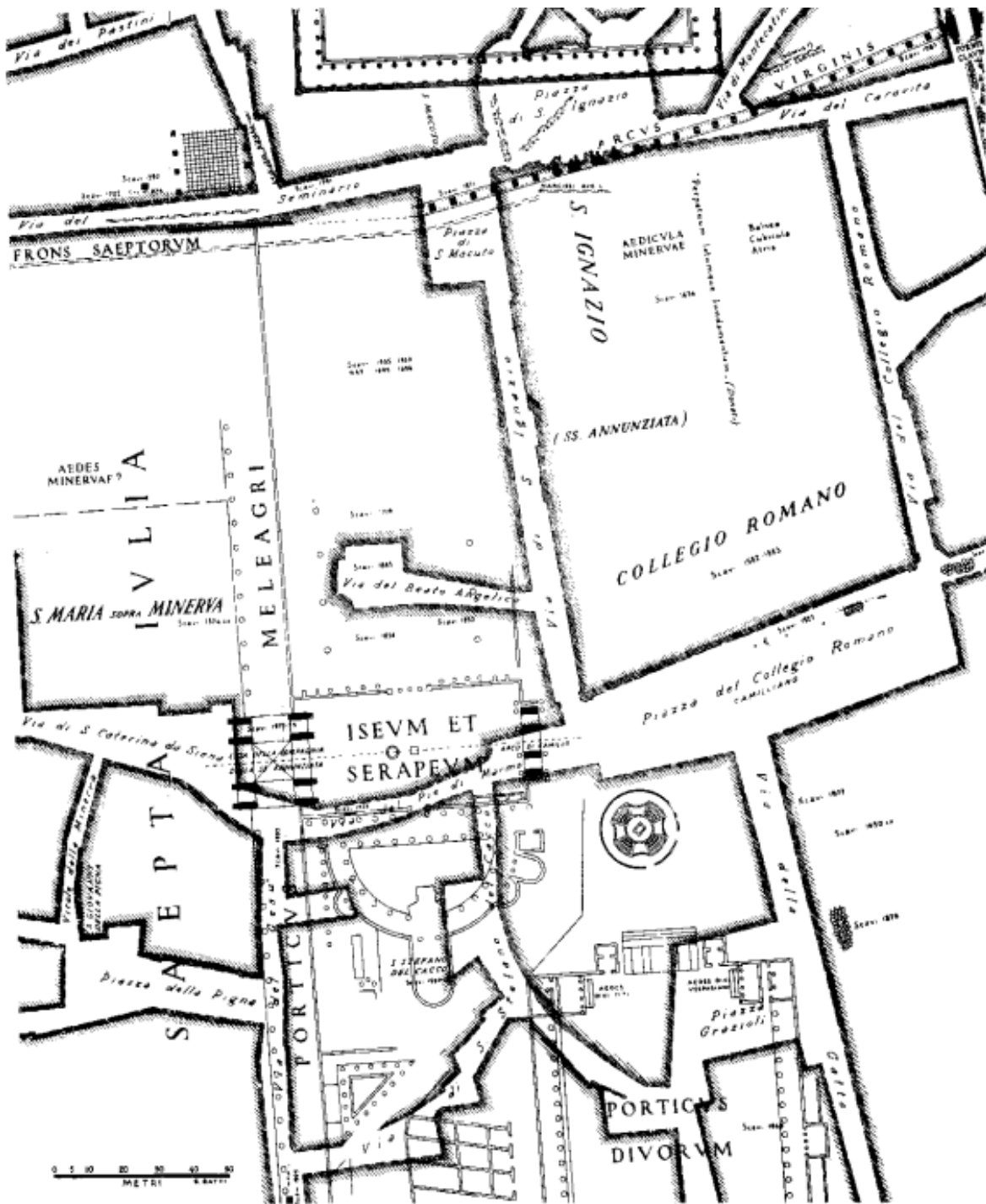
³⁵¹ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 146-47

Fig. 2 Templum Divorum on Severan Marble Plan.³⁵²



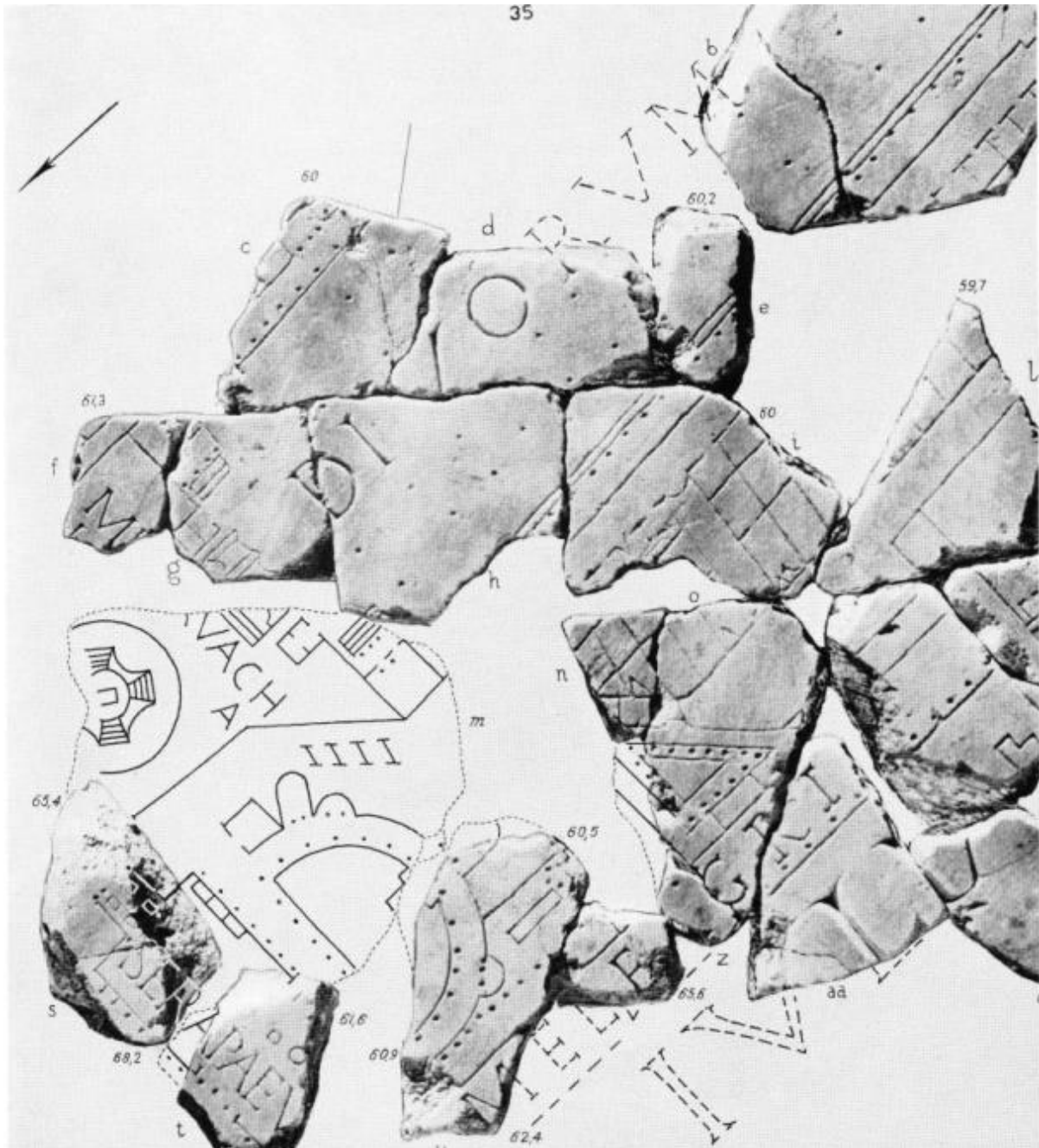
³⁵² Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 304

Fig. 3 Iseum et Serapeum.³⁵³



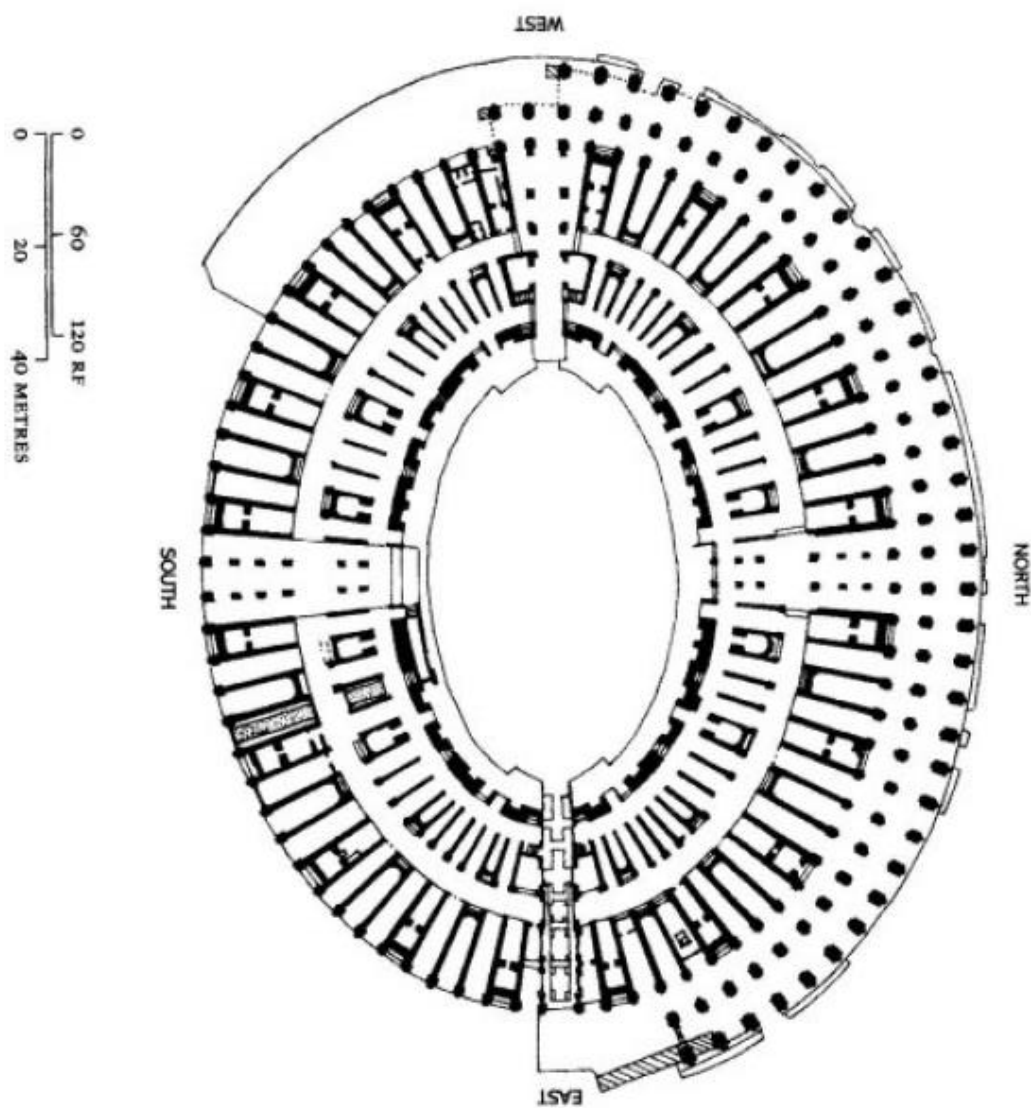
³⁵³ Richardson Jr. (Ed), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 212

Fig. 4 Minerva Chalcidica on the Severan plan. The circular structure with four staircases and a rectangle in the center, also see Fig. 3 above.³⁵⁴



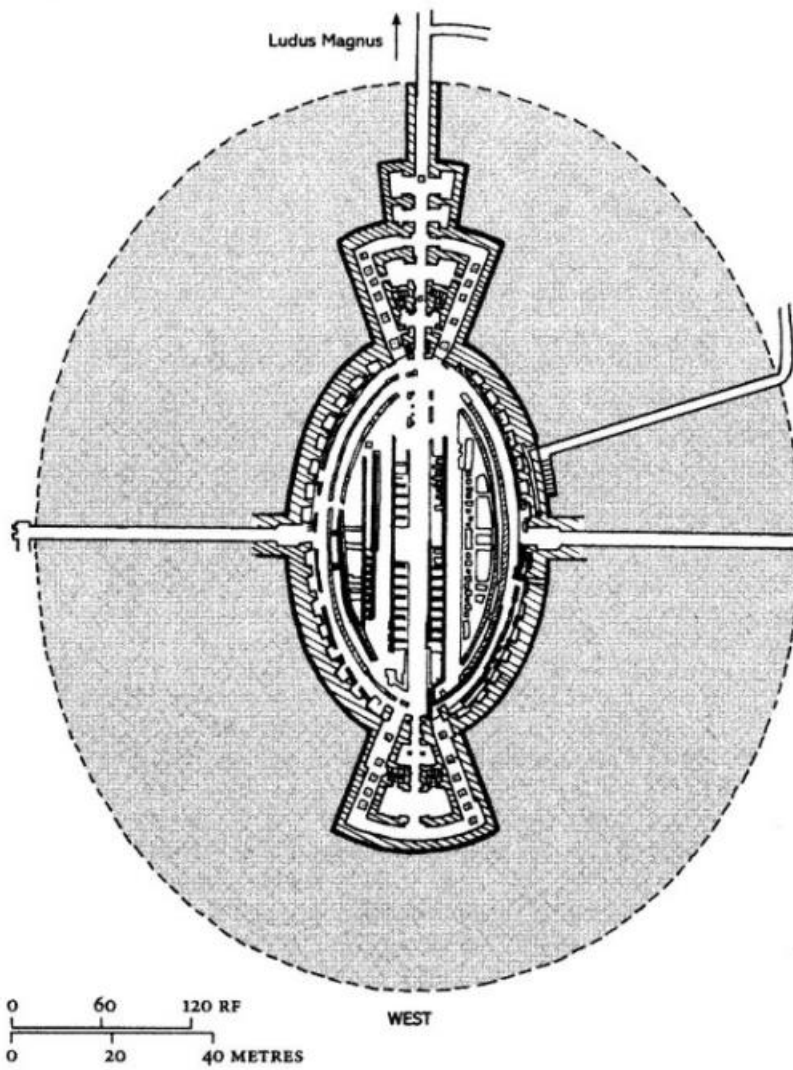
³⁵⁴ Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 67

Fig. 5 Colosseum Ground plan, current state.³⁵⁵



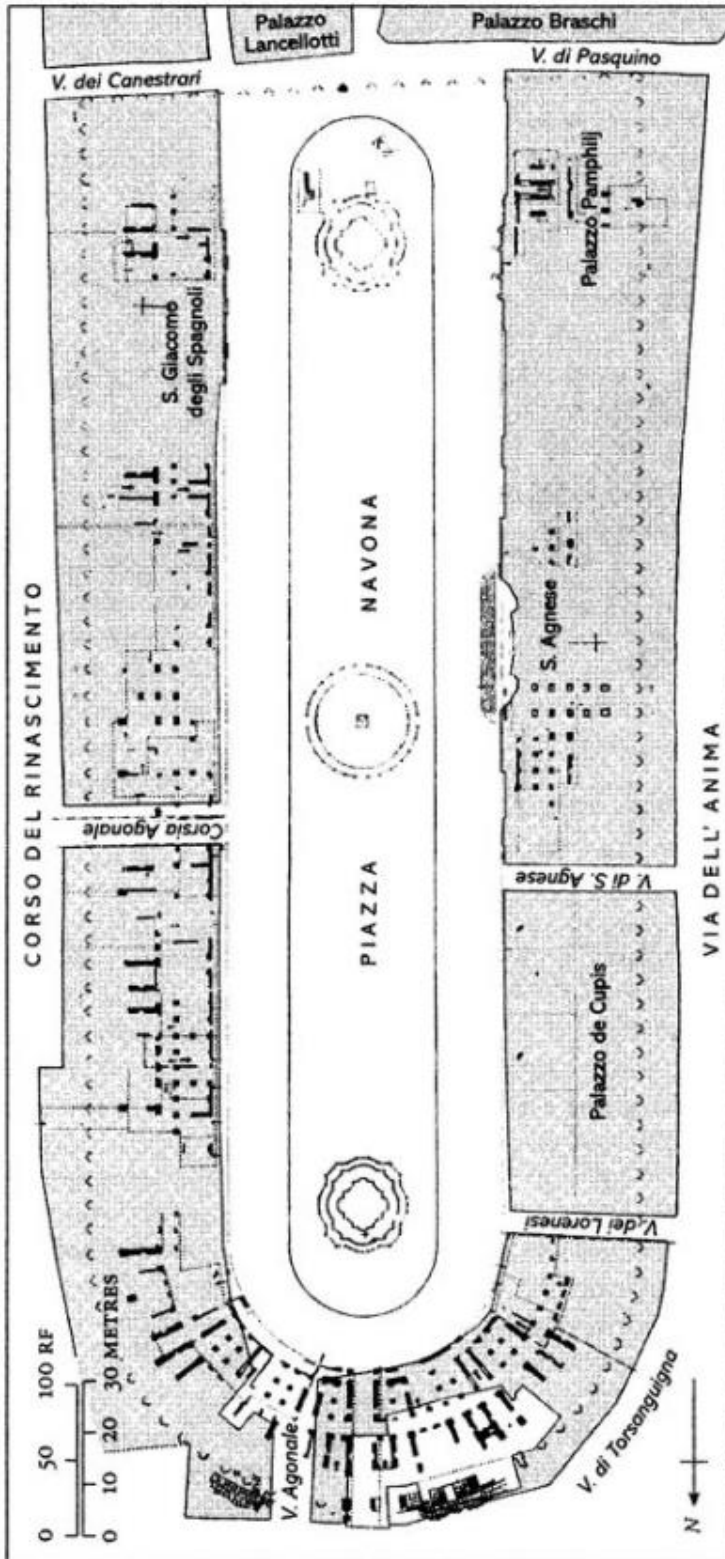
³⁵⁵ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 313

Fig. 6 Colosseum, Plan of Subterranean Levels.³⁵⁶



³⁵⁶ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 316

Fig. 7 Piazza Navona.³⁵⁷



³⁵⁷ Claridge, *Rome*, p. 235

Fig. 8 Reconstructed Plan of the Stadium of Domitian.³⁵⁸

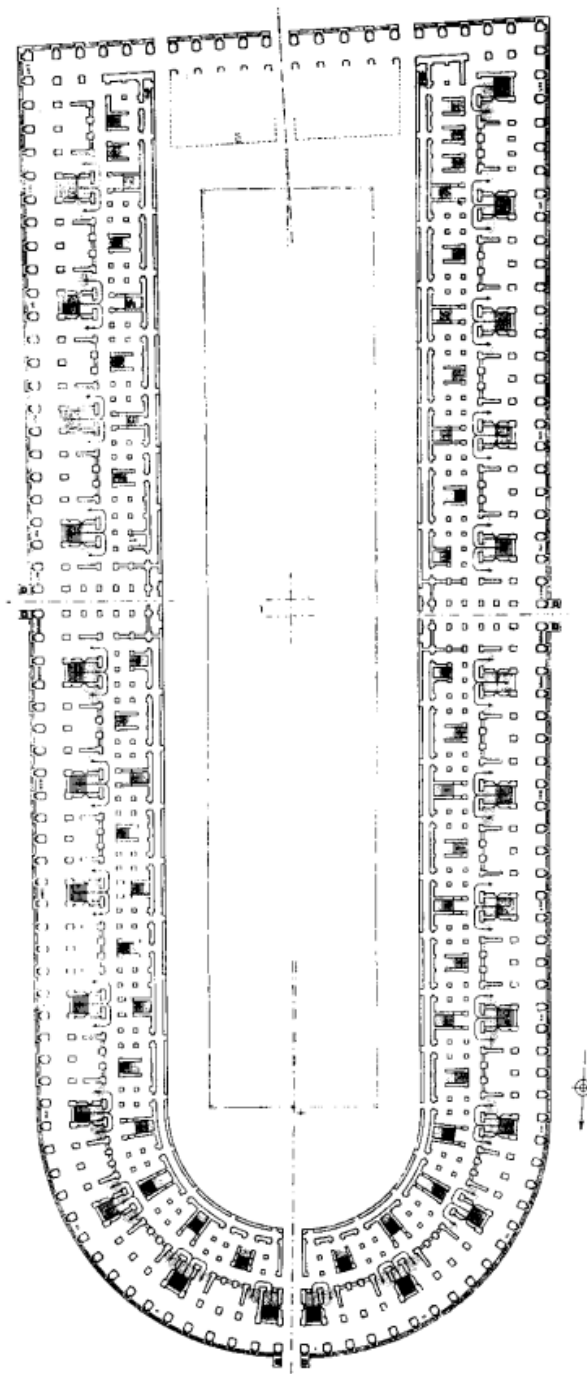


Figure 79
Stadium Domitiani,
Restored Plan
(1 cm = 18.4m)

³⁵⁸ Richardson Jr. (Ed), *A New Topographical Dictionary*, p. 367

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