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Filius Minervae: A Study of Domitian's Relationship with Minerva

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Filius Minervae: A Study of Domitian's Relationship with Minerva By Kira K. Jones

Through an analysis of the imperial propaganda of Rome's eighth emperor, Domitian, the author argues that Domitian sought to create a public relationship with his patron goddess, Minerva, which would both underscore and validate his policies and legitimacy. The article focuses on coin issues, architecture, cameos, statuary, public events, and literature dealing with Minerva under Domitian's rule. Furthermore, the author shows that artistic objects utilizing a Minerva with Domitian's specific portrait features signal a new interpretation of the goddess' cult which was propagated during the Domitianic period.

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Filius Minervae: A Study of Domitian's Relationship with Minerva

Titus Flavius Domitianus was born on Pomegranate Street (*ad Malum Punicum*) in 51 CE, a month before his father Vespasian was due to take office as consul-elect (Suet. *Dom.* 1.1). He was the second son of Vespasian and would be both the third and last emperor in the Flavian dynasty. Accounts of his childhood and rule are recorded by Tacitus, Suetonius, Martial and Statius, among others.¹ Hostile ancient sources written after his assassination often depict him as a tyrant and a paranoid ruler who killed indiscriminately and sequestered himself in a marble palace when he began fearing conspiracies. Yet one of the most distinctive characteristics about Domitian is his fondness for the goddess Minerva who figures prominently in Domitianic construction projects, literature and coins. Philostratus records that Domitian thought himself her son, a statement that many modern scholars have found hard to believe (7.24).² Studying the cultural remains of his principate, in particular coins, literature, architecture and gems, indicates that even if he did not consider himself an actual child of his patron goddess, he created a Domitianic Minerva that worked to legitimize his rule and imperial program.

Numismatics

One of the most obvious indications of Domitian's predilection for Minerva is her abundant presence on his coins. When the fire of 80 CE damaged the senatorial mint, the imperial mint took over production of Rome's coins. While Domitian was at first content to

¹ Tacitus discusses Domitian in his *Agricola* and portions of the *Historia* that are now lost. Statius' *Silvae* were published during Domitian's reign, while Martial's *Epigrams* were published both during and after and reflect positive and negative opinions of the emperor. Suetonius' life of Domitian in the Twelve Caesars was published a number of years after Domitian's death.

² Southern 1997, 121; for a comprehensive study, see Girard 1981.

continue his brother Titus' issues, he soon initiated a fiscal reform that included raising troop pay and public bounties, improving the weight and fineness of silver, and creating a new series of reverses highlighting his campaigns and ideals.³

Ian Carradice has divided Domitian's coinage into three periods based on this fiscal reform. The first, from 81-82, has the lowest amount of precious metal (corresponding to a devaluation by Vespasian). Period two, from 82-85, is the highest quality and corresponds a weight and fineness of Rome's silver coinage which had not been seen since Augustus. Unfortunately, Domitian was forced to devalue the coinage in 85, but refused to return to the levels which his father had instituted. Instead, he merely halved his own improvement, corresponding to the valuation of silver coins under Nero.⁴

The Minerva issues within these three periods can be divided into four main categories (restricted to the Rome mint, largely the silver and gold issues, and with a few distinct reverses, to be discussed later). Type one would have been familiar to contemporary Romans, since it had been used first under Claudius, reused by Titus (with the addition of an owl), and then again by Domitian under Titus (minus the owl).⁵ Here Minerva strides to the right, brandishing a spear in her right hand and a shield in the left.⁶ She wears a Corinthian helmet with full crest and a long peplos, with her aegis streaming out behind her. Minerva 1 is the earliest standard type to be featured in Domitian's coins as emperor, which is perhaps not surprising since his first few issues tend to follow coin types minted by his brother.⁷

³ Carradice 1983, 142.

⁴ Carradice 1983.

⁵ *BMCRE* 512, p. 417, pl. 83.3.

⁶ *BMCRE* 260, p. 280, pl. 53.10.

⁷ He also retains his type 2 portrait in the early editions, which emphasizes his physical resemblance to Titus and Vespasian.

The second Minerva type made its debut in 83, during the second period.⁸ Minerva 2 adopts a similar pose to Minerva 1, in that she strides to the right brandishing spear and shield with her aegis streaming behind her. The difference is that this Minerva is mounted on a ship's prow and has an owl at her feet. Whether this is meant to indicate an affiliation with the imperial fleet or a connection with the Forum rostra is uncertain; what is certain, however, is that this type has no predecessor. Another possibility is that this image could represent a specific statue type with a figural base, although no examples have survived.

Minerva 3 also appears in silver coinage during 83 (although it had appeared on bronze *sestertii* as early as 81), and has a much more peaceful attitude.⁹ This Minerva is stationary and contraposto. Instead of her usual belted peplos, she wears a himation over two other garments.¹⁰ She faces left and holds a spear in her right hand, while her left rests on her hip.

The last type, Minerva 4, is another left-facing stationary type which appears on the silver coinage during 83 (although, unlike type three, this one is a thoroughly new method of portrayal).¹¹ Her spear has shifted to her left hand, so that she can hold forth a thunderbolt with her right. Her shield is once again present but lies behind her on the ground. It may be significant that she is offering the thunderbolt, attribute of Jupiter and symbol of divine power, to her left while the head of Domitian on the obverse almost invariably faces right. Flipping the coins over or displaying the obverse of one coin beside a reverse of the same type would have enabled the

⁸ *BMCRE* 103, p. 322, pl. 63.3.

⁹ *BMCRE* 73, p. 314, pl. 61.15.

¹⁰ The two other garments are indicated by the two hemlines and vertical pleats above her feet, and may be double chitons or a chiton and peplos. The modeled lines around her breasts could be physiognomic, draped folds in the himation, or an indication of her aegis underneath the cloth. The preservation of the coins makes it hard to tell either way. Minerva appears in a chiton and himation in a number of Roman era statues, many of which have her wearing the aegis slung diagonally across her chest. These seem to be based on 4th and 5th c. BCE Greek representations. For comperanda, see a colossal marble statue from Alexandria (Greco-Roman Museum, inv. 23350; *LIMC* Athena in Aegypto 31, vol. 2.1, 767; vol. 2.2, 1046), the Giustiniani Minerva in the Vatican Museums (Musei Vaticani, Braccio Nuovo, inv. 2223, ex coll. Giustiniani; *LIMC* Minerva 154, vol. 2.1, 797; vol. 2.2, 1086), and a marble Minerva currently in Florence (Galleria degli Uffizi, inv. 185; *LIMC* Minerva 155, vol. 2.1 798; vol. 2.2, 1086).

¹¹ *BMCRE* 42, p. 306, pl. 60.10.

viewer to re-enact the transfer of divine power to Domitian through his divine patroness, in effect a portable reminder of Domitian's divinely sanctioned rule. Much like the child's toy where a piece of paper is spun around quickly enough to make the bird on one side appear as if it is in the cage on the other side, manipulating the type 4 coins in such a way initiates a perpetual cycle of the left-facing Minerva favoring a right-facing Domitian.

A comparable vignette can be found on a later triumphal arch in Benevento, dedicated under Trajan. Here, the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva) on the left side of the dedicatory inscription present the thunderbolt, held by Jupiter, to Trajan on the right side. Alternatively, Jupiter could be presenting it to the titles of Trajan which make up a large part of the dedication.¹² Something similar to this may also be occurring in the type 4 Minerva coins. If the viewer did not wish to flip the coin, he could also envision the transfer of power by letting Domitian's titles (replacing the legend related to Minerva which one would expect here) stand in for his image on the obverse. Contemporary viewers would have been familiar with the phenomenon through a coin minted under Otho in 69, where Victory crowns the legend (*VICTORIA OTHONIS*) with a laurel wreath.¹³

As mentioned, these four reverse types first appear together in 83 but almost immediately come to dominate the silver coinage. They are issued almost continuously (the only break is for a series of coins commemorating the *Ludi Saeculari* in 88) until Domitian's death in 96. This prevalence has led many scholars to wonder as to their importance. H. Mattingly sees them as a war goddess, a protector/symbol of the fleet and legions, a peaceful incarnation, and Jupiter's vicegerent respectively.¹⁴ Morawiecki disagrees, noting that the four types are issued during times of war and peace, although the 'war' type only appears after Domitian starts using his

¹² Benevento, Italy, dated to 114; see Rotili 1972.

¹³ Cohen 23, p. 353.

¹⁴ Mattingly 1976, XCIV.

Germanicus title. Instead, Minerva 2 could be associated with the circumnavigation of Britain by the Roman fleet under Agricola, which occurred in 83. The other types could also conform to a notion of *Minerva armifera*, or Domitian's well-documented interest in the arts.¹⁵ Carradice has suggested that each reverse type indicated a specific *officina* in the Mint.¹⁶ Regardless of speculation and despite numerous Minerva issues by subsequent emperors (especially the Antonines), type 1 is the only one of the set to be reused. Morawiecki concludes from this that the other three types must have some intimate association with Domitian.¹⁷ Domitian suffered a condemnation of memory after his assassination which was never reversed, so subsequent emperors would not have wanted to appropriate iconography from a "bad" emperor. Since Minerva 1, which has a long history with more acceptable imperial regimes, was reused while the other types were not (even though later emperors were undoubtedly aware of them), Morawiecki's assumption is not unreasonable.

Despite their popularity, the four standard Minervas are not the only ones to appear in Domitian's coins. A coin which Domitian introduces in 81-2 shows Minerva standing left, holding a Victory in her right hand and a spear in her left (a composition that, although not used by Titus, is very similar to the Athena Parthenos.¹⁸ Gold *aurei* issued in 82 could have a bust of Minerva helmeted and facing left, a few variants of which include a scepter over her right shoulder.¹⁹ The helmeted bust appears again in 84, this time facing right and sporting an Attic

¹⁵ Morawiecki 1977, 188. Minerva took many of her attributes from her Greek counterpart, Athena. In addition to being associated with women's crafts (as seen in the myths of Arachne and Pandora), she was a goddess of knowledge, skill, civilization, music (it was she who gave the double-flute to Marsyas), and tactical warfare (Minerva armifera refers to Minerva bearing arms).

¹⁶ Carradice 1983, 144.

¹⁷ Morawiecki 1977, 187.

¹⁸ *BMCRE* 13, p. 301.

¹⁹ Cohen 607, p. 520.

helmet instead of a Corinthian.²⁰ However, this type does not seem to have caught on as it is never re-issued and is exceedingly rare.

An ornate, commemorative 8 denarius piece was introduced in 85 CE.²¹ Here Minerva is enthroned to the left with her feet propped on a stool and a Victory in her right hand. A scepter is supported by her left arm, which rests on a shield decorated by two temples and four figures. The shield is supported by the head of a captive, who is in turn seated left on a prow. This particular type of Minerva has a long history, having been popularized by Lysimachus of Thrace in the 3rd c. BCE. The last years of his life (95-96 CE) herald the arrival of a winged Minerva (Minerva Victrix), who hurries to the left with shield and spear.²² An undated coin, which was likely issued during the last years of Domitian's reign and is argued to depict the temple of Minerva Chalcidica, shows a round, four-columned temple without pediment.²³ Inside, a distinctly martial Minerva advances in a manner quite similar to standard Minerva type 1.

The bronze coinage also has a number of Minerva issues. *Sestertii* from 81 show Domitian bearing the palladium, perhaps in conjunction with his ascension to power (although standard Minerva types 1 and 4 also appear on reverses during this issue).²⁴ *Sestertii* minted between 85 and 89 had the option of showing an elaborate scene in which a togate Domitian (with toga pulled over the head in the attitude of pontifex maximus) sacrifices to a small shrine with a statue of Minerva.²⁵ In 92-94 a coin showing Domitian being crowned by Victory has a variant which includes Minerva, although its popularity does not seem to be great.²⁶ *Semis* and *quadrans* often have busts of Minerva on the obverse (replacing Domitian), while the reverse can

²⁰ *BMCRE* 45, p. 307, pl. 60.12.

²¹ *BMCRE* 83, p. 316, pl. 62.3.

²² *BMCRE* 237, p. 344, pl. 67.1.

²³ *BMCRE* 241, p. 346, pl. 67.7.

²⁴ Cohen 566, p. 517.

²⁵ *BMCRE* 296, p. 363, pl. 71.1.

²⁶ Variant of *BMCRE* 381; Carradice 1983, 114.

vary between a plain SC and various attributes of Minerva, such as owls and olive branches.²⁷ *Dupondii* and *asses* issued in 95-96 often had an owl or olive branch with SC on the reverse, although the obverse portrait was once again Domitian (wearing either an *aegis* or a *paludamentum*). Mattingly has suggested that the Minerva bust and attribute issues may be linked to the Capitoline games, or perhaps (as Morawiecki suggests) the Alban games which Domitian held in honor of Minerva.²⁸

One method of examining Domitian's relationship with Minerva is to determine when he wears her aegis in conjunction with her imagery (since the aegis could also be used as an attribute of Jupiter, and acts as such under earlier emperors such as Claudius) and indeed, one might expect him to do so at every opportunity. Surprisingly, he does not do so very often (at least in numismatic form). He first adopts the aegis in the second issue of 84, and then continues to do so throughout 85 (in fact, the second and third issues of 85 do not feature him without it). He stops wearing it consistently after 85 (although all of the shrine *sestertii* show him with the aegis), but does so briefly in the first issues of 88 and 92, as well as once during 95-96. When he does wear the aegis, his head is laureate and facing right.

Provincial coinage is another story. Bosphorus, a client province with its own coinage system, always represented him with the aegis, although other provinces seem to have followed Rome's example. The four standard Minerva reverses are not used by mints other than the imperial one; however, there are still many Minerva issues put forth. A bronze coin minted by Aegae in 94 shows Minerva seated and holding a globe in her right hand, with a horse head on her left.²⁹ A *didrachm* from Caesaria Mazaca minted between 93 and 94 shows Minerva standing

²⁷ *BMCRE* 483, *BMCRE* 487, *BMCRE* 489; pp. 409-10, pl. 81.8,10.

²⁸ Mattingly 1976, XCVI; Morawiecki 1977, 186.

²⁹ *BMCRE* 92, p. 319, pl. 62.10.

right, with a spear in her left hand and an owl in her right.³⁰ Perhaps the oddest issue is a bronze coin from Augusta, dated between 85 and 86, which seems to show Livia on the obverse and a helmeted Athena on the reverse. These Minerva issues could be used to argue Domitian's influence over provincial mints, although if he had (or wished to exercise) extensive control over them he likely would have imposed at least some of the standard Minerva types which he continued to have issued in Rome throughout his reign.

All four types appear in fairly equal numbers on the silver coinage, but at least one of them made it into gem form.³¹ A cameo from the Bibliothèque Nationale shows Minerva in the type three position.³² Although the front of her helmet and spear tip have broken off, the figure's identification as a type three Minerva is undeniable. If, as the ground line on the type three coins may suggest, this type of Minerva is a depiction of a statue then its commemoration on a cameo figure may indicate special importance. The fire of 80 CE destroyed much of Rome's buildings and the emperor's particular piety towards Minerva led him to take advantage of this opportunity for construction.

Architecture

After the fire Domitian constructed seven temples to Jupiter, eight to Juno, eleven to Hercules, eleven to Phoebus, eleven to Castor and Pollux, twelve to the Gens Flavia and ten to Minerva.³³ Although many of these were reconstructions after the fire, it is interesting to note that all ten of the Minerva temples were new. This would have necessitated the commission of new cult statues, which may have led to one or more of the new Minerva types shown on Domitian's coins.

³⁰ Burnett 1999 (*RPC2*) no. 1673/2, p. 243.

³¹ Carradice 1984, 147.

³² Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 26, 12.0 x 5.5 cm. Furtwängler 1896, AG III 367; Babelon 1897, 17f. Nr. 26 Taf. 4; Megow 1987, 222-223, Taf. 37; Varner 2008, 187.

³³ Darwall-Smith 1996, 105.

Three of these temples can be documented through literary sources or archaeological evidence. The first of these is a temple to Minerva Chalcidica, which is shown on the marble plan and mentioned by both Jerome and the Chronographer.³⁴ The temple is specifically described as round, and may be shown on an undated denarius.³⁵ The coin shows a frontal view of a round temple (indicated by a curved base) with two Corinthian columns on either side of a cult statue. The statue is a helmeted female running to the right, with a spear and shield in her left hand (similar to both the first and second Minerva types). There is no pediment, but a series of globes and palmettes ornament the top of a blank architrave.

The Minerva Chalcidica temple appearing on the marble plan does not have columns, but no other round temple of Minerva is known in Rome. The lack of columns could be due to space concerns, as the temple was small in the greater scheme of the map and was sandwiched in a larger religious complex.³⁶ The complex was situated to the east of the Saepta Julia and, through its emphasis on Domitian's newly deified relatives, served as a concrete reminder of his own relationship with the divine. The temple to Minerva Chalcidica honored his favorite goddess, while the Porticus Divorum directly behind it commemorated the divine Titus and Vespasian. L. Richardson has proposed that the Porticus Divorum replaced the Villa Publica, a site that had been used as a marshalling ground for triumphal processions.³⁷ If this is indeed the case, then building a temple to his father and brother on the site would have reminded visitors of Flavian military prowess.

³⁴ Darwall-Smith 1996, 125; Marble plan fragments 35m and 35f.

³⁵ *BMCRE* 241, p. 346, pl. 67.7.

³⁶ Darwall-Smith 1996, 125.

³⁷ Richardson 1976, 159-63.

The third temple was a reconstruction of two earlier temples, for Isis and Serapis respectively.³⁸ Domitian's connection to Titus and Vespasian needs no explanation, but his relationship with the Egyptian gods harkens back to his life during the Year of Four Emperors. Suetonius states that, "during the war against Vitellius, Domitian, with his uncle Sabinus and part of the forces under him, fled to the Capitol; but when the enemy burst in and set the temple on fire, Domitian concealed himself all night in the caretaker's quarters and, at daybreak, disguised as a devotee of Isis, took refuge among the priests of that rather questionable order. Presently he managed to escape with a single companion across the Tiber, where the mother of one of his fellow-students hid him so cleverly that she outwitted the agents who had followed in his tracks (Suet. *Dom.* 1.2)."³⁹ Sabinus was captured on the Capitoline and quickly killed, leaving Domitian as the sole survivor when his father's forces eventually arrived in the city.

Although he would later credit his survival to Jupiter Conservator, it is not unrealistic to expect that Domitian harbored some favor towards Isis as well. It was as her worshipper that he managed to escape a certain death on the Capitoline in 69 CE, whether Jupiter's hand was the ultimate precursor or not. If Domitian has been planning on constructing a religious complex centered around his own divine connections then incorporating a reconstructed temple to Isis and Serapis would have fit very well into his scheme. On the one side are his direct ancestors, now apotheosized and presumably watching over him. On the other side is the goddess whose cult afforded him escape from a death that even his uncle could not avoid. Finally, the complex is completed by a temple dedicated to the goddess with whom he admittedly feels the closest connection: Minerva.

³⁸ Darwall-Smith 1996, 125-26.

³⁹ Trans. R. Graves.

Any specific connection that the cult of Minerva Chalcidica may have had with Domitian is unfortunately lost to the ages. Coarelli has suggested that “Chalcidica” be translated as “she who guards the door,” with a specific reference to the Porticus Divorum, but unfortunately does not explain his reasoning.⁴⁰ Giraud suggests a Greek origin, with Minerva Chalcidica being a Latin transliteration of Athena Chalchioikos from Sparta. The clear difference between Chalcidica and Chalchioikos, however, make this an unlikely explanation.⁴¹

Another Domitianic temple that has been lost to the ages is the Templum Castorum et Minervae. Its location is uncertain and the only literary mention comes from the Chronographer, who may have misunderstood a reference to two separate temples.⁴² However, a statue of Minerva found in the Forum Romanum near the extant Castores temple may indicate the presence of a sacred area. Further evidence is offered by military *diplomata* dating to the 27th of October in 90 CE, which state that, “*quae fixa est Romae post templum divi Aug. ad Mineruam*”. Military *diplomata* were usually posted on the Capitoline, as stated in *diplomata* from December 68-September 82 and May 100-November 122.⁴³

While the location of the original Divus Augustus temple is debated, it is generally thought to have been behind the temple of Castor and Pollux. Combining this supposition with the mention of “*templum divi Aug. ad Mineruam*” from the October 90 military *diplomata* handily explains the presence of the statue. Regardless of whether they were fixed to a statue or a separate temple which is yet unknown, the *diplomata* only changed position during the reign of Domitian.⁴⁴ Affixing them to anything associated with Minerva would underscore her new

⁴⁰ Coarelli 1985, 297-298.

⁴¹ Darwall-Smith 1996, 250.

⁴² Darwall-Smith 1996, 126.

⁴³ *MW* 396-402; *Sm.II*, 343-348.

⁴⁴ Darwall-Smith 1996, 126.

importance as both a military goddess and imperial patroness, especially considering Domitian's new Minerva legion.

Out of the ten temples to Minerva for which Domitian is credited, the only one with archaeological remains is the temple located in the Forum Transitorium. The temple itself was dedicated by Nerva in 97 CE, which led the forum to be named after him, but Eutropius, Jerome and the Cartographer all refer to the complex as the Forum Transitorium (Eutrop. VII 23.4; Jer. *Chron.* 215th Olympiad). This is likely connected to the Argiletum, an important thoroughfare that connected the Forum precinct with the Subura.⁴⁵ The forum was built over the old Argiletum but preserved a number of important axes, notably through the reconstruction of a temple to Janus Quadrifrons at one end of the forum.

Thirty-eight bays articulated the long colonnaded walls of the forum precinct, which were topped with an entablature featuring a continuous frieze leading to the temple of Minerva at the far end. Above this frieze was an attic story with central reliefs decorating each of the bays. One of the few surviving frieze scenes, notable for the rarity of its subject, depicts the contest between Minerva and Arachne.⁴⁶ The story, alluded to by Vergil in the *Georgics* and expanded upon by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, deals with the age-old trope of mortal hubris against the gods (Verg. *G.* 4.246-47; Ov. *Met.* 6.5-145).

According to Ovid, Arachne was the daughter of Idmon, a dyer in Lydia. Although she was of low social standing her skill in weaving gained her fame, so much so that even nymphs and naiads would come to see her work. Arachne's pride in her work grew and she began to believe herself without equal, even when compared with the goddess of weaving herself. Minerva heard of this boast and disguised herself as an old woman in order to warn the girl of

⁴⁵ Darwall-Smith 1996, 116.

⁴⁶ Frederick 2003, 223; D'Ambra 1993.

her haughtiness. Unfortunately, Arachne decried the old woman and stated that if the goddess were listening she would do well to accept Arachne's offer of a contest. Minerva, in reaction to the girl's arrogance, accepts the challenge and they agree to weave tapestries. Minerva chose to weave the Olympian gods in all of their splendor, from Jove on Olympus to Neptune in the sea. She wove herself in a moment of triumph against Neptune, when she won the contest for Athens by giving the Greeks an olive tree. Each corner, in a nod to Arachne's own eventual fate, showed a mortal who had been transformed after defying the gods.

Arachne also wove a tapestry of divine theme, but was considerably less tactful in her subject matter. She wove the illicit love affairs of the gods, not just confined to the amorous adventures of Jove but also including Neptune, Phoebus, Bacchus and Saturn. When it came time for Minerva to examine her rival's work she was incensed by the theme, but could find no fault in the craftsmanship. Flying into a rage the goddess ripped Arachne's tapestry apart and began beating the girl. Arachne attempted to hang herself in despair and Minerva, whether through pity or a protracted sense of revenge, transformed her into a spider. The girl would live, but as penance for her crimes she would be doomed to hang from the ceiling and weave her webs.

As the story seems to be a Roman tradition, there is no Greek precedent to draw upon for iconography.⁴⁷ Domitian is thus able to adapt it to his own means with relatively little cultural baggage. The story of Arachne and Minerva is above all a tale of hubris, of a person who goes outside the proper order of things and is then punished for her transgressions. In addition to being part of the mythos of his favorite goddess, the tale also fits in well with Domitian's campaign to resurrect Augustus' moral reforms. It has been stated by other scholars that Domitian saw himself as the rebuilder and re-founder of Rome, not only as a result of the 80 CE fire but also regarding the excesses of the late Julio-Claudian emperors (Nero in particular) and

⁴⁷ Gantz 1993, 86.

the resulting chaos in 69 CE. David Frederick has proposed that Arachne is to Minerva as the elite men of Rome were to Domitian. Both Minerva and Domitian work to preserve and restore order and morality, just as they inflict punishment on those who step outside the bounds of propriety.⁴⁸

Eve D’Ambra also sees a connection between Minerva and Domitian in the Forum Transitorium frieze. A figure of Minerva with distaff and spindle, which she identifies as Minerva Ergane (work or craftsmanship), is shown as “a guardian of the traditional virtues summoned by the task of weaving.” Domitian, a follower and apparent favorite of the goddess, is by extension the same. Viewers of the temple frieze can assume that devotion to Minerva (and by extension Domitian) will be rewarded while transgressions against the morality which they impose will only invite punishment.⁴⁹

Minerva Ergane is not the only depiction of the goddess. A more traditional portrayal appears in the attic of one of the bays, showing Minerva facing outward with spear, shield, helmet and *paludamentum*. The soffits of each entablature below the attic are decorated with gorgoneions, recalling the head of Medusa that Minerva received from Perseus and afterwards wore on her aegis.⁵⁰

As the rest of the colonnade is not preserved, it is impossible to be certain concerning the subject of the remaining frieze. Other aspects of Minerva would be likely candidates, as well as other stories of divine punishment. D’Ambra has suggested that a portrayal of the Quinquatria, a festival of Minerva that Domitian celebrated at his Alban villa, would also have been appropriate. She has also proposed that the corresponding attic relief for this hypothetical frieze

⁴⁸ Frederick 2003, 223.

⁴⁹ D’Ambra 1993, 54.

⁵⁰ The story is recorded by Pherekydes; Gantz 1993, 310.

section could have been similar to a coin reverse depicting Domitian at a small, private shrine to Minerva.⁵¹

The coin shows a togate Domitian offering libation to a small statue of Minerva. His head is covered by part of his toga mantle, in the manner of a pontifex maximus, as he empties a patera over a garlanded altar. The statue of Minerva is set into a niche beneath a small pediment, with three visible Corinthian columns supporting the structure. She is shown in a static pose at eye level with Domitian and holds a spear in her left hand while offering something else forward with her right.⁵²

Suetonius mentions that Domitian had a private shrine to Minerva in his bedroom, and it has been proposed that this private shrine may be the one shown on the coin (Suet. *Dom.* 15.2).⁵³ While this would explain the small, personal nature of the scene (as opposed to coins from the *ludi saeculari* which show him sacrificing at large, public altars) it would be odd for an emperor to portray such a private scene in such a public manner. However, if Domitian's aim was to show that he was just as pious in his personal affairs as he was in the public eye, then it would be hard to find a more appropriate vignette.

Cancellaria Reliefs

Portions of another Domitianic monument featuring Minerva have been preserved in the Cancellaria Reliefs, which once again show highlight the emperor's interest in promoting his own relationship with the divine. The Cancellaria Reliefs (so called because of their discovery

⁵¹ D' Ambra 1993, 77; *BMCRE* 296, p. 363, pl. 71.1.

⁵² This particular coin bears some resemblance to issues from Ilion (Hissarlik/Troy). If the resemblance is intentional, Domitian would likely have been making a comparison between his own piety and the palladium (or possibly Ilion's temple to Athena), which was taken from Troy and eventually made its way to Rome. It is significant that Domitian not only appears on early coinage bearing the palladium but seems to incorporate a bust very similar to the Ilion Athena obverse on his later coins.

⁵³ Scott 1935, 69-72.

under the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome) were found leaning against the republican Tomb of Aulus Hirtius. The reliefs have been subject to controversy ever since their discovery in the 1930s, regarding everything from their date of manufacture to their subject. However, most scholars agree that the reliefs were originally Domitianic (although recarved).

Relief A shows a procession with most of the figures facing to the left.⁵⁴ It is clear from the cut-off body of a Victory on the left side that this panel was part of a much longer frieze course. However, that additional section has never been found. The first full figure, standing directly in front of the Victory, is a *lictor*. He is shown in an act of forward motion, looking back at the figures behind him while he rests his weight on his outstretched leg. As is consistent with his status, he bears the fasces and ax.

The next figure is the god Mars, dressed in full battle regalia and bearing a shield. He looks back as well, but also continues the forward motion by resting his weight on his right leg and extending his right arm. Minerva follows him in her own trademark garment, the belted peplos, along with aegis and Corinthian helmet. She does not bear weapons, but locks eyes with Domitian (directly behind her) and guides him with outstretched left arm. Her right arm is bent back upon itself in a curious position, resting on the neck-guard of her helmet. F. Magi has interpreted this as a gesture borrowed from images of Diana pulling arrows out of her quiver, with no particular meaning in this context.⁵⁵ However, Minerva has her own library of gestures that could have been drawn upon rather than plucking one from Diana's repertoire. J. Toynbee suggests that it is much more reasonable to assume that Minerva has just donned her helmet and is securing the neckguard in its proper place, while others propose that it is a gesture to

⁵⁴ Rome, Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano (13389-13391). Magi 1945, Toynbee 1957, Magi 1973, Ghedini 1986.

⁵⁵ Magi 1945, pl. 3.

emphasize both her chaste and militaristic qualities.⁵⁶ Without firm comparanda, however, it is impossible to identify this gesture beyond doubt.

The figure originally depicting Domitian stands immediately next to her, dressed in the outfit of a travelling general. His left arm is secured within the folds of his mantle and supported by Roma (or Virtus), while his extended right arm points towards the left. His features, like so many of his sculpted portraits, have been recarved into those of Nerva. The figure's identification as Domitian, however, is secured both by elements of his hairstyle that are consistent with Domitian's third portrait type, as well as inconsistencies in the recarving (such as the lack of a naso-labial line or a hollowed cheek on the side of the face which is hidden from the viewer, or the miniscule proportions of the head with the rest of the body).

Two more lictors with *fasces* follow behind the emperor, as does Roma (or Virtus, as some have identified her). This female figure is dressed as an amazon, with the short tunic, bared breast, and militaristic accoutrement that one expects. She supports Domitian's arm and urges him forward towards the left, where the other gods are waiting. Next to her stands a personification of the Roman Senate, holding a scepter crowned with an imperial bust and lifting his right arm in acknowledgement (or perhaps farewell). His younger counterpart, the personification of the Roman People, is also present with bared chest, youthful features, and abundant cornucopia. The rest of the scene is completed by members of the Praetorian guard. Although traditional views have identified the scene as Domitian's *profectio* for his Sarmatian campaign in 92-93 C.E, recent scholarship indicates that this is the *dona militaria* after the Sarmatian campaign, when Domitian refused a triumph in lieu of dedicating captured arms at the

⁵⁶ Toynbee 1957, 13; Henderson 2003, 253.

temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. Jupiter would thus occupy the missing relief and the scene as a whole would emphasize Domitian's *pietas*, *virtus*, modesty, and divine status.⁵⁷

Relief B has traditionally been identified as the *adventus* of Vespasian when he returned to Rome in 70 C.E.⁵⁸ This relief, unlike relief A, does not have much forward motion. Many of the figures are stationary, with only the central lictors showing active movement. The left side of the scene begins with an *apparitor*, the traditional attendant of the Vestal Virgins, bearing rods. To the right are five Vestals (the sixth would have been tending the sacred fire in the city temple) with their characteristic fillets. Between the first Vestal and the *apparitor* one can see Roma (or Virtus) in the background, seated on a raised throne and bearing a spear which is cut off by the upper border. Like relief A, she wears a short Amazonian tunic with one breast bare and an attic helmet. Past the Vestals are the two lictors, mentioned previously, and the personifications of the Senate and Roman People (the latter holding a staff or spear, cut off by the upper border, and a cornucopia). The *Genius Populi Romani* is in the back register with his foot resting on a block, perhaps signifying a boundary of some sort. Immediately in front of him is the reunion between Vespasian and Domitian, both togate. Domitian faces right towards his father (who is crowned by a barely-visible Victory) and is shown as youthful, with a slightly protruding upper lip and ornate hairstyle characteristic of his first portrait type. He clutches the folds of his toga with both hands and receives the greetings of his father, who places his right arm on Domitian's shoulder.

Vespasian is shown with his strongly veristic portrait features; deep nasolabial lines, bulbous nose, and furrowed brow. Since Domitian was still in Rome during the Year of Four Emperors, and greeted his father upon his triumphant return to the city, this relief could be an

⁵⁷ See Kleiner 1992, pp. 191-92 and Toynbee 1957 for earlier scholarship, and Ghedini 1986; Varner 2004, 119 for recent arguments.

⁵⁸ 93-95, Rome, Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano.

effort on Domitian's part to hearken back to the beginning of his father's popular reign.⁵⁹

Suetonius suggests that there was some unhappiness concerning Domitian's actions between the failed assassination attempt by Vitellius and Vespasian's arrival at Rome; if true, Vespasian's affectionate gesture towards his son in this relief could be an attempt by Domitian to set the *adventus* in a different light and indicate his father's approval (Suet. *Dom.* 1.3).

The absence of Minerva in the second panel is odd; since it was obviously an important state occasion for Domitian, one would expect her to have a prominent place. She may have been present on the missing panel or in the background of the broken section, although both of these options would place her at a distance from Domitian. It is likely that the relief is meant to focus more on Vespasian and the ascension of the Flavian dynasty than on Domitian as emperor. Since he was not even the heir at this time (that honor was reserved for his brother, Titus) it may not have been appropriate to show him with Minerva. Alternatively, he may be handing control of the city (which stands behind him, personifications and all) over to his father, in which case Minerva (who presumably stayed with him) would not be present.

Thankfully, Minerva's presence on relief A is undeniable. She occupies a prominent place right beside her protégé and leads him forth into his campaign, much as she led mythical heroes such as Hercules into epic battles in her role as the goddess of strategic warfare. The artist has taken careful steps to integrate her form with that of Domitian; her arm blends into his shoulder as she reaches around his back to urge him forth, and his outstretched arm continues the line of her bicep as she adjusts her helmet (which is, perhaps, one reason why the artist chose to

⁵⁹ It has been suggested that Vespasian was recarved from Domitian, which would necessitate a different identification for the young man. However, if relief B was redone under Nerva, as proposed, then one would expect more similarities between Vespasian and the obviously-recarved Domitian/Nerva in relief A. Vespasian shows none of the proportion discrepancy or melded hair styles which are present in relief A; furthermore, the young man is so consistent with Domitian's portrait features that any other identification is questionable at best. See Kleiner 1992, 191; Ghedini 1986, 297-300; Varner 2004, 119-120, n. 62.

give Minerva such an unusual gesture). Their heads are almost level and they seem to lock gazes; even their right legs are in similar positions. The formal relationship between the two figures here is clear; everyone (with the notable exception of a praetorian, who looks backwards) is focused on Domitian, but his connection with Minerva serves to create an almost private vignette. He goes forth to war, urged on by the Senate, the Roman people, and even Rome herself, guided by Victory, Mars, and the promise that his divine patroness will be at his side.

Alban Games

Domitian's *Quinquatria* are attested in several literary sources. The first mention of these games is the first epigram in Martial's fourth book from 89 CE, where he describes Caesar sacrificing to Minerva in the Alban hills and awaiting the secular games (Mart. *Spect.* 4.1). Writing after Domitian's death Suetonius records that, "Domitian also celebrated the *Quinquatria* of Minerva each year on his Alban estate. He founded a priestly college for the goddess from which were chosen by lot office holders to stage splendid hunts and dramatic games and in addition competitions of orators and poets (Suet. *Dom.* 4.4)."⁶⁰ Cassius Dio also mentions the annual event, saying that Domitian celebrated "the Panathenaea [quinquatria] on a magnificent scale; on those occasions he held contests of poets and orators and gladiators almost every year at his Alban Villa (Dio. Cass. 67.1.2)."⁶¹ By celebrating the *quinquatria* at his own estate rather than in the city of Rome itself, Domitian was able to accentuate the personal relationship that he had with Minerva.

Holding the games in Rome would have made them more accessible to the masses, but they would have taken on an official cast that may have been incompatible with his desire to

⁶⁰ Trans. R. Graves.

⁶¹ Trans. E Cary.

promote an intimate relationship with the goddess. Additionally, the Alban games would have had to compete with his lavish Capitoline games. The Capitoline games, which began in 86 and were held every four years thereafter, are attested by both monuments and literary evidence.⁶² They necessitated the building of a new Odeum and Stadium to house the poetry, music, athletic, oratory, and singing competitions, as well as the chariot races. Domitian himself wore a purple toga and a golden crown featuring the Capitoline triad, while the judges wore similar crowns that included his image as well (Suet. *Dom.* 4.4, *ILS* 5178). Even though his games for Minerva were held more often, they would have undoubtedly been outshone by the Capitoline festivities if they were both held in Rome.

The exact origins of the Alban games are not mentioned anywhere, but M. Rostovtzeff published a series of lead *tesserae* in 1898 which bore legends of “IVVEN[es] AVG[ustales]” on one side and ALBAN[i] with a bust of Minerva on the other.⁶³ It is highly probable that ‘albani’ in conjunction with a bust of Minerva refers to Domitian’s Alban games, and the ‘iuvenes augustales’ legend implies that they were youth games. As the aedicula to Iuventus was in the cella of Minerva at the Capitoline Triad temple in Rome, a connection between her and the god of youths was likely commonplace. Domitian himself was *princeps iuventus* during the period when his father and brother were in power, much of which he spent at the Alban villa. The *quinquatria* could have begun during this period of residence, or even evolved from something earlier that he adopted.⁶⁴

In addition to mentioning the locale, Suetonius also refers to a collegium of priests which Domitian formed to oversee the events. Martial may make reference to this collegium when he

⁶² Martial 9.40, 4.54.1 (viz. Collinus 86), 6.46.1-2; *ILS* 5177, 5178; Suet. *Dom.* 4.4, 12.1, 13.1; Stat. *Silv.* 3.5.31-3, 5.3.231-3. See Caldelli 1993; Jones 1992, 103-105.

⁶³ Rostovtzeff 1898, 276 no. 19.

⁶⁴ Hardie 2003, 135.

addresses Sextus, the personal literary advisor to Domitian, in an effort to get his own work into the imperial library (Mart. *Spect.* 5.5). He calls Sextus the “palatinae cultor facunde Minervae,” the eloquent ministrant of Palatine Minerva. Palatine Minerva is significant because of the intended party. Martial does not refer to just any Minerva, but the one who is associated with the Palatine hill, most notably the Palatine palace, and by extension Domitian himself. “Facunde” is a nod towards Sextus’ literary credentials. Since he is eloquent, he will recognize the quality of Martial’s work and Domitian will heed his recommendation.

The remaining word, “cultor,” carries a bit more weight. A. Hardie has pointed out that it is the technical term for a member of a collegium of worshippers.⁶⁵ As a member of Domitian’s personal staff Sextus would have had intimate access to the emperor’s programs and, while he may not have been a member of the specific collegium that Suetonius mentions in connection with the Alban games, he may have aided with the organization. If this was indeed the case it could indicate a level of involvement on Domitian’s part that would further enhance his personal connection with the Alban games.

Statius also recalls the Alban games when he speaks of his victory in one of the poetic competitions. “Here,” he says, “the maiden queen of wars crowned my poems with Caesar’s gold (Stat. *Silv.* 4.5.22-4).”⁶⁶ The *carmina* to which he refers are also mentioned earlier in his *Silvae* when he says that, “your hand bestowed on me Pallas’ gold, singing now of German conflicts, now of Dacian battles (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.66-7).”⁶⁷ The subject matter would certainly have been topical for Domitian, who campaigned in both Germania and Dacia during 89 CE and adopted Germanicus as one of his favored titles.

⁶⁵ Hardie 2003,135.

⁶⁶ Trans. J.H. Mozley.

⁶⁷ Trans. J.H. Mozley.

The gold which he received likely refers to a monetary prize, but the specific way in which he phrases the reference could have a few different meanings. On the one hand, “Caesar’s gold” could mean that the prize was awarded by Domitian, or that Domitian used his own money to fund the contests. “Pallas’ gold” obviously refers to the same prize and could simply mean the gold that was given to him at her games. On the other hand, “Caesar” and “Pallas” could be a reference to the figures on the coins. The gold could also refer to a golden crown.

As mentioned previously, Minerva occupied most of Domitian’s *aurei* reverses during this period of his reign. She appears on an unprecedented number of his coins, perhaps due to the fact that the imperial mint (as opposed to the senatorial mint) had taken control of Rome’s currency manufacture.⁶⁸ Of course, Statius does not elaborate on these matters and none of these suppositions necessarily exclude the others, but it would not be out of the question for a Roman literary artist to pen a phrase with more than one meaning. As he was directing a number of his works towards the emperor, it would have been in his interest to include as many flattering aspects as he could.

Equestrian Monument from the Forum Romanum

One of the other passages which Statius writes in honor of Domitian deals with his monumental bronze equestrian statue in the Forum. Although the statue does not survive, Statius’ vibrant description has enabled scholars to identify a sestertius from 95 or 96 CE as a portrayal of the statue.⁶⁹ As Statius writes, “...did Pallas fashion you for us, Germanicus, in such guise as the Rhine of late and the lofty home of the astounded Dacian saw you holding your reins? Your right hand bans battles; Tritonia is no burden to your left as she holds out severed

⁶⁸ Carradice 1984, 148.

⁶⁹ Cohen 482, p. 510.

Medusa's neck as though to spur the horse forward; nowhere did the goddess choose a sweeter resting place, not even, Father [Jupiter] if yourself held her...no long delays drew out the time. The god's present likeness itself makes labor sweet and the men intent upon their task are surprised to find their hands more powerful...(Stat. *Silv.* 1.1)."⁷⁰ As in Statius' ekphrasis, the coin shows Domitian with his right hand stretched out in a gesture of clementia, while his left holds a statue of Minerva that is just visible between his chest and the horse's neck. His steed stands proudly on the statue base with its front right hoof balanced on something, likely a foreigner, trophy or perhaps a representation of the Rhein.

The presence of Minerva on Domitian's war monument is particularly telling. Clementia can, by definition, only come after victory and by holding a statue of Minerva while making the gesture, the emperor is in effect attributing his victory to her favor. The legion he formed shortly after his ascension was the *Legio I Minerva* and all four of the Minerva coin types show her in battle regalia. The Minerva-Victoria obverses released early in his reign emphasize Minerva's role in granting military victory and the Minerva Victrix obverse minted just before his death effectively combines her, through the addition of wings, with victory iconography.⁷¹ However, a number of factors seem to suggest that Domitian considered his relationship with Minerva to be more than just one between a goddess and her favored worshipper.

A Private Affair: Domitian and Minerva

Martial, in another of his epigrams, asks Minerva why Domitian has been tardy in paying him. He writes, "O Virgin, confidant of our Jupiter, tell me, I pray you, if he refuses with such a look as this, with what sort is he wont to grant? Thus I besought Pallas, and thus she, laying aside her Gorgon, briefly replied: "Do you imagine, foolish man, that what is not yet given is

⁷⁰ Trans. J.H. Mozley.

⁷¹ *BMCRE* 13, p. 301; *BMCRE* 237, p. 344, pl. 67.1.

necessarily refused (Mart. *Epi.* 6.10)"⁷² Even as Pallas chides Martial for being impatient, she is revealed to have intimate knowledge concerning the plans of the emperor. Of course, she is the goddess of wisdom and can be assumed to know such things, but she is also, as Martial says, Domitian's confidant.

The relationship between Minerva and Domitian becomes even more intimate when Statius expresses his desire that, "the fold surround these, your shoulders, with plenteous purple, and the bordered gown from your own Minerva's hastening hands (Stat. *Silv.* 4.1.20-23)." ⁷³ Here it is not just anyone who weaves his *toga praetexta*, but Minerva herself. Furthermore, Statius implies a privileged relationship when he refers to the goddess as "your own Minerva." This is not the state goddess, the one who sits with Jupiter and Juno on the Capitoline or presides over the Parthenon in Greece. This is a goddess who has cultivated a special relationship with Domitian and shows it by crafting his official toga.

Yet, it is not just the *toga praetexta* which links Domitian with his favorite goddess. According to Martial, Domitian had a breastplate made with an aegis design on it. In honor of the occasion Martial suggests that the emperor should "receive the terrible breastplate of the warlike Minerva, which even the anger of the snaky-locked Medusa dreads. When you do not wear it, Caesar, it may be called a breast-plate; when it sits upon your sacred breast, it will be an aegis (Mart. *Epi.* 7.1)." ⁷⁴ Martial has no allusions that the breastplate is an actual aegis; as he says, when not worn by the emperor it is merely a piece of armor. However, as soon as Domitian puts it on, it takes on the mythical significance which had previously been reserved for Minerva and Jupiter. The goddess had not just granted him her favor, she had granted him the use of her most feared and famous weapon. Such an act is reminiscent of mythic heroes who receive gifts

⁷² Trans. anonymous (Bohn's Classical Library 1897).

⁷³ Trans. J.H. Mozley.

⁷⁴ Trans. Walter C.A. Ker.

from gods, as well as the type 4 Minerva coins where Minerva presents Domitian with the thunderbolt.

As mentioned earlier, Domitian also appears with an aegis on some of his coin issues, all of which call to mind yet another passage from Martial. He asks of a silver Minerva, “Tell me, fierce virgin, since you have helm and spear, why you don’t have the aegis. ‘Caesar has it.’ (Mart. *Epi.* 14.179)”⁷⁵ The work which this passage comes from was published shortly after Domitian’s assassination, but one has to wonder whether it was written with the emperor in mind, perhaps even before his death. Of course, it was not unusual for Roman emperors to wear the aegis in official portraits. For example, Claudius wears it on a sardonyx cameo from Vienna.⁷⁶ Given Domitian’s predilection towards Minerva, however, it is possible that incorporating the aegis into his personal image had more meaning to him than previous emperors.

Dominus et Deus

Domitian’s reputation as a tyrant comes from the political writings released shortly after his assassination, and historians have only recently begun to reformulate their view of his reign. One of the most popular accusations, other than rampant paranoia and unusually cruel punishments, is that Domitian believed himself to be a god. He was already the son of a god, as Vespasian was deified shortly after his death, and brother to the newly divine Titus. Domitian was also father to a god, as shown by a coin depicting his newly divinized son (who died at a young age) playing with stars while perched on top of the world.⁷⁷ Both his wife Domitia and his

⁷⁵ Trans. Walter C.A. Ker.

⁷⁶ Gemma Claudia, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wein, Antikensammlung, inv. ANSA IXa 63.

⁷⁷ *RIC2.1* 213, p. 180.

niece, Julia Titi, were associated with Juno and adopted her peacock attributes in their coins.⁷⁸ Considering the examples of previous emperors, and provided that he managed to secure the goodwill of his successor, there was no reason not to assume that Rome would eventually celebrate his apotheosis as well. Unfortunately, those writing after his death would have us believe that he started the path to godhood a little earlier than was customary.

Martial, once Nerva has taken power, writes that, “in vain, flatteries, you have come to me, miserable with your shameless lips. I am not going to say ‘lord and god’. Now there is no place for you in this city. Go far off to felt-capped Parthians and as base and lowly supplicants kiss the feet of embroidered kings. Not here is there a lord, but a commander in chief, the most just senator of all, under whom unadorned and rustic truth has been brought back from the Stygian house. Under this ruler, if you are wise, beware, Rome, of speaking words from prior times (Mart. *Epi.* 10.72).”⁷⁹ The *dominus et deus* accusation is not restricted to Martial, as Suetonius also includes it among his list of Domitian’s crimes. Apparently the emperor “also spoke of his action in taking Domitia back, after the divorce, as “a recall to my divine bed” and on the day of his public banquet delighted to hear the audience in the Colosseum shout: “long live our Lord and Lady!” Just as arrogantly he began a letter, which his agents were to circulate, with the words: ‘our lord and god instructs you to do this’ and lord and god became his regular title in both writing and conversation” (Suet. *Dom.* 13).⁸⁰ If Suetonius and Martial are to be believed, then Domitian had already proclaimed himself divine long before Rome herself had a chance to declare an apotheosis. Yet, some classical authors write that he went one step further;

⁷⁸ *BMCRE* 249, p. 350, pl. 67.17; *BMCRE* 250, p. 350, pl. 67.18. Domitia also appears riding a peacock on a gem from the British Museum, Inv. Nr. 99.7-22.4.

⁷⁹ Trans. Walter C. A. Ker.

⁸⁰ Trans. R. Graves.

Philostratus mentions a man from Tarentum that was imprisoned because he failed to end his prayer with a reference to Domitian being the son of Minerva (VA 7.24).

Such accusations must be taken with a grain of salt, as they were undoubtedly influenced by the political situation after Domitian's death. Martial implies that Domitian is like an Eastern king with delusions of importance, rather than the 'commander-in-chief' who realizes that he is still one of the people. Considering that both Vespasian and Nerva worked hard to include Republican ideals in their propaganda, accusations of this sort of hubris only work to deepen the divide between Domitian and these so-called 'good' emperors.

However, *dominus et deus* appeared in connection with Domitian during his lifetime as well. In his Epigrams, Martial refers to "the edict of our master and god" and Statius writes, "See! He is a god, him Jupiter commands to rule the happy earth in his stead...hail, leader of men and parent of gods, deity by me foreseen and placed on record!"⁸¹ Granted, neither of these works were under the complete control of Domitian and it would not be unheard of for a Roman author to heap extensive praises on a powerful patron.

Scholars have disputed whether or not Domitian actually used *dominus et deus* as a title. Those against have pointed to its lack of inclusion on coins and inscriptions.⁸² Given the evident fondness Domitian had for his titles and his proclivity to have as many of them displayed on coins as possible, this is not an unreasonable argument. However, others have pointed out that the title's absence from coins and inscriptions does not automatically preclude its existence.⁸³ Domitian was extremely powerful and if his reign was half as tyrannical as later authors would have us believe, then censorship of Roman poets would not be much of a stretch. Even if he was not quite so tyrannical as ancient historians claim, his apparent sense for propriety (the

⁸¹ Mart. Epi. 5.8, trans. Walter C. A. Ker; Stat. Silv. 4.3.128-129, 139-140, trans. J.H. Mozley.

⁸² Jones 1992, 108-9; Thomson 1984, 469-75; Waters 1964, 67.

⁸³ Boyle 2003, 17.

reinstatement of Julio-Claudian moral reforms being one example) make it unlikely that he would let such a potentially inflammatory statement go by lightly.

Domitianic Minerva

Despite such claims, the matter still remains as to whether Domitian thought he was, as Philostratus says, the son of Minerva. He makes no such claims in his inscriptions, and even if he did make use of a *dominus et deus* title it does not specifically qualify him as Minerva's son. The Flavians did not have an ancestral connection to the gods, as the Julio-Claudians did with Venus, and even if they did it would be hard to claim such a relationship with Minerva since one of her main characteristics was virginity. Answers to this claim may lie in a series of Minerva cameos from the Bibliothèque Nationale in France.

The first of these cameos shows a bust-length view of Minerva facing right.⁸⁴ Her helmet is emblazoned with a gryphon and the crest flows down behind her, much like the tendrils of hair cascading down her shoulder. What is odd about the cameo is the way that the artist has carved her face. Her cheeks are unusually full and her nose unusually short, while her eyes stare forward widely and her lips slightly part. All in all, it is not the vision of a serene goddess that one usually sees with Minerva.

The second cameo shows a bust of Minerva facing left.⁸⁵ This time she wears a Corinthian-style helmet with a truncated crest and spiral pattern. Her chest is shown almost frontally, making her scaled aegis especially visible. Once again, however, her face is a little odd. She has regained the aquiline nose and straight brow that is typical of goddesses, but her

⁸⁴ Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles (Inv. Nr. RC-A-43828), 3.5 x 2.75 cm. Vollenweider II, 117. Chabouillet 28. Babelon 1897, 19.

⁸⁵ Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 22 (Inv. Nr. 71 A 23443), 9.9 x 7.0 cm. Megow 1987, 223-222; Varner 2008, 187.

eye is still stylized with heavy lines. Additionally, the aegis she wears is very similar in style to one on a chalcedony bust of Domitian, also in the Bibliothèque Nationale.⁸⁶

However, both of these cameos pale in comparison to the third.⁸⁷ This Minerva sports her trademark aegis, stylistically very similar to the second cameo and the chalcedony bust of Domitian, as well as a helmet with vine patterning. Her nose has been shortened and slightly hooked, while a small overbite and upwards-pointing chin give her the appearance of a pouting grimace. Her eyes bear the same severe lines as the other cameos and the line of her nose dips in before reaching her brow. It is clear that this is no typical Minerva, but the impact of these stylistic features can be seen by comparing the cameos to a portrait of Domitian himself. Interestingly, her helmet is an Attic one, as in the *aureus* from 84 discussed above.⁸⁸

The shortened nose, overbite, pointed chin and protruding brow are all part of Domitian's portrait features. Another of his portrait features, the regular curls around his forehead, are also echoed in the way Minerva's hair curls itself around her helmet on all three cameos. The helmet crest on cameos two and three even seems to mimic the way the fillets fall on Domitian's imperial crown.

It was common for imperial Romans to blend their portrait features with others, especially if they wanted to bolster their own claim to power. The entire line of Julio-Claudians used the tactic, and Claudius can be seen to match his features to that of his wife on the Vienna cameo.⁸⁹ Titus and Domitian both bear a certain resemblance to their father, and Domitian

⁸⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles (Inv. Nr. B 11318), 5.1 cm x 4.6 cm. Megow 1987, pp. 220-221.

⁸⁷ Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 128, 13.4 x 8.1 cm. In Megow 1987, pp. 221-222; Babelon 1897, 64ff. no. 128 plate. 14; Delbrueck, 1940, 48 f. 4-110; Bovini 1941, 132f. p. 6; L'Orange 1947, 144 no. 13; Felletti Maj 1958, 234, no. 317, plate. 43, 143; H. Kyrieleis 1971, 188 no. 102; Richter 1968, no. 111; Schauenburg 1973, 63 no. 88; Möbius, 1977; Bergmann 1977, 48 no. 161; Varner 2008, 187.

⁸⁸ *BMCRE* 45, p. 307, pl. 60.12.

⁸⁹ Kunsthistorisches Museum (Inv. ANSA_IXa_63), H. 12 cm, W. 15.2 cm. 49 BCE.

himself issues coins where he and Domitia Longina begin to look suspiciously similar.⁹⁰ The difference between these instances and the Minerva cameos is that these all occur within the family.

A few cameos exhibiting this phenomenon could be put down to an accident of survival or an over-zealous supporter, but Domitianic-looking Minervas also appear on coin issues. An *aureus* from 82 CE shows a bust of Minerva with a protruding chin, deep eyes set under a heavy brow and an accentuated nose that is quite similar to that of Domitian on the reverse.⁹¹ Another coin has a bust of Minerva on the obverse, in one of the rare instances when Domitian does not appear on his own coin.⁹² Here she once again appears with a slightly hooked nose, protruding chin and heavy brow. The importance of these coins cannot be underestimated; while cameos are one-time commissions for a select audience, coins are mass-produced and widely distributed. Furthermore, Domitian's hold over mint production would have ensured that he had a personal hand in approving any such designs.

In addition to the coin and cameo portraits, at least one colossal statue portrait survives which depicts the Domitianic Minerva.⁹³ This head, originally from the Palazzo Brancaccio in Rome but relocated to Budapest, gives an undeniably public face to the Domitian-Minerva portraits so delicately carved into the aforementioned cameos. Whereas the cameos were private items and the coins, though public, served a purpose besides advancing the emperor's ideals, this statue head would have been the crowning piece of a monument that could not be seen as anything other than a statement of Domitian's relationship with his patron goddess.

Conclusions

⁹⁰ *BMCRE* 58, p. 310, pl. 61.2.

⁹¹ *BMCRE* 33, p. 304, pl. 60.3.

⁹² *BMCRE* 482, p. 391, pl. 78.4.

⁹³ Varner 2008, 187-8.

When taken together, the evidence for a close relationship between Domitian and Minerva is overwhelming. He counted on her for military success, even to the point of commissioning and wearing an aegis-themed breastplate. He took advantage of a city-wide disaster to build a significant number of temples to her, one of which was the crowning jewel of his new forum and another which was the centerpiece in his own religious complex. He used his own private villa for annual games in her honor and the poets frequently mention her name when praising his. Moreover, he went out of his way to promote what would seem to be a familial relationship with her by promoting a portraiture series in which she began to take on his features. However, the reasons for which he did so are more elusive.

One possibility is that, as with his moral reforms, he was hearkening back to Augustus. Much as Domitian appropriated Minerva for his military campaigns, Augustus included Apollo in his own exploits. The accounts of ancient authors are redolent with references to Apollo at Actium, the great naval battle between Augustus and Antony which secured the future of the empire. According to Vergil, who has Vulcan decorate Aeneas' shield with scenes from the battle, Apollo contributed his legendary skills as an archer (*Aen.* 8.671-713). Propertius goes even farther, saying that Apollo not only instructed Augustus before the battle, but fought on his behalf (*Prop.* 4.6). There were already two shrines to Apollo in the area (Leucas and Actium), but Augustus added a temenos in his new city of Nicopolis (*Strab.* 7.7.6).⁹⁴ Dio also mentions a memorial at the Actium campsite, and Strabo mentions that the hill on which it was located was sacred to Apollo.⁹⁵

One of the most iconic Augustan Apollo monuments, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine hill, also had a military connection; Augustus vowed to build it after his victory over

⁹⁴ Murray and Petsas 1989: 5, 11-12.

⁹⁵ Dio 51.1.3; Strabo 7.7.6. Recent excavations have confirmed the existence of an altar, although other gods are mentioned. See Zachos 2003, 82-83; 2001a, 37-38; and 2001b.

Sextus Pompey at Naulochus in 36 BCE (Vell. 2.81.3; Dio 49.15.5). Augustus bought the property for the temple himself, which he dedicated to Apollo and which happened to be adjacent to his own house. The profuse Apollonian imagery which covered both the house and temple, along with the close proximity between the two buildings, would have made a comparison between Augustus and Apollo inevitable. This comparison would have been strengthened by the sight of an Apollo statue with Augustan features in the Greek and Latin libraries of the temple.⁹⁶

Augustus also claimed divine parentage, both from his adoptive father Julius Caesar (apotheosized after his death) and Apollo. According to Suetonius, the god visited Augustus' mother, Atia, in the form of a snake and impregnated her (Suet. *Aug.* 94.4). This is extraordinarily similar to the account of Olympia being visited by Zeus in the form of a snake, who then sired Alexander the Great (Plut. *Alex.* 3.1). Other ancient authors mention Augustus' divine parentage; Horace notes that Augustus is "descended from the kindly gods" and "a god himself" (Hor. *Carm.* 32, 34-5). However, it is unclear whether Horace is referring to Augustus' divine adoptive father, Julius Caesar (and through him to Venus), or to Apollo. Horace may have left the passage vague to allow his audience to decide for themselves.⁹⁷

It cannot be said whether Domitian really believed that he was the son of Minerva or not, and it is probably foolish to hope for evidence supporting Philostratus' statement regarding the man from Tarentum. Regardless, the evidence that history has left certainly implies that there is more to the story than previously thought. In the most extreme case, Domitian could have believed that he actually was the son of Minerva and worked to express that through his artistic program. Imperial Romans often expressed dynasty and relation through assimilation of portrait

⁹⁶ ps. -Acro, and Comm. Cruq. on Hor. *Epist.* 1.3.17; Serv. *Ecl.* 4.10.

⁹⁷ Miller 2009, 289; translations K. Jones.

features (such as the Gemma Claudia or any number of coin issues featuring imperial women), and Domitian's use of a Minerva with his features may lend credence to the rumor that he considered himself her son.

Promoting a Minerva image with his features could also signal a divine sanction of his actions, much like the coins where she hands him the thunderbolt. In this case it would not be Minerva becoming Domitian, but Domitian becoming a Minerva for imperial Rome. Upon channeling Minerva in all of her varying aspects (military, civilization, morality, etc) Domitian would have the tools and the power to restore Rome to its former glory. This view would play into his adoption of Augustan politics and tropes, as well as his extensive rebuilding program and restoration of currency value. Regardless of whether he thought himself a living god, the savior of Rome, or perhaps something in between, it is clear that Minerva was at the heart of his political program. She pervaded his monuments, military achievements, public festivals and coinage, a symbol of power, piety, and divine right. Domitian's relationship with Minerva was a special one, carefully cultivated from the beginning of his reign and enduring long past his death. Whether the product of political machinations or divine aspirations, an understanding of Domitian's Minerva is crucial to an understanding of his reign.

Abbreviations

BMCRE	H. Mattingly. <i>Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum II</i> (British Museum 1976).
Cohen	Cohen, H. 1880. <i>Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'Empire Romain</i> . Paris: Chez. MM. Rollin and Feuardent.
MW	M. McCrum, A.G. Woodhead. <i>Select documents of the principates of the Flavian Emperors</i> (Cambridge, 1961)
RPC2	Burnett, A, Michel Amandry, Ian Carradice. 1999. <i>Roman Provincial Coinage</i> . Vol. II. London: British Museum Press.
SM.II	E.M. Smallwood. <i>Documents Illustrating the Principates of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian</i> .(Cambridge, 1966).

All ancient texts are abbreviated according to American Journal of Archaeology standards.

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