

The throne and curule chair types of Titus and Domitian

Autor(en): **Damsky, Ben L.**

Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Schweizerische numismatische Rundschau = Revue suisse de numismatique = Rivista svizzera di numismatica**

Band (Jahr): **74 (1995)**

PDF erstellt am: **27.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-175475>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

BEN L. DAMSKY

THE THRONE AND CURULE CHAIR TYPES
OF TITUS AND DOMITIAN*

Plates 3–4

Introduction

A well known series of coins initiated by Titus and later continued by Domitian was explained by Mattingly in a way that has been generally accepted. This paper will provide an alternative interpretation and show that the new theory better fits the appearance of the types on other occasions.

The class in question includes aurei and denarii with reverses showing backless thrones which are covered with a fringed drapery and which support various insignias. These latter include a thunderbolt for Jupiter and a crested Corinthian helmet for Minerva. Other insignias are unclear, taking the form of a semicircle or a triangle, both with an evenly spaced row of ornaments along their top edge. Another member of the class is a type showing a curule chair with a wreath on it. There are others which probably belong to the group, but differ in presentation – they have emblems of gods without a throne: reverses of dolphin twisted about anchor; lighted, garlanded altar; and dolphin on tripod – often with ravens and wreath. It seems straightforward to see these as symbols of Neptune, Vesta and Apollo respectively. Representative examples are shown in *Pl. 3, 1–9*.¹

* The author wishes to thank Michel Amandry of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Jan Blamberg, Andrew Burnett of the British Museum, Curtis Clay, Robert Harlick, Silvia Hurter, James Lamb, William E. Metcalf of the American Numismatic Society, Frank L. Kovacs, Paul Stringer and Rick Witschonke.

Unless otherwise indicated, BMC refers to BMCRE II.

¹ The coins are cataloged in BMC as follows:

Under Titus: Titus TR P IX: *Fulmen* on throne, p. 231, 49 & p. 232, 51; Semicircle on throne: p. 232, 57 & p. 233, 58; Triangle on throne: p. 233, 61; Wreath on curule chair: p. 233, 64 & p. 234, 66; Dolphin and anchor: p. 234, 71 & p. 235, 72; Dolphin on tripod: p. 235, 77 & 78. Domitian COS VII: Garlanded and lighted altar: p. 239, 91 & 92; Helmet on throne: p. 240, 97 & 98.

Under Domitian: Domitian COS VII AVG: *Fulmen* on throne: p. 297, 1; Triangle on throne: p. 297, 2; Dolphin and anchor: p. 297, 3; Raven and wreath on tripod: p. 298, 4; Domitian COS VII DES VIII PONT: Semicircle on throne: p. 298, 6; Domitian COS VII DES VIII PM *Fulmen* on throne: p. 300, 8 & 9; Semicircle on throne: p. 300, 10 & p. 301, 17; Wreath on curule chair: p. 302, 18; Dolphin and anchor: p. 302, 20; Dolphin on tripod: p. 302, 22; Garlanded and lighted altar: p. 302, 23. Domitian COS VIII: *Fulmen* on throne: p. 303, 26; Semicircle on throne: p. 303, 27; Dolphin and anchor: p. 304, 29; Dolphin on tripod: p. 304, 30; Garlanded and lighted altar: p. 304, 31 & 32.

There is a rare variation in the design for the wreath on curule chair design whose significance is unclear to me: portions of an unadorned semicircle are visible behind the wreath. *Pl. 3, 10* shows a specimen in my collection ex Sternberg 27, 1994, 396. A second example from different dies, but also with the head of Titus, has recently been in trade: Superior 13 August 1995 (Dr. John Jacobs), 765. Is this the handiwork of a literal minded engraver who included the support device which held the wreath in place? Is this some combination of the wreath and the ornamented semicircle types?

The coins commence in 80 with portraits of Titus and Domitian Caesar.² There are no dated coins of 81 for Titus of any type, but when Domitian begins striking after his succession in September of that year, he resumes the types and continues with them into early 82. All come from the mint of Rome; none of the types appears on bronze denominations and the helmet on throne and lighted altar types are used only by Domitian.

Mattingly described the types as «*pulvinaria*, or sacred couches of the gods, associated with a *supplicatio* and *lectisternium* voted by the senate after the eruption of Vesuvius.»³ He cited passages in Dio Cassius and Suetonius describing the event. Suetonius actually mentions only «every kind of sacrifice» was tried to stop a plague, one of the disasters occurring during Titus' reign.⁴

Mattingly noted prior examples of propitiatory ceremonies mentioned in texts. Following the great fire in Rome of 64, «After consultation with the Sibylline books, prayers were addressed to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina. Juno, too was propitiated by women who had been married – first on the Capitol, then at the nearest sea-board, where water was taken to sprinkle her temple and statue. Women with husbands living also celebrated ritual banquets and vigils.»⁵

The first objection to this hypothesis is that the coins in question clearly date from a somewhat lengthy time span, from early to mid 80 and then again from late 81 into early 82. If Mattingly is correct, one would expect to see coins from a much shorter period as is common for coins associated with specific events rather than general government policy.

The curule chair-with-wreath type is also awkward to fit into Mattingly's scheme. The curule chair is a reference to a high magistrate rather than a god. It would be readily associated with Divus Vespasian as several of his consecration

² It has long been mistakenly thought that the series commenced late in 79. According to RIC (p. 118, 20), there is both an aureus and a denarius of 79 (TR P IX COS VII) with portraits of Titus and reverse wreath on curule chair. Despite the fact that both of these are rated as 'common' by RIC, there is no firm evidence that either exists. Published catalogues show that neither the BM nor Hunter collections contains a specimen. There are no specimens in Vienna (information from C. Clay) or New York (information from W. E. Metcalf.) A scan of major auction sales did not turn up a specimen. (The Trau sale catalogue lists an aureus, lot 683, but the plate readily shows it is a COS VII piece which has been misread.) There is no photograph of the type in the ANS photo file and C. Clay reports no photographs at the Austrian Numismatic Institute. RIC cites Cohen as the reference (Titus 298 and 299.) Cohen notes an aureus which he says was formerly at Paris and a denarius there now. M. Amandry informs me that there are no such pieces or records of them at the Bibliothèque Nationale. It would seem that an error on Cohen's part (most likely a misreading of COS VIII as COS VII) has been carried forward until today without a check. The hypothesis proposed later in this paper is strengthened by the newly understood starting date for the series, as the reader will see. – The break in dated coins for 81 is normally explained as a hiatus in minting activity caused by the fire.

³ BMC, p. lxxii. This concept is followed by C. Foss, *Roman Historical Coins* (London 1990), pp. 85 and 87.

⁴ Divus Titus, 8, translation: J. C. Rolfe, Loeb.

⁵ Tacitus *Annals* 15, 44; translation: M. Grant.

coins show,⁶ but would the populace be appealing to his spirit for relief from natural disasters?

An additional difficulty for Mattingly's hypothesis is the more subtle one of the suitability of a subject for commemoration on the coinage. It is somewhat odd to suppose that so much of the coinage of Titus and of the early coinage of Domitian was directed to the negative topic of warding off additional plague and disaster. Roman coins carry messages of imperial propaganda and as such they stress the positive aspects of each reign, even if this means moving beyond fact into the realm of promise and wish. Why would the practice be varied for the case in question? What other Roman coin design has so a negative message as the one suggested by Mattingly?

Alternate theories

In 1935, a few years after volume 2 of BMCRE appeared, several papers were published suggesting alternatives to Mattingly's hypothesis.⁷ In the first paper, independently of the other two, Alföldi traced the use of ornamented chairs or

⁶ The first appearance of the wreath on curule chair design was a denarius struck by Octavian honoring Julius Caesar, a type which will be discussed later in this paper.

Note that coins showing deified emperors usually show them seated on thrones rather than curule chairs: Divus Augustus on throne: BMC I, p. 130, 75; p. 134, 102; BMC, p. 281, 261; BMC III, p. 29, 153; on curule chair: BMC, p. 281, 263; Divus Vespasian on throne: BMC, p. 242, 107; p. 269, 224; on curule chair: p. 270, 225; Divus Titus on throne: BMC, p. 358, 284; Divus Trajan Pater on curule chair: BMC III, p. 101, 500; Divus Nerva on throne: BMC III, p. 144, 706; Divus Hadrian on throne: unpublished specimens at London, Paris, Vienna and Dublin, but see R. Etienne and M. Racht, *Le trésor de Garonne* (Bordeaux 1984) p. 330 and Pl. 71 for a publication of one of these sestertii. In contrast, living emperors are never shown seated on a throne, but always on a curule chair or a military camp chair. This was done because the throne was a symbol of divinity and of kingship and so to be avoided by a Roman *princeps*. Later, under Constantine the Great, coins for Claudius Gothicus, Constantius and Maximianus as *divi* show them seated on curule chairs. This would seem to be a result of Christian theology which allowed them to be honored, but would have been offended if they were treated as genuine divinities. The subject of this distinction of the seats for the case of Divus Augustus is treated by H. Kùthmann, *Claudius, Germanicus und Divus Augustus*, JNG 10, 1959–60, pp. 47–60.

Similarly gods, goddesses and personifications are almost never seated on curule chairs. Some of the rare exceptions are: Constantia on denarii and aurei under Claudius (RIC pp. 121–124, 2, 13, 14, 31, 32, 42, 43, 55, 56); Roma on coins of Hadrian (RIC Aureus: p. 370, 263A; Denarius: p. 370, 264; Sestertius: p. 439, 774–775); Felicitas on denarii of Marcus Aurelius (RIC p. 221, 110–113). A borderline case is a type of Securitas on coins of Trajan and subsequently Antoninus Pius and Caracalla. She sits on a pair of crossed cornucopiae which resemble a curule chair: BMC III, p. 36, 36, BMC IV, p. 340, 2016 and BMC V, p. 258, 516A. This list of exceptions is not long when compared with the full set of thousands of seated figures used by the Roman mint during this span. One must suspect that there was a special significance to these appearances, for instance, that a link between the deity and a consul (presumably the emperor) was being drawn.

⁷ A. Alföldi, *Insignien und Tracht der Römischen Kaiser*, MDAI Röm., 50, 1935, pp. 1–148; A. L. Abaecherli, *Imperial Symbols on Certain Flavian Coins*, *Classical Philology* 30, 1935, pp. 131–140; and L. R. Taylor, *The sellisternium and the Theatrical pompa*, *Classical Philology* 30, 1935, pp. 122–130. The last two were coordinated papers.

thrones as royal insignia back to Hellenistic times and discussed the coins of this paper as honoring special gods and the imperial brothers.

In the next paper Abaecherli argued that the semicircular and the triangular devices shown on the thrones are the same as the ornaments which we see on the *carpentum* (mule cart) and the *tensa* (ornamented *quadriga*) used to honor a *diva* and a *divus* respectively in the opening procession at the circus (see *Pl. 3, 11*).⁸ She noted how similar the items on the thrones are to the ornaments on the carts and offered as supporting evidence a die variety of the sestertii showing the temple of Diva Faustina. This coin occasionally features a square surmounted by a semicircle placed in front of the temple. Abaecherli believed this to be a chair holding the symbolic emblem of the *Diva*.⁹ I would add that it could even be an end view of the *carpentum* itself, parked and without its mules.

Abaecherli's conclusion was that the coins of Titus and Domitian honored the *divi* of the Flavian family and possibly all the imperial *divi*. Abaecherli overlooked what should be the final step in her logic: if the semicircular and triangular devices were used on the *carpenta* and the *tensae* of the imperial *divi*, were these devices not borrowed from the details of the *tensae* of the gods and goddesses honored in the same procession? And if this is so, how can one say that their appearance on the coins of Titus and Domitian refer to the imperial *divi* and not to the gods and goddesses collectively? What we see may be cases in which Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo, Vesta and Minerva are singled out for particular honor and then general references to the gods (triangle?) and the goddesses (semicircle?) honored in procession and in their symbol and throne at performances. The reference is broad enough to include the imperial *divi* as well as the gods.

Having argued against this aspect of Abaecherli's thesis, allow me to add further thoughts which support it. References to the male and female *divi* seem a bit farfetched to propose based only on the similar appearance of the triangular and

⁸ The situation is not quite as clear as Abaecherli believed. There seems to be some crossover of vehicles between the *divi* and the *divae*. Note the aureus and denarius of Diva Matidia with a mule biga pulling a *tensa* with a triangular pediment: BMC III, p. 126, 653–654. One possible explanation: did Marciana's image ride with that of her brother in the same *tensa*?

⁹ An example is shown in BMC IV, plate 36, 2. It is logical that the throne and accompanying symbol of a god or goddess would be kept at the appropriate temple and carried in procession to a theater, circus, etc. We now have confirmation of this arrangement from the *tabula Hebana* which, in respect to honors for Germanicus, decrees that his sacred curule chairs shall be kept in the temple of Mars Ultor until the temple of Divus Augustus is completed (see P. Raveggi, A. Minto, U. Coli, Scoperta di una tabula aenea iscritta nella località 'Le Sassaie' nel territorio dell' antica Heba, *Notizie degli Scavi* 72, 1947, pp. 49–68 and a discussion in Stefan Weinstock, *The Image and the Chair of Germanicus*, JRS 47, 1957, pp. 144–154.) It is a short extrapolation to conclude that a *tensa* or *carpentum* would also be kept at the temple of the *divus* they served. On the other hand, C. Clay has pointed out to me that there was an *Aedes Tensarum* on the Capitoline hill, presumably the place where the *tensae* were stored, see L. Richardson, Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore 1992) pp. 2–3. Might any of the cargo of the *tensae* have been housed there as well?

semicircular devices to items on *tensae*, but recall that these precious metal coins, struck during the last of Titus's reign and the first of Domitian's, appear at the same time as the large issue of restoration bronzes honoring the imperial *divi*, an issue without precedent at that time.¹⁰ Seeing these two issues together makes the case considerably stronger – the denarii and aurei suggested the honor in general and the bronzes identified the particular personalities to be remembered and revered. It is a bit odd that the precious metal and the bronze coin types struck by Titus seem, on the surface, not to be connected with each other. My expansion of Abaecherli's thesis would explain that they really are coordinated, each having a separate role to play in an overall scheme.¹¹

It is my belief that what we see, looking at the ornamented semicircle and triangle, is a back for the throne, shown in several variations. In addition to the semicircle and triangle there are rare versions with a square form above the seat. Having a third form makes the argument that each design represents a sex obsolete. Note that the curule chair is often shown with a low back; some examples of this can be seen in *Pl. 4, 16 & 17*.

Among the coins struck by Philip at or near the millennium of Rome's foundation are some which seem to honor the imperial *divi* as a whole. The authors of RIC adopted the view that the AETERNITAS AVGG coins with rider on elephant refer to the eternity of Philip's family, but there are details that support a wider interpretation.¹² While most riders are shown with no special distinguishing features, there are specimens on which the rider is clearly shown with a radiate crown and others on which he has a crescent at his shoulders. Is the intent to recall the *pompa circensis* honoring all the *divi*? One assumes that there was a similar *pompa* at the coliseum. An expression that Rome's eternity is now bound with the eternity of her emperors ties in with a feeling of awe for the current house as well. So in the coins of Philip we may have a second occasion on which the *divi* in general were honored in connection with a special celebration.

The set of Antoniniani from the middle of the third century honoring all the divine emperors also seems to be motivated by a similar concept.¹³

¹⁰ BMC, pp. 281–293 (under Titus) and pp. 414–417 (under Domitian.) Mattingly discusses the series on pp. lxxvii–lxxviii and xcvi and in a separate article, The “Restored” coins of Titus, Domitian, and Nerva, NC 1920, pp. 177–207. One could cite Tiberius' coinage for Divus Augustus as a precedent, but this was for his adopted father and limited to a single *divus* and so has a rather different flavor.

¹¹ Mattingly commented with surprise on there being «very little connexion» between the precious metal coins and the base coins, BMC, p. lxxv.

¹² RIC 4, part 3 p. 63. It was the keen eye of Frank Kovacs who first noted the attributes of the riders (all references call them ‘mahouts’) and pointed out to me that they are significant figures, not simply the means of guiding the elephants.

¹³ See M. R.- Alföldi, The Consecration Coins of the Third Century, Acta Archaeologica Academ. Scient. Hungaricae, vol. 6 (1955), pp. 57–70. Alföldi cites hoard evidence and a die link: head of Divus Augustus with a reverse of AD 252 (IVNONI MARTIALI) to argue convincingly that the *divi* coins were struck under Trebonianus Gallus and not Trajan Decius as is commonly thought.

Taylor's thesis in the third of the 1935 papers is that the coins do not refer to an expiatory banquet, but to the procession and honored seats used at theatrical performances.¹⁴ She establishes this by pointing out that the gods would have dined while reclining on couches rather than seated on thrones. It is true that there are representations showing goddesses dining on thrones while accompanying gods are reclining, but this does not seem to be the explanation for the coins in question. It is unlikely that only goddesses were addressed and one coin type presents a *fulmen*, the unmistakable emblem of Jupiter, on a throne.

In a later paper Taylor returned briefly to the subject and added a telling example.¹⁵ The pediment of the temple of Magna Mater on the Palatine has a relief of a turreted crown atop a draped and cushioned throne. The space in front of the temple was used for the *ludi Megalenses* so that the spectacle would be observed by this relief as well as any actual symbol on chair brought forth to the seating area.

The Magna Mater pediment is also discussed in an earlier paper in connection with the design on an altar.¹⁶ This paper gives only a verbal description of the Roman altar which is its subject. This is unfortunate since it appears that this altar, in private hands, provides the only known representation of the ritual procession carrying a cushioned throne with symbol atop.

Another important point Taylor makes is that it was a well known custom to carry chairs into the theater for reigning and deified emperors as well as gods. Dio Cassius mentions a club on a throne to signify the presence of Herakles at a theater.¹⁷ Chairs for Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Sejanus and Commodus are mentioned during their lives; we hear of chairs for Marcellus, Germanicus, Faustina the Younger and Pertinax after their deaths.¹⁸ It is hard to imagine that Augustus was not also honored and, indeed, one supposes that the remainder of the full set of imperial *divi* was also included.

Having proposed that the coins celebrate honors for gods or *divi* at theatrical performances, Taylor ended her paper without speculation as to the specific event. It seems most likely, however, that the "theatrical games" which dominate the precious metal coinage for a significant period must have been of high importance to receive such prominent and unprecedented notice.

¹⁴ Taylor's citation, *supra* note 7. See also St. Weinstock, *The Image and Chair of Germanicus*, JRS 48, 1958, pp. 144–154. Weinstock believed the curule chair coins of Titus and Domitian referred to honors granted to these individuals in their lifetimes. The precedent in coinage, however, was Octavian's honoring of his dead father (this coin will be treated later, see n. 31) and the first two Flavians showed an acute awareness of Republican and Augustan antecedents in coin designs. Furthermore, Weinstock fails to provide any explanation of how the curule chair coins relate to the throne coins, surely an essential point for any theory of the issue.

¹⁵ Sellisternium and Theoxenia: Atti dell' VIII Congresso Internazionale di Storia delle Religioni, (Rome 17–23 April, 1955), pp. 349–350.

¹⁶ E. M. W. Tillyard, *A Cybele Altar in London*, JRS 7, 1917 pp. 284–288.

¹⁷ 73.17.4.

¹⁸ Julius Caesar: Dio Cassius 44.6.3; Tiberius and Sejanus: Dio Cassius 58.4.4; Commodus: Dio Cassius 73.17.4; Marcellus: Dio Cassius 53.30.6; Germanicus: Tacitus, *Annals* 2.83; Faustina: Dio Cassius 71.31.2; Pertinax: Dio Cassius 74.4.1.

My thesis is that the coins in question are references to spectacles at the coliseum since the games held to inaugurate it seem to be the only logical candidate for a performance of such significance.¹⁹ We see the insignias and honored thrones provided for the gods at these performances rather than any representation of the spectacles themselves. Whereas the examples cited above honoring gods and *divi* by means of thrones and symbols all occurred in the theater, there are also references to similar honors at the circus and it is only a small step to assume a parallel process at the coliseum.²⁰

One imagines that specific days were set aside to honor each of the divinities or group of divinities represented on the coins. The wreath on curule chair refers to Divus Vespasian and the honors he received in the arena he conceived and labored over. Note that the emphasis of the throne and chair coins is not on the undoubtedly beloved shows, but on the honor given to divinities on the occasion of the spectacles. The Roman government found a way to remind the populace of its thoroughly popular arena and shows through reference to the gods honored.

There are coins that clearly refer to the completion of the coliseum and its inauguration: a sestertius showing a bird's eye view of the building and a denarius and an aureus with an elephant on the reverse.²¹ Domitian's semis with a rhinoceros refers to later spectacles; the type could be associated with his expansion of the seats (see below), but the coins have the title GERM which probably came late in 83.²² Considering the importance of the building and the magnitude of the inaugural games, the numismatic commemoration previously identified does not seem very extensive – the sestertius is rare and the denarius is scarce.

We know that the planning and most of the construction of the coliseum were done under Vespasian and that Titus held the first shows. We also know that Domitian oversaw the construction of the top tier after Titus' death. The suggestion that the throne and curule chair designs refer to games at the coliseum fits the observed chronological pattern of the chair types: a first appearance under Titus

¹⁹ There were 100 days of games to inaugurate the coliseum and nine thousand animals were killed – Dio Cassius, 66.25.

²⁰ The senate had voted that an ivory statue of Scipio Africanus be carried in the *pompa circensis* in the procession of the gods (Livy 38.56.13). A similar honor was voted for Julius Caesar (Dio Cassius 43.45.2). See also Suetonius, Divus Titus, 2, «equestrian statue (of Britannicus) of ivory, which is to this day carried in the procession in the circus» translation: J. C. Rolfe, Loeb. This subject has been treated by C. Clay when he studied the commemorative coinage for Divus Claudius as part of his paper «Die Münzprägung des Kaisers Nero in Rom und Lugdunum», NZ 96, 1982, pp. 7–52.

²¹ Elephant: BMC, p. 231, 42 (aureus) and p. 231, 43 (denarius); Coliseum: BMC, p. 262, 190 which is itself a coin of 80 which fails to mention that Titus is DIVI F. The elephant is here taken as a reference to shows in the coliseum with the evidence being the similar appearance under Antoninus Pius on asses (INDVLGENTIA AVG) to commemorate his productions for the 900th anniversary of the founding of Rome and the denarii and sestertii struck by Septimius Severus and Caracalla for their shows of 198 and 211 respectively. A combat in the arena involving four elephants is mentioned by Dio Cassius, 66.25 in association with the opening of the coliseum.

²² BMC, p. 411, 496. A logical supposition is that a series of spectacles was held to celebrate Domitian's German victories.

and continuation under Domitian. Mattingly's hypothesis provides no explanation of why the series was prolonged into Domitian's reign.

Other coins

There are appearances of curule chairs on Republican and Imperial coins and thrones with divine insignia occur on Hellenistic coins, Roman provincial coins and on a later Roman Imperial coin. None of the earlier authors has considered them in a meaningful way when discussing the coins of Titus and Domitian, but we will see they shed considerable light on the subject.²³

Tetradrachms of Seleucia from the period after 108 B.C. show a head of Tyche and a reverse with a thunderbolt resting on a cushion on a throne, see *Pl. 3, 12*.²⁴ Fortunately the series is dated and we can therefore see that many years are represented over a span of about twenty years. The type recurs at this mint as a Roman provincial coin type as well under Augustus, Trajan, Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus and Caracalla, see *Pl. 3, 13 & 14*.²⁵ This seems to be an example of games of some sort in honor of Zeus. The idea that Seleucia struck coins for about twenty years recalling an expiatory ceremony and then repeated the type at five more occasions in a span of over two hundred years is not acceptable. The games, of course, would have been held in a repeating cycle every few years.

There are also examples of Roman provincial coins with a similar concept. *Pl. 3, 15* shows an example with a head of Philip II from Diocaesaria in Cilicia which has a vertical thunderbolt resting on a backed and armed throne.²⁶

Republican denarii often show curule chairs as one of several insignia of high offices held by illustrious ancestors of the moneyers. *Pl. 4, 16 & 17* show some examples. Clearly the details of the design were individual. Note particularly the presentation of the back rest. The *sella curulis* was an honor reserved for holders

²³ To be accurate: Abaecherli in her paper cited in n. 7 mentioned the Trajan restoration of Divus Vespasian and the *fulmen* on throne of Antoninus Pius, but did not make any serious attempt at explaining them (see her n. 21 on p. 134); St. Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, (Oxford 1971), p. 172, associates the denarius with wreath on curule chair of Octavian with the similar pieces by Titus and Domitian without further comment.

²⁴ BMC Galatia, Cappadocia and Syria, p. 271, 16–23 and 25–27. There are additional dates not represented in the British Museum cabinet, but this subset is sufficient to establish the principle, if not the complete pattern. Weinstock (see above n. 9), p. 148, cites references to Hellenistic practices of honoring gods and Alexander with sacred thrones: Eumenes set up a golden throne for Alexander in 318 B.C. (Diodorus 18.61.1); at a festival given by Ptolemy II about 270, thrones of gods made of ivory and gold with symbols on them were carried in procession.

²⁵ BMC Galatia, etc.: Augustus: p. 273, 32 and see RPC Vol. 1, p. 631, 4328 and 4329, dated to A.D. 6 and 8; Trajan: p. 274, 35; Antoninus Pius: p. 275, 46; Septimius Severus: p. 275, 49; Caracalla: p. 276, 53–55.

²⁶ SNG von Aulock 8669 = H. Lindgren and F. Kovacs, *Ancient Bronze Coins of Asia Minor and the Levant from the Lindgren Collection* (San Mateo 1985), p. 79, 1489. The type was also used for Julia Domna (von Aulock 5543 = Lindgren & Kovacs, p. 78, 1487) so there is a parallel in Diocaesaria with the repeated appearances at Seleucia.

of curule magistracies and was clearly an item of family pride thereafter. It is an important point that this chair was an honor for Roman magistrates, but not for gods who are almost never shown seated on one.²⁷ Exceptions are the aurei struck by L. Cestius and C. Norbanus in Rome about 43.²⁸ The reverses show a) a Corinthian helmet on curule chair (*Pl. 4, 18*) and b) snakes on curule chair. Crawford notes that the symbols refer to Minerva, but does not comment on the odd combination of divine and human symbolism. Is the concept that the Roman Consul is guided in a military campaign by inspiration from Minerva?

There is a rare and unusual quinarius of Brutus which may also be relevant to understanding the Flavian types (*Pl. 4, 19*). One side shows an empty throne while the other has a tripod.²⁹ It does not seem likely that Brutus stopped in the middle of a desperate military campaign to hold a ceremony asking for the end of a plague and that he commemorated this on his coins. Rather it seems likely that some sort of games were held in honor of Apollo with the throne symbolizing his invited presence at the occasion just as the tripod is an actual or symbolic prize awarded to victors in the games.³⁰ This coin, which combines the throne and the tripod symbols, also suggests that the several other insignia coins (tripod, altar and dolphin on anchor) should also be grouped with the throne and curule chair coins.

Octavian struck the denarius to honor Divus Julius in 42 B.C. (*Pl. 4, 20*).³¹ Here we see the first occurrence of the formula of wreath on curule chair as a coin design. A relevant literary reference we have is a senate decree «that his golden chair and his crown set with precious gems be carried into the theater in the same manner as those of the gods.»³² Following and expanding on the comments of Weinstock and Taylor, I suggest that the specific point of this coin was commemorative shows of some type held in Divus Julius' honor.³³

²⁷ A comprehensive treatise on the subject is the recent book by Th. Schaefer, *Imperii Insignia, Sella Curulis und Fasces zur Repräsentation römischer Magistrate*, (Mainz 1989). The coins of Augustus, Titus and Domitian with wreath on curule chair are mentioned on p. 122. The distinction between a throne and a curule chair is discussed in J. W. Salomonson, *A Roman Relief with Chair, Scepter and Wreath and Its Historical Associations*, *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving* 30, 1955, pp. 1–21 and in A. Alföldi (above, n. 7), pp. 124–134. A few examples gleaned from a scan of Crawford RRC: 409/2; 414/1; 435/1; 460/2; 465/1a; 465/2a; 473/2a; 491/1a; 494/26a; 494/28; 494/31; 497/2a. See n. 6 above for a mention of the rare occasions on which gods or personifications are shown on curule chairs during the empire.

²⁸ Crawford, RRC p. 500, 491/1a and 1b.

²⁹ Crawford, RRC p. 515, 502/4. He dates the issue to 43–42 B.C.

³⁰ Crawford, p. 741, sees references to Apollo on coins of the conspirators as being tied to *libertas* and sees the *sella* as an office badge of the Proquaestor L. Sestius. This is further discussed by A. Alföldi. *Hasta – Summa Imperii. The Spear as Embodiment of Sovereignty in Rome*, *AJA* 63, 1959, p. 10.

³¹ Grueber *BMCRR* II, p. 405. Crawford, RRC p. 513, 497/2 – he has a passing comment on p. 741 to the effect that the curule chair is a substitute for Caesar's head.

³² Dio Cassius 44.6.3

³³ See St. Weinstock (above, n. 23), pp. 271 & 282 and L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*, (Middletown 1931), pp 97–99. The unstated purpose of the type was to remind the public of the extraordinary position and honors given to Julius Caesar in order to enhance the prestige of his heir; see P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 1988), pp. 33–35.

Perhaps the most illuminating additional coin is an aureus which Trajan struck for Vespasian as part of his interesting series of 'restitution' coins honoring the earlier deified emperors; the reverse type is a *fulmen* on throne (*Pl. 4, 21*).³⁴ Trajan used this reverse type for both Vespasian and Titus (see *Pl. 4, 22* for an example of the Titus type) which is puzzling on the face of it since the prototype was struck by Titus and Domitian, but not by Vespasian. Nor are we dealing with events so far in the past that, by the time of Trajan, they may have become fuzzy in the collective memory. There was less than a thirty year span between the Flavian period in question and the striking of Trajan's restitution coins in 107. Nor does it seem possible that the Vespasian/*fulmen*-on-throne aurei are unintentional hybrids made through mint error (reverse intended for Titus coupled with obverse of Vespasian): they are the most numerous of Trajan's restoration types for Vespasian and no die links with restored aurei of Titus are evident.

How are we to explain these restitution coins? To say that the aspect of Vespasian's reign most worthy of commemoration in the eyes of Trajan was a ceremony held to ward off disasters is not logical. And since the disasters and the ceremony all occurred during the reign of Titus, nothing about Mattingly's hypothesis makes sense in light of the restitution design which Trajan gave to Vespasian.

My theory, that there were games in the new coliseum held in honor of Divus Vespasian and other gods, and that the coins of Titus and Domitian refer to this memorable event, fits the observed pattern of coinage much better. To honor Vespasian, Trajan chose a type recalling games at the new coliseum since the major work of the structure was accomplished by Vespasian. Although Titus held the opening ceremonies, he was responsible for only a part of the construction and so shared the honor for the amphitheater with his father. Domitian, who constructed the final phase of the coliseum, was not consecrated after his death and was not honored in Trajan's coinage for the *divi*.

Antoninus Pius struck denarii with a reverse type of *fulmen*-on-throne in a representation almost exactly identical to that used by Titus, Domitian and Trajan.³⁵ *Pl. 4, 23* shows an example of this type which has hardly elicited comment or explanation. We do not know of any plague, earthquake or volcanic eruption in the beginning or middle of Antoninus Pius' reign (admittedly the record is poor), but we do know of a special celebration whose dedication to Jupiter this coin may depict. In 147 Antoninus Pius celebrated the 900th anniversary of the founding of Rome. Coins and medallions had alluded to the upcoming event during the four year period prior to the event, but the only coins previously identified with direct reference to any spectacles were two modest issues of middle bronzes – considerably

³⁴ Vespasian: BMC III, p. 143, 703; Titus p. 144, 705. For a discussion of the entire series, see H. Mattingly, *The Restored Coins of Trajan*, NC 1926, pp. 232–278 and especially pp. 258 (14); 259 (18); 263 and 264.

³⁵ BMC IV, p. 77, 536.

less than one would expect from the anticipatory issues.³⁶ Antoninus Pius' denarius with *fulmen* on throne is a common issue which was clearly struck in large numbers. It is my belief that it constitutes his major commemoration of the actual celebration for the anniversary.

Another bit of evidence concerns coins that do not exist. We are told that Marcus Aurelius held *lectisternia* in 167 to halt the great plague then raging.³⁷ If Mattingly's explanation is correct, why do we have no coins from this period repeating the Flavian formula? The two cases seem to be exactly parallel in regards disaster and propitiation, yet Titus and Domitian produced a very large issue spread over a considerable span while Marcus Aurelius ignored the subject on coins.

Looking at the throne and curule chair coins as suggested in this paper opens another possibility as well. It has long been noted that there was a puzzling delay between the death of Vespasian in the summer of 79 and his deification in the early months of 80.³⁸ It is difficult to imagine any hesitation on the part of either the senate or Titus to deify Vespasian, so the pause seems to call for some explanation. Titus must have delayed the event until it could be coupled with the opening of

³⁶ Middle bonzes: BMCRE IV; Munificentia p. 300, 1838; elephant p. 301, 1840. It must be admitted that Claudius gave us nothing numismatic for his celebration of the 800th anniversary. P. L. Strack noticed the minimal commemoration in 147 – see *Untersuchungen zur römischen Reichsprägung III* (Stuttgart 1937), pp. 134–135. He suggested the *fulmen*-on-throne type recalled a supplicatio held for some indefinite reason – perhaps the birth of a son to Marcus and Faustina or the celebration of the 900th birthday of Rome's foundation. In critique of Mattingly, Strack noted that, under the Empire, supplications were usually held for successes rather than disasters. (This is the only comment on the meaning of the type that I am aware of.) The series of coins and medallions issued by Pius as COS III, well before the actual event, was discussed by J. M. C. Toynbee, *Some 'Programme' Coin-Types of Antoninus Pius*, *Classical Review* 39, 1925, pp. 170–173. These designs focused on myths associated with the founding of Rome.

³⁷ SHA Marcus Aurelius, 13.

³⁸ He died on July 23 according to Suetonius, *Divus Vespasian*, 24. T. V. Buttrey, *Documentary Evidence for the Chronology of the Flavian Titulature*, (Meisenheim am Glan 1980) takes it as July 24 in Table 1 on p. 7. The problem of the delay was highlighted by G. W. Clarke, *The Date of the Consecratio of Vespasian*, *Historia* 15, 1966, pp. 318–327; and further discussed by T. V. Buttrey, *Vespasian's Consecratio and the Numismatic Evidence*, *Historia* 25, 1976, pp. 449–457. Clarke established that there was no other documented example of significant delay with the exception of Hadrian's deification and this was a case involving senatorial animosity. Clarke argued that, in cases of conflict, epigraphic evidence should be given credence before coins and concluded that Vespasian was consecrated before the end of 79. On this basis there is no puzzling pause and nothing to explain. Buttrey convincingly argued against Clarke, pointing out that his case was based on the crucial evidence of a single, suspicious inscription whereas the numismatic evidence rests on a large base of coins struck under official authority. Buttrey concluded that consecration occurred in 80 between January and May, but did not offer any explanation of the delay.

Recall that the class of coins discussed in this paper was first struck in 80 (see n. 2 above.) Judging from their number, they seem to begin earlier rather than later in the year.

the coliseum which would have then been presented as Vespasian's posthumous accomplishment.³⁹

Perhaps the first spectacle held in the coliseum was in honor of Divus Vespasian and was the event commemorated by the wreath-on-curule-chair coins⁴⁰. *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*.⁴¹

Ben L. Damsky, 1746 Terrace Drive, Belmont, CA 94002, USA

Key to plates 3–4

Figure	Reference	Photo Source
1 Titus. Denarius.	BMC p. 234, 66	Author
2 Titus. Denarius.	BMC p. 232, 51	Author
3 Domitian. Denarius.	BMC p. 298, 6	Trade Zurich
4 Domitian. Denarius.	BMC p. 297, 2	Author
5 Domitian Caesar. Aureus.	BMC p. 240, 97	British Museum
6 Titus. Denarius.	BMC p. 236, 82	Author
7 Domitian. Denarius.	BMC p. 302, 22	Author
8 Domitian Caesar. Denarius.	BMC p. 239, 93	Author
9 Domitian. Denarius.	BMC p. 302, 20	Leu 61, 1995, 251
10 Titus. Denarius.	cf BMC p. 234, 66	Author
11 Julia Titi. Sestertius.	BMC p. 402, 458	Christie's, 12 June 1993, 110
12 Seleucia. Tetradrachm.	BMCGalatia p. 271, 16	Lockett IV, 1961, 2655
13 Seleucia (Trajan). AE	BMCGalatia p. 274, 35	P. Stringer collection
14 Seleucia (Sept. Sev.). AE	BMCGalatia p. 275, 49	Author
15 Diocaesaria (Philip II). AE	von Aulock 8669	von Aulock
16 L. Plaetorius. Denarius.	Crawford 409/2	Bank Leu 17, 1977, 551
17 Q. Pompeius Rufus. Denarius.	Crawford 434/2	Bank Leu 17, 1977, 634
18 L. Cestius. Aureus.	Crawford 491/1	NFA 22, 1989, 12
19 Brutus. Quinarius.	Crawford 502/4	R. Witschonke collection
20 Octavian. Denarius.	Crawford 497/2	Bank Leu 28, 1981, 351
21 Vespasian. Aureus.	BMC p. 143, 703	Trade Zurich
22 Titus. Aureus.	BMC p. 144, 705	Private collection
23 Antoninus Pius. Denarius.	BMC IV p. 77, 536	Author

³⁹ There was at least one precedent for staging a dedication on a date significant for the builder of a public arena. The Theater of Pompey was dedicated on his birthday, September 29. See F. Coarelli, *Il complesso pompeiano del Campo Marzio e la sua decorazione scultorea*, *Rend Pont Acc* 44, 1971–72, p. 99, note 2. Vespasian's birthday was in November (PIR II F263; see also R. O. Fink, A. S. Hoey and W. F. Snyder, *The Feriale Duranum*, *Yale Classical Studies* 7, 1940, p. 163), but my proposal is that the day of dedication was matched to his day of consecratio or the public celebration thereof.

Note that the sestertius of Titus depicting the coliseum (BMC, p. 262, 190) calls the emperor IMP T CAES VESP AVG PM TRP PP COS VIII. It does not call him DIVI F and so would seem to antedate the *consecratio*. The explanation of this seems to be that it was struck in anticipation of the actual completion of the structure. It is not clear that there are any genuine coins of the coliseum with DIVI F in the legend, but, if so, they would be evidence that the issue spanned a period before and after consecration.

⁴⁰ The sister coin of the wreath-on-curule-chair pieces then would be the sestertii showing the elephant quadriga for Vespasian in the *pompa circensis* (BMC, p. 269, 221.)

⁴¹ If you require a monument, look around you; epitaph of Sir Christopher Wren in St. Paul's cathedral.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11





12



13



14



15



16



17



18



19



20



21



22



23



