

IN SEARCH OF *AUCTORITAS ET MAIESTAS* – THE FLAVIAN DYNASTY AND RELIGIONS*

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Abstract: Vespasian and his sons were forced to create their own style of politics, and, in search of *auctoritas* and *maiestas*, they could not neglect the realm of religion. We should bear in mind that in the Roman world, religion was an integral and indispensable component of social and political life. For these reasons, these representatives of the Roman Imperial Dynasty, just like their predecessors and successors, successfully used different forms of activity surpassing the narrow interpretation of the domain of *religio*, including massive building programmes, monetary policy or even poetry, to express devotion and respect for *mores maiorum* as well as to confirm the legality of their power by presenting the divine approval of their political strength.

It seems legitimate to acknowledge that the Flavian era did not bring revolutionary changes in traditional religion. This clearly shows that the new dynasty was perfectly aware that one of the aspects of a well-functioning Rome was preservation of the ancestors' customs and a belief in divine protection which could ensure safety, strength and belief in the unity of the Empire.

Key words: Flavians, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, religion.

The Flavian dynasty represents an epoch of great significance for the history of Rome. It is claimed that even though it lasted no more than 26 years, it was still essential for the further development of the state, since Vespasian and his successors either continued transformations started previously or individually initiated such changes which eventually redefined the Roman governing system and re-established the Empire's structure.¹

Therefore, it seems that the term referring to Vespasian included in the title is so accurate as far as its wording is concerned as it shows that both Vespasian and his sons were forced to create their own style of politics and, in search of *auctoritas* [legal (title)

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¹ The measure of interest in this time period is demonstrated by a large number of substantial essays whose authors made attempts to describe the developmental tendencies of the Roman Empire during the Flavian era. These include Scott 1936; Bengtson 1979; Griffin 2000; Capogrossi/Tassi Scandone 2012.

authority] and *maiestas* [dignity], could not neglect the realm of religion.² We should bear in mind that in the Roman world, religion was an integral and indispensable component of social and political life. In other words, political changes were also reflected and expressed in religious aspects of life. Both political and religious issues intermingled and interacted strongly with each other. Various forms of contact with gods were considered to be a part of all aspects of human activity on a daily basis. Therefore, it would be quite impossible to identify which issues should be interpreted as religious in our much narrower understanding. In fact, it is absolutely pointless, as it narrows down or even distorts our perception of Roman religiosity.

For all these reasons, the representatives of the Roman imperial dynasty described below, just like their predecessors and successors, successfully used different forms of activity surpassing a narrow interpretation of the domain of *religio*, including massive building programmes, monetary policy or even poetry, to express devotion and respect for *mores maiorum* as well as to confirm the legality of their power by presenting divine approval of their political strength.³ Due to the fact that Vespasian took over his office in a quite accidental way, his manifestation of the worshipping of gods had a crucial importance for acceptance of his legitimate power. Praising and giving due honours to gods and following sacred tradition ensured that tight bonding was maintained between deities and humans. Also, as an indispensable element of civil rituals, it served to strengthen the organisational structures and unity of the state on various levels. Subsequent generations continued to follow the same rules of conduct and accepted them as binding ones since they had proven to be effective in the past. Thanks to this sense of duty and people's religiousness, the state and the gods could act as one. Due to the fact that this approach still prevailed during the reign of the Flavian dynasty, their religious policy seems to be a natural continuation of traditional Roman practices. Playing certain religious roles still constituted a vital part of public political activity, and the emperor remained a kind of a religious leader in two aspects. The first aspect of his leadership was connected with being the head of the most prestigious colleges and holding formal supervision over the issues of official worship. The emperor himself was also the object of religious worship.⁴

It is not surprising that Vespasian's sons, Titus and Domitian, became members of priestly colleges at a fairly young age. By the year 71, Titus was already a *pontifex*, an *augur*, a member of *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* responsible for Sibylline books and probably a member of *septemviri epulones*.⁵ Perhaps even then, and certainly around 73, Domitian joined the aforementioned colleges. We know for sure that he also belonged to an association of *fratres Arvales*.⁶

Titus, the emperor, used offerings and rituals as a way to appease the gods after a series of disasters which affected Rome during his reign, and we must remember that there were quite a few of these, including the eruption of Vesuvius, the Great Fire of Rome,

² Suet. *Vesp.* 7.2: *Auctoritas et quasi maiestas quaedam, ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi, deerat: haec quoque accessit.*

³ On written sources devoted to the issue of religion during the reign of the Flavian dynasty among others: Ando 2003, 323–344; Van Haepereen 2009, 133–148.

⁴ Rives 2007, 148–157.

⁵ CIL VI 31294 = ILS 258; VI 40453.

⁶ CIL IX 4955 = ILS 267 and CIL III 12218.

and the plague which spread in this region between 79–80.⁷ In this way, he tried to stress the significance of his position, which was as a matter of fact an imperial one.⁸

In the year 81, Domitian followed the path of his brother by stressing the power of *pontifex maximus*. Suetonius underlines the emperor's involvement in restoration of the role of *pontifex* and his influence on the functioning of the college of Vestal Virgins.⁹ Cornelia, as *virgo Vestalis maxima*, was probably accused of breaking chastity vows in the year 83.¹⁰ Several years later, in 89 or 91, the same Cornelia was accused of maintaining contacts with men for the second time.¹¹ As Pliny the Younger wrote, a final judgment against the accused woman was given despite her absence and the fact that no certain evidence of her guilt was presented.¹² Additionally, Celer, who was accused of having sexual intercourse with the Vestal Virgin, screamed that he was innocent as he had done nothing improper.¹³ Cornelia was sentenced to death by being buried alive, although she fiercely denied her guilt and repeatedly stated that her prayers had contributed to the emperor's successes.

Such harsh decisions were explained by Pliny as Domitian's tendency to tyranny,¹⁴ but it seems that tightening of overall and religious discipline and Domitian's ruthless treatment of the Vestal Virgins all belonged to his restoration plan of morality and traditional Roman religiousness. Most of all, the greatest attention was given to lifting the position of *pontifex* college, who was responsible for conducting legal cases against priestesses. The activity of priestly colleges was one of the priorities of emperors during the Flavian reign, referring to Domitian in particular. Suetonius mentions a priestly college dedicated to Minerva and adoption of new outfits for *sodales Flaviales* and *flamen Dialis*.¹⁵ Such new elements aimed to enhance the prominence of imperial power and the traditional Roman perception of religion. As a matter of fact, Domitian proclaimed the beginning of a new, better period in the history of Rome, and on this occasion ordered *Ludi Saeculares* celebrations to be held in this year.¹⁶

⁷ BMC II 49, 57,61, 64, 71, 77; Suet. *Tit.* 8; Blamberg 1976, 201.

⁸ Suet. *Tit.* 9.

⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 8.3–4; Cass. Dio 67.3.3.

¹⁰ Pigoń 1999, 206–213; Misztal-Konecka 2007, 311. During the first trial she was acquitted; however, at that time three other Vestal Virgins were prosecuted – one of them a woman by the name of Varonila and two other women named Oculata – as well as their lovers. All the women were sentenced to death but were allowed to choose the way to die, while their lovers were banished from the city.

¹¹ The date of the trial is disputable: Misztal-Konecka 2007, 311, note 222.

¹² Pliny, *ep.* IV, 11, 6.

¹³ Pliny, *ep.* IV, 11, 10.

¹⁴ Pliny, *ep.* IV, 11, 11.

¹⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 4.

¹⁶ Suet. *Dom.* 4, 7. Cf. Mart. IV 1, 7–8; X 63, 3; Stat. *Silv.* I 4, 17–18; IV 1, 17–18; Zos. II 4, 3; Cens. XVII 11; On this occasion, coins with the inscription *Lud.Saec.* were minted: RIC II (ed. 2007) (Domitian) 610, 611, 595–608, 614–628. Most of them represented the emperor presiding over celebrations of this holiday. As Blamberg (1976, 203) highlights, this image of the emperor was a dominant element as it was located in the central part of the reverse and, thus, viewers' attention was concentrated mainly on him. Blamberg also points to the fact that to a much greater extent than was the case with coins minted for *Ludi Saeculares* celebrated by Augustus, the emperor, there was a dominating motif and a central person of the image: Grunow Sobocinski 2006, 581–602.

In order to emphasise the legality of the power, representatives of the Flavian dynasty chose a middle path. They often stressed the Flavian relationship with the Julio-Claudian dynasty, especially with Emperor Augustus, claiming his divine relationship.¹⁷ In order to strengthen divine protection over the state and the ruling imperial family they often invoked Jupiter,¹⁸ whose representations regularly appeared on coins minted by Vespasian.¹⁹ Even Vespasian's initiative to reconstruct the Temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest on the Capitoline could also create the impression of him striving for restoration of religious order in the public sphere. Domitian was generous in spending money to rebuild this temple, which had previously been destroyed by fire in the year 80.²⁰ The new building erected thanks to the emperor's initiative was meant to be traditional in character and adjusted to the requirements of practices of ancient worship. The variety of materials used for the reconstruction and splendour of the interior equipment were clear emanations of the wealth and good taste prevailing in Rome at the end of the first century. Obviously, Jupiter was one of those gods whose protection provided victory, peace and prosperity.

Apart from continuation of cults rooted in the tradition of ancient Rome, Domitian also decided to introduce a cult of his predecessors. He built a new temple – *Templum Gentis Flaviae* – which apart from meeting the demands of the cult was also designed as a family mausoleum.²¹ Worship of deceased relatives was connected with adoration of Jupiter. This was a smart propaganda move that strengthened the political position of the emperor, who wanted to be perceived as an earthly representative of Jupiter's, or even his "deputy". This is how we should interpret a suggestion which we can find in the poetry of Statius: "This is the God himself! To him Jupiter gives his power to rule the lands of happiness."²²

Even though Jupiter played a more important role in imperial ideology and, thus, remained a dominant image presented on coins,²³ Domitian was still more eager to manifest his attachment to the goddess Minerva.²⁴ A large number of contemporary authors point to his extraordinary predilection. Minerva's *sacrarium* was located in the emperor's private rooms.²⁵ Written sources tell the story of a high official who did not mention that Domitian was Minerva's son when participating in public prayers and giving his

¹⁷ Jones 1992, 99.

¹⁸ I.e. Tac. *hist.* 3, 74.

¹⁹ RIC II (Vespasian) 849, 850, 863, 874, 1501, 1502; (Domitian) 218–220, 275, 301–302, 352–353, 381–382, 398, 416, 464–466, 489–491, 526–527, 633–635, 702, 751, 794.

²⁰ Suet. *Dom.* 5; Plut., *Publ.* 15,5.

²¹ Suet. *Dom.* 5; Torelli 1987, 563–582; Dąbrowa 1996a; Dąbrowa 1996b, 153–161.

²² Stat. *Silv.* 4, 3,128. See also Mart. 9.20.

²³ Coins with the inscription *Iuppiter conservator*: RIC II (Domitian) 143, 144, 382; *Iuppiter Custos* 466, 635.

²⁴ Domitian displayed a great predilection for the cult of Minerva (cf. Suet. *Dom.* 15, 3). He made her his patroness and guardian and wished her, similarly to Venus Genetrix, who was a protector of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, to become a patron of *gens Flavia*: Suet. *Dom.* 15.3; Cass. Dio 67.1.2; Scott 1935, 69–72; Morawiecki 1977, 185–193; Girard 1981a, 203–232; Girard 1981b, 33–245; Blamberg 1976, 107–108; 209–212; Mrozewicz 2006, 89–96.

²⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 15.3.

offerings in Taranto, and for that reason was charged, convicted and later imprisoned.²⁶ Quintilian also mentions the emperor's kindred with Minerva, who, under the pretext of elaborating on Domitian's literary inspirations, underlines his bravery and war victories. He tries to prove that

... Germanic Augustus was distracted from his poetry work and was deeply worried about the condition of the whole country, and for this reason the gods did not allow him to become the greatest poet ever. Still, there is nothing loftier, more learned and more perfect in every possible aspect than even those of his poetry pieces which he wrote when as a teenager he passed on his imperial power to others. After all, who could possibly better and more eloquently write about the wars which he himself so greatly conducted! Who would muses, the patrons of poetry, listen more willingly to than to him! Before whom would Minerva open her heart and disclose her secrets than the one who is bound to her in blood!²⁷

The goddess Minerva supposedly appeared in Domitian's bedroom in his dream just before his death and warned him that she was no longer able to serve him with her protection, as she had been disarmed by Jupiter.²⁸ Dio describes a similar event in which the emperor was allegedly approached by Rusticus with a sword while Minerva, whose statue stood in Domitian's bedroom, cast away her weapon and fell into an abyss together with her chariot drawn by black horses.²⁹ This dream was naturally interpreted as a bad omen. Philostratus, when describing Domitian's death in the *Life of Apollonius*, also pointed out that the emperor was supposed to invoke this goddess in the last moments of his life. Wounded but still powerful enough to fight, he grappled with Stefanos, knocked him down, clung to him, gouged out his eyes and pounded his cheeks with the bottom of a golden chalice which he used during religious ceremonies, and "called Athena to give him her support".³⁰

The divine patron and protector of Domitian described here was worshipped, together with Jupiter and Juno, during the *Ludi Capitolini* festival, which was celebrated every four years in Rome.³¹ However, the emperor ordered separate celebrations just to honour Athena. *Quinquarties* were traditionally celebrated between 19 and 23 March.³² Domitian worshipped Minerva mostly in his private sacrum³³ but also in the public space, where there were numerous sacred places. Martial mentions a shrine dedicated to her near the temple of Augustus.³⁴ Minerva's Atrium is equally worth mentioning here. It was a part of a curia, a cryptoportique earlier known as Chalcidicum. After its renovation by Domitian, which most probably took place in the year 94, it received the name of Minerva's Atrium.

²⁶ *Vita Apoll.* 7.24.

²⁷ *Quint. Inst.* 10.1.91.

²⁸ *Suet. Dom.* 15.3; Hekster 2010, 601–615.

²⁹ *Cass. Dio* 67.16.1.

³⁰ *Vita Apoll.* 8.25.

³¹ *Suet. Dom.* 4, 3; Simon 1975, 58–59.

³² In this case, Domitian managed to combine traditional Roman religiousness with elements of Greek culture, as these holidays were organised at the same time when in his Albanian villa competitions of poets and orators were held together with presentations of gladiator fights: *Suet. Dom.* 4, 3–4; *Cass. Dio* 67.1. Statius was three times the winner of this competition: *Silv.* 3,5,28–31.

³³ *Cass. Dio* 67,16; Scott 1935, 69–72.

³⁴ *Mart. IV* 53.1.

During the reign of Domitian, *Templum Castorum* (Minervae) was renovated, and construction works on *Forum Transitorium*³⁵ were commenced nowhere else but at the Temple of Minerva.³⁶ The *Filocalus* calendar from the year 354 lists a sanctuary devoted to Minerva on the Field of Mars among many other construction projects conducted by Domitian.³⁷ It bordered with a monumental centre dedicated to Isis and Serapis, who were two other deities that clearly marked their presence in the Flavian religious world.³⁸

Every ruling individual at that time was expected to give an open declaration confirming his “imperial powers” in the form of some kind of statement of his relationship to the gods. Vespasian sought his legitimacy as a representative of the new dynasty by putting himself under the protection of Serapis, who was one of the Egyptian deities. He confirmed this in the year 71, when he and his son Titus spent the night preceding his Triumph celebrating the suppression of an uprising in Judea in the Temple of Isis on the Field of Mars.³⁹ This was a possible reference to the dramatic events of the year 69, when the disguise of a priest of Isis helped Domitian to save his life when he was escaping from the supporters of Vitellius. According to Suetonius, Flavius Sabinus, the brother of Vespasian and his younger son, Domitian, were hiding from attacks on the Capitol Hill, but “when the enemy burst inside and the Temple was set on fire, Domitian was secretly put up by the doorman of the Temple. In the morning, disguised in the robes of a priest of Isis, he managed to remain unrecognised and fled among a group of sacrifice-makers of various rites over the Tiber River to the mother of his school friend with only one companion”.⁴⁰ This course of events may possibly have contributed to the fact that young Domitian began to perceive Isis as his saviour. At the time when the aforementioned events took place, Titus was in Judaea and Vespasian in Alexandria, and that was where he was proclaimed emperor by his soldiers.⁴¹ Tacitus mentions that even before the Senate accepted Vespasian’s election he went to the Sanctuary of Serapis to thank him for his protection.⁴² While he was in the temple, other miraculous events also took place, such as the healing of the blind and the lame, and all these were supposedly confirmed by the priests of this temple.⁴³ This form of looking for and revealing associations with gods or at least divine protection seems to be perfectly understood. In opposition to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the Flavians could not present any historically or at least mythologically justified background or heritage which could help in the process of confirmation of their rights to rule the country. Suetonius believes that due to the fact that Vespasian

³⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 5.

³⁶ CIL VI 953.

³⁷ *Chronica minora saeculorum* (= *Monumenta Germaniae historica. Auctores antiquissimi*, IX), by T. Mommsen, p. 146. This nickname probably came from Athens: Castagnoli 1960, 91–95.

³⁸ Their “religious policy” was clearly influenced by events connected with their gain of power. This dynasty’s strength was strictly connected with support of the military forces, as they helped the Flavians to gain the throne. However, Roman society and the whole political system in Rome displayed a set of habits, customs and opinions which stemmed from “propaganda work” over a hundred years old being conducted by those in power.

³⁹ Josephus, *bell. Iud.* 7; *ant. Jud.* 6.123.

⁴⁰ Suet. *Dom.* 1.

⁴¹ Heinrichs 1969, 51–80.

⁴² Tac. *hist.* 4. 81; cf. Suet. *Vesp.* 7.2; Derchain/Hubaux 1953, 38–52.

⁴³ Tac. *hist.* 4. 81; Lattimore 1934, 441–449; Morgan 1996, 41–55.

lacked natural *auctoritas* and *maiestas* he had to “gain” them somehow. In summer of 70, Domitian took south in order to greet Vespasian returning from Egypt. The father and son met in Benevent, and found themselves in quite different roles, as the former was the emperor and the latter a possible successor-pretender to imperial power.⁴⁴

The emperor spent the aforementioned night of 71 which directly preceded the Triumph with his second son, Titus, in the Temple of Isis on the Field of Mars,⁴⁵ and, according to Katja Lembke, it was another symbolic reference to events connected with Vespasian’s gain of power in Egypt.⁴⁶ Mary Beard is of the opinion that it could have been a meaningful and well-thought-out choice which was an allusion to the aforementioned events of the year 69, when it was the clothes of a priest of Isis that helped Domitian during his escape from the supporters of Vitellius.⁴⁷ What other place could have been more appropriate than a temple of a goddess who protected an imperial family member before such an important and symbolic happening as his spectacular success?

Lembke also related the quoted Triumph to coins minted in Vespasian’s times in the years between 71 and 73 and which represent the temple’s façade.⁴⁸ John Scheid claims that the coins were not meant to commemorate this event, but rather the rebuilding and dedication of the Temple of Isis on the Field of Mars after the fire in the year 80.⁴⁹ Nobody suspects that the fire was started intentionally; nevertheless, it is true that it enabled Domitian, who was the successor of Titus, to conduct extensive construction works on these grounds.⁵⁰ The temple had already existed in this place, but its reconstruction and the spectacular scope of the project highlighted once more the role of Isis for the governing Domitian.⁵¹

For the followers of Isis, the sanctuary itself and its decorative style had an important role for the cult, but for the rest of ordinary Romans, who were just onlookers and had no relations with Egyptian religion, a large part of the ornamentation could be perceived as just an attractive, exotic decoration of the city.⁵² The Temple of Isis on the Field of Mars

⁴⁴ Cass. Dio 65,9,3. It might be for precisely this reason that more than 10 years later (in 88/89) in this very place Domitian also decided to build a temple to Isis: Müller 1969.

⁴⁵ Josephus, *bell. Iud.* 7.4; *ant. Iud.* 6.123. On the triumph itself and all the preparations before it, see Beard 2003, 543–558; Beard 2009, 92–101. On the escape see Wellesley 1956, 207–214.

⁴⁶ Lembke 1994, 91.

⁴⁷ Suet. *Dom.* 1, 2–4, similar Tac. *hist.* 3, 74; Wellesley 1956, 207–214.

⁴⁸ RIC II (ed. 2007) 116–117, 204; Hill 1979, 205–223; Hill 1989, 28–29; Lembke 1994, 91.

⁴⁹ Scheid 2004, 308–311.

⁵⁰ Darwall-Smith 1996; Tatarkiewicz 2010, 111–132.

⁵¹ Brenk 2007a, 371–381; Brenk 2007b, 383–395. (Re)construction of the sanctuary for Isis and Serapis after the fire of 80 did not require from Domitian any particularly “pro-Egyptian” attitude, and according to Sabine Panzram (2008, 91), Domitian did not necessarily have to be an “Egyptophile.”

⁵² Roulet 1972, 19–21; Versluys 2002. We should not neglect the sanctuary’s economic function connected with import and distribution of grain and other goods from Egypt. Egyptian architectural and decorative elements, which were initially imported and later manufactured in Rome, were mostly used in order to achieve an “Egyptian, mysterious atmosphere.” A large number of monuments was most probably brought to meet political objectives or to enlarge the private collection of some amateur collector. Roulet has no doubt that some of the monuments which could be found as parts of the temples’ equipment were made in Rome to fill the needs of temple, house or villa. Such roles were played by sphinxes, lions, baboons and obelisks. However, the building complex on the Field of Mars was a conjunction of two centres of worship which were the temples of Isis and Serapis, where each of the deities took a separate space separated by a courtyard which

clearly presents this dualism. On the one hand it possessed religious significance, but on the other hand it had a purely decorative and propaganda dimension.⁵³ Domitian could have treated this building complex as just another place of self-presentation to show his person as an emperor, a divine pharaoh and a builder.

The Flavians' favour undoubtedly stimulated the development of the Serapis and Isis cults, but it is difficult to prove that they were purely selfless followers of these deities, as Michel Malaise suggests.⁵⁴ V. Tran Tam Tihn speaks of a *mélange* of these two factors. Vespasian was proclaimed emperor by the legions in Alexandria, and did not find a better solution which would ensure the faithfulness of Egypt as Rome's "granary" as to position himself near the powerful deities of Alexandria. As far as Domitian's preferences were concerned, they were "manifestations of piety with a dose of extravagant 'Egyptomania' and the search of such dimension of domination in Rome which could be comparable with a god-like power of the pharaohs."⁵⁵ The inscription engraved on the obelisk currently located in Piazza Navona states that it was erected by the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Lord of two Lands, the Son of Re, Isis loving Emperor Domitian.⁵⁶ Grenier's analysis indicates that the text of the inscription was probably made in Rome itself, and this was where other inscriptions were made, which enables a better understanding of the concept of Domitian's power. They are sort of an anthem praising the emperor together with the whole Flavian dynasty,⁵⁷ in which Domitian is called "the king and the divine ruler."⁵⁸ A strong argument supporting such statements was Domitian's divine birth, which was part of his policy to present himself as a living god which could serve as a strengthening factor for dynastic policy. Hieroglyphics became the emperor's personal code, inaccessible to the simple mortals of Rome. It was his private language which helped him to express what he did not want or would not dare to utter, meaning his desire to achieve a god-like position as well as his pursuit of absolute monarchy.

In the light of the above, an interesting illustration might be the small-sized pyramid which was positioned at the top of the aforementioned obelisk and was complementary with the emperor's vision. The image represents Egyptian gods who are taking a bow in front of Domitian. They are handing him a crown, a lightning rod and a picture showing an Egyptian (not Roman!) Goddess of Justice named Maat. The whole image can unquestionably be interpreted as a declaration of how the emperor's power was exercised. We can also suspect that the monument, even if most of its admirers did not understand the meaning of hieroglyphics, emphasised the strength of imperial power and highlight-

could be entered through two arches: Lanciani 1883, 38–60; Sesler 1952/53, 88–93; Kleiner 1990, 131–134; Sinn/Freyberger 1996, 67–76.

⁵³ Versluys 2002, 378–379. Usage of these elements in a non-original context contributed to the process of "re-contextualisation," as the original context was to a greater or lesser extent changed.

⁵⁴ Malaise 1972, 412.

⁵⁵ Thin 1996, 215–230.

⁵⁶ Roulet 1972, 72–73; Malaise 1972, 203–207, no. 387; Grenier 1987, 937–961; Lembke 1994, 210–212. According to Ensoli (2000, 271), this obelisk was not located on the Field of Mars, but in Serapeum in Quirinal.

⁵⁷ Darwall-Smith 1996, 148, note 14.

⁵⁸ Grenier 1987, 937–961.

ed the distance between him and ordinary citizens. Additionally, it contributed to an aura of exotic mystery.⁵⁹

During the reign of the Flavian dynasty, as an effect of spreading Romanisation, the Roman world was unified as it had never been before.⁶⁰ The Roman army and process of urbanisation contributed to a widespread worship of Roman gods. Local cults were Romanised, as this brought measurable benefits to inhabitants of colonies and municipalities. How fast temples and monuments were being built was closely connected with urbanisation processes, people's wealth and political engagement in urban centres. For political and economic reasons, Roman citizens were intensively mobile, which was a factor that contributed to the strong migration of beliefs and religions towards and from every corner of the Empire.⁶¹

Each Roman citizen and even imperial resident participated in national rituals, prayers, and offerings, and "experienced" the direct presence of deities in his or her life. There is no doubt that one of the most characteristic features of Roman religions was their universality and accessibility.⁶² Many people were also attracted by the chance of obtaining knowledge about "something different" or experiencing religious and mystic aspects of life which were not available for everyone, but solely for the chosen and the insiders. The situation of political stabilisation, relative welfare and social peace with good conditions for unobstructed travelling and free trade was also a time when it was more feasible to transmit new cults. They offered a different type of experience, especially including those ones with eastern roots – the cults of Cybele or Isis. During the reign of the Flavian dynasty, they were greatly popular among Roman dwellers, and they were also treated favourably by the authorities.⁶³

Naturally, Judaism and Christianity constituted an exception from this rule, as they aroused a sense of apprehension among Romans, not only for their monotheistic and too abstract character, as the Roman people saw it, but mostly due to their negation of organic bonding between deities and rulers, which was extremely important for the national well-being. Also, the lack of obligatory dominance of divine powers over the imperial authority, which brought fatal repercussions for organisation of social life, was of great importance.

In the case of Judaism, the most vivid expression of people's awareness of imminent danger as well as the enormity of the problem was the demolition of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans. However, it should be mentioned here that much data indicated that it was to a great extent an unintended action.⁶⁴ In June 71, the emperor and his son Titus conducted a Triumph after the victory at Judea. The existing description of this event, whose author was Joseph Flavius, probably depicts it quite realistically.⁶⁵ Among the presented spoils, an important role was played by a golden candelabra and other accessories taken from a burnt temple, including a Torah scroll. Flavius gave the clear

⁵⁹ Grenier 1987, 949.

⁶⁰ Liebeschuetz 2000, 984–998.

⁶¹ Beard/North/Price 1998, 313–320.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ MacMullen 1981, 6.

⁶⁴ Goodman 2007, 332.

⁶⁵ Josephus, *bell. Iud.* 7, 122–157.

message that they were celebrating a Triumph not only over the province of Judea, but over Judaism as a whole.⁶⁶ Vespasian decorated the Temple of Peace with artworks from all over the known world, including those which had once belonged to the demolished Temple of Jerusalem. However, Vespasian decided to store the Torah scroll and purple curtains from the sanctuary of Yahweh in his palace. We could conclude that Triumph over Judea somehow “set the tone” for the reign of the Flavian dynasty until its end upon Domitian’s death and, as it may seem, for long years to come shaped the Romans’ attitude towards Jewish people.⁶⁷

Symbols of victory over Judea could be seen in the Roman urban space in many places. The Flavian Amphitheatre, whose construction was accomplished in 80, was built using money gained after the sale of a part of the Jewish spoils. The coins which were introduced at that time throughout the whole territory of the Empire had a clear sign of conquest, which was represented by a figure of a tied female captive with the inscription *Iudea capta*.⁶⁸ An inscription ornamenting an arch which was erected in the year 81 at the south-western end of *Circus Maximus* had a relatively similar meaning. The sign was meant to glorify Titus, who thanks to a wise piece of advice which he received from his own father made the Jewish nation subject to Rome as well as destroying Jerusalem, which had previously been unsuccessfully attacked by all military leaders, tribes and kings.⁶⁹

Not only did the Jewish people have their temple demolished, but additionally “on all Jews, no matter where they lived, a poll tax of two drachmas was imposed which on the order of Vespasian was paid to the Capitol, as used to previously be done in the Temple of Jerusalem.”⁷⁰ Cassius Dio writes that “since then all the Jews who observed the customs of their ancestors offered yearly an amount of two drachmas to Jupiter of the Capitol.”⁷¹ It would appear that the tax constituted a payment not so much to the state treasury as a money contribution devoted in particular to the process of the reconstruction of the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, which burnt down in 69. This meant not only that the Jews were forbidden to rebuild their own temple, but also that they were forced to finance a sanctuary of a completely unknown deity.⁷²

As far as the situation of the Christians during the reign of the Flavian dynasty is concerned, uncritical acceptance of the widespread stereotype of persecution of Christians seems to be unjustified. The available sources are too poor, or maybe not sufficiently objective, to constitute unquestionable proof of the bloody persecution of Christians. We

⁶⁶ Goodman 2007, 339.

⁶⁷ Goodman 2007, 338.

⁶⁸ RIC II (ed. 2007) (Vespasian) 51, 81, 134, 159, 160, 163–167, 233–236, 271, 303–304, 375–376, 422, 445, 457, 495, 562, 626, 1134, 1181, 1204–1205, 1233, 1245–1246, 1268–1269; (Titus) 57, 133, 369, 502, 145–153, 500–501, 504.

⁶⁹ ILS 264; Goodman 2007, 339.

⁷⁰ Josephus, *bell. Iud.* 7, 218. The so-called *fiscus Iudaicus*, according to information provided by Josephus, referred to practising Jews inhabiting the whole territory of the Roman Empire. Domitian also imposed a payment obligation on those who had abandoned the faith of Moses and who were not Jewish by origin but had converted to Judaism. During his reign, the “Jewish tax” was collected very rigorously: Suet. *Dom.* 12, 2; Thompson 1982, 329–342; Williams 1990, 196–211.

⁷¹ Cass. Dio 66.7.2.

⁷² Goodman 2007, 340.

obviously cannot exclude the possibility that, during the times of Domitian, Christians were put on trial and convicted in various part of the Empire. However, most frequently it probably depended on individual interpretation of law by the province governors rather than on the official directives and orders of the emperor himself.⁷³ Christian tradition provided plenty of information about numerous trials and death sentences for Christians.⁷⁴ Still, except for Christian sources which were dated much later than the events described in them, there is no other valid evidence in this matter.⁷⁵ Belief in the persecution of representatives of Christianity in the times of Domitian is mostly based on the evidence of Bruttius, whose words could have been wrongly understood or even twisted by Christian storytellers.⁷⁶ As a matter of fact, Eusebius' version of events about the alleged treatment of Christians, which is a basic source of data on this subject, is based on Bruttius' texts.

Cassius Dio's remarks concerning this issue were only preserved in epitomes by Xiphilinus, who seemed not to understand or even see a difference between Judaism and Christianity. If he did, he would surely have expressed his interest in Christian inclinations towards Christianity displayed by Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla, especially for the fact that they were related to the emperor. Both of them were accused of impiety. However, Dio writes that "the ones who were suspected to follow 'judaistic tradition' were given a punishment and were either killed or deprived of their property." Domitilla was only sentenced to banishment to Pandateria. One of the "persecuted" ones mentioned by Dio is Glabrio, who "was tried and killed for the same reasons as others (...)."⁷⁷ In spite of this fact, it is possible that Domitian was not interested in the persecution of Christians, but rather in their marginalisation, and it did not actually refer to Jews themselves but to their religion, which was Judaism, and not really to Christians but their views.⁷⁸ J.G. Cook claims that Domitian was so strongly convinced of his own divinity⁷⁹ that it must be taken into account that he could look at Christians as not really dangerous for the state but as deserving to die as "atheists"⁸⁰ who did not want to accept such an obvious truth and faith.

The Flavian era did not bring revolutionary changes in traditional religion. This clearly shows that the new dynasty was perfectly aware that one of the aspects of a well-functioning Rome was preservation of ancestors' customs and a belief in divine protection which could ensure safety, strength and belief in unity of the Empire. This was clear and apparent in every step of the dynasty's representatives. A perfect example is Vespasian's reconstruction of the destroyed Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, or the prayers and offerings given by Titus after the dramatic events between 79 and 80 as well as the strengthening of the position of *pontifex maximus* during the reign of Domitian.

⁷³ Cook 2010, 112.

⁷⁴ Jones 1992, 117.

⁷⁵ Pfeiffer 2009, 118.

⁷⁶ Cook 2010, 136–142.

⁷⁷ Cass. Dio 67, 14.

⁷⁸ Goodman 2007, 346–347.

⁷⁹ Cook 2010.

⁸⁰ Cook 2010, 136.

The time of relative peace contributed to the significant progress of urbanisation in the Roman Empire, and this dually influenced the religious world. On the one hand, it contributed to an arousal of interest in the newly formed cults, and on the other, it boosted the spread of various forms of worship of Roman deities throughout the Empire. Development of urbanisation and the need to look for a connection with the Empire and identification with it was expressed by worshipping the imperial family.⁸¹ As Duncan Fishwick writes, undoubtedly “the Flavian era is the most significant period since its origins under Augustus,” now including the living emperor from the start.⁸² A new dynasty, deprived of the “family’s nobility”, used the emperor’s cult as “a vehicle for legitimacy and authority.”⁸³ The emperor was a comparable individual to such other gods as *humanos propior love digerit actus*,⁸⁴ *genium domini praesentis*,⁸⁵ *dominus et deus*,⁸⁶ or *deus praesens*.⁸⁷

When Domitian assumed power, unlike his father and brother, he could not boast and be proud of his military achievements and prestige. Therefore, he chose to develop courtly ceremonies as well as imposing the obligation of worship of his own, which had never previously been observed by any emperor. With time, he demanded to be treated equally with the gods and to be called the Emperor and the God.⁸⁸ There is no surprise in the fact that these were hard times for followers of monotheistic religions, who found it difficult to accept it. The Flavians’ ruling was a hard time for the Dispersion. It also marked the beginning of more lively activity of the Christian community, which soon began to be perceived as a growing threat to Roman authority.

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⁸¹ Studies on the so-called “emperor’s cult” in the Flavian period are very numerous, cf. Scott 1935; Price 1984; Torelli 1987, 563–582; Friesen 1993; Rosso 2007, 125–151.

⁸² Fishwick 2002, 95.

⁸³ Fishwick 2002, 96.

⁸⁴ *Stat. Silv.* 5.38.

⁸⁵ *Stat. Silv.* 5.74.

⁸⁶ *Suet. Dom.* 13.2.

⁸⁷ *Stat. Silv.* 1.1.62.

⁸⁸ Blamberg (1976, 228–229) points to the fact that none of the coins represented Domitian in the form of a god. Also, no names such as “sacer” or “dominus et deus” could be found; cf. p. 231: “Domitian’s excesses, including his use of the title ‘dominus et deus’, again come to us only from literary sources. The court flattery which treated Domitian as a divine monarch is presented by the poets, not by the sculptors or the engravers”. See Thompson 1984, 469–475. However, inscriptions sporadically include such phrases as “sacratissimus imperator” (ILS 6105). Suetonius (*Dom.* 13,1) calls Domitian’s bedroom a “holy alcove” (*pulvinar*).

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