Denarius of Domitian depicting the temple of Capitoline Jupiter (95-96 CE)

Denomination: denarius

Date: 95 CE to 96 CE

Material: Silver

Mint: Rome

Name of Ruler: Domitian

Obverse (Image and Inscription):
Image: Head of Domitian, looking right
Inscription: DOMITIANUS AVG GERM

Reverse (Image and Inscription):
Image: Temple of Capitoline Jupiter with six columns; Jupiter standing in the centre and flanked by two figures; IMP CAESAR on the architrave of the temple

Weight (g): 2.80g

Commentary:
RIC II/1 2, Domitian, no. 815, p. 325.

This coin is a denarius minted at Rome in 95-96 CE. It depicts on the obverse the head of Domitian, referred to as Augustus and Germanicus. On the reverse, the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus is depicted as set on a three-tiered base and sustained by six Corinthian columns which were characteristic of this temple (De Angeli, “Iuppiter,” p. 151-152). In the centre, a figure, probably Jupiter, is represented seated. The god is flanked by two figures, maybe Juno and Minerva, appearing between the columns. A quadriga is placed on the temple’s gable. There is a statue on each edge of the roof.

The legend IMP CAESAR on the architrave of the temple is the most interesting element depicted on the reverse of that denarius. This legend does not appear on the coins representing this temple which were previously minted in Rome under Vespasian or Titus, or even on the cistophori of the “CAPIT REST” type minted under Titus and Domitian (see Bastien, “Vitellius et le temple,” p. 194-195). This detail has been associated with a passage of Suetonius’s Life of Domitian in which Domitian is said to have written his name on every building he restored, including the Capitoline Temple, but without mentioning the name of the original builder (Suetonius, Life of Domitian V.1). Such a tradition has been reused by Cassius Dio who claims that Vespasian had a very different attitude, since he wrote the name on the original builder on the monuments restored by him (Dio, Roman History LCV.10.1). The aim of these two authors clearly hostile to Domitian was to show that he was the archetype of the bad emperor tempted by a tyrannical regime. Domitian appears as the counter-model of Augustus who had restored the Capitoline Temple and the theatre of Pompey sine ulla inscriptione nominis eis, “without any inscription of his name” (Res Gestae [2]XX.1). Domitian was also the counter-model of the ruling emperor of Suetonius’s time, Hadrian, who restored the Pantheon but placed Agrippa’s name on the restored building.
(Southern, *Domitian*, p. 37). Even if the concordance between Suetonius’s writings and the image represented on the reverse of this denarius seems obvious, it is necessary to interpret the coin and the legend IMP CAESAR not only in connection with Domitian’s tyrannical designs. Brian W. Jones rightly mentions that many inscriptions refer to Domitian’s restorations (*Domitianus . . . refecit or restituit*) but do not mention either that the restored building was his, nor the identity of the original builder (Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 80). Thus, the inscription on the Capitoline Temple might have only mentioned that Domitian was the restorer of the building.

The most important point is that this denarius was minted in the last year of Domitian’s reign, in 95-96 CE, thirteen years after the achievement of the restoration of the Capitoline Temple. In 82 CE this restoration had been largely celebrated in the whole Empire as proven by the issue of cistophori perhaps minted at Rome but which circulated in Asia (see *Cistophorus of Domitian representing the temple of Capitoline Jupiter, 82 CE* [3]). In the first years of his reign, many building operations led in Rome enabled Domitian to justify his accession to power through dynastic claims. With the dedication of the triumphal arch of Titus or the Capitoline Temple – whose third restoration had been led by Vespasian with the money taken from the Jews of the Empire and whose fourth restoration started under Titus –, Domitian wanted to present himself as the worthy heir of his father and his brother’s policies. During his entire reign, the restoration of the Capitoline Temple continued to be a central theme in Domitian’s propaganda (see *Statius, Silvae I.6,85-102* [4] of 89 CE; *Statius, Silvae IV.3,123-163* [5] of 95 CE). The fact that Domitian may have written some elements of his official title on the architrave of the Capitoline Temple, the most important shrine of the Empire, can be interpreted as a symbol of Domitian’s close relation with Jupiter, his official protective god. From a broader perspective, this investment of the architrave of the Capitoline Temple may have fit in with Domitian’s Jovian ideology, according to which Domitian was, on Earth, the exact counterpart of Jupiter in heaven (Fears, “Jupiter and Roman,” p. 79).

Keywords in the original language:

- *Germanicus* [6]
- *Caesar* [7]
- *imperator* [8]
- *Domitianus* [9]

Thematic keywords:

- *Domitian* [10]
- *Capitoline Triad* [12]
- *Jupiter* [13]
- *restoration* [14]

Bibliographical references: Bastien, Pierre, “*Vitellius et le temple de Jupiter Capitolin: un as inédit.*” [15], Numismatica e antichità classiche 7 (1978) : 181-202
  Southern, Patricia, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant* [16] (Roman Imperial Biographies; London: Routledge, 1997)
  Fears, Jesse R., “*Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology.*” [19], in Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt (ed. Wolfgang Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), 3-141

Other sources connected with this document: *Text*

*Statius, Silvae IV.3,123-163* [5]

Sibyl’s speech ending a poem commemorating the *via Domitiana*
Cistophorus of Domitian representing the temple of Capitoline Jupiter (82 CE) [3]

Cistophorus of Domitian representing the temple of Capitoline Jupiter (82 CE)

• Read more about Cistophorus of Domitian representing the temple of Capitoline Jupiter (82 CE) [3]

Text


Poem describing the Saturnalia, probably in December 89 CE

• Read more about Statius, Silvae I.6.85-102 [4]

Realized by:

Marie Roux [20]

Source URL: http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/denarius-domitian-depicting-temple-capitoline-jupiter-95-96%C2%A0CE

Links
in%C3%A9dit%E2%80%9D