



## Aureus depicting the head of Domitian and the eagle of Jupiter (84 CE)

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[1]

**Denomination:**

Aureus

**Date:** 84 CE

**Material:**

Gold

**Mint:**

Rome

**Name of Ruler:**

Domitian

**Obverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Laureate head of Domitian looking right

Inscription: IMP CAES DOMITIANVS AVG PM

**Reverse (Image and Inscription):**

Image: Eagle standing right on thunderbolt, head left

Inscription: IVPPITER CONSERVATOR

**Commentary:** RIC II<sup>2</sup>, Domitian, no. 143, p. 275.

The obverse of this aureus, minted in 84 CE, depicts the head of Domitian, while the reverse depicts the eagle of Jupiter, standing on a thunderbolt. The inscription on the obverse refers to Domitian as *imperator*, Caesar, Augustus, *pontifex maximus*, or high priest of the Roman religion. The inscription on the reverse refers to Jupiter as *conservator* (“preserver” or “defender”), one of his attributes. The meaning of the word *conservator*, “the one who preserves,” probably served to associate the supreme god, Jupiter, with the ruler, Domitian, whose power and personal security was therefore “preserved” by the supreme god; the epithet served also to suggest that the rule of the emperor over the *oikoumenè* reflected that of the supreme god. Equally, Domitian extended this “preservation” to the Roman people, whose security and prosperity he safeguarded through his administration of the empire. One of the first acts of Vespasian, the father of Domitian, when he had returned to Rome following the Jewish war of 70 CE, was to rebuild the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which had burned down during the civil war in 69 CE (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.71–72). This restoration had again been destroyed by fire in 80 CE, during the reign of Domitian’s brother Titus, giving Domitian the occasion to renew his association with the supreme god through a second Flavian restoration of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (for the archaeology of the Flavian restorations, see Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, p. 41-47). Domitian’s version of the temple was by far the most extraordinary yet, with bronze roof tiles and monumental sculptures serving as acroterial figures, and a *quadriga* surmounting the apex of the pediment; in the centre of the pediment sat Jupiter, flanked by Juno and Minerva, with a monumental eagle stretching its wings beneath them (Plutarch *Life of Publicola* 15.3–4; see also [Cistophorus of Domitian representing the temple of Capitoline Jupiter \(82 CE\)](#) [2]).

The eagle depicted on the reverse epitomized Jupiter and was his main attribute, together with the thunderbolt –



which he clutches in his claws in the depiction here. However, Jupiter's eagle was generally depicted in profile, and not frontally. The earliest frontal depiction of Jupiter's eagle is a cameo, today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna, dated to 27 BCE. It was only from the reign of Nero onwards that the eagle was depicted on coins frontally with spread wings. Good examples are the provincial tetradrachms minted at Antioch during the reign of Nero.

As a type, this eagle coinage was not new to Domitian's repertoire, but rather a repeat of a type that was issued in 82-83 CE (RIC II/1<sup>2</sup>, Domitian, no. 143 p. 275). It was clearly intended to celebrate and commemorate Domitian's victories against a German tribe, the Chatti, for which he had been awarded a triumph at the end of 83 CE (see Suetonius, *Life of Domitian*, 6 and Tacitus, *Agricola*, 39 for descriptions of these campaigns). The association with the eagle of Jupiter was a sign that the victory was in part due to the will of the gods, and the favour that the ruler found with them.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Caesar](#) [3]
- [Augustus](#) [4]
- [imperator](#) [5]
- [pontifex maximus](#) [6]
- [Iupiter conservator](#) [7]

Thematic keywords:

- [Domitian](#) [8]
- [Jupiter](#) [9]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [10]
- [thunderbolt](#) [11]
- [Capitoline Temple](#) [12]
- [eagle](#) [13]
- [divine protection](#) [14]

**Bibliographical references:** Darwall-Smith, Robin H., [Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome](#) [15] (Brussels: Latomus. Revue des Études Latines, 1992)

Southern, Patricia, [Domitian: Tragic Tyrant](#) [16] (Roman Imperial Biographies; London: Routledge, 1997)

Jones, Brian W., [The Emperor Domitian](#) [17] (London: Routledge, 1993)

Foss, Clive, [Roman Historical Coins](#) [18] (London: Seaby, 1990)

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[2] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/cistophorus-domitian-representing-temple-capitoline-jupiter-82%C2%A0ce>

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