



Sestertius depicting a bust and an equestrian statue of Domitian (95-96 CE)

Sestertius depicting a bust of Domitian and a equestrian statue of Domitian

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[1]

[Reverse of the sestertius](#) [2]



[3]

Denomination:

sestertius

Date: 95 CE to 96 CE

Material:

copper alloy

Mint:

Rome

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):

British Museum, Coins & Medals (registration number: 1978,1021.5)

Name of Ruler:

Domitian

Obverse (Image and Inscription):

Bust of Domitian looking right, laureate, draped and cuirassed.

Inscription: IMP CAES DOMIT AVG GERM COS XVII CENS PER P P

Reverse (Image and Inscription):

Equestrian statue of Domitian looking right.

Inscription: SC

Weight (g): 24.64g

Commentary:

RIC II/1², Domitian, no. 797, p. 324.

This sestertius, minted in 95-96 CE, depicts on the obverse the head of Domitian presented as *imperator*, Caesar, Augustus, Germanicus, and consul for the seventeenth time. On the reverse, we can see an equestrian statue of



the emperor which may correspond to the statue just after its dedication described by Statius in 91 CE ([Statius, *Silvae* I.1.22-55](#) [4]). The poem and the image converge, insofar as they both represent Domitian as a war leader looking for pacification, as we can see through two details: his right arm raised and his control of his frisky horse. Both sources allude to an important detail: the right hoof of the horse is crushing the head of a man. According to Statius's poem, it consisted in the head of the river god Rhenus, but if it is impossible to identify the head clearly on the coin. Due to this uncertainty and the absence of the representation of a Minerva in Domitian's left hand, as mentioned in the poem, John Geysen hypothesizes that the man represented could be a Dacian (Geysen, *Imperial Panegyric*, p. 23). It is however possible that the coin-designer did not have enough space for representing it and that this sestertius was part of the coins representing Domitian dominating the Germans. The presence of the title *Germanicus* in the inscription on the obverse supports this statement.

Close parallels can be made between the image of the reverse and other series, as for instance the sestertii of 84-87 CE representing Domitian riding right and striking with a spear at a falling German with a shield: RIC II/1², 205 (p. 280), 280 (p. 285), 358 (p. 290), 470 (p. 297), 529 and 530 (p. 301), and the sestertii of 87 CE representing Domitian standing with a *parazonium* and a spear, crushing the god Rhenus lying on the ground: RIC II/1², 528, p. 301. All these monetary series are part of a large iconographic program often presented as the "*Germania capta*" type (Cody, "Conquerors and Conquered," p. 112-113), which promoted the military successes of Domitian over the best archetypical enemy of Rome, the Germans. Actually, the two main victories of Domitian against the Chatti occurred in 83 CE and in 89 CE. This program had a remarkable longevity since it lasted from the beginning to the end of Domitian's reign. It was systematically used when the emperor wanted to reaffirm his authority. In 95-96 CE, when this sestertius was minted, four and five years after the dedication of the equestrian statue on the Forum, Domitian was politically weak. Since the execution of his cousin Flavius Clemens in 95 CE, Domitian had no heir and dealt with strong political resistances. In such a problematic situation for the Flavian dynasty and while all military campaigns had been accomplished, Domitian chose to reaffirm his authority through a martial message in which he was still presented as a victorious war leader ready to crush his most dreadful enemies and able to restore peace afterward. As Carole Newlands writes, this sestertius minted in the peaceful context of the last two years of Domitian's reign was one of the last monetary series which insisted upon the martial powers of Domitian in order to reaffirm the legitimacy of the Flavian dynasty, and which played upon "the imperial fiction" of the invincibility of the ruling emperor (Newlands, *Statius' Silvae*, p. 275).

Keywords in the original language:

- [Caesar](#) [5]
- [Augustus](#) [6]
- [imperator](#) [7]
- [Germanicus](#) [8]
- [consul](#) [9]

Thematic keywords:

- [Domitian](#) [10]
- [victory](#) [11]
- [Germans](#) [12]
- [Rhenus](#) [13]
- [statue](#) [14]
- [invincibility](#) [15]

Bibliographical references: Cody, Jane, "[Conquerors and Conquered on Flavian Coins](#)" [16], in *Flavian Rome, Culture, Image, Text* (ed. Anthony J. Boyle, William J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 103-123

Geysen, John W. , [Imperial Panegyric in Statius. A Literary Commentary on Silvae 1.1](#) [17] (New York: Peter Lang, 1996)

Newlands, Carole E., [Statius' Silvae and the poetics of Empire](#) [18] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Other sources connected with this document: Numismatic item



[Sestertius depicting the head of Domitian and a trophy with German captives \(85 CE\) \[19\]](#)

- [Read more about Sestertius depicting the head of Domitian and a trophy with German captives \(85 CE\) \[19\]](#)

Numismatic item

[Aureus depicting the head of Domitian and the personification of Germania mourning \(88-89 CE\) \[20\]](#)

- [Read more about Aureus depicting the head of Domitian and the personification of Germania mourning \(88-89 CE\) \[20\]](#)

Text

[Staius, *Silvae* I.1.22-55 \[4\]](#)

Description of Domitian's equestrian statue newly erected on the Roman Forum

- [Read more about Staius, *Silvae* I.1.22-55 \[4\]](#)

Realized by:

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Links

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- [2] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/file/reverse-sestertius>
- [3] https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/sestertius_domitianus_equestrian_statue_95_96_reverse.jpg?itok=DYZTzyHN
- [4] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/staius-silvae-i122-55>
- [5] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/caesar>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/augustus>
- [7] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/imperator>
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- [9] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/consul>
- [10] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/domitian>



- [11] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/victory>
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- [18] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/stattus%E2%80%99-silvae-and-poetics-empire>
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- [20] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/aureus-depicting-head-domitian-and-personification-germania-mourning-88-89-ce>
- [21] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/erc-team/marie-roux>