

*D*OMITIAN'S *DAMNATIO*: A CRITICAL CASE ANALYSIS

Abstract:

Domitian's *damnatio* has been looked into many times and from many angles; following the path of senatorial historical writings, researchers have often emphasized the totality of the results of the senate decree which ordained it. Based on an analysis of narrative sources, epigraphic evidence, images and statues of Domitian, monuments, and coins, the authors tried to verify that simplistic opinion, pointing out his posthumous popularity in some social circles.

Keywords:

Domitian, *damnatio memoriae*, inscriptions, statues.

Introduction

Recent years have seen an increased popularity of studies into memory, which have even become an independent discipline in Western historical research, developing their own methodology. One important part of those is research into memory and the politics of memory in ancient Rome.* In Rome, diverse sanctions on memory were employed, aimed either at condemning a specific person to oblivion or at deprecating or disgracing their memory,¹ levelled chiefly at emperors whose reigns had been considered tyrannical and people accused of treason (*perduellio*, *crimen laesae maiestatis*). Very often those people would first be found enemies

* We would like to thank A. Kluczek, K. Królczyk and F. Taterka for consulting on some matters discussed in the article. We would also like to thank the Lanckoroński Foundation and the Polish Historical Mission in Würzburg for financial support.

¹ That double nature of Roman *damnatio memoriae* is pointed out in Flower 2006. Somewhat differently J. Osgood who believes its point was chiefly to disgrace a person's memory: 'the so-called practice of *damnatio memoriae* best understood as a dishonoring rather than destruction of the memory' (Osgood 2016: 179).

of the state (*hostes publici* / *hostes populi Romani*).² In modern scholarship, that aspect of Roman political life is generally referred to as *damnatio memoriae*, but it ought to be remembered the Romans themselves did not use the term explicitly to refer to the various forms of punishment used against a person's memory; instead, the technical expression *memoria damnata* comes up in legal sources,³ while Roman authors often use the term *abolitio memoriae*.⁴ In reference to the practice of erasing the name or titles of a person sentenced to *damnatio memoriae* from inscriptions as well as destroying their statues or images, Roman sources tend to use the verbs *eradere*, *abolere*, and *tollere*.⁵ With that in mind, we shall only apply the term *damnatio memoriae* conventionally.

The sanctions on memory applied in ancient Rome varied considerably, and often depended on a number of circumstances, especially the standing of the person to be condemned. One of the punishments used for the purpose consisted in removing from both public and private spaces the statues and images of the person subjected to *damnatio memoriae*; those would be destroyed or put in storage. Often they were thrown into the Tiber or sewers, so that paradoxically, and against the intentions of the ancients, they have survived to this day. However, some statues and busts of condemned emperors were simply remade into images of other rulers. In that case the head of a princeps condemned by the senate to *damnatio memoriae* was replaced with one of the princeps then reigning; the practice was fairly common.⁶ Another sanction applied widely to the condemned was the obligatory erasure of their names from official public documents, inscriptions on monuments, and coins (*abolitio nominis*).⁷ The consequences of a *damnatio memoriae* could also include annulling the person's will, desecrating their grave or destroying their private house. Pulling down the *domus* was closely connected to how an aristocrat's house was seen in the Roman society: not just as a private space, but also as a public monument after a manner, a visual expression of its owner's prestige and social standing as well as a carrier of the memory of his deeds. Thus destroying it was a part of *damnatio memoriae*.⁸ Among the sanctions the Romans imposed on memory there were also some whose point was to preserve a bad memory of a person.

² Vittinghoff 1936: 9–11; Flower 1998: 155.

³ *Dig.* 24.1; 32.7; 31.76.9; *Cod. Iust.* 7.2.2. For a list of relevant examples, see Vittinghoff 1936: 66–74.

⁴ See e.g. Suetonius (*Calig.* 60), in reference to the motion put forward by a number of senators after Caligula's death, although ultimately it did not pass, to condemn the memory of the whole Julian dynasty (*Dom.* 23.1), after the senate decreed Domitian's *damnatio memoriae*, and *HA (Com.* 19.1), where the man condemned was Commodus.

⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 23.1; *HA, Com.* 17.6; 20.5; *SCPP* II. 75–76; 82–83.

⁶ See Varner 2004: 1, 5–6.

⁷ Varner 2004: 8.

⁸ Varner 2004: 17.

To that end, their birthday was declared cursed (*vitiosus*), which would be noted in official state calendars, while the day of their death became a public holiday.⁹ In this paper, we shall analyze the *damnatio memoriae* of emperor Domitian, after whose murder the senate decided on a variety of sanctions on his memory. We shall primarily aim to critically verify previous findings regarding a number of aspects of his *damnatio*, also trying to answer the question of whether Domitian's *damnatio memoriae* was actually as universal as ancient authors and certain modern researchers appear to suggest.

Domitian was assassinated on 18 September 96, after a fifteen-year-long reign.¹⁰ We owe a fairly detailed description of the assassination to the accounts of Suetonius and Cassius Dio. Although the two authors differ when it comes to certain details, as the *spiritus movens* of the whole undertaking they both mention Parthenius, who held the post of *cubicularius* and had supposedly organized the assassination, and Stephanus, who carried it out. Apparently they both lured the emperor to his bedroom to talk, the pretext being that they wanted to inform him of an alleged assassination plot against him. According to the accounts, during the conversation Stephanus stabbed the surprised Domitian with a dagger. Suetonius also reports other people involved in the murder – Clodianus (*cornicularius*), a Praetorian on duty in the palace, and an unnamed gladiator. Those finished the work begun by Stephanus, killing the wounded emperor.¹¹ In the opinion of some researchers, the conspiracy indirectly included certain senators, among whom was the future emperor Nerva, and some of the military commanders in the provinces.¹²

One of the first actions taken against Domitian's memory was refusing him a public funeral (*funus publicum*). From Suetonius we know the emperor's body was cremated by his old nurse Phyllis in his private villa along the *via Latina*. Phyllis then secretly deposited Domitian's ashes in the *templum gentis Flaviae*, in the family tomb of the Flavian dynasty.¹³ Regardless of the veracity of that episode, we do know for sure that Domitian received no official funeral ceremony, important parts of which would have been publicly displaying the corpse in the Forum Romanum and a *laudatio funebris* given, also publicly, in honour of the dead emperor.

⁹ Varner 2004: 1.

¹⁰ Kienast, Eck, Heil 2017: 109.

¹¹ Suet. *Dom.* 16–17; Cass. Dio 67.15–18. On Domitian's assassination, see especially Collins 2009: 73–106.

¹² An attempt at determining who any other potential conspirators were, was undertaken by Grainger 2003: 4–27.

¹³ Suet. *Dom.* 17.3.

Soon after the assassination the senate convened and passed a decree implementing Domitian's *damnatio memoriae*.¹⁴ Crucial information on the type of sanctions employed comes from Suetonius and Cassius Dio.¹⁵ It is unfortunate that Tacitus' account, whose narrative ends abruptly in AD 70, does not survive, as it may have contained important detail pertaining to both Domitian's death and the nature of the sanctions adopted by the senate in order to condemn his memory. Suetonius' and Cassius Dio's accounts are complemented by a passage in the *Panegyricus* of Pliny the Younger in which he describes a wholesale destruction of statues of Domitian in Rome's public spaces. In Suetonius we read that after the emperor was murdered, the attacks first turned against his images and honorary shields, which were removed and destroyed. Moreover, according to the decree of the senate, Domitian's name and titles would be erased *en masse* from inscriptions throughout the Empire. Thus the senators meant for the memory of the hated princeps to be annihilated:¹⁶

*Occisum eum populus indifferenter, miles gravissime tulit statimque Divum appellare conatus est, paratus et ulcisci, nisi duces defuissent; quod quidem paulo post fecit, expositulatis ad poenam pertinacissime caedis auctoribus. Contra senatus adeo laetatus est, ut repleta certatim curia non temperaret, quin mortuum contumeliosissimo atque acerbissimo adclationum genere laceraret, scalas etiam inferri clipeosque et imagines eius coram detrahi et ibidem solo affligi iuberet, novissime eradendos ubique titulos abolendamque omnem memoriam decerneret.*¹⁷

'The people received the news of his death with indifference, but the soldiers were greatly grieved and at once attempted to call him the Deified Domitian, while they were prepared also to avenge him, had they not lacked leaders. This, however, they did accomplish a little later by most insistently demanding the execution of his murderers. The senators on the contrary were so overjoyed, that they raced to fill the House, where they did not refrain from assailing the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries. They even had ladders brought and his shields and images torn down before their eyes and dashed upon the ground; finally

¹⁴ According to B.W. Jones (Jones 1996: 155), *aboliitio memoriae* would be a more appropriate term for the sanctions adopted on Domitian's memory, but his arguments fail to convince. It is worth noting this was the second case of an emperor's official *damnatio memoriae* (after Nero's); see Vittinghoff 1936: 99; Varner 2004: 84–85; *contra* Zissos 2016: 485, who is wrong to conclude Nero's *damnatio memoriae* was in fact unofficial, an opinion obviously contested by a passage in Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.16), who lists Nero as the first case of an emperor's *damnatio*.

¹⁵ Regrettably, as is typical of narrative sources, the information provided by those authors on Domitian's *damnatio memoriae* is not as detailed as, say, that found in the official document that is the *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (ll. 71–108) regarding Cn. Calpurnius Piso.

¹⁶ Suetonius' narrative ties in well with Lactantius' (*Mort. pers.* 3.2–4), who also writes the purpose of the senate was to thoroughly demolish any memory of Domitian by removing all his images, his name and titles from inscriptions, as well as cancelling all the legal acts issued by him.

¹⁷ Suet. *Dom.* 23.1.

they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated' (tr. J.C. Rolfe).

Dio in turn reports that statues of Domitian made of gold and silver were to be smelted into coins, and arches in his honour, demolished:

μετὰ δὲ Δομιτιανὸν Νέρουαν Κοκκήιον οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι ἀπέδειξαν αὐτοκράτορα. μίσει δὲ τοῦ Δομιτιανοῦ αἱ εἰκόνες αὐτοῦ, πολλαὶ μὲν ἀργυραῖ πολλαὶ δὲ καὶ χρυσαῖ οὖσαι, συνεχωνεύθησαν, καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν μεγάλα χρήματα συνελέγη· καὶ αἱ ἀψίδες πλεῖσται δὴ ἐνὶ ἀνδρὶ ποιοῦμεναι καθηρέθησαν.¹⁸

'After Domitian, the Romans appointed Nerva Cocceius emperor. Because of the hatred felt for Domitian, his images, many of which were of silver and many of gold, were melted down; and from this source large amounts of money were obtained. The arches, too, of which a very great number were being erected to this one man, were torn down' (tr. E. Cary).

The question arises of how and how intensely (in as much as that can be gleaned from the extant sources, mostly epigraphic and archaeological) the sanctions on Domitian's memory listed by the above-mentioned ancient authors were actually put into practice.

Inscriptions

Although, as the above-cited Suetonius writes, in 96 the *damnatio memoriae* decree of the senate ruled that Domitian's name should be erased from all inscriptions in the whole Empire (*ubique*),¹⁹ it does survive in epigraphic material, mostly in those categories of inscriptions that were rarely martellated due to their very nature, such as *diplomata*, *acta Arvalia*, *fistulae plumbae*, bronze copies of municipal law in Spain, as well as sacred, sepulchral, and private inscriptions.²⁰ Research into the results of Domitian's *damnatio* in epigraphic evidence has been quite frequent, but its conclusions can be controversial. In his 1987 study Alain Martin claimed 385 Latin and Greek inscriptions mentioning the emperor's name survived (while in his 2007 article he listed as many as 467²¹), with 155 of those, constituting 40% (although other scholars report as many as 44%²²), bearing some traces of deliberate damage, usually to Domitian's name and titulature.²³ According to Martin's calculations, a clear majority of such partially martellated inscriptions come from

¹⁸ Cass. Dio 68.1.1.

¹⁹ Suet. *Dom.* 23.1.

²⁰ Martin 1987: 197–198; Martin 2007: 66–67.

²¹ Martin 2007: 60.

²² Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 16–17.

²³ Martin 1987: 197–199; Flower 2001: 630; Flower 2006: 240.

the final years of Domitian's reign, or 88–96, with the greatest number (approximately 60%), from the years 91–93.²⁴ We also have Pailler and Sablayrolles's statistical calculations on the percentage of inscriptions with signs of martellation originating in Rome, Italy, and the provinces, interesting even though they suffer from a degree of methodological error (as to how unrepresentative and random the preserved material is, but also how varied, since the study includes both public inscriptions and private ones, where the *damnatio* did not apply).²⁵ Taking into account all the provinces, that ratio equals 53% (being the lowest, or 33%, in the Danubian provinces, and the highest, 76%, in Asia province), but the values for Italy and Rome are relatively low (15% and 21% respectively).²⁶ In the authors' opinion, the surprisingly low percentage of partly martellated inscriptions from Rome and Italy does not result from the senate decree of ad 96 being enforced leniently or undutifully, following instead, as in Egypt (24%) from the statistics including a large group of private and administrative inscriptions, which escaped *damnatio*.²⁷ It ought to be regarded as the most reliably indicative of the real scale of martellation in Rome that Domitian's name was consistently removed from all the known public dedications in the city²⁸ (except for the Egyptian obelisk from Piazza Navona brought to Rome specially at Domitian's order, which bore his titulature in Egyptian hieroglyphs, which were presumably not legible²⁹). Based on statistical data, the authors also put forward a fairly extreme hypothesis about Domitian's name being erased in a systematic and organized manner, which from a practical epigraphic perspective proved more efficient than Nero's *damnatio*.³⁰ Still, considering the incompleteness and randomness of the epigraphic material under scrutiny, no conclusion of that sort can be regarded as convincing. A smaller percentage of inscriptions with Nero's name erased does not mean he enjoyed greater popularity than Domitian did.³¹ The Roman people may well have destroyed some inscriptions with the emperor's name in the thrall of intense emotion (although in either case, Suetonius writes they were indifferent towards

²⁴ Martin 2007: 70.

²⁵ Cf. Benoist 2003: 234.

²⁶ That percentage is higher in public provinces (59%) than in imperial ones (48%): Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 17. Some see the lower percentage of martellation in militarized provinces such as Britain as linked to Domitian's good relations with the army, although of course here, too, there is the problem of just how representative the epigraphic material is. Cf. Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 17; Benoist 2003: 234.

²⁷ Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 17.

²⁸ Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 17.

²⁹ Grenier 1987: 937–961; Hekster 2015: 270.

³⁰ Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 14. Cf. Bönsch-Meyer, Witschel 2014: 159 n. 370. J. Gering (Gering 2012: 331) went so far as to write of *damnatio* having been improved upon under Domitian, which is possible, but unconfirmed in sources.

³¹ Gering 2012: 330–331.

Domitian), but that cannot have been a decisive factor in how efficiently the *damnatio* was carried out. In the context of analyses of epigraphic material it should also be noted that Domitian's *damnatio* may have resulted, not just in erasing the emperor's name from an inscription, but also in smashing or otherwise destroying images of Domitian (including inscribed monuments) or the stone inscriptions themselves.³² Still, certain modern interpretations (and over-interpretations) of such objects seem problematic, as some researchers try to interpret and explain the condition of newly discovered damaged finds bearing inscriptions purely through the lens of the *damnatio*. For example, in the *miliarium* from Roussy-le-Village, Domitian's name was not erased, but the editors of the inscription still attributed the fragmentation of and damage to the upper portion of the find to the senate's decree condemning him.³³ However, in this case one must first meticulously investigate the archaeological context of the find with the inscription (if known) if one is to claim the damage was a result of the *damnatio* rather than of later merely mechanical (and perhaps random) forces.³⁴

Little is known about the *senatus consultum* itself; we only have the brief summary of it as passed down in Suetonius: *Senatus adeo laetatus est ut [...] eradendos ubique titulos abolendamque omnem memoriam decerneret*.³⁵ Based on that, we can only surmise the *damnatio* was total, or at least such was the intention, but the logistics of enforcement remain unknown. We do not know who was responsible for any administrative management, whether a list was kept of inscriptions to be erased, or what the punishment was, if any, for bringing up Domitian in future inscriptions. It is only later sources that mention such sanctions in the context of Geta's *damnatio*.³⁶

Although Domitian's *damnatio* tended to result in only segments of his name being erased (usually *Domitianus* and *Germanicus*),³⁷ in the case of one Puteoli inscription,³⁸ unusually, the whole text of eleven lines was erased, probably shortly after his assassination. As H. Flower says, that 'is a remarkable historical phenomenon that attests to complex feelings of fear and to correspondingly

³² Cass. Dio 68.1.1.

³³ Dupuy, Massy 1993: 283–287 (= *AE* 1993, 1209); cf. *AE* 2000, 345 a–b; Martin 2007: 63–64.

³⁴ Cf. Martin 2007: 66.

³⁵ Suet. *Dom.* 23.1. Cf. Cass. Dio 68.1.1.

³⁶ From Cassius Dio (78.12.5–6) we know uttering and writing Geta's name were punishable by death, but that was the emperor's decision rather than a decree of the senate. Also worth mentioning here, although it was not a classic example of *damnatio*, is Heliogabalus' order to smear clay on the inscriptions on some statues erected to Severus Alexander in order to disgrace him. See *HA, Hel.* 13.7.

³⁷ Merkelbach 1979: 62–64; Martin 1987: 198–199; Flower 2006: 240.

³⁸ *AE* 1973, 137.

elaborate mechanisms of self-defence'.³⁹ Still, it cannot be ruled out that erasing the entire text of the inscription was due to misunderstanding the decree of the senate, which only mandated the removal of Domitian's name.⁴⁰ Another example of particular interest is an inscription from Coptos dated to AD 90 commemorating Roman soldiers constructing of a bridge in that town, which was most likely martellated twice.⁴¹ First, emperor Domitian ordered the removal of the name of M. Mettius Rufus,⁴² a prefect of Egypt who had fallen out of his favour; later, after 96, it was Domitian's name that was erased.⁴³ One other example worth noting and usually omitted by researchers dealing with Domitian's *damnatio* is erasing his name written in Egyptian hieroglyphs from decorative reliefs on the walls and cornices in the pronaos of an Egyptian temple at Deir el-Hagar (the Monastery of Stones), on the western edges of the Dakhla Oasis. The name *Domitian* was removed, while the name *Caesar* remained intact.⁴⁴ Interestingly, it is the only example known to us of Domitian's name being erased from Egyptian temples, and the earliest of any Roman emperor's name being removed from the temples there (later reliefs exist in Esna with Geta's name removed).⁴⁵

However, another group of inscriptions are especially interesting and demonstrate the complexity of the *damnatio memoriae* of the last of the Flavii: those which mention emperor Domitian by name, although they were made, in spite of the *damnatio*, after 96. It is usually emphasized that in inscriptions put up after 96 Domitian's name was replaced with a neutral expression (*ab Imperatore*) or omitted altogether, especially when listing offices held by equites and senators,⁴⁶ but the practice is not easy to interpret,⁴⁷ as indicated for example by the *Tabula Banasitana* from AD 177. That official inscription, containing copies of the documents granting Roman citizenship to Iulianus, a *princeps* of the tribes of the Zegrenses in Mauretania Tingitana, and his family, contains the titulature of

³⁹ Flower 2001: 630.

⁴⁰ On the other hand, there was the strange practice of erasing from inscriptions some very general and neutral expressions, such as *Augusti nostri* from the titulature of an equestrian procurator found in an inscription from Proconsular Africa dated to the beginning of the 3rd century, see Chaouali 2018: 305–307.

⁴¹ *CIL* III 13580.

⁴² *PIR*² M 572.

⁴³ Flower 2006: 237. Rufus' name was removed from four inscriptions of the eleven that are known all four from Egypt. See Flower 2006: 342 n. 11.

⁴⁴ Kaper 2012: 141–142.

⁴⁵ Kaper 2012: 142. Interestingly, the reliefs with Domitian's name erased were already noted in Winlock 1936: 32.

⁴⁶ Martin 1987: 202. The eques Cn. Octavius Titinius Capito (*PIR*² O 62) held the post of *ab epistulis* under Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan, but the inscription only contained the names of the latter two, while Domitian's was omitted on purpose (*CIL* VI 798).

⁴⁷ Martin 1987: 203.

the Flavian emperors: *Divorum Augg(ustorum) Vespasiani et Titi et Caesaris | Domitiani*.⁴⁸ While the expression *Caesaris Domitiani*, unusual compared to his father and brother, may be controversial in this case, one thing is certain: in this official document from Marcus Aurelius' times, Domitian's name was not omitted (and neither was that of Nero, condemned earlier).⁴⁹ Martin did not quite agree with the opinion that inscriptions put up after 96 using the emperor's nomenclature in a form reduced to a single name was part of the process of the memory of him being erased.⁵⁰ In that case, how is one to interpret the fact that epigraphic material originating after the year 96 could both contain and omit Domitian's name?

It is in fact not easy, also when it comes to inscriptions put up by soldiers and veterans, who tended to like Domitian⁵¹ and are often mentioned as the only social group to ignore his *damnatio* in inscriptions.⁵² This group of inscriptions cannot be interpreted unambiguously in that respect. Some soldiers stressed having received awards (e.g. for taking part in the campaign against the Chatti) from Domitian, listing his name, as confirmed by three inscriptions,⁵³ including the famous sepulchral one from Philippi in Macedonia, put up for Ti. Claudius Maximus, who had slayed Decebalus,⁵⁴ while others mentioned Domitian anonymously.⁵⁵ Pailler and Sablayrolles argued against Martin, who invoked the inscription of Decebalus' killer as an example for soldiers remaining loyal to Domitian despite the *damnatio*; instead, they believed that under Hadrian, when the inscription was made, any consequences of the *damnatio* had already passed, Domitian's name by then part of a simple administrative formula.⁵⁶ However, they ignored another sepulchral inscription, this one by the *Via Nomentana* in Rome, put up for C. Vedennius Moderatus, a former legionary and Praetorian, which emphasized him receiving *dona militaria* from Vespasian and Domitian and was probably set up at the beginning of Trajan's reign.⁵⁷ In other words, soldiers already invoked Domitian's name in inscriptions (mostly epitaphs) not only under Hadrian, when the force of the decree supposedly relented, but under Trajan, with Domitian's *damnatio* only a few years in the past. Thus it can be surmised that in at least some (perhaps most) cases soldiers and veterans mentioning or failing to mention

⁴⁸ AE 1971: 534, ll. 24–25.

⁴⁹ Martin 1987: 203–204.

⁵⁰ Martin 2007: 71.

⁵¹ Suet. *Dom.* 23; Aur. Victor 11.9–11.

⁵² Martin 1987: 204; Flower 2006: 253. Cf. Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 22.

⁵³ AE 1969–1970, 583; *CIL* VI 2725; *CIL* VIII 1026.

⁵⁴ AE 1969–1970, 583: *bello Dacico ob uirtu/te(m) donis donatus ab Im/p(eratore) Domitiano*.

⁵⁵ AE 1903, 368; AE 1972, 572; *CIL* V 3356; *CIL* VI 1626.

⁵⁶ Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 49 n. 46.

⁵⁷ *CIL* VI 2725. Another inscription datable no earlier than Trajan's reign is the epitaph of a soldier of the *cohors XIII urbana* from Carthage, *CIL* VIII 1026.

Domitian was completely unrelated to his *damnatio* and only depended on whatever they (or the funders of the inscription) had personally decided. As an expression of their self-representation, the epitaphs of soldiers and veterans followed a formal structure of their own, and in their individualized form they were chiefly to build a favourable image of the dead man,⁵⁸ in which a reference to a reward received from the emperor played an important part.

Meanwhile, the epigraphic activity of the *servi et liberti Augusti* after 96 has often been ignored or belittled in the context of Domitian's memory, as demonstrated by the opinion of Martin, who claimed that, like soldiers, imperial servants tended to skip in their cursus the condemned emperor's name, which supposedly only appeared later in spite of the senate's decision in epitaphs of the slaves and freedmen of the former empress dowager as part of their nomenclature (*Domitiae Domitiani servus*).⁵⁹ H. I. Flower also quoted Domitia Longina's brick-stamps (*ex figlinis Domitiae Domitiani*) from AD 123, which mention Domitian's wife.⁶⁰ That category of inscriptions, including *fistulae aquariae*, is made up by specific inscribed domestic objects bearing the owner's name of the *figlinae* – the emperor's widow rather than the emperor himself. Even so, she did still figure in epigraphic material, if specific, as *Domitia Domitiani*. Moreover, some imperial slaves and freedmen are referred to with the *agnomen*, *Domitianianus*, in inscriptions set up after AD 96.⁶¹

Still, did Domitian's slaves and freedmen consistently omit his name after his death or did they continue to emphasize their link to him as their master or patron despite the *damnatio* as they had in epitaphs set up during his lifetime? While commenting on the epigraphic practices of members of the *familia Caesaris* in his 1987 study, Martin chose to focus on only two inscriptions. The first is a bilingual inscription from Ephesus outlining the career of Ti. Claudius Classicus or actually that part of it in which Domitian's reign was omitted in the account of that imperial freedman's career: *Ti(berio) Claudio Aug(usti) lib(erto) / Classico, / divi T(iti) a cubiculo et proc(uratori) / castrensi, divi Nervae / proc(uratori) a voluptatibus (...)* θεοῦ Τίτου ἐπὶ τοῦ / κοιτῶνος καὶ ἐπίτροπον καστ/τρήσιον θεοῦ Νέρουα ἐπίτρο/[πον] ἐπὶ τῶν ἀπολαύσεων.⁶² Hans-Georg Pflaum explained the omission as a result of Classicus falling out of favour under Domitian and only being restored to service after his death,⁶³ while Martin claimed the funder of the inscription may have observed the *damnatio memoriae* and deliberately omitted the fact that

⁵⁸ Speidel 2015: 335.

⁵⁹ E.g. *AE* 1985, 483; *CIL* VI 20492; *CIL* VI 24655. See Martin 2007: 71.

⁶⁰ *CIL* XV 548a–549d. See Flower 2001: 646 n. 131.

⁶¹ *CIL* VI 8532: *Encolphius Domitianianus*; *AE* 1922, 122: *Graphico Aug(usti) / lib(erto) Domitianiano, / proc(uratori) hereditatium tra(ctus) Campaniae*. See Fabre 1994: 349.

⁶² *AE* 1972, 574 = *I.Ephesos* 852.

⁶³ Pflaum 1982: 25. Cf. Suet. *Dom.* 2.3.

Classicus was *a cubiculo et procurator castrensi* under Domitian as well as Titus.⁶⁴ Although both those interpretations are possible, we do not think it likely for Domitian, who disliked his brother ardently, to keep in office a freedman who used to be in charge of Titus' imperial bedroom and palace finances. Moreover it is quite possible that in omitting Domitian's reign in Classicus' career, the funder of the inscription had reasons other than his *damnatio*. The dead man may simply not have wished to commemorate that stage of his career, possibly considering the posts too minor.⁶⁵

The other inscription is an epitaph from Puteoli (AE 1901, 171) commemorating M. Ulpius Proculus, who held the post of *tabularius* in the *Fiscus Alexandrinus*:

*Dis Manibus
M(arci) Ulpi Proculi,
tabulari(i) fisci
Alexandrini,
Domitiani Caesaris
vernae et Augustor(um)
liberto (!), qui
vixit ann(is) +++*

The epitaph, certainly erected after Domitian's death, lists the nomenclature of an imperial freedman complete with the name *Domitiani Caesaris* even though the *damnatio memoriae* was then in force.⁶⁶ Martin attributes that to a practice or custom prevalent in the *familia Caesaris*.⁶⁷ However, bringing up Domitian's name like that was neither a frequent onomastic practice nor a schematized one, expressing instead a special relationship between the deceased and the emperor (one of gratitude and an important stage of life being commemorated), stressed particularly in epitaphs.⁶⁸ We know of thirteen sepulchral inscriptions put up in Domitian's lifetime which contain his name and/or titulature as part of the nomenclature of imperial slaves and freedmen or a complement of whatever palace function they held (e.g., *procurator praegustatorum Imperatoris Domitiani Caesaris Augusti Germanici*):

1. CIL VI 5405: Euhodus et Eva/nder **Imp(eratoris) Domi/tiani n(ostris) ser(vi)**
2. CIL VI 8410: Fructus **Imp(eratoris) Caesaris / Domitiani Aug(usti) Germanic(i)** / Atticianus

⁶⁴ Martin 1987: 203.

⁶⁵ Cf. Fabre 1994: 343.

⁶⁶ Martin 1987: 176.

⁶⁷ Martin 1987: 176, 204.

⁶⁸ Weaver 1972: 22.

3. *CIL* VI 8831: Eutycho / filio suo piissimo / **Imp(eratoris) Domitiani Caesaris / Augusti Germanici** servo / dispensatori Montaniano
4. *CIL* VI 8768: Ianuarius / **Domitiani Caesaris** l(ibertus) / scribe(a) cub(iculariorum)
5. *CIL* VI 8921: Paris **Imp(eratoris) Domitiani / Aug(usti) Germanici** ser(vus) / ministrator
6. *CIL* VI 9052: Placidus / **Imp(eratoris) Domitiani Aug(usti)** / tabellarius
7. *CIL* VI 15368: Daphnus / **Imp(eratoris) Domitiani / Aug(usti) Germanic(i)** ser(vus)
8. *CIL* VI 18290: Apollonius / **Imp(eratoris) Domitiani Aug(usti) / Germanici** ser(vus) pecul(iaris)
9. *CIL* VI 23454: Olympus **domin(i) / Domitiani / Aug(usti)** ser(vus) / vern(a) Rom(ae)
10. *CIL* VIII 5415 = *ILAlg* 1, 325: Gaetulicus / **Domitiani / Caesaris** ser(vus)
11. *AE* 1959, 42: [- - -] **Imp(eratoris) Caesaris [Domiti]ani Aug(usti) Germanici** [lib(ertus)]
12. *AE* 1976, 504 = *AE* 1989, 564: Ti(berio) Claudio / Aug(usti) l(iberto) Zosimo proc(uratori) / praegustatorum **Imp(eratoris) / Domitiani C[a]esaris / Aug(usti) Germanici**
13. *AE* 1987, 238: [- - - divi T]iti et [Imp(eratoris) Do]mitiani [Caesa]ris **Aug(usti) [- - - Germa]nici** [- - - - -] [- - - Aug(usti) lib(ertus)?]

It should come as no surprise that after 96, the emperor's name was not erased from the thirteen inscriptions listed above, since sepulchral inscriptions, while not strictly speaking private, primarily honoured the dead person rather than the emperor,⁶⁹ assuming his name was merely part of the nomenclature and titles of the imperial slaves and freedmen involved, not, say, of a dating formula. His name did tend to disappear from the latter, even in epitaphs.⁷⁰ Yet in the epitaph of M. Ulpius Proculus, born into the *familia* of Domitian Caesar (before AD 81) as a *verna* and freed by Trajan, what we have is not a simple schematic formula; rather, it is distinct emphasis placed on the pride taken in coming from and having been born in Domitian's *familia*. It is not known how many years M. Ulpius Proculus lived or in whose reign he died. Having been born before AD

⁶⁹ Pailler, Sablayrolles 1994: 15 merely wrote, pointing out the contrast to official inscriptions subject to *damnatio* most often, that its consequences did not reach the epitaphs of imperial slaves and freedmen which mentioned Domitian. Cf. Flower's (Flower 2006: 247) reflections on the sepulchral inscription of Ti. Claudius Zosimos (*AE* 1976, 504 = *AE* 1989, 564).

⁷⁰ *CIL* VI 131; *CIL* XIII 7797.

81, he might have lived until AD 161 or even longer, as the formula *Augustorum libertus* would suggest.⁷¹ There is no answering the question of whether the funder of the epitaph knew Domitian had been condemned, but even if so, he may have simply ignored that. One thing is certain: this epitaph put up decades after Domitian's death quite unembarrassedly (without curtailing or veiling the would-be emperor's titulature) stressed the important initial period of the freedman's life in Domitian's *familia*.

In that context it is worth pointing out another inscription, discovered during farming and published recently. It comes from the imperial estate at Aïn El Gueliane in Proconsular Africa, 1.600 metres from Mustis and 600 metres to the south-east of the Tunis–Le Kef road, and reads:⁷²

*Dis Manibus.
T(ito) Flavio Venusto,
Domitiani Aug(usti)
[i]b(erto) vixit annis
LXXX, sine cruciat[(u)].
Chrysanthus Aug(usti)
disp(ensator), amico bene
merenti fecit*

The inscription contains Domitian's name as part of an imperial freedman's nomenclature and bears no signs of martellation or deliberate damage. H. Abid dated it to Domitian's reign (AD 81–96 same as *AE* 2016, 1912) and claimed that T. Flavius Venustus had been freed as an old man of 65 to 70, early in Domitian's reign, to die towards the end of it.⁷³ However, dating the inscription to Domitian's rule, while possible, is not the only option. Assuming Venustus was a freedman procurator (his actual office is not known), we may surmise he was freed and held the office much younger.⁷⁴ If he was freed at 30 (as stipulated by the *lex Aelia Sentia*), at the earliest in AD 81, but no later than AD 96, then, living to the age of 80, T. Flavius Venustus could have seen the reign of Hadrian (in AD 131) or even Antoninus Pius (AD 146).⁷⁵ Thus we find it more likely for the inscription bearing the name of *T. Flavius Venustus Domitiani Augusti libertus* to have been put up after Domitian's death rather than before. It seems that, as in the case of M. Ulpius Proculus' sepulchral inscription, invoking Domitian's name here after his death and

⁷¹ Weaver 1972: 58.

⁷² Abid 2016: 99–114; cf. *AE* 2016, 1912. The proposed reading of *sine cruciatu* (*AE* 2016, 1912), instead of *sine cruciare* is more correct linguistically, although it cannot be confirmed based just on analyzing the find and its photograph.

⁷³ Abid 2016: 102, 105.

⁷⁴ Weaver 1972: 225, 269 calculated that freedman procurators usually assumed their procuratorship at the age of 40 to 45, dying at around 75 on average.

⁷⁵ For a more detailed treatment, see Kłodziński 2020: 306–307.

in the specific, individualized form of this imperial freedman's nomenclature was possible and quite free from sanction, and the emperor's *damnatio* was no obstacle.

Pliny the Younger stressed that only those freedmen (*in usu*) chosen by the emperor himself, his father, and *optimi principes*, entered Trajan's imperial service,⁷⁶ but his text was written for a special occasion, omits Domitian deliberately, and is actually inaccurate.⁷⁷ In fact, the imperial freedmen (*Claudii* and *Flavii*) who had been making their careers under the Flavians, and particularly under Domitian, continued to be active in the state and palace administration in the first half of the 2nd century, but some freedmen of Trajan, and presumably of Nerva as well, had been Domitian's slaves and came from his *familia*.⁷⁸ One such was the M. Ulpius Proculus mentioned above, who had been *Domitiani Caesaris verna*.⁷⁹ G. Fabre's analysis of the nomenclature of Domitian's slaves and freedmen points to the kind of patronage where it was devotion to the imperial service, rather than to the emperor himself, that was crucial, so it is possible to discern a certain continuity in the functioning of the *familia Caesaris* and palace administration.⁸⁰ Still, that does not rule out some slaves and freedmen (*intimi liberti*) having had a closer relationship with Domitian; those may have mentioned serving the last of the Flavii even after his *damnatio*.

The above analysis of epigraphic evidence demonstrates that Domitian's *damnatio* was not absolute and did not result in the memory of that emperor being completely wiped from inscriptions, even though based on their surviving number it does seem likely that originally the decree of the senate from AD 96 was carried out fairly meticulously all across the Empire. Certainly removing traces of Domitian's existence from public spaces, including from inscriptions, would have been more efficient had it gained wider social support and been enacted as zealously as during Nerva's short reign. Calling upon Domitian (and failing to do so) in epigraphic practice after 96 is difficult to evaluate clearly, although it ought to be stressed that Domitian's *damnatio* mandated the erasure of his memory from inscriptions made in his lifetime rather than afterwards. The senate's *damnatio* decree was chiefly a political act, and it was current political situation in Rome that determined its enactment.⁸¹ After the reign of Nerva, who remembered the

⁷⁶ Plin. *Paneg.* 88.3.

⁷⁷ Fabre 1994: 348.

⁷⁸ Fabre 1994: 349.

⁷⁹ *AE* 1901, 171.

⁸⁰ Fabre 1994: 342–344.

⁸¹ The approach to the memory of Domitian could have itself changed as Nerva adopted Trajan. Adopting that commander, who came from circles supportive of Domitian, was treated as an attempt at striking a compromise with the Praetorians and other soldiers demanding that Domitian's murderers be punished (in the summer of 97 there was even rioting in the Praetorian Guard), see Grainger 2003: 96.

political events after Nero's death and was especially interested in his predecessor's quick, efficient and total condemnation,⁸² people could freely include or omit Domitian's name in epigraphic material, and whether they took advantage of that freedom was solely determined by the individual decisions of the soldier, imperial freedman, eques or senator involved and of their attitude to Domitian. While bringing him up a few years or decades after his death may have been looked down on in some circles (in particular among senators; after all, it was in senatorial historiography that Domitian was painted a tyrant⁸³) and treated in Roman political culture as something of a *faux pas* (presumably made light of already in the reign of Trajan, who came from pro-Domitian circles), it was never formally forbidden, as confirmed by epigraphical practice post AD 96—as we have tried to demonstrate, not only among soldiers, but also among *servi et liberti Augusti*.

Statues and images

In the *Panegyricus* Pliny wrote in honour of the emperor Trajan, he reports that after Domitian's assassination a furious mob destroyed statues of his with such passion that it might have as well been murdering the man himself. The author writes the people smashed the heads of the statues on the ground and hacked the limbs off with axes:

*illae autem aureae et innumerabiles strage et ruina publico gaudio litaverunt. Iuvabat illidere solo superbissimos vultus, instare ferro, saevire securibus, ut si singulos ictus sanguis dolorque sequeretur. Nemo tam temperans gaudii seraeque laetitiae, quin instar ultionis videretur, cernere laceros artus, truncata membra, postremo truces horrendasque imagines abietas, excortasque flammis; ut ex illo terrore et minis in usum hominum ac voluptates ignibus mutarentur.*⁸⁴

whereas those innumerable golden images, as a sacrifice to public rejoicing, lie broken and destroyed. It was our delight to dash those proud faces to the ground, to smite them with the sword and savage them with the if blood and agony could follow from every blow. Our transports of joy—so long deferred—were unrestrained; all sought a form of vengeance in beholding those bodies mutilated, limbs hacked in pieces, and finally that baleful, fearsome visage cast into fire, to be melted down, so that from such menacing terror something for man's use and enjoyment should rise out of the flames (tr. B. Radice)

Pliny's account is no doubt exaggerated, made to fit the widespread convention of portraying Domitian as a universally hated despot, found in historical works

⁸² Flower 2006: 238–239.

⁸³ Saller 2000: 4–18.

⁸⁴ Plin. *Paneg.* 52.

created after the emperor's death.⁸⁵ However, we do know Domitian enjoyed the affection of the army and neither do we have grounds to suppose the Roman plebs harboured any exceptional hatred of him, as Suetonius reports the plebs reacted to his murder rather indifferently.⁸⁶ Thus Pliny's account of mass destruction of Domitian's statues at the hands of the common people reflects the negative attitude of senatorial elites rather than any real aggression the inhabitants of Rome felt and took out on statues,⁸⁷ and so should be considered relatively unreliable. Neither do we know exactly what statues of Domitian were allegedly destroyed, as Pliny lists no specific examples. We can only suspect he meant the most monumental ones, placed in vital locations in Rome. E. Varner assumes among those there was a bronze mounted statue of that princeps put up in AD 91 in connection with his victories in Germania in the Forum Romanum, between the Basilica Aemilia and the Basilica Iulia. As depicted in it, Domitian held his right hand up in a gesture of *clementia*, while with his left he held up a statue of Minerva holding Medusa's head. The horse trampled a personification of the Rhine with its front hooves, in reference to Domitian's German victories.⁸⁸ It is supposed the statue features on the reverse of an emission of sesterces minted in the years 95–96.⁸⁹

Pliny's account on the smashing of statues of Domitian after the senate decided on his *damnatio memoriae* is supplemented by Cassius Dio. In the passage quoted above, Dio reports all the gold and silver statues of Domitian were to be smelted and the metals so obtained, used to produce a number of coin emissions.⁹⁰ Based on that, J. Gering assumes Nerva then had coins of his own beaten from the metals.⁹¹

E. Varner has proved that images of Domitian surviving today bear rather few traces of intentional damage we could treat as an expression of *damnatio memoriae*.⁹² One of those few examples is a relief from Domitian's residence in what is today Castel Gandolfo. Only its upper part is preserved, containing an armoured bust of the emperor. The head shows signs of deliberate damage on the face, done with a chisel.⁹³

⁸⁵ See Saller 2000: 4–18.

⁸⁶ Suet. *Dom.* 23.1.

⁸⁷ See Varner 2004: 113; Gering 2012: 161.

⁸⁸ A description of that statue can also be found in Statius (*Sil.* 1.1.32–60); see also Varner 2004: 113.

⁸⁹ See *RIC* II², *Dom.* 797; Gering 2012: 161 n. 123.

⁹⁰ Cass. Dio 68.1.1.

⁹¹ Gering 2012: 301.

⁹² Varner 2004: 113.

⁹³ Varner 2004: 113.

Still, we do know most images of Domitian were after his death and *damnatio* remade or rechiseled into images of the two subsequent emperors, that is, Nerva and Trajan. Generally it is emphasized that nearly all the portraits of Nerva were based off earlier ones of Domitian.⁹⁴ E. Verner's calculations indicate at least 14 images of Domitian were remade into ones of Nerva; thus approximately 82 percent of the extant images of that princeps were based off earlier statues of Domitian. In those cases, Domitian's facial features and hair were subtly modified to make the result resemble Nerva better.⁹⁵ The most spectacular example of portraits of Domitian being rechiseled into images of Nerva is provided by the famous Cancellaria Reliefs (at present in the Vatican Museums). On the so-called relief A, the emperor is shown wearing a tunic and a *paludamentum*, surrounded by the personifications of various deities, by lictors, and soldiers,⁹⁶ Domitian's face deliberately rechiseled into Nerva's (with signs of aging). In spite of those modifications, the image still has traces of Domitian's features. Interestingly, the image of Domitian on the so-called relief B was left intact. There, the emperor is shown next to his father Vespasian as Victory crowns him and lictors and soldiers look on.⁹⁷ Another example is a bronze mounted statue of Domitian from Misenum, which originally stood in the local temple of the imperial cult. It depicted the emperor wearing armour and a *paludamentum*, a spear in his right hand. The dedication of the statue was probably linked to the construction of the *via Domitiana*, which connected Rome to Puteoli. The statue was subsequently remade into one of Nerva; however, rather than replacing the whole head, only the face was rechiseled into Nerva's. As E. Varner demonstrates, that was cheaper than replacing the head. And so, traces of a hairstyle can be seen on the head of the statue characteristic of one of Domitian's portrait types,⁹⁸ which in turn makes it possible to determine to whom the statue was dedicated originally.⁹⁹ The inscription on the statue was rededicated to Nerva too.¹⁰⁰

Some statues and portraits of Domitian were also made into images of Trajan, indicating they were first kept hidden for years—or remained in public spaces in spite of the *damnatio* adopted by the senate, a possibility that cannot be ruled out

⁹⁴ See Flower 2006: 261–262.

⁹⁵ Varner 2004: 115.

⁹⁶ One interpretation is that the relief depicts Domitian's departure (*profectio*) for his campaign against the Chatti in AD 83; according to another, it shows his return (*reditus*) from his campaign against the Sarmatians in 93; see Varner 2004: 119.

⁹⁷ The scene is probably a reference to the new emperor's return to Rome from Judaea in AD 70, after he had hailed the new princeps, see Varner 2004: 119–120.

⁹⁸ In principle, three portrait types of Domitian are distinguished: the first from Vespasian's reign, when Domitian was Caesar (72–75), the second from the period before he came into power (75–81), and the third from his own principate, see Varner 2004: 112.

⁹⁹ Varner 2004: 121; Galinsky 2008: 11.

¹⁰⁰ Flower 2006: 259–260.

either. We know of some interesting examples of the practice from the provinces, such as the full-length *statua togata* of Trajan found in an archaeological excavation in the Roman forum in Sabratha in *Africa Proconsularis* together with a statue of Titus, which suggests it originally depicted Domitian. Another piece of evidence for it having originally been of Domitian is the hairstyle at the back of the head, typical of that emperor's portrait type three (although the hairstyle at the front is characteristic of images of Trajan). The statue was most likely altered after AD 103, which means it may have stood intact in the local forum for seven years after Domitian's death.¹⁰¹ It is rather unlikely for such alterations to have been suggested from above, by the imperial administration; more probably the initiative in this case came from the local authorities, who wanted to get in Trajan's good graces.

Cases are also known of portraits of Domitian being altered so as to become images of his elder brother Titus; they are two sculptures found today in the Vatican Museums, one of them a *statua togata*. The main evidence for those two statues of Titus having originally been of Domitian is, again, the hairstyle, traces of which survive, and are characteristic of Domitian's portrait types. It is supposed they were both modified under Nerva or Trajan. In this case, those who commissioned the alterations intended to posthumously honour Vespasian's elder son; as we know, he was made *divus* after his death.¹⁰² Such actions demonstrate clearly that Domitian's successors wished to cut themselves off, not from the Flavian dynasty, but rather from its last emperor, whose memory had been condemned.¹⁰³

As can be seen, a large majority of portraits of Domitian were made into images of other emperors in the reigns of Nerva and Trajan, showing that as time passed, acts aimed at his memory lost momentum. Still, the alterations were not drastic, so that we can tell they were originally statues of Domitian, proving that in practice, and contrary to the original intentions of the senate, *damnatio memoriae* never brought about an utter annihilation of the memory of the individual. Evidence to that effect includes the fact that some images of Domitian remained quite intact, as we have at least five depictions of him preserved with no damage at all on cameos produced during his principate.¹⁰⁴

To summarize, it is impossible to determine precisely the percentage of statues and other images of Domitian that were destroyed, damaged or altered to depict other emperors, because we do not know exactly how many such images were made under the Flavii. Neither do we know if damage resulted directly from the *damnatio memoriae*, or from other factors, such as barbarian raids under the

¹⁰¹ Varner 2004: 122.

¹⁰² Titus' consecration took place on September 13 of AD 81, see Kienast, Eck, Heil 2017: 105.

¹⁰³ Varner 2004: 123–124.

¹⁰⁴ Varner 2004: 131–132.

late Empire or the acts of Christians, who saw Domitian as a persecutor.¹⁰⁵ Then it cannot be ruled out the statues were damaged by accident. Thus any conclusions regarding the intensity or momentum of Domitian's *damnatio memoriae* drawn from the scale of damage of statues and portraits of his can only be speculative.

Monuments

We know from Cassius Dio that among the sanctions imposed on memory of Domitian was the destruction of all the arches erected in his honour.¹⁰⁶ Suetonius writes Domitian was particularly inclined to have them constructed all over Rome,¹⁰⁷ but we do not know exactly which arches those were. Contrary to Cassius Dio's text, it seems unlikely they were in fact demolished; more probably, only Domitian's name, titulature and statues were removed from them.¹⁰⁸ Considering Domitian's nomenclature was consistently erased from all his official inscriptions in Rome (which we have discussed above), the inscriptions on the arches presumably met the same fate. It is also possible some of the arches were rededicated to Nerva or Trajan, a hypothesis supported by applying that practice to monuments of earlier emperors subject to formal or informal *damnatio*. To quote an example, the honorific arch of Caligula in Thugga in Africa was not destroyed after his death and his informal *damnatio*, but rather rededicated to Claudius. Similarly, the column of Juppiter from Mainz, dedicated to Nero, merely had the emperor's name erased from the inscription after his death and his official *damnatio*.¹⁰⁹ Afterwards, some decorative elements which used to be part of arches of Domitian may have been used to decorate other structures. E. Verner suspects the tropaea which had been there on one of Domitian's arches were later used by Severus Alexander to adorn his nymphaeum on the Esquiline.¹¹⁰

Coins

Ancient authors are silent about Domitian's coins being smelted or damaged,¹¹¹ but certain modern researchers believe traces of *damnatio memoriae* can be discerned on some of his coin series. The example adduced the most often is an

¹⁰⁵ Pollini 2006: 594; Jones 2002: 114–117.

¹⁰⁶ Cass. Dio 68.1.1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ianos arcusque cum quadrigis et insignibus triumphorum per regiones urbis tantos ac tot extruxit*: Suet. Dom. 13.2.

¹⁰⁸ Verner 2004: 133.

¹⁰⁹ See Kleiner 1985: 94–95.

¹¹⁰ Verner 2004: 133.

¹¹¹ We know later such actions were taken against Geta. Cassius Dio (78.12.6) reports Caracalla ordered coins depicting his younger brother smelted after his assassination.

emission from Cybira in Phrygia. However, great caution is needed when analyzing this category of sources: we cannot be absolutely certain if the damage to any given coin is due to deliberate actions, simple wear or some completely different factors. Even determining a coin was damaged on purpose is not proof the reason was *damnatio memoriae*; we then still do not know who damaged it, when or why. The *asses* emission from Cybira mentioned just above is among the few cases where Domitian's coins were deliberately damaged.¹¹² The obverse bears portraits of Domitian and his wife Domitia, but the depiction of the emperor and his titulature (ΔΟΜΙΤΙΑΝΟΣ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ) have been intentionally erased (or only made indistinct) with a chisel. It strikes the eye that Domitia's image remains intact, indicating it was only the emperor who was targeted in this case. Scholars explicitly interpret the damage as a result of *damnatio memoriae*,¹¹³ however, the question immediately arises of whether that was in fact due to someone consciously carrying out the senate's decree on condemning Domitian's memory, an act of loyalty to the new dynasty or a spontaneous action of a person unknown to us who merely vented off their anger at the overthrown emperor. In our opinion none of those options can be ruled out, although there is certainly no clear causal link between Domitian's *damnatio* and the exceptional cases of damage to coins depicting him.

Conclusions

The analysis of a number of categories of sources carried out in the article indicates that contrary to the accounts of ancient historians, Domitian's *damnatio memoriae* was not total. In the light of the extant sources, H.I. Flower's opinion that the sanctions on the memory of that emperor adopted by the senate after his assassination were more severe than in the case of previous emperors and members of the *domus Augusta* subject to *damnatio*, is only a hypothesis.¹¹⁴ No doubt the way Domitian was subsequently depicted in senatorial historical writings, which cemented the image of him as a cruel tyrant, was one of the more significant consequences of the senate's decree. His *damnatio memoriae* must be seen chiefly in the context of legitimizing Nerva's power. Since Nerva could not demonstrate any family ties to either of the preceding dynasties, public opinion needed to be convinced Domitian had been a despot and it had been necessary to overthrow him and have a new princeps. With that in mind it is clear officially condemning

¹¹² RPC II, 1262.

¹¹³ Hostein 2004: 223 n. 13; Varner 1995: 202–203; Varner 2004: 115.

¹¹⁴ Flower 2006: 234–235.

the memory of Domitian was a political move the new government could not dispense with. We can only suspect it would have been carried out more consistently had Nerva's reign been longer. Trajan himself, having risen to power from pro-Domitian military circles,¹¹⁵ was not particularly interested in condemning the memory of the last of the Flavii. On the other hand, because of the political compromise of sorts which he had with the senate, he did not formally rescind the *damnatio* or have Domitian consecrated.

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¹¹⁵ See note 81.

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