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Flavian feathers: expressing dynasty and divinity through peacocks

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Abstract: In 82/3 CE the peacock was introduced on Roman imperial coins. It appeared on the reverse of precious-metal coins struck for Domitia Longina, and reappeared in 88/9 for the same empress and for Julia Titi. This article contextualizes these coins in both the iconographic tradition and the contemporary politics of Domitian's Rome. It shows that the appearance of the peacock served a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it was part of a programmatic depiction of the imperial couple as Jupiter and Juno; on the other hand, it belonged to a new way of visualizing the divine triad worshipped in the Capitolium as restored by Domitian. The article illustrates how the peacock was embedded in a concerted program that simultaneously highlighted the Flavian dynasty, the apotheosis of its deceased members (both men and women), the divine association of those alive, and the dynasty's care for the cityscape. In doing so, the coins stood at the beginning of an imperial tradition in which all of these elements became part of imperial (self-)display.

Keywords: Domitian, Domitia Longina, Julia Titi, coinage, dynasty, consecration, peacock

In 82/3 (Fig. 1) and 88/9 CE (Fig. 2) the Roman mint issued *aurei* that depicted on the obverse the busts of Titus' daughter, Julia (also known and henceforth referred to as Julia Titi), and Domitian's wife, Domitia Longina, respectively, with a peacock on the reverses of both coins. Despite being the first Roman coins to depict a peacock, the sacred animal of the goddess Juno, these *aurei* have only appeared as a side note in scholarly literature, usually to support a conclusion that offers a better or more complete understanding of Domitian's reign as a whole.¹ They have not yet been

¹ See Varner (1995), 202 who made a reference to the peacock coins to support his classification of Domitia Longina's sculptural portraits in three distinctive types, without attending to the numismatic

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examined in their own right. In this contribution, instead of using these coins as an instrumental footnote to an overarching narrative, as has been the case so far, we will put these coins at the center of our analysis by taking into account the iconographic precedents and parallels of the coins, as well as their contemporary context, all of which add to our understanding of these *aurei*. In what follows, we assess the novelty of the peacock coins in their respective historical, numismatic and iconographic contexts. To that end, before we can turn to the analysis of the coinage of 82/3 and 88/9, we discuss the imperial practice of associating women with the divine during the preceding decennia and, secondly, map the iconographic tradition of the peacock on the Italian peninsula (and beyond). We argue that iconographic precedents and historical context both paved the way for the inclusion of the peacock on the coinage of Domitia Longina and need to be taken into account in order to evaluate to what extent the inclusion of the peacock in the official visual language of the Flavians was self-explanatory. To put it briefly, would the coins' audiences have understood the message(s) the imagery evoked? After all, a peacock had never appeared on imperial coins, as we will demonstrate. Could a numismatic program be successful if it was too novel, or were there enough anchor points for the coins' target audiences to make sense of the visual language?



Fig. 1: Peacock *aureus* of 82/3 with Domitia Longina on the obverse (*RIC* II.1 Domitian 150). Source: American Numismatic Society, 1967.153.132.

Several questions will help us determine this:

- i. To what extent did the Domitianic coins follow or differ from the visual language established in the past Julio-Claudian decades to represent imperial women?
- ii. How do the peacock coins relate to other, past as well as contemporary, numismatic developments?

context of the coins. Also Wood (2010), 52 who used the peacock coins of 88/9 to support her hypothesis for a Flavian propagandistic strategy in which the imperial family was presented as a harmonious entity. The same interpretation is also put forward (without referencing Wood's article) in Fraser (2015), 235. All dates in this article are CE unless otherwise noted.

- iii. Which ideological messages did the peacock coins – individually and as part of a series – evoke and how does this further our understanding of the role of Domitia Longina and Julia Titi in expressions of Flavian ideology?



Fig. 2: Left: Peacock aureus of 88/9 with Domitia Longina on the obverse (RIC II.1 Domitian 678, cf. nos. 679–681). Right: Peacock aureus of 88/9 with Julia Titi on the obverse (RIC II.1 Domitian 683, cf. no. 684). Source: *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.

It is worth pointing out from the outset that the *main* focus of this contribution is to shed light on processes of tradition and innovation during the Flavian dynasty. We aim to explain to what extent these peacock coins stood at the beginning of a tradition in which the peacock was explicitly linked to the realm of apotheosis. Although an even more holistic approach in which the iconography of the Flavian age is analyzed in detail vis-à-vis the ancient literature, some of which with a strong laudatory character that seems to play into the existing iconography, would help us understand the representation of the imperial family even further, such a detailed examination is beyond the scope of this contribution.

I Imperial women and divine association

By the time Domitia Longina's first peacock coins appeared, the appearance of the emperor's wives and female relatives on imperial coinage was a 45-year-old phenomenon. Caligula's reign was a transformational period in the development of imperial women's inclusion as key figures in imperial ideology and its dissemination through visual communication. In 37, the Roman mint introduced an important innovation when it produced the first coin type that depicted living women of the *Domus Augusta* and identifying them by name.² In doing so, Rome appropriated practices that were

² For a detailed account on these coins, see Trillmich (1978). Note that some scholars have identified earlier Julio-Claudian coins as the first coinage on which living women were depicted. However, in none of these examples were the women identified by name nor depicted in a clearly recognizable form. *RIC*² I Augustus 404 and 405 have three busts on the reverse that have been identified by scholar-

already common in the Greek provinces of the Roman Empire since the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius.³ *Sestertii* and *dupondii* were issued with the portrait of the emperor on the obverse and three standing female figures on the reverse, carrying divine attributes (a cornucopia, *patera* and rudder), accompanied by the names AGRIPPINA, DRUSILLA and IULIA.⁴ Through the coins' visual design, Caligula's sisters were assimilated to the abstract concepts of Security, Harmony and Good Fortune. This coin type was an important step towards the creation of the so-called 'empress coin', a coin type on which an imperial woman's isolated profile – as was customary for the emperor – appears on the obverse.⁵ The peacock coins of Domitia Longina and Julia Titi in 82/3 and 88/9 discussed in this contribution are such 'empress coins'. One of the most common design strategies in this type of coinage is to pair the imperial woman's portrait on the obverse with an image that clearly refers to a goddess or an imperial or personified virtue on the reverse. This suggests a close connection between the divine and the imperial woman in particular, and the entire *Domus Augusta* by extension.⁶ By the time of Domitian's reign, however, this was far from systematized.



Fig. 3: *Aureus* with Antonia Augusta wearing corn-ears on the obverse and Constantia Augusti on the reverse (RIC² I Claudius 65). Source: American Numismatic Society, 1956.184.19.

ship as Gaius Caesar, Julia and Lucius Caesar (e.g., Fantham 2006, 66–68). The reverse bust of Diana on RIC² I Augustus 403 has also been understood (and equally often disputed) as a possible depiction of Julia (see Wood 1999, 63–65). The Tiberian *dupondii* dedicated to Pietas, Iustitia and Salus Augusta, in 22/3 (RIC² I Tiberius, 43, 46–47) have also been forwarded as a first incorporation of a living woman on imperial coinage (Kleiner and Matheson 1996, 59–60). It may very well have been the case that to some viewers the portrait of the divinity suggested the emperor's mother, who had recovered from a serious illness around the same time, but Livia is not identified as such. For a short overview of the debate, see Boatwright (2021), 128 n. 51. The literature on these and other coins (allegedly) depicting Julio-Claudian women is extensive, see, besides those already mentioned, also Barrett (2002) and Harvey (2019).

3 See esp. Hahn (1994).

4 RIC² I Gaius 33, 41. In 22/3, a coin was issued that depicted a *carpentum* accompanied by Livia's name. Though its meaning remains unclear, it was the first public reference to a living imperial woman on central coinage, yet without actually depicting her in a recognizable portrait or shape (RIC² I Tiberius 50–51; see Ginsburg 2006, 59–60). Caligula's coinage clearly took it one step further by portraying the emperor's sisters in a clearly recognizable bodily shape and identifying them.

5 For the term 'empress coin', see Boatwright (2021), 129–139.

6 Williams (2007), 150–158; Rassiller (2022), 137–225.

Though both living and deceased imperial women began to appear, undisputedly identified by name, in imperial coinage from Caligula's reign onwards, they were initially rarely paired with deities or abstractions. Instead, their portrait appeared on the reverse in combination with the isolated profile of the emperor on the obverse to emphasize family connections. Alternatively, they were visually connected to the religious sphere in general and the imperial cult in particular either through a depiction of the special funeral rites that were granted to them after their death or by representing them as *Diva* or as a *flaminica*.⁷ There are two notable exceptions to this pattern. During Claudius' reign, both his deceased mother Antonia and his wife, Agrippina Minor, appeared on coins: they wear Ceres' crown of grain-ears and have their hair in a long plait behind.⁸ Their portraits are almost identical. Yet, whereas Agrippina is paired with either the reigning emperor Claudius or her son Nero, thus following the general pattern set during Caligula's reign, Antonia is paired with an image of Constantia Augusta on the reverse (Fig. 3). In doing so, as others have pointed out, Claudius' reverence towards his mother and the care of the grain supply are emphasized.⁹

The most remarkable deviation from the pattern, however, appeared in the reign of Titus and already points towards a tendency to give a prominent place to the women of the Flavian dynasty in the visual communication in the capital. In 80/1, a series of *denarii* and *dupondii* appeared on which the isolated profile of the emperor's daughter, Julia Titi, was paired with the figures of Salus Augusta, Venus Augusta, Vesta, Concordia Augusta, Pax Augusta and Ceres Augusta (*RIC* II.1 Titus 385–398). Julia herself did not carry divine attributes. On the types where she was pictured with her hair in a long plait, she also wore a diadem, an attribute that was already used in Julio-Claudian sculpture for different imperial women but had not been introduced in imperial coinage.¹⁰ On the types where Julia adapted the new 'Flavian' hairstyle with the hair bundled high in front and knotted in back, the dia-

7 In combination with the emperor's portrait, see *RIC*² I Gaius 13–14, 21–22, 30 (Agrippina Maior); *RIC*² I Claudius 92, 104 (Antonia Augusta); *RIC*² I Nero 1–3 (Agrippina Minor); *RIC*² I Vitellius 78–79 (Vitellia); see also *RIC*² I Claudius 102 (Agrippina Maior paired with the inscription SC and the titulature of the emperor). In combination with a depiction of funerary rites, see *RIC*² I Gaius 55 (Agrippina Maior); *RIC*² I Claudius 103 (Agrippina Maior). With clear references to the imperial cult, see *RIC*² I Claudius 67–68 (Antonia Augusta as *sacerdos*); *RIC*² I Claudius 101 (Diva Augusta); *RIC*² I Nero 6–7 (Agrippina Minor and Divus Augustus and Diva Augusta); *RIC*² I Galba 142–143, 150–153, 184–189, 223–224, 331–338, 432–433 (Diva Augusta).

8 *RIC*² I Claudius 75 (Agrippina-Ceres with a young Nero), 80–81 (Claudius with Agrippina-Ceres), 65–66 (Antonia-Ceres with Constantia), 67–68 (Antonia-Ceres with SACERDOS DIVI AUGUSTI).

9 Rassiller (2022), 145.

10 Alexandridis (2004), 49–50. On the diadem as an attribute of imperial power, see Hekster (2023), 88–90.

dem was left out.¹¹ These series illustrate that one did not shy away to introduce new elements to what appeared to have been an established Julio-Claudian pattern. On the one hand, the coin designers introduced iconographic innovations such as the diadem, the hairstyle and the association between a living imperial woman and the realm of the divine, not in one individual coin type such as during the reigns of Caligula and Claudius, but in a series of six types that appeared simultaneously. On the other hand, by emphasizing imperial virtues and deities such as Concordia, Pax or Vesta, for the first time, an imperial woman was used to illustrate the well-being and continuity of the imperial dynasty and – by extension the Roman Empire – now and in the future. Although the repertoire of divinities was elaborate, the goddess Juno, whose peacock was used on Domitia Longina and Julia Titi's empress coins, was not included in Titus' coinage.

We have sketched the preceding history of what we call the Flavian peacock empress coins in detail in order to demonstrate that there were no direct parallels to these coins. In a numismatic context, evoking this direct association between an imperial woman and Juno on a central level was a novelty. At the same time, modern scholars have argued that associating the empress with Juno was an established 'Roman imperial tradition'.¹² However, it is rarely explained what is meant by 'tradition', nor is it made explicit in which (visual or otherwise) media this tradition was rooted. This might seem nit-picking or asking for a clarification of something that is deemed obvious or common knowledge. Nevertheless, putting something under the umbrella of tradition without trying to clarify who is involved in creating it and in which historical contexts this tradition came about obscures the processes by which a tradition is established and maintained. To use the words of Osborne: "To ignore tradition, or indeed to mistake tradition for *habitus* or merely for a trend, is to write the individual responsible for the cultural product in question out of the story."¹³ Could we assume that when one or more precedents exist, a 'tradition' is established? And, how many precedents do we need, how many different agents need to be involved, and to what extent do these precedents need to occur cross-regionally to be able to talk about an established imperial tradition? This is worth pointing out as it forces us to reassess the character of the Flavians' politics of representation. It forces us to address the decisions that were consciously made, the actors who made them, their awareness of the past, and the extent to which these decisions lasted in a world of change. It helps us to understand whether the different aspects in their politics of representation were traditional or innovative.

¹¹ For an examination of Julia Titi's different portrait types, see Rosso (2009).

¹² For the phrase 'Roman imperial tradition', see Dominik (1994), 178.

¹³ Osborne (2008), 286

A first question that needs to be addressed with regard to the peacock coins, therefore, or any coins for that matter, is who was involved in creating these images. Unfortunately, there rarely is any evidence that helps us determine who played an active role in the choice of the imagery. Some scholars assume that the emperor was the main decision-maker; others take a more cautious approach and feel that the emperor would at the very least have been consulted on the imagery of coins before they were issued; still others think it more likely that mint workers were behind the design with the emperor as one of the audience members at whom the visual language was targeted.¹⁴ So far there is no way of determining for certain which of these scenarios applies to the Flavian period. The decision-making processes might also have varied according to the circumstances and the people involved: strong personalities potentially had more impact on the decision-making process, which could trigger changes in the execution processes of an issue. As there is no direct evidence as to whether the peacock coins during Domitian's reign were the result of a top-down or a bottom-up decision, we refrain from taking an explicit stand. The least we can say is that the imagery will have been in line with what the emperor stood for or aimed to stand for. It is inconceivable that anyone involved in the process will have deliberately wanted to harm or insult the imperial dynasty with ill-chosen imagery.

It has been assumed to be self-evident that the appearance of the peacock in Domitian's coinage intended to align Domitia Longina in 82/3, and both her and Julia Titi in 88/9 with Juno. In the eastern provinces during the Julio-Claudian period, several female relatives of reigning emperors had already been associated with Juno's Greek counterpart, Hera, on coins as well as in papyri or inscriptions, to which we will return below.¹⁵ Yet, when considering the complete absence of associations between women and Juno in the imperial *visual* communication on the Italian peninsula – and based on the surviving sources the same can be said for non-imperial imagery – the Roman appropriation of the peacock/Juno/empress association needs some explanation.¹⁶

¹⁴ See, with further references, Noreña (2014); Claes (2014); Elkins (2018); Kelly (2020).

¹⁵ Mikocki (1995), nos. 63–66 (Livia), 86–89 (Livia), 243–244 (Messalina), 266 (Julia Titi?), 281 (Domitia Longina), 322–328 (Sabina), 330–331 (Sabina), 421–422 (Julia Domna), 452–456 (Plautilla), 478 (Tranquillina). See also Barrett (2002), 209; Levick (2007), 130 and 136; Brennan (2018), 11.

¹⁶ In his catalogue, Mikocki lists no examples of a Juno/empress association on the Italian peninsula before Sabina, Faustina Maior and Julia Domna. See Mikocki (1995), nos. 321 (Sabina), 356–357 (Faustina Maior), 423–427 (Julia Domna).

II The peacock before the Flavian age

There is no way to establish a detailed chronology of what came first, nor to clearly define the extent to which socio-economic and religious phenomena influenced each other, but, as far as we can tell, the arrival of the peacock on the Italian peninsula and the peacock/Juno association occurred more or less simultaneously. Though peafowl were bred in different parts of the eastern Mediterranean from the fifth century BCE onwards, pavoniculture did not become part of Roman farming until the first century BCE, as the literary sources attest.¹⁷ Peafowl were kept for profit: the peacock feathers were sold as luxury accessories to embellish dress, hairstyle or houses, and the eggs and flesh appeared on the dinner tables of wealthy elites.¹⁸ In the first century CE, peacocks were a well-established commodity in Roman elite circles. Although there was a centuries-old tradition in the Greek Mediterranean that visualized Juno's Greek counterpart Hera with the peacock, on the Italian peninsula the connection between the bird and Juno seems to be no older than the late first century BCE or early first century CE.

In the Greek Mediterranean, Hera was worshipped in the Heraion on the island of Samos, where, according to Menodotos of Samos, peacocks were bred and dispersed from there to other regions.¹⁹ By 200 BCE the birds were clearly considered an identifying token of the goddess and her shrine, for Samos started minting coins that showed the portrait of Hera on the obverse, while her scepter and a peacock standing on a caduceus adorned the reverse.²⁰ During the imperial period, this numismatic practice continued but now Hera's peacock was also paired with the obverse portrait of the emperor and in one instance, during Nero's reign, with an imperial woman, Agrippina Minor.²¹

On the Italian peninsula, peacock imagery first appeared in the first century BCE without associating the bird with Juno. In her detailed iconographic study of the peacock motif in Mediterranean art, Tortel argues that the oldest images of the birds in houses on the Italian peninsula were meant to highlight the Dionysiac theme of its surroundings rather than evoking the goddess Juno.²² The peacock ap-

¹⁷ Varro, *Rust.* 3.6. Cf. Columella, *Rust.* 8.11; Enn. *Ann.* 1, fr. 9; Plin. *HN* 10.45.

¹⁸ Cic. *Fam.* 9.18.3, Suet. *Vit.* 13.2; cf. Mart. 13.70, Juv. 1.143.

¹⁹ *FGrH* 541 F2 (in Ath. 14.655a). For an in-depth study of the Samian shrine, see O'Brian (1993).

²⁰ *BMC Ionia*, Samos, nos. 201–208. For a discussion of the iconography, see already Gardner (1882), 218.

²¹ *RPC* I, nos. 2681 (Augustus), 2686 (Agrippina Minor); II, nos. 1138 (Domitian). Cf. *RPC* II, nos. 1133 (Domitian), 1134 (Domitia Longina), 2097 (Trajan); IV.2 no. 9155 (Faustina Minor) for different motifs with peacocks.

²² See Tortel (2019), 177–195 who suggests that in wall paintings the peacock could also be read as alluding to the mystery cults of Isis/Demeter and Orpheus, in addition to the cult of Dionysus.

peared, in combination with other fauna and flora, as a celebration of human, animal and plant nature. Frescoes in the villa of Oplontis dated to the mid- or late first century BCE, for instance, show the peacock amidst theatre masks of tragedy, branches of myrtle, flower garlands, a garden fountain, dolphin and dove.²³ In less well-defined contexts, the peacock also made its entrance in various art forms of the western Mediterranean, featuring on oil-lamps, for example.²⁴

To summarize briefly, in the two centuries leading up to the reign of Domitian, the peacock emerged as part of the iconography in the western Mediterranean, but unlike the eastern Mediterranean it was not yet explicitly linked with Juno. This does not mean of course that a viewer could nonetheless make this connection. The first clear instance in which the peacock is depicted as the Roman goddess' totem animal occurs in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, dated to 8 CE. In Ovid's tale, Juno had asked Argus to guard one of her husband's paramours, the nymph Io, who was turned into a heifer by Zeus. Ovid explains how Argus' task was facilitated by his one hundred eyes, with which he always kept watch. Zeus, taking pity on Io, sent Mercury to kill Argus and to free Io of her guardian. In two different passages, Ovid explains how Juno took the eyes of the beheaded Argus and put them on the feathers of her bird, the peacock.²⁵

At this point, it is worth pointing out that the first instance in which a living woman is likened to the Roman deity Juno can also be attributed to Ovid. Contrary to the Greek provinces, of which the above-mentioned Samian coin with Agrippina Minor is a clear example, on the Italian peninsula and in the city of Rome, the association of imperial women with Juno was absent, with only one notable exception. In his exile poetry, Ovid depicts Livia as having the beauty of Venus and the character of Juno, thus making her a worthy consort for Augustus, whom Ovid associates

23 See Oplontis, villa A (so-called villa of Poppaea) triclinium 15, room 66, 70 and 81, porticus 23, caldarium 8. See Tortel (2019), 178–187, 190 with illustrations.

24 See, e.g., oil-lamps from Lyons now held by the Louvre, roughly dated to the first century CE: *Musée de Louvre*, inv. nr. CA 6724 (=MG 5282); *Musée de Louvre*, inv. nr. CA 6740 (=MG 5295). Similar to the former is a lamp found at Colchester, yet manufactured in Gaul, and now in the British Museum: BM reg. no. 1870,0402.672.

25 Ov. *Met.* 1.722–723: *Excipit hos volucrisque suae Saturnia pennis / collocat et gemmis caudam stellantibus inplet*. 'Saturnia took these eyes and set them on the feathers of her bird, filling his tail with star-like jewels' (trans. Loeb Classical Library). And Ov. *Met.* 2.531–533: *Di maris adnuerant: habili Saturnia curru, / ingreditur liquidum pavonibus aethera pictis, / tam nuper pictis caeso pavonibus Argo* (...) 'The gods of the sea granted her prayer, and Saturnia, mounting her swift chariot, was borne back through the yielding air by her gaily decked peacocks, peacocks but lately decked with the slain Argus' eyes (...) (trans. Loeb Classical Library). Tortel (2019), 221 attributes the invention of this story to Ov., as there are no parallel stories in Greek mythology or on Greek ceramics.

with Jupiter.²⁶ Ovid is the first to represent the reigning emperor and his consort with their divine equivalents. No other surviving text, inscription or artwork repeats this association in such unambiguous terms until the time of Domitian, when the poet Statius echoes Ovid's motif, to which we will return when discussing the coinage of 82/3 below.

III The coins of 82/3: the divine imperial couple and the restoration of the Capitolium

The peacock first appeared in Domitianic precious metal coinage in 82/3. It appeared walking right and surrounded by the legend *CONCORDIA AVGVSTA* on the reverse of *aurei* and *denarii* struck for Domitia Longina.²⁷ During the late Republic, the peacock had occasionally appeared as a control-mark, yet to have the bird fill the field of a coin was nothing short of a numismatic novelty.²⁸

It is difficult to ascertain what had inspired the coin design. As mentioned, the first century CE had seen an increasing number of peacocks in western Mediterranean art. The designs we find on the *aurei* may very well have been inspired by these contemporary iconographic developments.²⁹ On the bronze coins from Samos (Fig. 3), for example, the peacocks that appeared were quite similar in composition to their Roman counterparts. Of course, a peacock facing right is a rather generic image, so the engravers of the imperial peacock coins did not necessarily require iconographic prototypes to come up with their own design of the bird. At the very least, however, the very existence of the Samian peacock coins would have increased the recognition of Domitia as the earthly manifestation of Juno at a local level, all the more so because the empress also appeared on the obverse of Samian bronzes with Juno and her peacock on the reverse (*RPC* II, no. 1134).

What probably strengthened the association between Juno, the peacock, and Domitia were coeval *aurei* and *denarii* on which the portrait of Domitian was paired

²⁶ Ov. *Pont.* 3.117–118; cf. 3.145; *Fast.* 1.648–650. See Johnson (1997).

²⁷ *RIC* II.1 Domitian 150–151. As far as dating is concerned, these *aurei* were among the first coins to be introduced after Domitian's currency reforms, which saw an increase in the weight of *denarii* and *aurei* in late 82. These reforms corresponded to a complete overhaul in coin typology, for which see Claes (2014), 168–169. For the currency reforms, see Carradice (1983), 12–21; *RIC* II.1, at 242–244; Butcher and Ponting (2014), 384–389.

²⁸ Crawford (1974), 400–401, 416. For the use and purpose of these marks, see most recently Witschonke (2012).

²⁹ It is noteworthy that the peacocks we find on the oil lamps mentioned above are depicted quite similarly to those on the Flavian *aurei* of 82/3 and 88/9, perhaps suggesting one influencing the other.

with another sacred bird on the reverse: Jupiter's eagle (*RIC* II.1 Domitian 143–144). The contemporaneity of their appearance suggests these coins were part of a programmatic attempt to associate the imperial couple with their divine counterpart. On a chalcedony cameo, we even find the peacock carrying the bust of Domitia, which may have been paired with the portrait of Domitian atop an eagle.³⁰ For both the coins and the cameo, the use of the birds may be interpreted as a subtle means of associating the imperial couple with the divine – as opposed to outright identifying them as such. Such subtleties were not new in imperial representation, as similar associations with the gods had been made on coins of Augustus and Nero, for example.³¹ The symbolic equation between the imperial couple and the divine couple is also attested outside visual representation. In his poem on the eunuch Earinus, Statius explicitly casts Domitian and Domitia in a divine role as he speaks of how Earinus is favored by the 'Ausonian Jupiter and the Roman Juno alike' (*Iuppiter Ausonius pariter Romanaque Iuno*).³² In the provinces, this association was also recognized, with a statue base from Stratonikeia, for example, speaking of Domitia as 'the new Hera, wife of the emperor' (Δομετίαν νέαν Ἥραν τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ).³³

Ovid, as we have seen, had already come up with the equation between the imperial couple and Jupiter/Juno as an expression of marital harmony for Augustus and Livia.³⁴ The legend *CONCORDIA AVGVSTA* suggests that our peacock *aurei* were meant to express a similar message for Domitian and Domitia.³⁵ But Roman coins often bore more than one message, and when seen in the light of the context of its production additional layers of significance may be distinguished.³⁶ The date of 82/3 makes it tempting to relate the *aurei* to Domitian's efforts in restoring the cityscape, which he took over from Titus after his brother's demise in 81. This had been

³⁰ BM reg. no. 1899,0722.4; see with Varner (1995), 201–202. Also, see Megow (1987), 262.

³¹ See most recently, Grau (2022), 109–113.

³² *Stat. Silv.* 3.4.18: *misisti Latio placida quem fronte ministrum | Iuppiter Ausonius pariter Romanaque Iuno | aspiciunt et uterque probant, nec tanta potenti | terrarum domino divum sine mente voluptas*. 'You sent to Latium a servant whom Ausonian Jupiter and Roman Juno alike regard with kindly brow, both approving; and not without the will of the gods is the lord of earth so well pleased' (trans. Loeb Classical Library). See Ahl (1984), 205–208; Giusti (2020).

³³ *IStr* 1008 (=SEG 31, 945). Domitian's association with Zeus Olympios is well-attested for Ephesus: see Friesen (1993), 118–120.

³⁴ Johnson (1997), 403–420.

³⁵ Carradice (1983), 20. The connection between the peacock and the marital harmony of Domitian and Domitia has also been made in the context of a sardonyx cameo kept in the British Museum (BM reg. no. 1824,0301.55): Fraser (2015), 205–266, 226–227. The idea of Domitia as the embodiment of (imperial) harmony was recognized in the provinces, for which see Hahn (1994), 243.

³⁶ On the multi-interpretability of Roman coins, see Cheung (1998), 54.

prompted by a fire that struck the city in 80, which had ravaged much of its sacred landscape (Suet. *Tit.* 8.3–4; Jer. *Chron.* 2105). Not least significant of the buildings that were destroyed was the Capitolium, the temple sacred to the city's protective triad: Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. Domitian's responsibility for its restoration is well-attested in the literary sources.³⁷ On coins of imperial produce, however, explicit references to the Capitolium are lacking. The temple with the statues of its main deities nevertheless interestingly appears on *cistophori* surrounded by the legend CAPIT(olium) RESTIT(uit) ('[he] restored the Capitolium').³⁸

To have the restored Capitolium appear on coins meant to circulate outside of Rome, but not on coins used in the city itself, seems somewhat peculiar. However, even if an explicit reference to the temple was lacking on imperial precious-metal coins of 82/3, we may see an allusion to its restoration in a more implicit way. In fact, Juno and Jupiter were not the only members of the Capitoline triad who made a numismatic appearance in 82/3, as the same was true for Minerva.³⁹

Minerva's appearance on Domitian's coins is of course hardly revealing, given that the well-known association between the two had been made from the very moment Domitian had appeared on imperial coins.⁴⁰ In 82/3, the connection between the emperor and his patroness was further emphasized by having Minerva appear in bust form on some of the *aurei* (RIC II.1 Domitian 138–140). As Wallace-Hadrill has pointed out before, using images of a bust on both sides of a coin more commonly created a deliberate confusion among the coin's audience as to who was to be considered its issuing authority.⁴¹ On a medium for which a single bust was the norm, placing a bust on each side gave the viewer an idea that both busts were to be closely connected – whether it be for dynastic reasons or for associations with the divine.⁴² On the *aurei* of 82/3 we see a combination of the two, as the double bust types were also used for Domitian/Domitia, Divus Vespasian/Diva Domitilla, and

37 Domitian's restoration of the Capitolium: Mart. 9.3.7; Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.100; Plut. *Vit. Pub.* 15.1–3; Suet. *Dom.* 5.1; Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 3.3; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 11.4; Jer. *Chron.* 2105; Eutr. 7.23.5; with Darwall-Smith (1996), 105–110; De Angeli in Steinby, *LTUR* 3.151–152; Siwicki (2020), 115–118.

38 RIC II.1 Domitian 841–842. Like the peacock *aurei*, a reference to Domitian's eight consulship allows us to date these coins to 82/3. The actual completion of the temple's restoration is likely of a later date, as was also remarked by Darwall-Smith (1996), 106. The *cistophori* reused a reverse type that had appeared slightly before during Titus's reign, similarly anticipating the building's actual restoration: RIC II.1 Titus 515.

39 *Denarii*: RIC II.1 Domitian 98–99, 158–159, 162, 164–165, 167, 169. *Aurei*: RIC II.1 Domitian 97, 137–140, 161, 163, 166, 168, 171.

40 For the numismatic representation of the association between Domitian and Minerva, see Morawiecki (1977).

41 Wallace-Hadrill (1986), 71–72.

42 On this, see also Betjes (2022), 64–68.

Divus Titus/Julia Titi.⁴³ Within the series, there was also room for Domitian's progeny, as his deceased son appeared as DIVVS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F ('the deified Caesar, son of Domitianus') on the reverse of *aurei* bearing the obverse portrait of Domitia.⁴⁴ In their togetherness, the coins showed the Flavian dynasty in all its glory. The fact that each deceased member appeared as *divus* or *diva*, moreover, made sure that the surviving members could also expect apotheosis upon their demise.⁴⁵

While still among the living, however, the Domitian/eagle and Domitia/peacock coins cast the imperial couple as the earthly representatives of Jupiter and Juno. Their double busts in the *aurei* series of 82/3 should therefore be seen in conjunction with the Domitian/Minerva *aurei*, as it effectively brought the Capitoline triad to coinage. Seen in this light, the CONCORDIA AVGVSTA around the peacock was not just speaking of the marital bliss of the imperial couple, as put forward by Wood, but perhaps also of the harmony of the *trias Capitolina*, which was (in the process of being) secured by the restoration of the Capitolium.⁴⁶ The simultaneity of these series of *aurei* and the CAPIT RESTIT *cistophori*, moreover, may well suggest a concerted effort to highlight the restoration of the Capitolium in Rome and Asia Minor alike.

In short, the peacock coins of 82/3 were rich in meaning and alluded to a variety of contexts. On its own their image and surrounding legend could be interpreted as a means to bring Domitia into the realm of Juno, so as to project her as the loyal wife of Jovian Domitian. As part of a series, on the other hand, the message was far-reaching. It belonged to a program that exalted the Flavian dynasty, with its deceased members having already become divine, and the living members being the gods' representatives on earth in anticipation of deification. Corresponding apparently closely to Domitian's restoration of the Capitolium, moreover, this message may even have received a sense of topicality that was strongly embedded in the Roman cityscape.

⁴³ Domitian/Domitia: *RIC* II.1 Domitian 148. Divus Vespasian/Diva Domitilla: *RIC* II.1 Domitian 146; Divus Titus/Julia Titi: *RIC* II.1 Domitian 147. Of these double bust coins, only those of Domitian/Domitia would also appear on *denarii*: *RIC* II.1 Domitian 149.

⁴⁴ *RIC* II.1 Domitian 152, 154. The type also appeared as a *denarius* with obverse portraits of Domitia (*RIC* II.1 Domitian 153) and Domitian (*RIC* II.1 Domitian 154), the latter of which may have been a mule, as suggested by *RIC* II.1, p. 276 n. 17.

⁴⁵ That the *aurei* of 82/3 were among the most numerous gold emissions of the reign of Domitian would surely have increased their impact: see Carradice (1983), 97–98, 161–162.

⁴⁶ Wood (2010), 52, argues this with regard to the 88/9 coins, with the same legend, and ignores the 82/3 precedent. Also Fraser (2015), 226–227, 235.

IV The coins of 88/9: Domitian's two wives?

The peacock would not reappear on imperial coins until five years later, when the same reverse image and legend were again paired with the obverse portrait of Domitia Longina, now including a reference to Domitian's new *cognomen ex virtute* Germanicus in the obverse legend (*RIC* II.1 Domitian 678–681). This time, however, the peacock would also appear on coins struck for Julia Titi (*RIC* II.1 Domitian 683–684). In its composition, Julia's bird received a treatment that differed from the peacock moving to the right that appeared with Domitia's effigy. Instead, it appeared frontally with its tail spread open, surrounded by the legend DIVI TITI FILIA.⁴⁷ Although such a depiction of the peacock had appeared in other art forms before the Flavian period, there was no numismatic precedent for this image.⁴⁸

Domitia had received various reverse images in 82/3. On the *aurei* of 88/9, both her portrait and that of Julia Titi were *only* paired with the peacock reverse type. That both empresses received the same symbol of Juno may strike one as somewhat odd, if one recalls that in the case of Domitia the peacock had meant to signify marital harmony. This it probably continued to do in 88/9, since the legend CONCORDIA AVGVST(A) remained unchanged. The change of the legend around Julia Titi's peacock and the bird's different rendering notwithstanding, one may appreciate why we read in Suetonius and Dio of an alleged affair between the emperor and his niece (Suet. *Dom.* 22; Dio Cass. 67.3.2). Whatever the veracity of the rumors, the somewhat ambiguous coin iconography may have made matters worse in fueling them.

It is, of course, unthinkable that the *aurei* struck for Julia Titi tried to undermine the very marital harmony boasted on the coins struck for Domitia. The reappearance of the peacock for Domitia would have served to underline that all was still well between the emperor and his *actual* wife, perhaps prompted by the rumors of a certain friction. Rumor had it that she had an affair with the well-known pantomime actor Paris, which supposedly resulted in Domitian divorcing her. But because the Roman people demanded her return, so the sources tell us, he took her

⁴⁷ Fraser (2015), 235 mistakenly includes coinage with Julia Titi, a legend referring to Concordia and the peacock in the 88/9 series, and in doing so aligns both women: "To deal with the malicious gossip directed towards the two women, both have coins in this issue that emphasize harmony in the imperial household with the legends CONCORDIA and Juno's peacock". None of the 88/9 coins combine Julia Titi with a legend emphasizing *concordia*. The 80/1 coins (*RIC* II.1 Titus 394–395), however, depicting Julia on the obverses, do mention Concordia, but without the peacock on the reverses.

⁴⁸ Examples of peacocks with their tails spread open, see Musée de Louvre figurine inv. Myr 116 (=Myrina 454), oil lamp CA 6724 (=MG 5282); Musei Vaticani oil lamp inv. MV.62446.0.0. Tortel (n. 23), 145, 151, 179, 190, 223, 234.

back and reinstalled her as empress of Rome.⁴⁹ To what extent these stories were based on truth remains impossible to tell. It is also not clear whether these rumors already circulated in Roman society during Domitian's reign or whether they were invented afterwards because they fitted the image of Domitian. At the very least, we can say that in the minds of the ancient writers – and presumably in the minds of their respective audiences as well – it was conceived plausible that the presence of two *Augustae*, especially when it was debatable which one of them should (and could) provide an heir to the throne, could cause anxiety due to shifting allegiances and conflicting ambitions of everyone involved.

Considering these dynastic tensions and the risk of an audience's 'misreading' of the messages on the imperial coins, one begs to wonder: why was it felt important in 88/9 to treat Julia Titi in an almost identical manner as Domitia Longina? After all, there can only be one empress, so why not just emphasize the return of the marital bliss in the imperial household? The strategic maneuver can be explained when one takes the age difference between the women into account. It could not be excluded that Domitia, at that time in her thirties or early forties, would still produce an heir. If not, there was always the possibility for Domitian to adopt one of Julia's potential children, if she, in her twenties in 88/9, were to remarry and become a mother. A hypothetical untimely death of Domitia would also leave open the way for Domitian to marry his niece, which was not considered incestuous anymore since the emperor Claudius had legalized this marital bond so that he could marry his niece Agrippina Minor. There were enough scenarios to be conceived, in other words, that necessitated an almost equal social and public standing for the two *Augustae* in order to allow Domitian the largest possible elbow room to ensure dynastic continuity.⁵⁰

For dynastic purposes, therefore, it was important for Julia Titi to become part of the imperial message. One may perhaps see in the alternative depiction of the peacock – i.e., moving to the right or with its tail spread open – a compositional means of distinguishing various significances of the bird. What this significance was, beyond the association with Juno and marital harmony, may be hard to uncover when only taking into account the other *aurei* struck in 88/9, which focused on Domitian's Germanic campaigns and the *ludi saeculares*.⁵¹ Other than the peacock coins, no *aureus* of 88/9 hinted at dynastic matters. For a better understanding, we would argue that Domitianic precedents need to be taken into account. It may be worth recalling the dynastic significance of the double bust types of the *aurei* of 82/3. On these coins, Julia Titi had solely been linked to the portrait of her deified father

⁴⁹ Suet. *Tit.* 10.2; *Dom.* 3.2, 10.1; Dio Cass. 65.3.4; 67.3.1-2; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 11.11.

⁵⁰ This has been argued earlier in Foubert (2021).

⁵¹ For an overview, see *RIC* II.1, p. 250–252. For Domitian's *ludi saeculares* coinage, see Sobocinski (2006).

(RIC II.1 Domitian 147). As far as divine association was concerned, she had been left out the equation, as opposed to the other living members of the Flavian family that had appeared on the *aurei* – i.e., Domitian and Domitia. In 88/9, however, Julia Titi was made part of the equation. Much like Domitian and Domitia before her, the bird on the reverse strongly associated her with the divine. In addition, the legend DIVI TITI FILIA anticipated Julia's apotheosis in a similar way as the series as a whole had done for Domitian and Domitia in 82/3.

Given the unusual place of the peacock coins in the 88/9 *aureus* repertoire, we may therefore interpret the coins struck for Julia Titi as an extension of the dynastic series of *aurei* of 82/3. In the same way as had happened for Domitian and Domitia, she was not only presented as part of an exalted dynasty, but was through the association with both Juno and her deified father also portrayed as being closely related to the divine and expected to be deified upon her demise. This indeed happened only two years later, when the deceased Julia received *aurei* showing her as DIVA IVLIA AVGVSTA (RIC II.1 Domitian 718).

The introduction of the peacock to Roman coinage during the reign of Domitian marked the beginning of a systematization of an iconography that connected Juno and the peacock to the image of the empress. This divine association and its embeddedness in the visual program of the imperial family would eventually be exploited and expanded under Domitian's successors. In this contribution, we have emphasized the chronology of peacock imagery, but also of a language – either through text or images – that connects the emperor's wife with Juno, in order to plea for fastidiousness: it is tempting to project the omnipresence of the emperor/Jupiter/eagle and empress/Juno/peacock associations of later times retroactively to the reigns of Augustus and Livia or of Domitian and Domitia Longina, and thus consider them as a self-evident part of imperial tradition. However, eighty years separate Ovid's Augustus/Jupiter and Livia/Juno from Statius' Domitian/Jupiter and Domitia/Juno connection, and the peacock was never introduced in the imperial imagery during Augustus' reign. What made the Domitianic peacock coins have an impact was offering his successors a visual instrument for self-display, their meaning stretching beyond the immediate evocation of marital harmony.

The peacock was embedded in a concerted program that at one and the same time highlighted the Flavian dynasty, the apotheosis of its deceased members, the divine association of those alive, and the dynasty's care for the cityscape. These various layers of significance were all imbued into a single *aureus* type. The coin already had a clear meaning on its own, underlining the marital harmony for Domitia Longina and divine pedigree for Julia Titi, but it was especially in combination with other media that we witness a sophisticated ideological framework. Along with Domitian's eagle, the association between the imperial couple and their divine par-

allel was showcased. Among the double-headed *aurei*, the divine prospects of this same couple was addressed. And, in the context of Domitian's reconstructed cityscape, this association with the gods gained a great sense of topicality. In brief, then, the potential for coins to be interpreted and understood in relation to various media was exploited to the fullest degree.

The systematization of which the bird had been part made sure that the iconography of these Flavian feathers would be picked up under Domitian's successors. First, having (part of) the Capitoline triad numismatically presented by the gods' associative birds – the eagle, peacock and owl – became a trope in imperial coinage after the three of them appeared on bronzes of Hadrian (*RIC* II.3 Hadrian 2182, 2824–2826, 2925). On its own, the peacock would similarly reappear under Hadrian before appearing more regularly under Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, often in combination with Juno or her throne.⁵² It was under the same emperors that the peacock would be explicitly linked to the realm of apotheosis, as attested by its appearance on the *consecratio* coins of the Antonine *divae*.⁵³ This all cannot be detached from a greater attention to dynasty that is characteristic to these reigns. The fact that in this dynastic repertoire the peacock reappeared in the same way as it had been depicted under Domitian can hardly have been coincidental.

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⁵² Peacock on its own: *RIC* II.3 Hadrian 2538; *RIC* III Antoninus Pius 1406; Marcus Aurelius 1727. Peacock and Juno: *RIC* II.3 Hadrian 2549; *RIC* III Antoninus Pius 331, 338, 1078, 1091, 1399–1400; Marcus Aurelius 687–689, 694–698, 772, 1496, 1645–1648, 1651–1652, 1745, 1750–1752; Commodus 283, 633, 679, 681. Peacock and throne: *RIC* III Antoninus Pius 332, 339A–341, 1079, 1092–1094.

⁵³ *RIC* III Antoninus Pius 384a–386, 407, 1144; Marcus Aurelius 743–745, 1702–1705, 1713.

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