

## Other criticisms of Domitian by Roman authors

### Tacitus:

“So blinded, so perverted was his intelligence by [receiving] unremitting flattery that he did not see that it is the bad prince who is made heir by good fathers,” Agicola, 43.

(Examples of Roman authors who flattered him include Quintilian, Martial, Statius, and Silius Italicus)

Examples of their flattery. Quintilian said Domitian was personally acquainted with the goddess Minerva; that “no god is more auspicious or more peculiarly favorable to learning” than Domitian; that the judgment he exercised was “divine,” [Institutes of Oratory, 10.1.91; and intro to book 4]. Martial calls Domitian “modest,” and “loyal,” so much so that his subjects extend him their “reverent love,” [Epigrams, 8.15f]. Statius calls him a humble god and “father of gods” who can control the weather [Silvae, 3.3.155-171; 4.1.34-47; 4.3.136-161]. And, Silius doesn’t call him a god, but the “Conqueror of Germany...dreaded by the blond Batavians [Punica, 3.610-614].

### Suetonius:

“He exercised all the tyranny of his high position so lawlessly, that even then it appeared what sort of man he was,” Caesars, Domitian, 1.3.

“With no less arrogance, he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the name of his procurators/governors, ‘Our Master and our God bids that this be done.’ So, the custom arose of henceforth addressing him in no other way, even in writing or in conversation. He suffered no statue to be set up in his honor in the Capitol, unless it were gold or silver, and of a certain weight,” Caesars, Domitian, 13.2.

“He became an object of terror and hatred to all,” Caesars, Domitian, 14.1.

### Dio Chrysostom

“How I bore my exile, not succumbing to loss of friends or lack of means or physical infirmity; and, besides all this, bearing up under the hatred, nor of this or that one among my equals, or peers as they are sometimes called, but rather of the most powerful, most stern man, who was called by all Greeks and barbarians both master and *despotēs*/god, but who was in reality an evil demon, and this too without fawning on him or trying to avert his hatred by entreaty, but challenging him openly,” Orations, 45.2

### Dio Cassius

“He even insisted as being regarded as a god and took vast pride in being called ‘master’ and ‘god.’ These titles were used not merely in speech, but also in written documents,” Roman History, 67.4.7.

He explains that Juventius Celsus evaded execution by offering to inform on others and

by “repeatedly calling him ‘master’ and ‘*despotēs*/god,’ terms that were already applied to him by others,” Roman History, 67.13.4

Pliny II:

“He was a madman, blind to the true meaning of his position, who used the arena to collect charges of high treason, who felt himself slighted and scorned if we failed to pay homage to his gladiators, taking any criticism of them to himself and seeing insults to his own godhead and divinity. He deemed himself the equal of the gods, yet raised his gladiators to be his equal,” Panegyric, 33.

“That fearful monster built his defenses with untold terrors, where lurking in his den he licked up the blood of his murdered relatives or emerged to plot the massacre and destruction of his most distinguished subjects,” Panegyric, 48.

“Both of us [I and Tertullus] suffered from that robber and assassin of every honest man through the massacre of our friends, as the hot breath of his falling thunderbolt passed close by our heads,” Panegyric, 90.

“When seven of my friends had been put to death or banished...I stood amid the flames of thunderbolts dropping all around me. Certain clear indications made me suppose that a like end was awaiting me,” Letter to Julius Gentor, 3.11.13.

Eusebus of Caesarea Maritima 324 AD:

Domitian had “given many proofs of his great cruelty,” and “showed himself the successor of Nero’s campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us...Writers foreign to our belief did not hesitate to commit to their narratives [Domitian’s] persecutions and the martyrdoms in it...He was a Nero in cruelty” Ecclesiastical History, 3.17. 19-20

Orosius, ca. 417 AD:

Orosius was a priest from Galicia (Spain) who travelled to Hippo to meet Augustine and later visited Jerome in Israel. He had to leave Roman Spain because of German invasions, and was sensitive to Roman-German history. His first statement refers to Domitian’s known fake “triumph” for wars against Germans (see Triumphs below).

“Domitian, elated by the most distorted form of vanity, held a triumph nominally over the enemy who had been overcome, but actually over the loss of his legions. This same emperor, crazed by his pride because of which he wished to be worshiped as a god, was the first emperor after Nero to order a persecution against the Christians. At this time, the most blessed apostle John was banished to the island of Patmos,” History against the Pagans.

### **Domitian and Triumphs**

A conqueror would return from war to a parade. Walking before him would be captives - some of the people who had surrendered, especially the generals or kings. Spoils of the war -

the armaments of the conquered and their objects of wealth (which were often religious objects, like the menorah from the Jerusalem temple) - also preceded the victor. [Titus displayed the menorah, put it in Rome's Temple of Peace, and there it remained until Vandals took it in 455AD.]

Such parades are recorded for Brasidas, a general of Sparta; Apelles, a general of Macedon; Alexander the Great; Antigonos I Monophthalmus, a general who unsuccessfully tried to ascend to the Macedonian throne after Alexander died; Antiochus III, Judas Maccabeus, Simon Maccabeus, Cicero, Marcus Agrippa, and many others.

In Rome, the conqueror wore a laurel crown and purple-and-gold toga; his face was painted red, imitating Jupiter's face. He stood (like the Sun god) in a chariot pulled by 4 horses. He was considered "divine." Yet, he still made sacrifices. He passed through a triumphal arch/*fornix*, that conferred immortality on him. The parade ended with a feast; at that of Caecilius Metellus, a general in the conquest of Gaul, the banquet on Dec 30, 71 BC included 5,000 thrushes.

Romulus is said to have had three triumphal entries, beginning in 753 BC, but the first demonstrable Roman triumph is the one in 504 BC for Publicola, who overthrew the monarchy and began the Roman Republic; that triumph occurred 5 years after the coup. No Roman triumph after that of Augustus in 19 BC was held for anyone other than an emperor.

### **NT Triumphal march imagery**

Ep 4.8: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive."

Col 2.15: "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display, having triumphed over them through it [the cross]."

Of course, Jesus' triumphal entry on the donkey is a mockery of all this worldly glory.

### **Domitian jealously wanted a triumph**

His brother and dad shared one.

His first year in power (end of 82 AD), he joined the troops in Gaul to face the Chatti, a German tribe on their NE border. He instantly bought the loyalty of troops, increasing their pay by a third, and making Domitian quite popular with them. There, he built 46 miles of roads into Chatti territory, declared victory after meaningless minor skirmishes, and went home to stage his first triumph, proclaiming himself *Germanicus*, conqueror of Germans.

Tacitus says that the Germans (when? after Domitian's "triumph"?) then routed 5 Roman generals and their armies, alleging that the result was as bad as the battle of Teutoburg forest, (where general Varus lost 15,000 men in 90 AD). Tacitus says that least one of these generals was captured. Things were so bad that six years later (89 AD), general Saturninus, governor of Germany, at the same border, attempted a revolt. Generals Norbanus and Trajan defeated the coup; Domitian executed Saturninus and numerous suspected co-conspirators, and displayed their heads on the *rostra* in Rome.