

The Flavians: The Divi

The Divi played a central role in the Arval Pantheon of deities to receive sacrifices for the princeps under the Julio Claudians. Their role was to guard the princeps and emphasize the dynastic source of imperial power. During Vespasian's reign, the Divi were removed from the Pantheon and were absent from the pantheon of deities to receive sacrifices for the princeps throughout most of the Flavian period. During the reign of Domitian, Divi were used to boost his claim to power - by promoting each Flavian divus as a collective with shared temples and priests.

Five family members of the Flavian dynasty received deification: Vespasianus, Titus, Julia Titi, Caesar Domitiani filius and Domitilla.

So, the first member to receive deification was Vespasianus. He died on the 24th of June in 79 AD without immediate deification. We know about this delay in deification thanks to two military diplomas dating to September 79 AD, where Titus is referred to as Augusti Filius, not Divi Filius. There are three other inscriptions from later in that year. Two from Phrygia and one from Aqua Marcia. All of them address his son, Titus, as divi filius, suggesting that Vespasianus was deified later that year.

Coins from the same year are contradictory to this. All found coins minted in 79 refer to Titus and Domitianus as Augusti filius. However, coins minted in 80 AD depict Titus and Domitianus variously as Augusti filius and Divi filius, indicating that their titles changed in the year 80. Since coins are a state produced official documents, so it's more logical to assume the deification happened in the year 80 AD.

The date of the deification of Titus is more difficult. According to Suetonius and Cassius Dio, Domitian deified Titus without delay, at least within two weeks of his death. His daughter, Julia Augusta appears as Divi Filia on coins and inscriptions, but none can be dated precisely.

Julia Titi died in 89 AD and was deified within a few months as she appears as a diva on coins minted between 90 AD and 94 AD. In the book six of Epigrammata, published in 90 AD, she's alluded to as a goddess, and is described dwelling in heaven with Venus and Cupid, spinning a golden life thread for Domitian's future successor.

Both Caesar Domitiani filius and Domitilla were deified years after their deaths. The first being Domitian's infant son. He was deified early in Domitian's reign, based on the coins between 82 and 84 AD. The son was even compared to Olympian gods whose mortal sons had died, saying he joined them in heaven, suggesting he was born immortal. Domitilla was either the wife or daughter of Vespasianus. Both died before 69 AD. Based on numismatic evidence and busts it's likely she was the mother of Titus and Domitianus, but this information is more of an opinion than a fact.

Until recently it was believed that Domitilla's deification happened during Titus' reign, based on numismatic evidence. Thanks to the detailed examination of the found coins, we now know that Diva Domitilla portrait type must date to Domitian's reform after the year 82 AD.

So now we know that four of the five deified Flavians were deified during Domitian's reign. He's known as the only princeps with this many deifications under his rule.

Flavian divi appear to have had the same role as the Julio-Claudian divi, although the Flavian divi were absent from the Arval pantheon of deities. Also, the Arvals never conducted sacrifices on their birthdays. As I mentioned before, the Flavian Divis had one shared temple and collective priests. We know of two temples in Rome, dedicated to Divus Vespasianus and Divus Titus. One was dedicated in Campus Martius and the other one in Forum Romanum. The constructions were finished under Domitian. There's also a temple of the Flavian gens, which was dedicated to all the divi including penates and Lares.

There is no evidence that the other three divi had individual temples, but it's presumed they had a place in the temples of Vespasianus and Titus.

Templum Gentis Flaviae also served as a mausoleum. The ashes of Julia Titi were present.

The Flavian divi did not appear to have had flamines, nor any other dedicated priests to an individual Flavian cult. It might be so, because the flamen and flaminica were likely the members of the royal family and no Flavians held these titles. This phenomenon is specific to the Flavians as the emperors down the line have had their own flamines.

Instead, they had sodales, most prominent being the Flaviales and Titiales. As the name suggests they served Divus Vespasianus and Divus Titus. There is an epigraphic evidence suggesting there was one kalator sacerdotii Flaviali and two sacerdotes Titiales Flaviales. There are a few suggestions that these priests were some kind of replacement for the missing flamines. But unfortunately, we do not have enough evidence to draw any kind of picture.

This Flavian collective approach is also evident in their provincial cults. The Domitianic provincial temple in Ephesus was dedicated to the Sebastoi. Sebastos means Augustus in Greek, therefore sebastoi meant Augusti. This term could've included the living princes, the divi and the unedified deceased principes or any other important family members.

The first provincial cults were established during Vespasianus reign, in Pamphly and Macedonia.

One possible explanation on why the decision to represent them collectively could be the emphasis on dynasty, being a part of the divine line. To make up for the loss of focus on dynasty caused by the removal of divi from the Pantheon of deities to receive sacrifices for the principes.