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THE ANATOMY OF THE ASSASSINATION OF DOMITIAN**Gökhan TEKİR¹****Abstract**

The assassination of Titus Flavius Domitian on 18 September 96 brought the end of Flavian dynasty, which had been ruling the Roman Empire since AD 69. The assassination was carried by a small group of court officials. However, this paper tries to indicate that the conspirators were related with oppositional figures, who constantly tried to eliminate the emperor. Classical historians Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and Cassius Dio in their accounts used the assassination to further slander the emperor, hated by the senate. Twentieth century historians, who engaged in endeavors of rehabilitation of Domitian, added new hypothesis and explanations to his assassination. This paper intends to demonstrate the claims on Domitian's death, to investigate the accuracy of the views on the assassination, conspirators, motives, and to offer a fresh perspective. For this purpose, it presents the conspiracies under Domitian's and their connections with the murder. Finally, it examines the aftermath of the assassination to evaluate whether the conspirators reached their aim with the murder of the emperor.

Keywords: Domitian, Assassination, Conspiracy, Stephanus, Stoic Opposition

Domitian Suikastinin Anatomisi**Öz**

18 Eylül 96 tarihinde gerçekleşen Titus Flavius Domitian suikastı M.S.69 yılından itibaren Roma İmparatorluğunu yöneten Flavian hanedanının sonunu getirmiştir. Suikast, küçük bir gruptan oluşan saray görevlileri tarafından gerçekleştirilmiştir. Fakat bu çalışma komplocuların, imparatoru sürekli olarak elimine etmeye çalışan muhalif figürlerle ilişkisini ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Suetonius, Genç Pliny, ve Cassius Dio

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, gokhan.tekir@hbv.edu.tr, Orcid: 0000-0003-3985-7442

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

gibi yazılarında klasik tarihçiler suikastı, senato tarafından nefret edilen imparatoru daha fazla kötülemek için kullanmıştır. Domitian'ı rehabilite etme çabalarında bulunan yirminci yüzyıl tarihçileri suikaste yönelik yeni hipotezler ve açıklamalar eklemiştir. Bu çalışma, Domitian'ın ölümüne yönelik iddiaları göstermekte, görüşlerin doğruluğunu, komplocuları, motivasyonu araştırmakta ve bir yaklaşım önerme amacını taşımaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, Domitian'ın dönemindeki komploları ve bunların cinayet ile ilgisini göstermektedir. Son olarak da suikastın sonrasında yaşanan olayları inceleyerek komplocuların imparatoru öldürerek amaçlarına ulaşip ulaşmadığını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Domitian, Suikast, Komplo, Stephanus, Stoacı Muhalefet

INTRODUCTION

Just before his assassination, the world's most powerful man, Titus Flavius Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus, had already been warned by his favorite deity Minerva in a dream. She informed him that she could no longer protect him since she was disarmed by Jupiter. Couple of omens and soothsayers also pointed out the imminent danger. The day before assassination his mood was gloomy. When he ordered some apples to be kept until the following day, he commented that "If I am spared to eat them." (Suet. Dom.15.16).

On 18 September AD 96, he anxiously awaited the passing of fifth hour, which would be marked as the most dangerous time for him. After being misinformed by the conspirators that fifth hour has passed, he joyfully hastened to bath. His steward Parthenius announced that an important matter came up, directing him to his bedroom. Stephanus, the freedman of the emperor's disgraced nephew Domitilla, presented a paper to him. Stephanus had wrapped his hand with bandages for days to hide a dagger, pretending an injury. While Domitian was reading the paper, Stephanus drew his dagger and stabbed the emperor in his groin. He looked for his dagger hidden under the pillow as soon as he was wounded but his dagger was removed. Despite being wounded and sliced fingers, Domitian grappled Stephanus and gauged his eyes out. Other conspirators Parthenius, the chamberlain, Clodianus, a subaltern, Maximus, freedman of Parthenius, Satur, a decurion of the chamberlains, and a gladiator entered into the room and murdered the emperor with seven wounds. (Suet.Dom.17.1).²

² Suetonius reports that this detailed description of the assassination was provided by a boy in Domitian's bedroom who has his duties of attending to Lares (Suet.Dom.17.4.).

The emperor's death was cathartic moment for the senate members, who had been made aware of their diminished status under principate by Domitian.³ After his death, they were finally free to express their hatred and anger. The official *damnatio memoriae* was promulgated. We can observe the joyfulness of the senate members from Pliny the Younger, who ironically very much owed his advancement to Domitian: "How delightful it was, to smash to pieces those arrogant faces, to raise our swords against them, to cut them ferociously with our axes, as if blood and pain would follow our blows" (Pan. 52.4-5). On the other hand, the people and army were not pleased with the news of the emperor's death. "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" (Suet.Dom.23.1). The army, which wanted revenge, had to wait one year. When they acted, they did not just punish the assailants of the emperor, but also opened the way of Trajan's accession.

The assassination of Domitian should be evaluated in a wider perspective, including the events that preceded the assassination and the aftermath of the assassination. His rule has been characterized by conspiracies and one big military revolt. The constant external and internal crisis required Domitian to play strong man role (Pleket, 1961, p. 299). After his assassination, the instability continued under Nerva's weak rule. The final event that marked the end of internal volatility was the Praetorian Revolt in AD 97 that *de facto* ended Nerva's rule and started Trajan's rule.⁴ However, before the dealing with the turmoil after the assassination, the plots during Domitian's reign will be presented to identify the usual suspects that might be responsible for Domitian's murder.

1. Conspiracies under Domitian

Nobody could understand better the fragility of the status of principes than Domitian who witnessed the slain of three emperors in the eternal city within one

³ In contrast to his predecessors, Domitian did not busy himself by pretending that the senate has equivalent position with the emperor. Pliny describes the futility of discussions held in the Senate see Pan.54. This aspect of Domitian's reign is also mentioned see K. H. Waters, "The Character of Domitian", *Phoenix*, 18.1 (1964): 65.; Pat Southern, *Domitian the Tragic Tyrant* (Oxon: Routledge, 1997), 49.; Brian Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 181.

⁴ Domitian's assassination by no means was the end of political turmoil. Calpurnius Crassus's plot against Nerva, the possible revolt of governor in the East reported by Pliny the Younger, and the revolt in the Praetorian Guard in the capital occurred in the same year, AD 97 see Andrew Berriman, Malcolm Todd, and Malcom Todd, "A Very Roman Coup: The Hidden War of Imperial Succession, AD 96-98", *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, 50.2 (2001): 315

year, which was later called as the Year of the Four Emperors.⁵ He once remarked the princes are unfortunate because no one believes them when a conspiracy is discovered unless it is successful (Suet.Dom.21.1.). His experiences in his reign proved this assessment's validity.

Domitian's bad blood with the senate could be traced back to his ascension to the emperorship. After his very much-loved brother Titus's death⁶, instead of seeking the approval of the senate, Domitian appealed to much more influential institution, the Praetorian Guard (Cass. Dio. LXVI.26.3.). The senate, on the other hand, gathered to render thanks to Titus at that day (Suet.Titus.11.) instead of confirming Domitian's titles. Domitian had to wait the next day to receive Imperium and the title of Augustus (Jones, 1992, p. 21). This reciprocal spite between Domitian and the senate in the beginning of his reign set the tone of his reign.

The execution of group of senators with Domitian's cousin Flavius Sabinus who was married with Titus's daughter Julia indicates the existence of coup d'état attempt while Domitian was absent from Rome, because of his campaign against Germanic tribe Chatti in 82 or 83 (Southern, 1997, p. 42).⁷ The pretext of Sabinus's execution was that he announced himself as imperator instead of consul on the day of consular elections (Suet.Dom.10.4.). It is highly possible that a group of senators thought another strong Flavian who was married with the daughter of the late emperor was a perfect alternative to Domitian. If we took Suetonius's narration true, Flavius Sabinus also considered that offer seriously by demanding to be saluted as emperor. The perfect opportunity for coup was most probably considered when Domitian was engaging a dangerous tribe the Chatti on the Germania frontier. Further proof of the date was presented by

⁵ After being appointed as Caesar by his father Vespasian in AD 69, who resided in Alexandria during the turmoil in Rome, Domitian was the nominal head of Vespasian forces in the capital against the Vitellian forces. When the street war erupted, his uncle Sabinus was killed and Domitian was forced to flee, disguising himself as an Isis follower see (Suet.Dom.1.1.).

⁶ Philostratus (VI.XXXII) claims that Apollonius of Tyana, who later became the archenemy of Domitian, predicted that Titus's death would be in the hands of his own kin, accusing Domitian of his brother's death. Cassius Dio assumes an ambivalent position Titus might have died due to natural reasons but also states that Domitian hastened his death (LXVI.26.2.). Suetonius claims that Domitian simply left Titus unattended by the physicians (Dom.2.3.). Without conclusive evidence, these accusations intend to stain the legitimacy of Domitian's emperorship.

⁷ Southern points out the lack of evidence concerning a real danger but she suggests there may be attempt to remove Domitian. Jones (*The Emperor Domitian*, 21) notes that Sabinus was executed before Domitian left for Germany. Eusebius (3.17) dates that the prominent men were executed between October 82-September 83. It is highly probable that the conspirators wanted to take advantage Domitian's absence from Rome.

Southern. Dio Chrysostom, who was exiled most likely in AD 82, reflected that he had been a friend of a noble man related to Domitian by blood and marriage. This fits the description of Flavius Sabinus (Southern, 1997, p. 43.). Besides date of the conspiracy, this account reveals the network of senators and philosophers united against Domitian. The failure of gaining the support of the army was probably the reason of their doom.

Another purge of the opposition occurred when he senators, Salvius Cocceianus, Sallustius Lucullus, Mettius Pomposianus, and Aelius Lamia were executed on the ground of preparing a revolution (Suet.Dom.10.2-3.).⁸ The motives of executions given by Suetonius are trivial. Salvidenius Cocceianus was executed because he celebrated the birthday of his paternal uncle, emperor Otho. Sallustius Lucullus's demise was due to naming Lucullan to lances of a new pattern. Mettius Pomposianus was executed because he carried the parchment of world map. Aelius Lamia was the victim of his jocular character (Suet.Dom.10.3.). It is common trait among classical authors downplay the motives of the prosecution of Domitian to emphasize his tyrannical character. Evans rightly points out that all these men could have been contenders for imperial seat (1974, p. 30). Considering how Flavius Sabinus was reached by the oppositional forces, Domitian could see that the conspirators could look for the figurehead for the coup attempts.

In AD 89 governor of Upper Germania Lucius Antonius Saturninus with two legions Legio XIV Gemina and Legio XXI Rapax revolted against Domitian. He also collaborated with the Germanic tribes including the Chatti, which proved their troublesome character in AD 82 -83. The time of the revolt was again carefully chosen. The Roman Army was struggling against the Dacians on the Danube front and the False Nero's revolt in the east (Jones, 1992, p. 30). Southern also notes that Upper Germany was a suitable place to attack Rome. Vitellius had already succeeded in overthrowing Otho in 69 (1997, p. 101). However, Domitian demonstrated his resolve by leaving Rome with his Praetorian Guards to counter the revolt as soon as he heard the revolt. Trajan was also summoned from Spain with his legion VII Gemina (Jones, 1992, p. 144).

The stance of the legions of Lower Germany was critical. Syme claims that if legions of the Lower Germany had defected to the revolt, Domitian would have retreated to the Danube with his legions (Syme, 1936, p. 173). The civil war was a real possibility. However, the commander of Lower Germany Aulus Bucius

⁸ The executions most probably took place in AD 87 see John Karl Evans, "Senatorial History and The Principate of Domitian" (McMaster University, 1974), 300.

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

Lappius Maximus suppressed the revolt with the aid of Norbanus from Rhaetia (Jones, 1992, p. 144). Syme argues that the victory occurred against great odds, praising Lappius Maximus of saving the emperor and the empire (1936, pp. 173-174). Cassius Dio's praise of Lappius Maximus has different angle. According to Dio, Lappius Maximus burned the letter that might incriminate the other people. Yet, this could not stop Domitian from punishing many people (LXVII.11.1.2.). It is distinct possibility that Lappius Maximus was a traitor as he was awarded with consulship by Domitian and there was no apparent reason for treason (Syme, 1936, p. 174).⁹ Domitian's punishments also indicate that Domitian acquired Saturninus's contacts in Rome.

Syme argued that the Saturninus revolt was a spontaneous event, which had no proven connection with the senate (1978, p. 20). Jones concurs with Syme in that he found no evidence concerning senatorial involvement in the Saturninus revolt (1974, p. 535). Southern, on the other hand, rightfully points out that without a support promised from Rome, the revolt could have been an act of a madman (1997, p. 103). Both Syme and Jones note that Saturninus was not a noble man, who did not have satisfying qualifications to be accepted as an emperor unlike other usurpers such as Vitellius (1978, p. 13; Jones, 1974, p. 531). If Saturninus did not have a promising promise for being an emperor, he might have acted as an agent for another candidate. This was not without precedent. In 69 Mucianus marched the army in the name of Vespasian, who resided in Alexandria.¹⁰ Domitian must have been keenly aware of this precedent. Although the senate performed ceremonies and sacrifices for Domitian's victory, it was composed of different factions and associations. At least some senators were likely to be linked with Saturninus. Southern reports that the deaths of senators Sallustius Lucullus and C. Vettulenus Civica Cerialis were related with the Saturninus revolt (1997, p.104)

Another indication of senatorial influence on the revolt of lack of motive for the legions to revolt. Domitian had already increased the pay of the soldiers and appeased the army on every occasion. The warm feeling seemed mutual. The soldiers showed their loyalty even after his assassination by demanding his deification and retribution of his murder (Jones, 1992, p. 144). Saturninus with

⁹ At least Domitian did not suspect that Lappius Maximus was a traitor. Lappius Maximus was tasked to pursue Chatti and punish them for their indiscretion to cross the frontier. He successfully completed his mission see Michael Schmitz, *Roman Conquests: The Danube Frontier* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2019), 85.

¹⁰ Although Mucianus considers himself equal in strength, he supported the claim of Vespasian's bid. see Gerda de Kleijn, "C. Licinius Mucianus, Leader in Time of Crisis", *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, 58.3 (2009): p. 311.

Legio XXI Rapax, whose reputation was already tainted,¹¹ might have been tempted by the opposing senatorial circles to ignite a revolt against Domitian by taking advantage of the state of war on Danube front and in the east but the rest of legions proved their loyalty to Domitian, suppressing the revolt.¹²

In the capital, another opposition circle, Stoic opposition, has become troublesome for Domitian. To appease them, Domitian demonstrated his conciliatory attitude to leading figures of the Stoic Party. Domitian assigned consulship to Arulenus Rusticus in AD 92. He had already granted consulship to younger Helvedius Priscus the Younger before AD 87. They were both executed in AD 93 (Evans, 1974, p. 23). Suetonius reports that Rusticus was executed because he published eulogies of Paetus Tharsea¹³ and Helvedius Priscus. Helvedius Priscus was executed because he wrote the play named Paris and Oenone, implicating the affair of Domitia, Domitian's wife, with an actor named Paris, allegedly caused rift between couple (Suet.Dom.10.3-4.). Tacitus presents these executions as whimsical punishments of tyrant and suppression of freedom of speech (Agr.2.1.). Besides Rusticus's eulogies of Theresa and Priscus, his profession as a philosopher was also listed as a reason for his execution by Cassius Dio (LXVII.13.2.). This additional charge solidifies classic historians' depiction of tyrant figure. Evans, however, argues that both Rusticus and Priscus committed *maiestas* by deliberately offending the emperor. Not only Domitian, but no other emperor could let these offenses go unpunished. Apparently, both Rusticus and Priscus demanded martyrdom and Domitian kindly granted their requests. Evans also claims that Stoics resorted to comfortable opposition without contributing nothing to state except their endless obstructionism (1974, p. 25-26).

In addition to being stubborn obstructionists, there is evidence that the Stoic Party involved in conspiracy, which brought about their executions and exiles. Pliny reports that Senecio, Rusticus, and Priscus were executed. Mauricus, Gratilla, Arria, and Fannia were banished (Ep.11.3.). This group consisted of tightly associated people. Mauricus was the brother of Rusticus. Aria was the widow of Tharasea; Fannia was the daughter of Tharasea, widow of Helvedius Priscus the Elder, and stepmother of Helvedius Priscus the Younger; Gratilla was the wife of Rusticus (Rogers, 1960, p. 19-23). Rogers points out those seven came

¹¹ Syme reports that that legion with its "avarita et festinato" arose hostilities of surrounding tribes (1978, p. 16).

¹² Domitian offered title of pia fidelis to the legions I Minervia, VI Victrix, X Gemina, and XII Primigenia, and the auxiliary regiments and the Rhine fleet see (Syme, 1978 , p. 176).

¹³ The name Tharsea, one of the biggest critic of Nero, became synonymous with the opposition against the principate see (Evans 1974, p. 25).

from a long line of conspirators. Helvedius Priscus the Elder, which is the nod that connects other people, had been exiled for treason in AD 66. He came back to Rome after Vespasian became emperor. He served as a praetor but his active opposition exhausted even Vespasian, who was most certainly more patient and tolerant towards criticisms than Domitian. Helvedius Priscus the Elder had been exiled and executed during Vespasian's reign (1960, p. 22). Rogers claims that the bases of their executions were not the books that Rusticus and Priscus wrote. Other condemned people did not write anything. Being wife, mother, brother of the Rusticus and Priscus could not be reasons of their punishments as Domitian considered the elevation of Helvedius Priscus the Younger to the consulship even though his father, Helvedius the Priscus, had been condemned and executed for treason ten years ago (1960, p. 22).

Tacitus presents burning of the books as a proof of a main motive of this trial as Domitian's hatred of free speech (Agr.2.1.). Rogers, however, gives an account how Tacitus distorts proceedings of trials. Tacitus alleges that Fabricius Viento was accused of publishing libels against senators in 62 A.D., but later he reveals that indictment was for the sale of offices (1960, p. 21). Thus, Tacitus had a habit of distorting facts to use them according to his hatred stance towards principes. Rogers concludes that the indictments were about treason. The publications of Rusticus and Helvedius Priscus were trivial in this trial (1960, p. 23).¹⁴ This trial demonstrates besides the senate and the small segment of army, philosophers also involved in treasonous activities. Domitian must have assessed this threat. Philosophers were not only expelled from Rome but also from Italy (Suet.Dom.10.3.). Tacitus would not miss this opportunity to present Domitian as a tyranny and evaluates this as exile of "teachers of philosophy...and all noble accomplishments (Agr.2.1.). However, this was not the first time Stoic party faced banishment. The Stoic philosophers were expelled because of their seditious activities under Nero and Vespasian. There was no evidence that Domitian extended suppression of liberal arts (Evans, 1970, p. 258).

The wave of prosecution against the Stoics involved high officials. Epaphroditus, Nero's freedman, was firstly banished and, then executed for failing to prevent Nero's suicide (Cass.Dio.LXVII.14.4.; Suet.Dom.14.4.). Cassius Dio and Suetonius attributed Epaphroditus's execution to Domitian's increasing paranoia. The charge indeed appears superfluous since the facts of the deed had been known for 25 years. However, if we examine Epaphroditus's

¹⁴ It is not unprecedented the involvement of philosophers in the conspiracies. Seneca, the famous Stoic philosopher, participated in the Piso's conspiracy against Nero and was driven to suicide see Suet.Nero.35.5.

connections with Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher banished by Domitian, this execution might make more sense. Epictetus wrote:

Don't I know how you came to be praetor, how you got your consulship, who gave it to you? As for me, I should not care even to live, if I had to owe my life to Felicio putting up with his insolence and slavish arrogance; for I know what a slave is, who is prosperous as the world goes, and puffed up with pride (IV.145.150.).

This passage was an apparent reference to Epaphroditus. Epictetus was a former slave of Epaphroditus (Bonforte, 1955, p. vii). This makes Epaphroditus as a close to circle of Stoic philosophers, who were banished due to their seditious activities. Most probably, his first undated exile before AD 95 was related with this connection and he was exiled along with other Stoic philosophers. His close connection to the palace could have been evaluated as dangerous in the heyday of persecution against high profile figures in AD 95, leading to his execution.

Finally, the conspiratorial elements reached to Domitian's closest circle. Flavius Clemens the consul, who was married to Domitian's relative Flavia Domitilla was executed for the charge of atheism. Domitilla was banished to Pandateria. Besides Flavius Clemens and Domitilla, many, who were drifted to Jewish ways of living were also condemned. Glabrio, who was a former consul was among those which were executed (Cass.Dio.LXVIII4.1-3.).¹⁵ Eusobius claims that the executions of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla were related with their testimony to Christ (III.18.). On the other hand, Jones claims that no evidence exists for Domitian's persecution against Christians. The execution of few Christians does not count as proof (1992, p. 117). As it is demonstrated in Tacitus and Pliny the Younger's presentation of persecution against the Stoics, the classical historians, who favor senatorial class, have engaged in distortions of the reasons of the indictments.

The fact that the sons of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla were named as Domitian's heir (Suet.Dom.15.1.) makes these condemnations remarkably interesting. Southern claims that the real reason of their persecution is related with this element. She notes that being the parents of apparent heirs may have led grandeur in their behavior, which was not tolerated by Domitian (1997, p. 116). Southern assumes innocent presumption concerning the behavior of the couple. Their executions could be related with their treasonous activities. Suetonius points out that the boys, adopted and renamed as Vespasian and Domitian, were

¹⁵Jones notes the executions were carried out in AD 95 when Clemens was ordinary consul (1992, p.48).

very young (Dom.15.2.) If Domitian could have been eliminated, Flavius Clemens and Domitilla would have acted as guardians of the boys, who would assume imperial throne, holding the real imperial power. While evaluating guardianship under principate, Barbara Levick argues that there can be no temporary guardianship. When unassailable power is attained, it is irrevocable (1998, p. 18-19) Flavius Clemens could have become the emperor if Domitian had died. The couple could have presented themselves as more relaxing and coopting figures than strict and authoritarian Domitian, to attract the support of anti-Domitianic forces in the senate and the court. Domitian's followers in the army could be appeased due to their belonging to the Flavian dynasty. The factual evidence which shows that they actually engaged in conspiracy is not yet presented, but this possibility could have not escaped from the eyes of Domitian. The fact that the assassination was carried out by Stephanus, the freedman of the couple, reinforces the view that Flavius Clemens and Domitilla, somehow, involved in treacherous activities against Domitian.

2. The Culprits of the Assassination

There are two main ancient narratives concerning Domitian's murder. The most extraordinarily detailed description is offered by Suetonius thanks to the testimony of an attendant boy in Domitian's bedroom. This detailed version has been given in the introduction part of this paper. Suetonius lists Domitian's killers as Stephanus, Domitilla's steward, Clodianus, a subaltern, Parthenius, Domitian's chamberlain, Satur, one of the chamberlains and Maximus, a gladiator (Dom.17.1-2.). He mentions that Domitian's wife was aware of the plot (Suet.Dom.14.1.).

The second main narration comes from Cassius Dio. He lists the adds new names to the list of conspirators. Parthenius, Domitian's chamberlain, Sigerus, one of the chamberlains, Entellus, responsible for petitions, and Stephanus, the person who actually tried to carry out the deed. The other names were more distinguishing. Two of the Praetorian Prefects, Norbanus and Petronius, and finally Domitian's wife, Domitia. In fact, the main instigator of the conspiracy was Domitia. She discovered names on the tablet where Domitian kept the names which he planned to kill and notified the persons related (LXVII.15.1-6.).

Other ancient sources present derivative narratives of Suetonius and Cassius Dio. Eutropius mentions Petronius and Parthenius as killers of Domitian (VIII.1.). *Epitome de Caesaribus* narrates Cassius Dio's version (II.13) while Philostratus's account of assassination delightfully retells Suetonius's narration, naming Stephanus and Domitian's bodyguard as primary heroes of the assassination (VII.25).

As the classical historians show negative bias towards, their list of conspirators needed to be examined. For Suetonius and Cassius Dio, the central figure of the assassination was Domitian's chamberlain, Parthenius. He was referred by Martial as Palatinus Munera Partheniu (Epig.IV.45.). Jones notes that the role of senior freedman in the court is distinguished with the title of Palatinus (1992, p.2). Cassius Dio also writes that Parthenius had been highly honored by Domitian. He was even allowed to wear sword (LXVII.15.1.). Martial also request Parthenius that the emperor would see his poems (Epig.V.6.2.). This passage highlights Parthenius's gatekeeper role in Domitian's palace. Without his involvement, the likelihood of the success of the assassination plot was low. Other men with lower status, the court officials and chamberlains that aided Stephanus were likely to be employed by Parthenius. Thus, his role was critical in the plot. His punishment would, later, fit his role.

On the other hand, adding Domitia to the list of conspirators has a purpose to blacken Domitian. Her involvement in the plot actually completes Cassius Dio's portrayal of Domitian as a tyrant, who was despised by even his wife. We can find hints about Domitia's innocence from some of the ancient sources. Herodian's account of Commudus's assassination gives clue about Domitia's non-involvement. He narrates that Commudus's concubine Marcia found the table, which contains the list of names to be killed by Commudus, in which her name was on the top. She notified other names, encouraging them to murder Commudus first (1.17). This style of assassination appears to be a popular smokescreen used by classical historians to narrate the assassination of the emperors. Contrasting Suetonius and Cassius Dio, in his *Secret History*, Procopius directly exonerates Domitia from her husband's death. He reports that Domitia requested the Senate to allow her to collect Domitian's body and make a bronze statue to him to remind people the inhumanity of the killers of her husband (VIII.17-20.).

Modern historians have almost a consensus that Domitia was not involved in the murder of her husband. Jones claims that the participation of some court officials in the plot does not mean that the whole court was part of it. Domitia considered herself the widow of Domitian after his death. Ten brick stamps dated to 123 A.D. bear the style "Domitia, [wife] of Domitian." Some bricks that produced in Domitia's factory in Gabii also bear the inscription: "Domitia, daughter of Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo" (1992, p. 37). This is an open defiance to *damnatio memoria* enacted since Domitia showed that she could easily avoid referring herself as wife of Domitian by also referring herself as the daughter of her famous general father Corbulo. Southern also writes there is no conclusive evidence to show that Domitia has active part in Domitian's assassination (1997,

p. 198). In Levick's account, Domitia's involvement story was invented to further slander Domitian (2002, p. 211). Fraser argues that she may have been an accomplice of the assassination, but she was not a major participant. Fraser reasons her witnessing of executions in the court may have compelled her to act with the conspirators (2015, p. 240). However, Fraser does not present any additional evidence to prove her involvement except referring to hostile sources. Her continued devotion to her condemned husband inscribed on the bricks, however, suggests Domitia was innocent.

The role of two of Praetorian Prefects, Petronius and Norbanus, is much more problematic. They were not in the room where Domitian was killed, and they did not participate in slaying the emperor. The only source that mentions Petronius as an active participator was Eutropius (VII.1.).¹⁶ Norbanus's involvement is more complex. He had helped Lappius Maximus to suppress the revolt of Saturninus (Jones, 1992, p. 144). His loyalty to Domitian, however, had been praised by Martial as: "When against sacrilegious frenzy your pious loyalty, Norbanus, was standing firm for Lord Caesar, I toyed with these verses, safe in the Muses' shade, I, that noted cultivator of your friendship" (Epig.IX.84). Yet, Cassius Dio includes Norbanus as one of the conspirators (LXVII.15.2.). Norbanus disappeared in AD 96 when Casperius Aelianus replaced him (Syme, 1958, p. 10). Even though the participation of these two Prefects is not clear, it is clear that they failed to protect their emperor. Therefore, they needed to be punished.

Although not mentioned in the sources as one of the conspirators, a name of Apollonius of Tyana, the famous Neopythagorean sage, should also be added. He had been brought to the court of Domitian to be tried on the charges of conspiracy against the emperor, performing human sacrifice, and magic. He courageously defied the emperor, accusing the emperor and his armies of cowardice. Although he was acquitted, he was forced to remain in the court. However, he magically disappeared from the court (Philos.VII.V.). If this story narrates facts, it misrepresents. Even the most courageous man could not insult the most powerful man of the world in his court and his armies and expect to stay alive. Apollonius's defiance could be made up to emphasize his courage against a 'tyrant.' His disappearance could not be attributed to his holy character. The logical and simple explanation is that someone in the court let him go. It is possible that Apollonius disappeared before he was tried since Domitian could

¹⁶ On the other hand, Cassius Dio ascribes a passive role to Petronius's account. According to Dio, Petronius was aware of the plot but did not intervene to protect Domitian (LXVIII.15.2.).

not have let treason go unpunished even if he had the slightest evidence exist.¹⁷ Thus, we can assume that Apollonius of Tyana had ties with the conspirators possibly with Parthenius. This connection can be confirmed from the prophetic reaction of Apollonius of Tyana concerning Domitian's death when he was in Ephesus. "Take heart, gentlemen, for the tyrant has been slain this day" (Philos.VIII.XXVI.). Cassius Dio reports that Apollonius of Tyana remarked: "Good, Stephanus! Bravo, Stephanus! Smite the bloodthirsty wretch! You have struck, you have wounded, you have slain."(LXVII.18.1.). Considering Apollonius of Tyana was not really a prophet, who had supernatural abilities, he must have been aware of the existence of the plot, its exact date, and the conspirators' name. He simply must have used this knowledge to solidify his status as a holy sage.

3. The Motive of the Assassination

As in the actors of the assassination, the motive of the assassination has been offered in the literature insufficiently. Suetonius and Philostratus place the motives of Stephanus at the center of the plot. Suetonius argues that the fear of being punished because of the embezzlement accusation prompted Stephanus to act (Dom.17.1.), whereas Philostratus put revenge as the main motive for the assassination. According to Cassius Dio, however, Domitian wanted to kill all his courtiers at the same time, thus, keeping the names of those whom he desired to kill. Domitia discovered this and urged those people to kill Domitian (LXVII.15.3-5). The implausibility of this story has been shown in the previous chapter. It is surprising to observe that the senate is not mentioned in the assassination of an emperor designated as a tyrant by the senate. The classical historians wished to distance the senate from killing Domitian.

Modern historians are also obscure in investigating the motives. Jones states that Domitian's deteriorating relations with his own freedman sealed his

¹⁷ The relationship between revolution and magic was not so distinct in the Imperial Rome. Tacitus reports the persecution of Drusus Libo under Tiberius's principate: Nearly at the same time, a charge of revolutionary activities was laid against Libo Drusus, a member of the Scribonian family. I shall describe in some detail the origin, the progress, and the end of this affair, as it marked the discovery of the system destined for so many years to prey upon the vitals of the commonwealth. Firmius Catus, a senator, and one of Libo's closest friends, had urged that short-sighted youth, who had a foible for absurdities, to resort to the forecasts of astrologers, the ritual of magicians, and the society of interpreters of dreams (Ann.27.1.).

Libo was later forced to commit suicide. Tacitus dismisses this event as an insignificant matter but Adrew Pettinger argues that this event was related with endeavors to prevent Tiberius's ascension to the principate; thus, had importance. see *The Republic in Danger Drusus Libo and the Succession of Tiberius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9. As an ardent reviewer of Tiberius's life (Suet. Dom.20.1.), Domitian must have found relevance in the case of Apollonius of Tyana.

fate (1992, p. 196). Southern argues Domitian's increasing cruelty led to his assassination (1997, p. 118). Both historians do not offer any substantial motives for the assassination. The lack of material provided by the historians requires us to speculate upon the motives by examining the facts.¹⁸

The style of assassination that Stephanus tried to execute could be considered as ingenious. He feigned injury for a few days and wrapped his hands to conceal the dagger. He sought an audience with the emperor, claiming that he had a very urgent matter to report. When the emperor lowered his guard, Stephanus stroke with a dagger (Suet.Dom.17.1.). He was picked by Parthenius for his strength (Cass.Dio.LXVII.17.1). This episode had similarities with the assassination in ancient Jewish history narrated by Flavius Josephus. Jewish nation had been subjected to servitude under Moabites. A man from Benjamin tribe, Ehud, known for its strength, brought presents for the king of Moabites. He hid the dagger on his right thigh, waiting for an opportunity when the guards were not strictly watching. When he presented his gifts to the king, he coaxed the king into dismissing the guards to have a private talk with him. Fearing that he might miss the strike, he told the king that the God imported a dream into him to distract the king. When the king leaped out of his throne joyfully, Ehud placed the dagger into the king's heart (Joseph.A.J.5.4.2.).¹⁹

The similarities between these two assassinations could not be ignored. This brings the question of the Jewish involvement in the assassination of Domitian. The planners of the plot might have been considerable knowledge about Jewish history to reenact Ehud's act. To investigate this involvement, we must revisit Stoic opposition. The words of Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher banished by Domitian, transmitted by his pupil Arrian testify Stoic connection with Judeo-Christian thought:

If, then, neither any man wishing to die nor to live by all means, but only as it may be permitted, approaches the tyrant, what hinders him from approaching the tyrant without fear?... Then through madness is it possible for a man to be so disposed toward these things, and the Galileans through habit, and is it possible that no man can learn from reason and from demonstration that God has made all the

¹⁸ Pettinger rightly points out that "The writing of history requires imagination; empathic in origin, creative in spirit: the glue by which fragments of knowledge are held together" (2012, Preface).

¹⁹ Thus, Ehud delivered Jewish nation from slavery. Josephus. A.J.5.4.3. We must remember Stephanus was a freedman of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla, condemned for their Jewish style of living. It is highly likely that Stephanus was convinced to free Jews from the oppression of Domitian, emulating Ehud's success.

things in the universe and the universe itself completely free from hindrance and perfect, and the parts of it for the use of the whole? (Disc.4.7.5-6.).

This passage reflects the trust in faith against tyranny, appreciating martyrs, who challenge the tyrant, surely meant Domitian.

Another connection between Judeo-Christian thought and philosophical opposition was pointed out by Shimon Applebaum. Apollonius of Tyana reportedly declined to tread the soil of the Land of Israel because it was contaminated (Philos.V.XXVII). This should not be necessarily interpreted as anti-Semite remark, the more correct interpretation is the land was contaminated because of what had been done to Jewish nation. Thus, Apollonius of Tyana considers Judea as a sacred land (Applebaum, 1974, p. 121). These overtures among philosophical circles could be considered to bring Judeo-Christian figures into an active struggle against Domitian.

In fact, Jewish community felt uneasy under Domitian's reign. His awareness of increasing Jewish visibility in aristocracy and society could have contributed to his treatment towards the Jews. The Jewish royal group consisted of the Jewish king Agrippa II, his sister Berenice, and his brother-in law Tiberius Alexander had helped Vespasian to seize the imperial power in 69 A.D. This oriental groups penetration into Roman aristocracy had been deeper. Agrippa's father Agrippa I had been friends with Tiberius's son Drusus and Mark Anthony's daughter Antonia, who was also grandmother of the emperor Gaius. This connection was inherited by Agrippa II, who found a place in the emperor Claudius's court. His sister Berenice had been the mistress of Titus (Jones, 1992, p. 5-6). Applebaum notes that from Juvenal and Martial's writings the penetration of Judaism into Roman society could be observed (1974, p. 121).

In Domitian's mind, Judaism's increasing influence surely must have been perceived as a threat. Domitian, reportedly, ordered the descendants of David to be exterminated. He also summoned the descendants of Jude, the brother of Jesus, into his court. He eventually released them when he found out they were poor people, who did not have earthly desires (Eus.III.19-20.). Their lowly status must have helped them to avoid the condemnation. The verdict was different for high officials such as Flavius Clemens, Domitilla, Glabrio, and other high officials.

The Jews were also subjected to taxes more harshly. The Jews, who did not acknowledge their faith publicly while still living as Jews and conceal their identity to avoid taxes levied on the Jews were investigated thoroughly (Suet.Dom.12.2.). This harsh implementation of the *ficus Iudaicus* indicates that

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

Domitian aimed to reduce financial power of the Jewish people by extracting their wealth to the treasury. It also aimed at reducing the attractiveness of Judaism among people, seeking to obstruct proselytism. Furthermore, the very Jewish identity was affected by Domitian's tax administration. The confusion arose when Jewish Christian could be considered as Jewish tax evaders. Thus, they could be persecuted, and their properties could be confiscated. Non-Jewish Christians could also be conflated with Jews, leading to their persecution as atheists. This was cleared when Nerva limited the taxes on "those Jews who remained faithful to their ancestral way". Thus, according to this thesis, the process created by Domitian's implementation led to final separation between Judaism and Christianity (Heemstra, 2020, p. 226). Besides those pressures, The Jews in Rome felt fear uneasy about a possible expulsion (Jones, 1992, p. 119).

If we reconstruct the events in AD 95 and the assassination in the next year, my hypothesis concerning the assassination follows this sequence. Considering that Domitian declared the sons of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla as his heir apparent, Domitian's removal would profit the parents, who had Judeo-Christian beliefs. The conspirators would have felt anti-Judaism would be reversed under their rule. The conspiracy was a failure. The condemnation of high-status men along with Flavius Clemens and Domitilla shows that the patrons of the conspiracy were punished. Yet, their freedmen in the court were still active. Stephanus, the freedman of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla was one of them. Domitian's gloomy emotional status, reported by Suetonius and Cassius Dio, was more related to the emperor's awareness concerning the infiltrators in his court than his superstitious devotion to Minerva, who reportedly appeared in his dream. Both Suetonius and Cassius Dio report the fear of punishment prompted the conspirators to act (Cass.Dio.LXVII.15.4.).²⁰ The reason for Domitian's planned retribution was given as embezzlement but the real motive must have been these freedmen's connection to high officials executed in 95 A.D. Their lives were at stake. Suetonius remarks that the execution of Flavius Clemens "hastened his own destruction" (Dom.15.1.). Epictetus's writings and Apollonius of Tyana's involvement indicate they had already made contacts with philosopher opponents. The complicity of Praetorian Prefects, at least their inaction, seemed to be provided. They must have been looking for other powerful patrons, who would protect them from the wrath of the army after committing the deed. The fact that they remained unpunished after the assassination until the revolt of Praetorians indicate that anti-Domitian members of the Senate must have been

²⁰ Dio's unbelievable story about Domitia's discovery of the tablet on which the conspirators' names were written could be evaluated as the embellishment of the circumstances that the conspirators' expectation to be punished by the emperor.

reached.²¹ Still, the question of army, which adored Domitian, remained a problem. The epilogue of the assassination, therefore, must also be examined.

4. Aftermath of the Assassination

4. 1. Nerva's Accession

After the death of the emperor Domitian, Nerva ascended to imperial power. He was a political survivor, who served under Nero, survived the Year of the Four Emperors, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. Although he was a colorless figure, he held active but unofficial role in the capital (Berriman, Todd, and Todd, 2001, p. 314). Ehrhardt elevates Nerva as a formidable secret police chief who no one dares to offend him (1987, p. 18-20). This claim appears as to be an exaggeration for Nerva's power since that formidable powerful spy boss was, later, taken hostage in his own palace while he was an emperor.

Jones argues that Nerva might have involved if Domitian's *amici* had also participated in the conspiracy, referring Suetonius's claim of the involvement of Domitian's *amici*. Nerva would be a compromise candidate to prevent a civil war among those powerful figures (Jones, 1992, p. 195). Jones's construction of events presented in the end of his book comes out of blue, disconnected from his general arguments in the book. He does not present any motive for Domitian's *amici* to turn against him. Yet, it is most likely that Nerva was aware of the plot:

They discussed the matter with various men, and when none of them would accept it (for all were afraid of them, believing that they were testing their loyalty), they betook themselves to Nerva. For he was at once of the noblest birth and of a most amiable nature, and he had furthermore been in peril of his life as the result of being denounced by astrologers who declared that he should be sovereign (Cass.Dio.LXVII.15.5.).

Dio's this passage is significant in that it, firstly, reveals that the conspirators had been looking for a figurehead, which would protect them from the retribution of Domitian's loyalists. This contradicts Jones's proposal that Domitian's *amici* as a group involved since the conspirators were expecting a counterattack from that group. Secondly, Nerva was not their first choice. Other

²¹ However unloved, the killers of an emperor have always been punished traditionally because there is no reason for those who betrayed an emperor, will not betray their new master. For instance, one of Claudius's first acts was to punish Gaius's murderers. Suet.Claud.11.1.

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

men were approached but their proposal was declined. Thirdly, Nerva was aware of the plot even though he did not actively participate. From Dio's account, it can also be deduced that Nerva was persuaded by the prophesy that he was meant to be a ruler. Nerva's appeasement to this prophesy hints that he repressed his desire to rule after serving several emperors.

There was justified reasons for the plotters why Nerva was at the bottom on the list for the successor of Domitian. His rule seemed to resemble an anarchy under a weak ruler:

Fronto, the consul, is said to have remarked that it was bad to have an emperor under whom nobody was permitted to do anything, but worse to have one under whom everybody was permitted to do everything; and Nerva, on hearing this, ordered that this condition of affairs should cease for the future. Now Nerva was so old and so feeble in health (he always, for instance, had to vomit up his food) that he was rather weak (Cass.Dio.LXVIII.1.3.).

He encountered the conspiracy Calpurnius Crasus, who had a noble lineage. Even though his conspiracy was discovered by the princeps Crasus was not executed but merely exiled (Syme, 1958, p. 9). This could be interpreted as weakness rather than compassion.

The army was certainly in agitation: "The soldiers were greatly grieved and at once attempted to call him the Deified Domitian." (Suet.Dom.23.1). The obvious fear was the outbreak of the civil war. It was just three decades ago when Nero's death caused the civil war across the empire. Syme's evaluation of Nerva shed light on Nerva's unequalness for managing the task. "Capable of guiding policy by art and influence, Nerva was not equal to task of piloting a government in a stormy season." (1958, p. 6). He sought the support of the army desperately. The four legions which was waging war against Pannonian tribes sent a laurel to Rome in 97. On the surface, this could be interpreted as a possible backing. The former commander of Upper Germany, Verginius Rufus, was appointed as *consul ordinarius*. These moves were considered as the frail emperor's attempts to draw support (Berriman, Todd, and Todd, 2001, p. 316).

Yet, the fact that he was an unknown figure to the armies suggests that the real conflict could have taken place among Domitian's generals. Jones mentions the generals who comprise Domitian's *amici*, considered themselves as worth for the post (1992, p. 195). Syme rightly identifies the political atmosphere: "It required no astrologer to predict that the emperor following Nerva would be a military man. The only question was: after a civil war, or averting a civil war."

(Syme, 1958, p. 9). Trajan's ascension was not predetermined by no means. Pliny the Younger mentions: "a man who at that time was in command of the most massive army in the East, the subject of some significant gossip, and one causing apprehension" (Ep.IX.13.11.). The possible candidate for this alleged rival of Trajan were Cornelius Nigrinus, Larcus Priscus, and Julius Proculus. Regardless of the exact name of the rival, the referral of the rival suggests the debate concerning the new emperor continued throughout AD 97 (Berriman, Todd, and Todd, 2001, p. 322). The delay in avenging Domitian's death could be attributed to those debates in find one leader to rule to avoid a civil war. The commanders and generals distributed across the empire required time to confer and plan (Berriman, Todd, and Todd, 2001, p. 325). As soon as the consensus had been reached, the action was taken. The timing could not have been perfect. The revolt approximately corresponded the anniversary of the death of Domitian.

4. 2. The Revolt of the Praetorians

One of the most underdiscussed events in Roman history is the revolt of praetorians in autumn 97. The death of Roman emperor by violent means is common. 62 percent of Roman emperors met violent death (Saleh, 2019, p. 1). What is unprecedented in the revolt of Praetorians in 97, a group of soldiers stormed the emperor's palace, and took the emperor hostage, made the emperor accept their demands, including appointing his successor. The delicate conduct prevented an eruption of civil war that happened in AD 69 and would happen in AD 193²² when the political vacuum emerged after the death of an autocratic emperor.

Casperius Aelianus, one of the Praetorian Prefects, led the mutineer Praetorian Guards to the palace and demanded handing over the murderers of Domitian from the emperor. Instead, Nerva dramatically offered his life. However, this dramatic tone did not impress the soldiers and Nerva was set aside. The murderers of Domitian were punished. Nerva, as a result of these events ascended the Forum and declared Trajan as his successor (Cass.Dio.LXVIII.3.3.). Pliny the Younger deeply grieved by the punishment of the assassins, describing this revolt as the greatest stain in the age. He reports that Nerva was besieged in his palace, arrested, and confined (Pan.6.1.). The main actors of Domitian's assassination were killed. The death of Parthenius, who was the chief instigator

²² The year AD 193 witnessed five emperors after the assassination of Commudus see Anthony R.Birley, *Septimius Severus The African Emperor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 89-107.

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

of the assassination of Domitian was particularly gruesome. His testicles were cut off and stuffed into his mouth, being suffocated by them. A fellow soldier Petronius was kindly killed with a single blow. Nerva was forced to offer thanks to the mutineers (De Caesaribus.12.8.). Despite humiliation he suffered in the hands of the mutineers, Nerva must have felt lucky, after seeing the fates of the murderers especially suffering of Parthenius, but his rule was over.

In a euphemistic manner, Pliny the Younger claims that the adoption of Trajan offered the imperial power of Trajan and solidified Nerva's (Pan.6.3.). In fact, Nerva was a liability after performing his duty to appoint Trajan as his successor. The adoption was equal to an abdication. The long survival of Nerva could have forced him to go an exile to an island. However, death, very timely, intervened only three months later, saving him further humiliation (Syme, 1958, p. 12).

The revolt of Praetorians was a coup against Nerva. Although Pliny the Younger hints that Nerva's adoption of Trajan as a successor should be evaluated as a clever countermove against the rioters to return the power to himself (Pan.6.3.), there was no indication that Trajan was to be named as his successor if the revolt had not occurred. Nerva was childless but he had living relatives (Cass.Dio.LXVIII.4.1.). Nerva did not just pass over his relatives but he also dismissed many noble families of the Republican and Principate periods (Syme, 1958, p. 11). Military oligarchy managed to get one of them appointed as an emperor.

Among the generals Trajan ascended to the emperorship. This choice requires an examination. Syme suggests that the profit of the revolt of Praetorians went to others, implying that the rioters' choice of the emperor was different (Syme, 1958, p. 13). This suggestion must indicate that Casperius Aelianus lost control after the riot by allowing Nerva to take countermeasures. However, there was no development that indicate their loss of control. Nerva was taken hostage and the assassins were punished flawlessly. After the completion of this goal, Nerva was forced to offer thanks to the rioters. This demonstrates the rioters retained control. Dio's account narrates that: "He [Trajan] sent for Aelianus and the Praetorians who had mutinied against Nerva, pretending that he was going to employ them for some purpose, and then put them out of the way" (LXVIII.5.4.). This does not necessarily mean that Trajan killed them. Aelianus was not naïve to think that their actions in taking an emperor hostage would not require punishment so it would not be easy to deceive him. It is also illogical to think that Trajan waited three months to punish the rioters and needed a deception if Trajan and Nerva established their authority in Rome. The possible explanation that

Casperius Aelianus was an agent of Trajan. After he completed his mission, Aelianus could become an embarrassment for new emperor, whose presence would become constant remainder to the emperor whom he should be grateful. He was either executed or, most likely, asked to retire (Berriman, Todd, and Todd, 2001, p. 322). Syme also concurs with the possibility of complicity between Trajan and Casperius Aelianus, stating that Casperius Aelianus had been a tribune under Vespasian and went to Egypt and known to Trajan. Thus, Trajan could also be the candidate of the Praetorian Guards (Syme, 1958, p. 35).

Trajan had helped Domitian in AD 89 in suppressing the Saturninus revolt by marching VII Gemina from Spain. His loyalty had been rewarded with ordinary consulship in AD 91 when he was only 38. He had been among Domitian's courtiers. Moreover, Domitian's and Trajan's families were related by marriage. Trajan's father and Domitian's brother, Titus, had married sisters (Jones, 1992, p. 59). Besides these connections, which make Trajan acceptable to Domitian's loyalists, the intellectual qualities of his wife, Pompeia Plotina, should also be mentioned. She was known for her adherence to Epicurean school of thought. In AD 121 she requested Hadrian to favor Epicurean school in Athens and remove restrictions that requires the scholarch to be a Roman citizen. Thus, she managed to appoint her candidate to the post of the scholarch. This indicates her connection with Epicurean scholars had been developed earlier although she avoided making those connections public (Smith, 1996, p. 120-130).²³ The future empress's connections with Epicureans could be seen beneficial to balance Stoics, who engaged in subversive activities against the state, for those who engineered Trajan's accession.

Syme writes the military oligarchy succeeded in seating Trajan into the post with the aid of "certain men in the background" (1958, p. 13). If we trace who these certain men were, we found their connections with Domitian. One of these men most probably was Sextus Iulius Frontinus whose career flourished under Flavians. He was a consul in 72 or 73 and governor of Britain in 73-77 under Vespasian. He was a legate in Lower Germany in 81-83, accompanying Domitian in his campaign against the Chatti. He was in charge of water supply under Nerva. He held second and third consulship under Trajan, *suffectus* in AD 98 and *ordinarius* in AD 100. The consecutive consulships outside the imperial family were unprecedented. This honor elevated him to the status of the *princeps*. This extraordinary honor bestowed upon him in the transition process demonstrates his importance in the settlement of post-Domitianic era and to the

²³ Trajan, who showed little interest to intellectual pursuits, left those matters to his wife see (Syme, 1958, p. 40). Thus, Plotina exercised intellectual power in the empire.

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

emperor himself (Malloch, 2015, p. 77).²⁴ Quoting from the historian Albino Garzetti, Berriman and Todd state that Casperius Aelianus did not view his actions as subversion of the state (2001, p. 325). Their aim was to punish Domitian's murderers and seat Trajan to the emperorship. If Frontinus was one of the most influential people which made Trajan's accession possible, his presence in Rome at the time was instrumental in ensuring that the coup would remain at surgical level. After Trajan ascended, he paid his debt by granting him extraordinary honors.

Thus, the civil war was avoided by being united behind one candidate. The personal rivalries and factions were disbanded to deal with internal and external problems. Internally, liberty promoted by Nerva caused disorder and anarchy (Syme, 1958, p. 7). Externally, the Roman legions were dealing with the unrest on the Danube frontier. The Domitian loyalists needed to be assured that Trajan would act along the lines of Domitian (Berriman, Todd, and Todd, 2001, p. 330). The Dacian campaigns of Trajan should be evaluated as a continuation of instead of reversal. The aggression against Parthian rested on Flavian defense policy (Waters, 1969, p. 401).

Internally, many of Domitian's most able and famous loyalist continued their posts under Trajan. Aurelius Fulvus, Frontinus, Iulius Ursus, Pedanius Fuscus, Iavolenus Priscus were among those names. The families, which flourished under Flavians, such as the Ceionii, the Annii, Aurelii continued their rise. notorious *delatores* such as Fabricius Veiento or Aquilius Regulus suffered no punishment. This indicates greater continuity from Domitian's administration to Trajan's (Waters, 1969, p. 390). Despite Pliny the Younger's praise of freedom under Trajan's rule (Pan.66.4.), the status of princeps did not change much vis-à-vis the senate. Trajan was as much as autocratic as Domitian had been. He closely followed Domitian's style. He equated himself with Hercules as Domitian associated himself with Minerva. He consecrated his relatives as Domitian had deified his relatives. His assumed title *optimus princeps* had previously used by Domitian (Waters, 1969, p. 394-396).²⁵

²⁴ Frontinus was also the author of *Strategemata*, which is written as a military guidebook. In this book, he explicitly praised Domitian in his conduct against the Chatti. He found Domitian very successful in concealing his plans and strategy (Strat.1.1.8.), determining character of the war (Strat.1.1.3.), laying out battle plans (Strat.2.3.7.9.), ensuring loyalty of his allies (Strat.2.11.7.), and restraint (Strat.4.3.14.).

²⁵ Besides the internal and external politics, Trajan emulated Domitian's building program see Waters, 2001, p. 403.

Another interesting statistic shows that *damnatio memoriae* attempts on Domitian also slowed down and abandoned. Comparing with other emperors subjected to *damnatio memoriae* the rate of erasure is lower. Domitian's name was erased in only 24 percent of examples found in Rome and in 37 percent in provinces whereas Geta's name was erased from 68 percent of inscriptions in Rome and 80 percent in provinces. An inscription dated to the year AD 99, three years after his death, Domitian was mentioned with his full honorific titles (Spinelli & Gregori, 2019, p. 254). This suggests that new dynasts succeeding Nerva did not follow *damnatio memoriae* against Domitian.²⁶

CONCLUSION

Classical historians and modern historians agree that Domitian had an authoritarian character. Witnessing the fickle character of the senate with his own eyes in the Year of the Four Emperors, Domitian further marginalized its status in political arena. The conspiracies and revolts in his reign, rightly, raised the level of distrust of Domitian. While the conspiracies against Domitian are examined, the perpetrators tried to take advantage Domitian's preoccupation with an external threat. The years 82, 87, 89, 93, and 95 when conspiracies emerged Domitian, also corresponded the years when Domitian waged campaigns in Germania, Danube, and Pannonia.

The actors of the conspiracies were mainly comprised of senators, Stoic philosophers, small segments of army, and finally Judaist circle. They constantly searched for alternative members who could replace Domitian, but Domitian ruthlessly and successfully suppressed these conspiracies and revolts. The latest conspiracy involved those who were the closest to him, Flavius Clements and Domitilla, both belonging to the imperial family. Their sons were adopted by Domitian as his successors. Flavius Clemens and Domitilla along with several high officials were executed for atheism and practicing Judaism. They were more likely to be impatient to wait Domitian's natural death to assume imperial power. After their purge, however, their men in palace remained, fearing for their lives. On September 18, 96, they successfully implemented their plan to murder the emperor.

²⁶ In fact, not only Trajan but the emperors, who succeeded Trajan were related with Domitian. Hadrian was a commander of Legio I Minervia, established by Domitian and received honorary title *pia fidelis* because of its role in suppressing the Saturninus revolt see Anthony Everitt, *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 22. Aurelius Fulvus, the grandfather of Antoninus Pius, was an *amicus* of Domitian see (Waters, 1969, p. 390).

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

Domitian's previous purges, however, left the conspirators' leaderless. The only person they could place to emperorship was Nerva. While the empire was experiencing anarchy, Domitian's generals were in seeking consensus in order to avoid civil war. Trajan, who was one of the most loyal generals of Domitian and consul in AD 91, emerged as a leading candidate to replace Nerva. In the autumn 97, the Praetorians under Domitian besieged the imperial palace, taking Nerva as hostage. The murderers of Domitian were killed in a gruesome manner. Nerva was forced to adopt Trajan and thank the rioters publicly. Domitian's loyalists continued to serve under the new regime. The senate's status never recovered. The successors of Domitian followed his example of rule. Therefore, Domitian was one of the most consequential rulers of the Roman Empire. The acknowledgment of the senate's diminished status by prompted senatorial authors such as Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Cassius Dio to attack vociferously his character and try to blacken his rule. Yet, the new contemporary studies started to vindicate this exemplary ruler.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Purpose: This article aims to illuminate the assassination of Domitian, who was the last of Flavian ruler. Although he was a capable administrator, his attempts to marginalize the Senate, whose influence had been waning since the introduction of the principate earned Domitian a lot of enemies. Domitian's rule was characterized by uprisings and conspiracies. He was successful in countering many betrayals but he did not escape the last one. This paper lists potential motives and culprits to explain the events that preceded the assassination. It also analyzes the events that took place after his assassination.

Method: This paper reviews the ancient and contemporary sources in a critical manner. As Domitian's rule was told by the hostile sources, the veracity of their accounts should be reviewed carefully. When these sources are cross-checked, the absurdity of some of their claims can be seen. Especially, this critical approach is necessary in finding the culprits of the assassination. The contributions of modern historians, who attempt to assess Domitian's reign in an objective way, therefore, are very valuable.

Findings: As a result of reviews of the sources, it is seen that Domitian encountered rebellions perpetrated by disaffected elite, who was not happy with Domitian's accession to the imperial throne. As soon as he came to the imperial power, the Senate members looked for potential candidates who could replace Domitian. The conspirators specifically chose dangerous times for the empire to unseat Domitian. In AD 82-83, when Domitian was waging war against the Chatti, they nominated his cousin for emperorship. In AD 89 when Domitian was at war on Danube front against the Dacians, the rebellion of Saturninus was encouraged. Due to their hatred for Domitian, the conspirators collaborated with the troublesome Chatti tribe.

Another circle of opposition was the Stoic party, whose goals were obstructionism and treason. Without a credible reason or offering an alternative, they were united against the principate. Domitian's disciplinary rule led the members of the party to subvert the state, despite the fact that Domitian demonstrated his conciliatory attitude to those members.

Stoic party collaborated with the Jewish group, which increased its influence during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus. Domitian's restrictions over this group caused them to join the opposition.

The Anatomy of The Assassination of Domitian

The opposition extended its reach to the palace. The parents of Domitian's heir apparents, Domitilla and Flavius Clemens, were punished due to their closeness to Jewish customs and atheism. This paper argues that the main reason of their punishment was their bid to the throne. When Domitian was eliminated, they would control their natural sons, Domitian's heir apparents.

Discussion and Conclusion: Domitian was murdered by the steward of the executed Flavius Clemens. This connection reveals that although Domitian managed to locate the leaders of the conspiracy in AD 96, their mid-level men in the palace carried out the assassination fearing that Domitian would expose them as traitors. After his death, his memory was obliterated. Many senators and senate leaning historians targeted his character and rule. Even his private life was subject to darkening rumors and slanders. Yet, he was a popular emperor among the Roman population and army. His death was avenged in a ruthless manner. Despite the fact that his successor Nerva was taken hostage in his imperial palace, this revolt did not cause a civil war. Even this event was an indicator how Domitian was successful in instilling discipline in the Roman administrator. Domitian's general, Trajan, who led his legion as soon as he heard the revolt of Saturninus to suppress it, succeeded Nerva, smoothly after the revolt of the Praetorians.