

THE DURATION OF THE CENSORSHIP OF VESPASIAN AND TITUS

The censorship of Vespasian and Titus ended in 74 and not in 79 as has been argued by Professor Armando Torrent. Inscriptions naming Vespasian *ensor* after 74 do not prove that he had become *ensor perpetuus*, but rather show that Vespasian felt it enhanced his personal *dignitas* to be called *ensor*.

Seven years ago, Professor Armando Torrent published in this journal an article¹ in which he argued that Vespasian did not cease to be *ensor* in 74, as is usually thought, but rather continued to hold the censorship until his death in 79. As evidence, Torrent cited the coins and inscriptions dated after 74 that include *ensor* in the titulature of Vespasian and Titus, and he noted that the extension of the *pomerium* by Vespasian and Titus in 75 might provide support for his theory. Further, he argued that the very fact that Domitian later became *ensor perpetuus* implies the existence of a precedent which can most easily be supplied by assuming that Vespasian became *ensor* for life, and, finally, that Vespasian's principal concern in assuming the censorship was to unite the powers of that office to his position as emperor², and that such a concern would much more likely result in the assumption of the censorship for life than for a limited period.

It is the purpose of the present paper to argue against Torrent's thesis and in favor of the traditional view, according to which the censorship of Vespasian and Titus ended in 74. The point is of some importance, for various events of the principate of Vespasian can be dated only, or primarily, by their connection with the censorship.

¹ «Para una interpretación de la 'potestas censoria' en los emperadores Flavios», EMERITA 36, 1968, pp. 213-229.

² *Ibid.*, p. 225: «... en mi opinión, Vespasiano tomó la censura simplemente como un elemento más en la consolidación de su poder...» Torrent did go on to discuss other probable reasons: the censorship helped in the reconstruction of the state, and served to increase the personal prestige of the emperor.

A. B. Bosworth has recently pointed out that scholars have tended to connect too many activities with the censorship of 73-74¹, but there are still some programs, such as Vespasian's adlections *in senatum* and *inter patricios*, that seem to have occurred during, and not after, the censorship. Thus, if the censorship did in fact last until 79 rather than 74, then the date of adlection of these men becomes quite uncertain, with numerous consequences for the dates of other positions in their careers and for the provincial *fasti*. Let us begin, therefore, by considering the evidence in favor of the traditional view that Vespasian ceased to be censor in 74.

First, and most importantly, Cassius Dio states explicitly that Domitian was the first and only man who ever held the censorship for life: *τιμητῆς δὲ διὰ βίου πρῶτος δὴ καὶ μόνος καὶ ἰδιωτῶν καὶ αὐτοκρατόρων ἐχειροτονήθη*.² Clearly, Dio is concerned here to emphasize the absolute singularity of the office, for which he knew of no precedent. Second, as has frequently been noted, the third-century writer Censorinus states that Vespasian and Titus performed the *lustrum*, and thus presumably brought the censorship to a close, in 74³. Third, at least thirty-one inscriptions datable to the years 75-79 mention Vespasian as *censor*, yet not one of them describes him as *censor perpetuus*⁴.

We have, therefore, an explicit statement that Domitian, and not Vespasian, was the first *censor perpetuus*; a clear statement that the censorship ended in 74, and not in 79; and rather convincing negative evidence in that no ancient source — literary, epigraphical or numismatic — ever refers to Vespasian as *censor perpetuus* or *censor* for life. Surely our assumption must be that Vespasian ceased to be censor in 74, unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary from other sources. Let us now turn to a consideration of those other sources.

To begin, we may note that the extension of the *pomerium* in 75 has no bearing on the duration of the censorship, for Vespasian was given the right to advance the *pomerium* at the very beginning of his principate, as recorded in the *lex de imperio Vespasiani*⁵.

¹ «Vespasian and the Provinces: some Problems of the Early 70's A. D.», *Athenaeum* 51, 1973, pp. 49-78. Bosworth makes useful comments regarding the activities of the censorship in general, and the independence of the provincial censuses in particular.

² Dio-Xiph. 67.4.3, Boissevain.

³ Censorin., *de die natali* XVIII 14.

⁴ For the inscriptions, see below, notes 1 and 2, page 400.

⁵ *ILS* 244, fifth clause.

If we turn now to the numismatic evidence, we find that Torrent relied upon the publication of H. Cohen¹, in which he found three coins that appear to record Vespasian as *censor* after 74, and ten that include *censor* among Titus' titles after 74. Concerning Titus, Torrent himself argued that the inclusion of the title was purely honorary; the coins mentioning Vespasian are as follows:

Cohen, Vespasian 383: obv. IMP. CAESAR VESPASIAN. AVGVST.; rev. PONTIF. MAX.? TR. P. COS. VII CENS. This coin appears to be otherwise unknown²; compare the comments on Cohen 384, below.

Cohen, Vespasian 156: obv. IMP. CAES. VESP. AVG. P. M. T. P. COS. VIII. This coin does not mention the censorship.

Cohen, Vespasian 384: obv. IMP. CAESAR VESPASIAN. AVGVSTVS; rev. (PON.? or PONTIF. MAX.) TR. POT. P. P. COS. VIII. CENS. S. C. Concerning this coin, Mattingly makes the following comment: «The coin of this year described by C. 384 (Paris) is mysterious, but perhaps ancient»³.

There are, in addition, various undated coins (Cohen, Vespasian, nos. 431, 515, 532, 578, 580, cited by Torrent, and numerous examples in Mattingly), but these are of course useless in establishing the duration of the censorship. We are left, therefore, with only two coins that mention Vespasian as censor after 74. Since there are, on the other hand, at least forty-eight different coin types mentioning Vespasian as censor which are to be dated in 73 or 74⁴, it is probably best to accept Mattingly's assertions that «... the censorship [appears] on issues of A. D. 73 only»⁵ (referring to gold and silver issues), and that «the censorship finds mention on [bronze] coins of A. D. 73-74»⁶. The two coins, Cohen 383 and 384, if they are in fact ancient, thus would seem to be quite anomalous, and it is certainly not possible to argue that

¹ *Description Historique des Monnaies Frappées sous l'Empire Romain*, Paris, 1880.

² Neither A. S. Robertson, *Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet*, University of Glasgow, London, 1962, nor H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, Volume II, London, 1930, appear to know of this coin.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 173, note.

⁴ Mattingly, *ibid.*, coins of Vespasian, nos. 91, 142, 143, 409, 655-666, 696-705 and 886-890, with comparative issues from other collections.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. XXXI.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. XLIIIff. Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. CXII-CXL, in describing the coin types of the reign of Vespasian, mentions no coins of Vespasian including *censor* and datable after 74.

they provide convincing evidence that Vespasian assumed the censorship for life.

When we consider inscriptions, however, we find that a rather different situation does in fact exist. A fairly extensive collection¹ of datable inscriptions on which the titulature of Vespasian and/or Titus is preserved beyond a reasonable doubt shows that, in fact, more inscriptions of the years 75 to 79 include *ensor* among Vespasian's titles than omit it. Year by year, the number of inscriptions of each type is as follows:

Y E A R	NUMBER OF INSCRIPTIONS THAT	
	Include <i>ensor</i> ²	Omit <i>ensor</i> ³
75	11	1
76.....	6	4
77.....	7	6
78.....	6	4
79 (before Vespasian's death).	1	2
TOTAL.....	31	17

¹ I have gathered all such inscriptions in *CIL* (but only from volumes with indices), in the volumes of *AE* from 1901 to the present, and in *SEG*, *ILS*, *IGLS*, *IGRR*, McCrum and Woodhead, *Select Documents of the Principales of the Flavian Emperors*, Cambridge, 1961, and H. C. Newton, *The Epigraphical Evidence for the Reigns of Vespasian and Titus*, Ithaca, 1901. Further items could no doubt be added if one looked in other collections, but they almost certainly would cause no substantial change in the figures presented here.

² These are, for 75: *CIL* 3.470, 3.7203, 3.7204, 6.933, 6.1232, 9.2564, 14.86; *ILS* 8795; *AE* 1968.7; Newton, 4; McCrum-Woodhead, 51; for 76: *CIL* 10.1629, 10.6812, 10.6817, 11.6106, 16.21; McCrum-Woodhead, 447 a; for 77: *CIL* 6.935, 10.6896, 10.6901, 11.2999; *AE* 1952.44, 1963.11; *IGRR* 3.840; for 78: *CIL* 5.7987, 6.934, 10.3829, 11.5166, 16.22, 16.23; for 79: *CIL* 2.4697.

³ These are, for 75: *AE* 1933.205; for 76: *CIL* 8.22190, 10.1406; *ILS* 8904; *AE* 1957.307; for 77: *CIL* 2.1423, 2.2041, 2.4814, 2.5264; *CIG* 1305; McCrum-Woodhead 485; for 78: *CIL* 3.6993; *AE* 1902.157, 1948.94, 1951.206; for 79: *CIL* 2.2477, 3.5201. I have not included in this list those inscriptions on which Vespasian's whole titulature is not given, since one might expect the censorship to be dropped from any shortened form of the imperial titulature.

If the inscriptions that survive are reasonably representative of all the inscriptions of this period, as seems probable, then it is clear from the figures given here that Vespasian regularly included the censorship among his titles after 74, although he was far more concerned to have *ensor* among his titles in 75 than he was in the later years of his principate. Our problem, then, is as follows: Are we to assume that the presence of the title *ensor* on inscriptions of the years 75-79 shows — contrary to all the evidence we have seen so far — that Vespasian became *ensor perpetuus*? Or is the use of the title to be explained in some other way?

I would suggest that the latter is the case, and that the reason for the continued use of the title *ensor* was a simple one: political advantage. It has recently been argued by B. W. Jones that «Vespasian and Titus... intended to convey the impression that they had *ensoria potestas*, not for a period of eighteen months, but for life»¹; while the fact that Vespasian is not called *ensor* on 37 % of the extant inscriptions or on coins of the years 75-79 (except perhaps for Cohen 383 and 384) would argue against such a conscious policy of duplicity as Jones suggests, still he is no doubt correct in his assumption that the holding of the censorship would increase the personal prestige of the emperor and his son. It is this desire — the desire to take advantage of the prestige accruing to the holder of the censorship — which can be taken as the explanation of the continued appearance of the censorship on inscriptions.

In passing, it may be worth noting that this assumption, that Vespasian continued to use the title *ensor* because of a desire to increase his *dignitas*, may help to explain a number of otherwise peculiar facts. For example, the heavy concentration of inscriptions including *ensor* in 75, as opposed to later years, makes perfectly good sense if one assumes that the prestige accruing from the title would be greatest in the year immediately following the actual censorship. Similarly, it would seem that Titus too understood the political value of the censorship and employed it when he became emperor, for every inscription I have found that can be dated in 79, after Vespasian's death, includes the title *ensor*².

¹ «A Note on the Flavians' Attitude to the Censorship», *Historia* 21, 1972, p. 128.

² There are six such inscriptions: *CIL* 3.7391, 5.7988, 6.942, 6.1246, 11.3734, 16.24. On the other hand, it should be noted that coins of this period do not mention Titus as *ensor*.

On the other hand, it may be that Vespasian was concerned not to lessen Domitian's prestige by contrast, for on five of the six inscriptions that mention Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, no mention is made of the censorship¹.

Finally, it is to be noted that, although Vespasian scarcely ever appears as *ensor* on coins after 74, Titus is frequently called *ensor* on them. Mattingly, for example, lists half a dozen coins of 76² and twenty-five of 77 or 78³ that include *ensor* among Titus' titles. It does not seem impossible that Vespasian saw the need for his elder son to acquire additional prestige in order to insure a smooth succession, while he himself felt secure enough to ignore the political value of mentioning the censorship on coins.

In sum, we have seen that there is clear evidence that Vespasian's censorship did end in 74, and that the evidence that Torrent adduced to the contrary does not provide convincing evidence of a continuation of the censorship to 79, and in fact can be explained quite readily on the assumption that the censorship ended in 74.

This being the case, it seems best to return to the views of Newton and Weynand, who long ago saw that the epigraphical references to Vespasian as *ensor* after 74 were purely a matter of political honors⁴, and not to be taken as an indication that Vespasian became censor for life.

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¹ The censorship is mentioned on *CIL* 14.86, of 75, but not on *CIL* 3.6993, 8.10119, 8.22190, *ILS* 8904, or *AE* 1902.157.

² *Op. cit.* (above, n. 9), Vespasian, nos. 484-486. Three more can be added from Cohen: Titus, nos. 62, 155 and 175 (cf. Mattingly, pp. 101, 220 and 206, notes, respectively).

³ *Ibid.*, Vespasian, nos. 855-872, with additional coins from other collections; also p. 221, note.

⁴ Newton, *op. cit.* (above, n. 14), p. 29, n. 2; Weynand in *RE* 6, 1909, col. 2659.