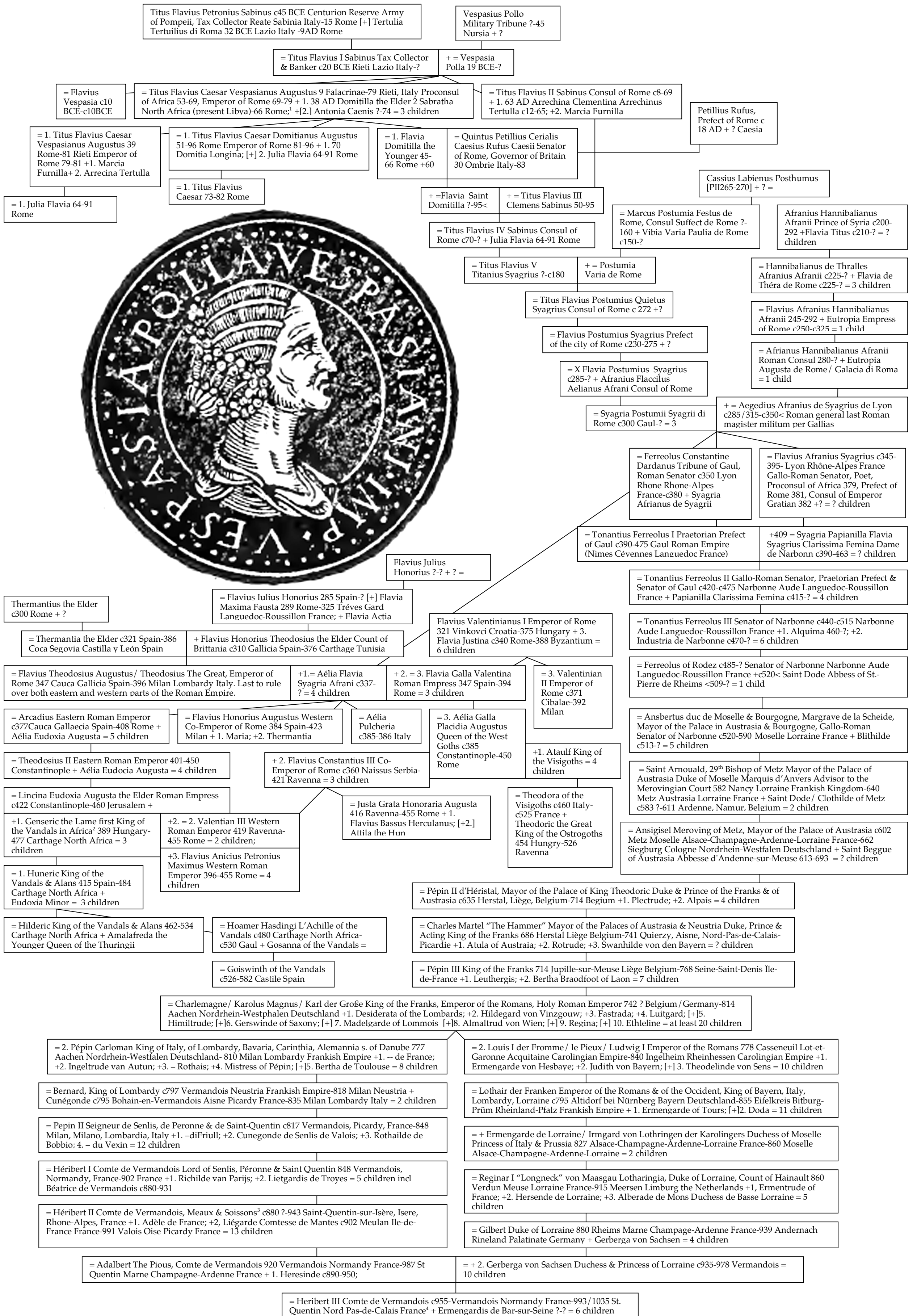


Vespasia Polla Vespasiani Family*



*After having worked backward through countless genealogies spanning centuries of mostly nameless, faceless, and invisible African forebears, and mostly nameless, faceless, and invisible wives and mothers, it was a welcome surprise to come across the Ur-matriarch of the Piper/Downs family, Vespasia Polla Vespasiani (15 BCE-?), pictured. She is the 22nd great-grandmother of both Liudolf Grand Duke of Saxony (c816-864) and also his first wife Oda Billung von Thüringen; and the 59th great-grandmother of both Daniel Ashby Piper (1881-1966) and also his first wife Beatrix Downs Piper McCleary (1892-1969). The mother of one Roman emperor, the grandmother of two more, and the 8th-plus great-grandmother of several more, her father's family, gens Polla, [or Pollia] is counted among the oldest patrician families of ancient Rome. But in fact they were originally a clever and enterprising plebeian clan of the equestrian order. Suetonius describes her as being "descended of worshipful parentage, ... the daughter of Vespasius Pollio" and refers to a "hill-top [near Nursia], bearing the name of Vespasia, where many monuments of the Vespasii are to be seen, a great evidence to prove the nobleness and antiquity of that family" (*History of Twelve Caesars*, trans. Philemon Holland, 1606), 347. At least

she has a name and a face. The medallion image of her is from page 121 of the *Promptuarium Iconum Insigniorum* (1558, Zürich).
 1 Domitilla the Elder, the Emperor Vespasian's wife and mother of his three children, was a North African freedwoman born to Flavius Liberalis (Lat. *befitting a freedman*), a scribe, and an unknown mother. She had been the consort of Statilius Capella, a Roman equestrian also born in Sabratha. Suetonius says that through her father's efforts, she was "afterwards pronounced a gentlewoman born and naturalized a citizen of Rome."
 2 The first known Roman expedition in Africa was led by Lucius Cornelius Balbus the Younger, Proconsul of Africa, in 19 BCE.
 3 In "The Feudal Society and the Christian Epic" in his *Medieval Essays*, Christopher Dawson compares Héribert II Comte de Vermandois (c880-943) to "the bosses and racketeers of the American underworld" "who had made a position for themselves by a judicious combination of intimidation and protection."