CALVUS NERO: DOMITIAN AND THE MECHANICS OF PREDECESSOR DENIGRATION*

Michael Charles
University of Queensland

ABSTRACT

The post-Domitianic literary record differs markedly from that of the emperor’s reign. Although portrayed as a victorious general, defender of Roman morality and a great builder while alive, he is described, after his assassination and damnatio memoriae, as a vainglorious and immoral tyrant. While judgment will not be passed on the man himself, this article will attempt to show that the record of Domitian’s reign and character was dictated not so much by reality as by the mechanics of predecessor denigration. What had been acceptable (and laudable) for other emperors was to become unacceptable (and worthy of condemnation) for Domitian. His virtues were made into vices and his successes were rendered as failures - all in order to accord with what was expected of a tyrant, a caluus Nero.

Juvenal, in his fourth Satire, wrote that Rome, under Domitian, was in the control of a caluus Nero (4.38). Such an epithet suggests to his audience that the two emperors Domitian and Nero were identical in terms of behaviour and morality, and that it was only Domitian’s baldness that differentiated him from his notorious predecessor. Although the reconstructed personalities of Nero and Domitian show marked differences, analysis of the ancient literary record of both emperors reveals a great number of similarities, so much so that Juvenal’s statement is, on the surface at least, not without justification. Nero, only a quarter of a century after his death, had became the archetypal tyrant, a man whose

---

* All translations in this article are taken directly or are adapted from the relevant Loeb editions. Abbreviations follow the ‘Liste des périodiques’ in L’Année philologique. In addition, PACA = Proceedings of the African Classical Association; TAASDH = Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland. All dates are AD. The author would like to thank Associate Professor B.W. Jones of the University of Queensland for his invaluable assistance and friendly criticism. Of course, this need not imply that he shares all of the views expressed herein. Thanks should also be expressed to the two anonymous referees, without whom many
supposed cruelty, profligacy and debauched character had become legendary amongst the Roman aristocracy. Domitian, when he was depicted as another Nero, thus received the ultimate condemnation. This paper will attempt to provide a ‘case in point’ for predecessor denigration and a brief résumé of the Domitianic and post-Domitianic reaction to aspects of the emperor’s conduct. With the exception of Philostratus and the Byzantine epitomes of Cassius Dio, ‘post-Domitianic’ will refer to accounts written in the reigns of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian, to the general exclusion of later writers such as Aurelius Victor and John Malalas. It should be noted, too, that the present article necessarily owes much to Ramage’s work on predecessor denigration, and to the various scholars who have attempted to rehabilitate the last Flavian emperor.

As is widely recognised, the majority of post-Domitianic literature relating to Domitian’s reign was penned either by the senatorial élite, a small and judgmental section of Roman society, or by poets who sought the favour of the new régime. The eques Suetonius, Hadrian’s one-time ab epistulis, remains a notable exception. Consequently, a ‘good’ emperor was one who took pains to placate the Senate, one who strove to preserve the façade of senatorial rule. A ‘bad’ emperor, however, was one who failed to disguise the true nature of imperial power. Such an emperor, at least according to those who wrote after 96, was Domitian. Yet this explains only in part why the post-Domitianic literary record is so condemnatory.

significant aspects would have been overlooked. Even if their views were sometimes contrary to the ideas expressed above (especially with regard to the presence or otherwise of figured-speech criticism in the works of the Domitianic poets), the present paper has nevertheless benefited enormously from their incisive criticisms and thought-provoking suggestions.


We might simplistically say that Domitian was portrayed as a *caluus Nero* because he executed so many members of the senatorial order. Yet Claudius, one of the deified emperors, may have put more senators to death than did Domitian. Why, then, did the Senate fail to condemn Claudius? Why was the despised cripple allowed to become *Divus Claudius*, a god like his grandfather Augustus? The answer, at least at a superficial level, is surprisingly simple. Claudius was succeeded by Nero, his adoptive son. Although Nero was neither friend nor admirer of Claudius — he owed his position entirely to the machinations of Agrippina the Younger, his scheming mother — it was in his best interests to deify his ‘father’ and thus consolidate his rule. Like Domitian, Nero felt the need to ally himself with divinity in order to reinforce public perceptions of his imperial infallibility. Of course, the new emperor’s *pietas* did not last for long. This is evidenced by the publication of the *Apocolocynosis Diui Claudii* (generally thought to have been written by Seneca the Younger) and Suetonius’ affirmation that rites associated with Claudius’ deification were soon neglected (*Claud. 45*). Still, Nero’s initial action prevented an official condemnation of the dead Caesar. Despite the accounts of Suetonius and Tacitus, and the scurrilous verse of Juvenal, Claudius’ position as a ‘good’ emperor remains, to this day, surprisingly intact. Nero, on the other hand, had also executed a great many senators, yet he, like Domitian, suffered *damnatio memoriae*. For the most part, this was the result of being succeeded (after the abortive reigns of Galba, Otho and Vitellius) by a new and necessarily hostile dynasty that was eager to allay senatorial fears of renewed tyranny.

---


5 See also Suet. *Vesp*. 9.1.

6 See Ramage (note 2) 641 and 676-79.
In literature, the present was regularly depicted as a happy age, an era in which, as Tacitus relates, it is permitted to write about the current régime without compromising one’s integrity (Hist. 1.1). It is the ideal age, a revivification of the ancient aetas aurea, compared with which the near past must inevitably suffer by comparison. Against this backdrop of felicity and good-will, the maleficia of the past receive suitable amplification, and, as a happy consequence, appear antithetical to the beneficia carried out by the incumbent dynasty. Consequently, the sycophantic, upon the installation of a new régime, are presented with an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with their new master, while the somewhat more principled, by means of Mahnschriften (such as Pliny’s Panegyricus), are able to encourage the reigning emperor to follow the precepts of sound rule. All of this, of course, is a commonplace, and one that has been oft-discussed. Yet the very men who had prospered under Domitian’s rule seem to have been loudest in their condemnation of the last Flavian. Pliny the Younger, for instance, was most scathing in his criticism of the preceding dynasty (and Domitian in particular). Indeed, he openly espouses the concept of denigration of predecessor: ‘hoc primum erga optimum imperatorem piorum ciuium officium est, insequi dissimiles’ (Pan. 53.2). Yet, despite his protests to the contrary, it seems reasonably clear that Pliny had enjoyed the especial favour of the ‘tyrant’. Tacitus was at least honest enough to admit that he owed his good fortune to the Flavian principes, not least of all Domitian. Those who sought to denigrate Domitian post mortem did so for a variety of reasons, not the least of which were political. Even if these detractors had not privately opposed the actions and behaviour of the dead Augustus, they saw no reason to refrain from echoing the official position of abhorrence in their subsequent literary

---

10 See also Tac. Agr. 3.1 and 44.5.
11 See also Pan. 53.6 and cf. M. Durry, Pline de Jeune: Panégyrique de Trajan (Paris 1938) 21-24. Ramage (note 2) 643 writes that ‘[t]here may be a hint that the panegyrist is following official policy.’ For a comprehensive modern discussion of the Panegyricus, see P. Fedeli, ‘Il “Panegirico” di Plinio nella critica moderna’, in ANRW 2.33.1 (1989) 387-514.
13 For a description of Pliny’s career, see R. Syme, Tacitus (Oxford 1958) 77.
14 Tac. Hist. 1.1: ‘dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius prorectam non abnuerim.’
15 Waters (note 3) 77.
work. Few would have wholeheartedly believed that the res publica was freer under the new dynasty that it had been under Domitian – the atmosphere may have changed, but the mechanisms of power remained. In their quest to secure the favour of the incumbent régime, and, in the case of the senatorial élite, facilitate a more willing dialogue between emperor and Senate, Domitian’s detractors deemed it acceptable, and appropriate, to stoop to whatever means they felt were necessary to tarnish the dead emperor’s reputation. To be fair, the Senate, as a body, had little choice but to demonstrate their fervour for the new régime by roundly condemning the last of the Flavian principes. Domitian had left no suitable heirs: (T. Flavius) Vespasianus and (T. Flavius) Domitianus, his adoptive sons, were too young and had not the political and military experience to command the requisite loyalty of army and Senate. Therefore, it would have been largely fruitless, if not dangerous, to have done anything but damn the memory of Domitian and allow the instruments of its propaganda to accord him the mantle of a tyrant, a calius Nero – and this is precisely what the Senate and its minions did. By this means, the senatorial class, amongst whom we must number Nerva and Trajan, was able to exculpate itself from the collective guilt of association that had stemmed from its previous approbation of the ‘tyrant’.

It is interesting to note that many of Domitian’s recorded actions are similar to those of Nero. But are these similarities more than coincidental? It would seem so. For instance, Suetonius alleges that no one was allowed to leave the theatre while Nero was singing, a rule which caused pregnant

---

16 Suet. Dom. 15.1. Domitian had ordered the deaths of Flavius Sabinus and Flavius Clemens, the two grandsons of his uncle Sabinus. On the relationship of these men to Domitian, see G. Townend, ‘Some Flavian connections’, JRS 51 (1961) 54-61. Cf. Plin. Pan. 48.3, where Domitian’s palace is the place where ‘illa immanissima belua ... propinquorum sanguinem lamberet.’ That Domitian put his relatives to death also reflects the precedent of Nero who killed his mother, his adoptive brother and his two adoptive sisters.

17 Suet. Dom. 15.1. Domitian named the sons of Flavius Clemens (his patrue lis) and his niece Flavia Domitia as his successors and changed the names of these two boys to Vespasianus and Domitianus.

18 Suet. Dom. 23.1. See also Plin. Pan. 53. An anonymous referee pointed out that the memory of Nero, although condemned immediately after his death, was subsequently honoured by Otho (see Suet. Oth. 7.1, but cf. Tac. Hist. 1.78). But this, it must be remembered, only happened after the reign of Nero’s successor. Vitellius was also supposed to have honoured Nero (see Suet. Vit. 11.2 and Tac. Hist. 2.95).
women to give birth where they sat, people to escape over the theatre wall, and others to feign death in order to be carried out as if for burial (Ner. 23.2). Similarly, Cassius Dio (67.8.3) tells us that Domitian refused to allow anyone to leave a gladiatorial event that was being held in the Circus Maximus, despite the fact that a storm had come up suddenly and many of the spectators were soaked in the ensuing downpour. Although Domitian himself rugged up against the chill, he would not allow others to change their attire. Some of the spectators, or so Dio asserts, subsequently became sick and died as a result of having to endure the miserable conditions.

Domitian’s alleged financial problems are comparable to those of Nero. According to Suetonius (Dom. 12.1), Domitian was rendered ‘exhaustus’ by the cost of his buildings and spectacles, as well as by the increase he had made to the soldiers’ pay. In order to remedy this situation, the emperor resorted to robbery: ‘nihil pensi habuit quin praedaretur omni modo’ (Dom. 12.1). To support this rather extravagant claim, Suetonius states that ‘bona uiuorum ac mortuorum usquequaque quolibet et accusatore et crimine corripiebantur’, and that estates were confiscated if it could be ‘proved’ that the deceased had named Domitian as his heir. Pliny, too, adds that Trajan will never replenish the treasury, if emptied, ‘innocentium bonis’ (Pan. 55.5). The allusion to the last Flavian is clear.

Although Domitian’s programme of public works and of entertainment, as well as his military expenditure, was undoubtedly costly, the absurdity of Suetonius’ allegation is suggested by the fact that the succeeding dynasty was possessed of a well-stocked treasury. It is significant that Tacitus, when speaking of the so-called ‘reign of terror’, fails to assign a financial motive to the charges of maiestas. If we believe

---

19 For a list of the expenditure, in the commendatory section of the Vita, see Dom. 4 and 7.3. Cf. Plin. Pan. 50.5. Pliny asserts that Domitian, despite having enough money, always craved for more.

20 The charge is repeated by Cassius Dio (67.4.5).

21 Cf. Plin. Ep. 10.97, in which Trajan himself advises Pliny to ignore anonymous accusations, as credence in such calumnies is contrary to the spirit ‘nostri saeculi’.

22 R. Syme, ‘The imperial finances under Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan’, JRS 20 (1930) 62-63 = Roman Papers, vol. 1, ed. E. Badian (Oxford 1979) 9-10 notes that Nerva had enough funds for congiaria, a special distribution of grain, the remission of burdensome taxes, the agrarian law, minor public works, the establishment of new coloniae, as well as the institution of the alimenta. See Cass. Dio 68.2.2-3. It might be noted, too, that Trajan, in the early part of his reign, continued Nerva’s programme of good works (Cass. Dio 68.5.4).
modern interpretations of the emperor’s character, the financial problems of Domitian may be little more than a myth. Why, then, did Domitian choose to confiscate the property of his victims? The answer is simple. Despite Suetonius’ assertion that he had expected his own death (Dom. 14.1), Domitian clearly intended to rule for a long time. He had no wish to grapple with a new generation of senatorial opposition. Property confiscation, as Syme argues, was an additional penalty for the condemned: ‘in his duel with the senate, [Domitian’s] rapacity is a weapon, not a cause.’ The confiscation of property was a means to an end. What better way to punish the victim than by depriving his heirs of their inheritance? Deprived of their inheritance, many senators’ sons would not have been able to meet the senatorial census – and, without that census, these young men would never possess the political ‘clout’ to avenge their fathers’ deaths.

Auvaritia was one of the uitia associated with the tyrant. Suetonius, therefore, needed to demonstrate the emperor’s rapacity. Consequently, the real reason for Domitian’s property confiscations was grossly distorted in order to conform with the biographer’s objective. It should be noted that Suetonius’ account of Domitian’s money-making scheme is pre-figured by earlier Vitae. Nero, like Domitian, had also drained the state’s resources with his spectacular games and lavish lifestyle. In order to remedy the situation, he reportedly used calumniae (i.e. false charges of maiestas) to raise funds when he found that he did not have enough money to pay the soldiers (Ner. 32.1). The similarity of these tales to Suetonius’ account of Domitian’s auvaritia is immediately obvious and hardly needs to be emphasised. Indeed, it could be argued that the latter account is no more than a carefully contrived amalgam of tyrannical topoi.

The examples above are only two of a number of similarities that are found between Nero and Domitian. As will be seen below, there are others.

---

26 Pliny accuses Domitian of this uitium (Pan. 50.5).
27 Dunkle (note 1) 19 writes that “auaritia refers to the tyrant’s greed for wealth which results in the confiscation of his subjects’ property.”
28 This ruse supposedly had a Caligulan precedent. According to Suetonius, when Gaius become impoverished (‘exhaustus’ again), he proceeded to raise revenue by nefarious
It seems evident that those who wrote after the death of Domitian thought that the best method to attack the assassinated emperor was to compare him with Nero. The question whether the last of the Julio-Claudians really was the depraved monster that the ancients described is beside the point – the only thing that needs to be considered is that the literate population regarded Nero as the archetypal tyrant. There should be no doubt, therefore, that Juvenal, Martial, Pliny and Tacitus invoked the name of Nero when relating the actions of Domitian in order to denigrate the dead emperor. As has been stated above, literature written about the incumbent princeps was at least superficially laudatory (even if it was intended to attack the emperor by means of figured speech); and this treatment might continue post mortem, if it suited the purposes of his successors. But if the emperor was the last of his dynasty, he became ‘fair game’ for subsequent writers. Hence actions that were worthy of commendation during Domitian’s reign became objects of scorn after his methods (Calig. 38.1–3). We are told that the mad emperor not only used ‘calumniae’ in order to confiscate the property of many unfortunate Romans, but also that he voided the will of any person who was said to have intended making him his heir, but had failed to do so. It is notable, too, that such charges continued to be levelled at unpopular emperors in the later Empire. For example, Lactantius (Mort. Pers. 7.12) asserts that Diocletian employed ‘calumnia et poena capitalis’ to procure coveted goods and property.

Note that Martial (4.63, 7.21, 7.34 and 7.45; Spect. 2 and 28.11) and Statius (Silv. 2.7.58, 2.7.58, 2.7.116-19 and cf. 4.3.7-8, 5.2.31-34), writing under Domitian, denigrate the memory of Nero.

Although Pliny’s Panegyricus mentions Domitian only twice by name, Ramage (note 2) 642, n. 4 holds that there are ‘some sixty separate allusions to him.’ See also Durry (note 11) 264 (see index s.u. ‘Domitian’). Of Ramage’s sixty or so allusions, Nero and Domitian appear together (usually unnamed) on three occasions (2.6, 54.4 and 63.3 - see Durry 87, 167 and 181-82) and are also in close proximity to each other at 52.1, 3-5 (see Durry 163-64). Tacitus makes an unfavourable comparison between Domitian and Nero in the De Vita Agricola (45.1-2). Martial even substituted Domitian’s name for that of Nero in one of his epigrams (11.33): ‘Nero’ is found four times in this epigram, on lines 1, 3 and 4. Juvenal, as has been related above, described Domitian as a caluus Nero (4.38). Also, an association of Domitian with Nero is demonstrated by the following: Domitian was alleged to have executed Epaphroditus, Nero’s a libellis, in order to avenge the freedman’s tyrannical master (Plin. Pan. 53.3-4; Suet. Dom. 14.4). On Epaphroditus, see P.R.C. Weaver, ‘Epaphroditus, Josephus and Epictetus’, CQ 44 (1994) 468-79.

Jones 1992 (note 3) 196. It is interesting to note that this tradition continues into the fifth century. Sidonius, in his panegyric on the emperor Avitus, denigrates the dynasty founded by Theodosius I, the last member of which was the weak and unmilitary Valentinian III (assassinated in 455): ‘sed dum per uerba parentum / ignauas colimus leges sanctumque putamos / rem ueterem per damna sequi, portauimus umbram / imperii, generis contenti
death. This point is admirably illustrated by comparing Domitianic and post-Domitianic literary reaction to three quite separate aspects of the emperor’s reign: (a) his martial conduct, in particular the campaign against the Chatti; (b) his construction of a new and extravagant imperial residence on the Palatine Hill; and (c) his sexual conduct. Due to the complexity of this last rubric, the theme of sexual behaviour will be dealt with in two parts. But before we review the contrary material relating to aspects of Domitian’s reign, a word on ‘subtle criticism’.

Several prominent literary scholars have attempted to demonstrate that material that might ostensibly appear laudatory is, in fact, furtively condemnatory. Of course, the existence of this form of criticism, which we are aware of through ancient references to the use of *figurae* (perhaps best translated as ‘innuendos’), cannot be doubted. For Domitian’s reign, the poets Martial and Statius are regularly arraigned as practitioners of this dangerous art and ‘evidence’ for figured-speech critique has been encountered in several of their imperial poems. While these attributions of

ferri uetusti / et uitia ac solitam uestiri murice gentem / more magis quam iure pati’ (Carm. 7.538-43).

See Quint. Inst. 9.2.65ff. and especially 9.2.67-68: ‘quomlibet ... apertum, quod modo et aliter intelligi posit, in illos tyrannos bene dixeris, quia periculum tantum, non etiam offensa uitatur. quod si ambiguus sententiae posit elidu, nemo non illi furto fauet’; cf. commentary on this passage by R.A. Baumann, *Impietas in Principem* (Munich 1974) 162. Discussions on ‘subtle criticism’ include F. Ahl, ‘The art of safe criticism in Greece and Rome’, *AJPh* 105 (1984) 174-208; id. ‘The rider and the horse: politics and power in Roman poetry from Horace to Statius’, *ANRW* 2.32.1 (1984) 40-110; S. Bartsch, *Acted in the Audience: Theatricity and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, Mass./London 1994) chapter 3, especially 67-71; W.J. Dominik, *The Mythic Voice of Statius: Power and Politics in the Thebaid* (Leiden/New York/Cologne 1994) chapter 4; and J. Garthwaite, ‘Martial, Book 6, on Domitian’s moral censorship’, *Prudentia* 22 (1990) 13-22, who writes that ‘the poems [of Martial] appear ... to have a deliberately ironic intent, their lavish praise acting as a foil for subsequent ridicule of the attempt to legislate morality’ (15-16). See also id. ‘The Panegyrics of Domitian in Martial Book 9’, *Ramus* 22 (1993) 98-99. In this article, Garthwaite finds the placement of Martial 9.2, concerning the castration of a sexually voracious and extravagant man called Lupus (who is supposedly analogous to Domitian), between two ‘imperial poems’ to be significant. He even suggests that 9.2 ‘consciously anticipates’ later epigrams, i.e. 9.12, which deals with Earinus, and 9.5 and 9.7, both of which deal with the emperor’s edict against castration. Garthwaite holds that Martial may actually be suggesting that Domitian, Lupus’ ‘even more prodigal and self-serving counterpart’, deserves a similar treatment. On a similar theme, J. Garthwaite ‘Statius, Silvae 3.4: on the fate of Earinus’, *ANRW* 2.32.1 (1984) 123 suggests that Stat. Silv. 3.4.99-106 is a ‘perverse hint’ that Domitian should be given the same treatment as Earinus. *Contra Ahl and Garthwaite’s interpretation of the Domitianic poets, see M. Johnson, ‘Martial and
‘subtle criticism’ are debatable, it is worth pointing out that the existence or otherwise of such criticism in the respective works of Martial and Statius does not affect the basis of the present argument. The imperial poems of both men, even if they do appear ambiguous to some modern commentators, were evidently meant to be viewed by the emperor as praise – so much appears incontestable. Thus these works are, at least on the surface, exemplars of the type of laudatory literature that was accustomed to be written about the princeps regnant.

But why, in any case, would Statius and Martial have wished to risk death for the publication of potentially offensive material? In Domitian’s reign, the ‘subtle criticisms’ of a certain Hermogenes of Tarsus were detected by the emperor: ‘occidit Hermogenem Tarsensem propter quasdam in historia figuras’ (Dom. 10.1). Junius Rusticus, according to Suetonius, was also executed for publishing eulogies of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus (Dom. 10.3). Cassius Dio (67.13.2), Pliny (Ep. 7.19.5) and Tacitus (Agr. 2.1), however, hold that it was Herennius Senecio who was killed for writing the biography of Helvidius. Lastly, the younger Helvidius was put to death for composing a farce that supposedly censured the emperor’s divorce from Domitia (Dom. 10.4). While it is understandable that members of the aristocracy (amongst which group we might number the eques Lucan) or of a philosophical background were prepared to risk their lives for their political and ideological beliefs, the onus rests on the proponents of ‘subtle criticism’ to demonstrate that Martial, a man of somewhat lower social standing, was similarly motivated. As Sullivan writes, there is no need to accuse Martial ‘of political insincerity’, nor need we ‘offer in his defence the untenable view that everything favourable he writes about Domitian is somehow ironic.’ Moreover, it is difficult to believe that the epigrammatist, whose complaints of early financial hardship may not be entirely hollow, would have wanted to compromise his chances of achieving and maintaining patronage at court. Evidence that

Domitian’s moral reforms’, Prudentia 29 (1997) 24-70.
33 See also Cass. Dio 67.13.2 and Tac. Agr. 2.1.
34 On this problem, see Jones 1996 (note 3) 92.
36 Mart. 2.90; 3.4; and 9.73.7. At 9.18.1-2 he refers to his modest abodes: ‘est mihi ... / rus minimum, parui sunt et in urbe lares’ (cf. 1.117.7, where he writes that ‘sealis habito tribus sed altis’). On this theme, see P.M.W. Tennant, ‘Poets and poverty: the case of Martial’, AClass 43 (2000) 139-56
Martial’s verse was in some way pleasing to the last two Flavian Augusti, not least of all Domitian, appears to be provided at 3.95.5-6; 3.95.9-12; and 9.97.5-6; and, that Martial was able to enjoy a comfortable existence in later life is attested by 12 Epist., in which he describes his pursuit of otium in the Spanish countryside. Similar comments might be made with regard to Statius. Would this poet, who evidently enjoyed the favour of the court,7 have dared to abuse his imperial patronage in works that may have been sponsored by the emperor himself? If Martial and Statius had been attempting figured-speech criticism of aspects of the emperor’s conduct, their furtive allusions to imperial hypocrisy must have gone unnoticed (which, of course, could mean that their supposed ‘subtle criticism’ was successful). The two poets in question outlived the reign of Domitian — those whose literature displeased the emperor did not.38

1. Martial conduct

Domitian’s military conduct has been the subject of some debate. The complimentary references to Domitian in Julius Frontinus’ Strategemata, which was almost certainly written during the reign of the last Flavian, provide a clear contrast to the savage indictments of Tacitus and the Younger Pliny.39 But note that even Frontinus’ opinion of Domitian changes in his post-Domitianic De aquae ductu urbis Romae, where we find criticism of the dead emperor’s collection of receipts from the rental of the

7 On the imperial court’s support of Statius, see A. Hardie, Statius and the Silvae (Liverpool 1983) 45-47.

8 Similarly, Tiberius was able to detect criticism of his adoptive father in the works of historians and playwrights. Like Domitian, he did not allow the perpetrators of these ‘crimes’ to go unpunished (Cass. Dio 57.22.5-23.1; Suet. Tib. 61; Tac. Ann. 4.34 and 6.29); nor did Gaius (Suet. Calig. 27.4). Cf. Suet. Aug. 68, in which a line in a play that ambiguously hinted at Augustus’ effeminacy did not seem to incur the emperor’s wrath; see also Tac. Ann. 4.34. Nero, too, showed surprising leniency. He merely exiled two men for perpetrating similar ‘crimes’ (Suet. Ner. 39.3). In this, he may have been imitating Augustus, who ‘relegated’ the poet Ovid to Tomis (Tr. 2.137) for the publication of a carmen, presumably the Ars armatoria (Tr. 2.207; cf. Ps.-Aur. Vict. Epit. 1.24), and an error (Tr. 2.207–08). It has been thought that Ovid’s deportation may have been prompted by knowledge of court intrigues (i.e. error, references to simplicitas [Tr. 1.5.42] and stultitia [Tr. 3.6.35; Pont. 1.7.44]). On this, see R. Syme, History in Ovid (Oxford 1978) 215-29.

38 See Waters (note 3) 51.
ius aquarum (Aqu. 118). Such critique of the emperor’s conduct is nowhere to be found in the earlier Strategemata. In this earlier work, Frontinus, no mean general himself,\(^{40}\) writes that Domitian surprised the belligerent Chatti by concealing his departure from Rome under the pretext of taking a census of the Gallic provinces (Strat. 1.1.8). The emperor, writes Frontinus, did this because he realised that the enemy would make greater preparations for the impending conflict ‘si aduentum tanti ducis praeensissent’ (Strat. 1.1.8). With the aid of such a stratagem, Domitian crushed the enemy and thus ‘provinciis consuluit’ (Strat. 1.1.8). Frontinus also comments favourably on the way in which he waged the campaign.\(^{41}\)

According to Frontinus, the emperor reduced the risk of ambushes by advancing the limites of the Empire along a front of one hundred and twenty miles and by uncovering the hiding-places of the enemy (Strat. 1.3.10). Furthermore, when Domitian was building castella in the territory of the Cubii, he ordered compensation to be made for the crops (fructes) that he had included within his fortifications and thus ‘iustitiae fama omnium fidem adstrinxit’ (Strat. 2.11.7).

Frontinus claims that the campaign against the Chatti was a complete success. Indeed, he writes that Domitian ‘eo bello quo uictis hostibus cognomen Germanici meruit’ (Strat. 2.11.7). That Domitian’s military ‘achievements’ were the object of commendation during his lifetime is also supported by Martial, Silius Italicus, Statius and Quintilian. On this topic, the interested reader should look no further than Ramage’s list of references to Domitian’s military victories.\(^{42}\) A sample follows: Martial writes that ‘cum [Roma] tot ... tibi debeat triumphos’ (6.4); and Quintilian, referring to Domitian’s gift for the composition of verse, was moved to write ‘quis enim caneret bella melius, quam qui sic gerit?’ (Inst. 10.1.91).\(^{43}\) Although Statius often refers to Domitian’s military achievements, it is notable that, in the Silvae,\(^{44}\) he briefly refers to a poem (now lost apart from

\(^{41}\) Front. Strat. 1.3.10 and 2.3.23.
\(^{42}\) Ramage (note 2) 704, n. 175 and especially n. 176. On Frontinus, see Ramage 659, n. 39.
\(^{43}\) See also Sil. Ital. Pun. 3.607-29.
\(^{44}\) Stat. Silv. 4.2.65-7: ‘Troianas qualis sub collibus Albanae / cum modo Germanas acies modo / Daca sonantem / proelia Palladio tua me manus induit auro.’
four lines quoted in Georgius Valla’s edition of Juvenal in the fifteenth century) which was wholly devoted to the emperor’s victories.\textsuperscript{45} After Domitian’s death, however, Tacitus and the Younger Pliny were quick to pour scorn upon the martial prowess and military policy of the dead emperor. Domitian’s victory over the Chatti, so applauded by Frontinus, is condemned by Tacitus in the \textit{De Vita Agricola} as a ‘falsum triumphum’ (39.1). Tacitus even alleges that Domitian, in order to display captives in the triumphal parade, purchased slaves whose ‘habitus et crines’ could be adapted to look like those of German prisoners.\textsuperscript{46} In the \textit{Germania}, Tacitus describes Germany as a land that, in recent times, has given the Romans more triumphs than victories: ‘[Germani] ... proximis temporibus triumphati magis quam uicti sunt’ (37.6). It is not surprising that Wellesley refers to Tacitus’ account of Domitian’s German war as ‘ignorance coupled with malevolence’.

While Tacitus and Pliny roundly condemn Domitian’s military policy (in particular, his prosecution of the war against the Chatti),\textsuperscript{47} it is pertinent to note that Suetonius refuses to follow slavishly what may be termed the

\textsuperscript{45} Ramage (note 2) 693 postulates that this lost work, usually called the \textit{De Bello Germanico}, provides the basis for Juvenal’s fourth \textit{Satire}. Valla’s scholion to Juv. 4.94 may be found in P. Wessner (ed.), \textit{Scholia in Juvenalem Vetustiora} (Leipzig 1931) 61-62: ‘lumina; Nestorei mitis prudentia Crispi / et Fabius [sic] Veiento (potentem signat utrumque / purpura, ter memores implerunt nomine fastos) / et prope Caesareae confinis Acilius aulae.’ See also F. Vollmer, \textit{P. Papinii Stati Silvarum Libri} (Leipzig 1898) 14 and n. 1; W.C. McDermott, ‘Fabricius Veiento’, AJPh 91 (1970) 133 and n. 21; G.W. Houston, \textit{Roman Imperial Administrative Personnel during the Principates of Vespasian and Titus} (A.D. 69-71), diss. (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill 1971) 88, n. 157; Syme 1958 (note 13) 5, n. 5.

\textsuperscript{46} The emperor Gaius provides a tyrannical precedent for this action (Suet. \textit{Calig.} 47).


\textsuperscript{48} Ursus was later awarded a consulship (Cass. Dio 67.4.2), probably in (May?) 84; an [U]rsus is found in the \textit{Fasti Ostienses}; see L. Vidman, \textit{Fasti Ostienses} (Prague 1982) 44 or M. McCrum & A.G. Woodhead, \textit{Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors Including the Year of Revolution A.D. 68-96} (Cambridge 1961) 8.

\textsuperscript{49} Cassius Dio also writes contemptuously of the emperor’s activities in Germany (67.3.5).
‘official line’. Suetonius (Dom. 6) merely states that Domitian’s war against the Chatti was ‘uncalled for’ (‘sponte’)\textsuperscript{50} and that a ‘duplicem triumphum’ was celebrated because of the emperor’s victories over the Chatti and the Dacians – he refuses to state whether the triumph was deserved. Indeed, the very positioning of Suetonius’ account of Domitianic foreign policy between the emperor’s building programme and legislative reforms – both of which are commendable \textit{acta} – appears to indicate that the biographer felt that Domitian’s military endeavours were not the completely farcical undertakings described by Pliny or Tacitus. Despite the arguments of Barton,\textsuperscript{51} the \textit{Domitianus} is not generally believed to have been a formal or overtly programmatic attack on the last Flavian in the manner of Pliny’s \textit{Panegyricus} or Tacitus’ \textit{Agricola} (both of which, quite clearly, have a firm political purpose).

There is, of course, a very good reason why both Pliny and Tacitus chose to attack the military conduct of Domitian so vehemently. The archetypal tyrant was slothful and lazy; he cared more for honours and adulation than real success.\textsuperscript{52} In other words, his behaviour approached that of a non-martial emperor like Nero. Of course, the difference between the military activity of Nero and Domitian is profound, and it is worth noting, in addition, that Domitian seems to have taken great pride in his personal involvement in military affairs. Indeed, the seemingly contrived criticisms of Pliny and Tacitus, in as much as they resemble the sort of tradition associated with the rhetorical tyrant, merely serve to prompt their modern audience to question such claims. Thus the post-Domitianic response to the emperor’s military activity resorts to the sort of topoi used to denigrate the martial undertakings of earlier ‘tyrants’. Still, Domitian’s activity, being within living memory, was unable to be given the same full-blooded treatment as that employed in the accounts of other emperors who had received \textit{damnatio memoriae} – those who attacked Domitian within a generation of his death could not yet give free rein to the overtly ridiculous.

\textsuperscript{50} That is, Domitian began the war of his own accord and was thus the aggressor. Note that Hadrian, under whom Suetonius was writing, employed a far more pacific foreign policy than did his predecessor. See S.H.A. \textit{Hadr.} 9.1. It was for this reason, perhaps, that Suetonius refrained from attacking Domitian’s policy of consolidating rather than expanding the frontiers of the Empire.


\textsuperscript{52} Waters (note 3) 71.
Yet it is worth noting that the supposedly farcical nature of the emperor’s triumphs recalls Neronian, and indeed Caligulan, military buffoonery, such as Suetonius’ observation that Nero dressed up women as Amazons for his intended campaign against the Gallic usurper Vindex (Ner. 44.1); and the same biographer’s account of Gaius’ seaside battle against the forces of Neptune, the spoils of which contest included a vast horde of sea-shells (Calig. 46). In addition, Cassius Dio’s later assertion that Domitian engaged in manifold debaucheries while his troops battled the Dacians has a Neronian flavour (67.6.3), especially in that it leads us to question the emperor’s bravery. Nero, as his detractors point out, was a coward. This lack of personal resolve, which hints at his effeminate nature (i.e. lack of virtus), was also manifest in Nero’s military policy. According to Suetonius (Ner. 18), the last of the Julio-Claudian emperors had no desire to extend the boundaries of the empire – the only acquisitions in his reign being the kingdoms of Pontus (in Asia Minor) and Cottius (a small Alpine kingdom). Indeed, Suetonius notes that he had even thought of withdrawing the army from Britain. Domitian, too, had been less than enthusiastic about increasing the size of the empire. Although most modern scholars believe that Domitian’s military policy was generally sound, the ancients would have regarded it as essentially cowardly, especially when one considers that much of the anti-Domitianic invective was written under Trajan, a ruler committed to imperial expansion.

2. Architecture

Architectural embellishment of the Capitol had traditionally been one of the most successful means by which an individual could claim a position

---

35 Cf. Plin. Pan. 15.5.
amongst the pantheon of Rome’s greatest statesmen. For example, Vitruvius Pollio, himself an architectus, asserts that the public works of Augustus will provide a lasting tribute to the industry of his principate (De Arch. I praef. 3). Likewise, Trajan’s reputation as a ‘good emperor’ rests, in part, on the spectacular monuments of his reign. Given that architectural achievement was a requisite for eternal fame, it is interesting to note that two of Rome’s greatest builders were Nero and Domitian, the scourges of the senatorial order, men whose public memory was to be officially obliterated after their deaths. In the immediate post-Neronian and post-Domitianic literary record, the architectural achievements of both men were largely glossed over. Still, even a writer as biased as the fourth-century Christian Lactantius is prepared to admit that the ‘persecutor’ Domitian had constructed ‘multa mirabilia opera, ... Capitolium’ aliaque nobilia monimenta’ (Mort. Pers. 3.3). But Suetonius, on the other hand, seems to display an almost complete indifference to the incontestable fact that Domitian was one of the Empire’s most prolific builders. Not for him Statius’ assertion that ‘continuus septem per culmina Martis / it fragor et magnae uincit uaga murmura Romae’ (Silv. 1.1.64-5). Jones describes Suetonius’ account of Domitian’s building programme as ‘unfair’, and draws our attention to later works that ‘add nothing to what Suetonius reveals’. Suetonius does refer to Domitian’s restoration of buildings – a laudable action and one that he rightly places amongst the emperor’s commendable acta. Yet Suetonius states that in all cases the emperor provided an inscription of his name only and made no mention of the original builder (Dom. 5). We cannot be sure whether this is simply a malicious accusation or a reflection of reality. Certainly, epigraphic finds

---

56 On Augustus’ building programme, see Res Gestae Diui Augusti 19-21 and Suet. Aug. 29.
57 For some ancient opinions on aspects of the building programme of the optimus princeps, see Amm. 16.10.15 and Cass. Dio 69.4.1.
58 Suetonius, for example, uses only a few sentences to describe the building programme of both Nero (Ner. 16 and 31) and Domitian (Dom. 5).
59 Of course, this, as J.L. Creed (ed. & trans.), Lactantius. De Mortibus Persecutorum (Oxford 1984) 84, n. 3 notes, was a ‘reconstruction’.
60 M.E. Blake, Roman Construction in Italy from Tiberius through the Flavians (Washington, D.C. 1959) 99; Southern (note 54) 126-32.
61 Jones 1996 (note 3) 49.
associated with Domitianic restorations feature the words ‘Domitianus ... restituit’ and make no mention of who was originally responsible for the construction of the road or the edifice. In any case, while Domitian’s restoration programme is described in the favourable section of the Vita, Suetonius, in alleging that the names of the original constructors of the buildings were removed, appears to be merely foreshadowing his later references to imperial arrogantia.

Nero’s architectural accomplishments are likewise neglected and are only invoked to demonstrate the outrageous excess that characterised his reign. The only significant attention that the post mortem sources pay to the building programmes of Nero and Domitian is to the impressive (and extravagant) palaces that these two emperors constructed.

A grand, palatial residence was the very hallmark of a tyrant. To avoid the negative regal connotations of such an edifice, Augustus, as Suetonius points out, chose to reside in residences far humbler than his means might have allowed (Aug. 72.1). But as the true nature of the Principate became manifest to all, it must have seemed necessary to the emperors, lest they be mocked by visiting dignatories or overshadowed by the opulence of their more affluent subjects, to provide themselves with residences that were consonant with their exalted station. This passion for architectural ostentation would reach its apogee under Nero, at least according to the derogatory literary tradition. As Suetonius tells us (Ner. 31.1), Nero ordered the construction of an immense palace that extended from the Palatine to the Esquiline, and, upon its completion, named it the House of Passage (domus transitoria). After it was burnt to the ground in the Great Fire of 64, the palace was rebuilt as the Golden House (domus aurea), an enormous and luxurious complex that was characterised by gilt walls festooned with precious gems and mother-of-pearl, ivory ceilings, a

---

62 For example, Domitianic inscriptions found at Thyatira (Asia) and Megalopolis, both of which can be found in McCrum & Woodhead (note 48) nos. 422 (= CIL 3.7191) and 436 (= CIL 3.13691) respectively.
63 Jones 1996 (note 3) 51, however, points out that there is ‘not the slightest attempt to claim the structure as “his”.
65 Suetonius does mention the arches that Domitian built to celebrate his military achievements (Dom. 13.2). However, these arci are not listed among the emperor’s plurima et amplissima opera (Dom. 5). Instead, they are used to demonstrate his insufferable arrogantia. Cassius Dio notes that the arches were torn down by Nerva (68.1.1).
revolving banquet hall, baths that were supplied with sea-water, and a colossal statue of the emperor in the vestibule (Ner. 31.1-2). When the palace was finished, Nero was reported to have remarked, in typically tyrannical fashion, that at last he was beginning to be housed like a human being (Ner. 31.2). Nero’s palace, viewed by his detractors as a selfish indulgence, was to become the symbol of his tyranny and imperial arrogance. Hence veiled comparisons between the domus aurea and Domitian’s new residence on the Palatine (the domus Augustana or Augustiana) were almost inevitable.

Celebrated during Domitian’s lifetime, the new imperial palace was closely associated with the emperor’s tyranny after his death. A vast and forbidding building with hidden rooms and private chambers, the domus Augustana, in its original state at least, was later regarded as symbolic of its owner’s character. An inspection of Domitianic and post-Domitianic literary references to the palace makes for interesting reading indeed. Martial, writing under Domitian, considered that the palace would surpass even the magnificence of the pyramids: ‘regia pyramidum, Caesar, miracula ride’ (8.36.1). He even writes that ‘clarius in toto nil uidet orbe dies’ (8.36.4). It might also be noted that Martial praises Domitian’s construction of ‘tot ... templa’, and that he had ‘tot renata’ (6.4.3). Such language, the renata in particular, has a decidedly Augustan flavour.

After Domitian’s death, however, the epigrammatist dismisses the

---

66 See also Tac. Ann. 15.42 and Mart. Spect. 2.1.3-4: ‘inuidiosa feri radiabant atria regis / unique iam tota stabat in urbe domus.’
67 ‘ut se diceret quasi hominem tandem habitare coepisse.’

---

Examples of the differing orthography are as follows: Augustana = CIL 15.7246: [DOMVS AVG]VSTANAE; Augustiana = CIL 15.1860: [DOM]VS AVGVSTIANAE. Modern scholars divide the complex into the domus Flavia (the official palace) and the domus Augustana (the private palace). For a discussion of the palace complex, see W.L. MacDonald, The Architecture of the Roman Empire I. An Introductory Study, revised edition (New Haven/London 1982) 47-74, 127-29 and 187, and Jones 1992 (note 3) 95-96 (with bibliography at 217, n. 115).
70 One might also compare Statius’ description of a colossal equestrian statue of Domitian at Silv. 1.1. Of especial interest are the first two lines: ‘quae superimposito moles geminata colioso / stat Latium complexa forum?’ An anonymous referee, an adherent of the school of thought that figured-speech criticism of Domitian’s conduct may be found in the verse of Statius and Martial, kindly pointed out that ‘the colossal statue of Domitian physically dominates the forum in the same manner that the rule of Domitian weighs upon Rome’; on this, see Ahl (note 32 [1984b]) 91-92 and 96. Such an interpretation is open to debate.
edifice and its luxurious contents as selfish extravagance. Martial, seeking
to ingratiate himself with the new régime, tells us that Jupiter, whose
temple had been bereft of treasure during Domitian’s reign, now ‘miratur
Scythicas uirentis auri / flammae ... et stupet superbi / regis delicias
grauesque luxus’ (12.15.5-7). The implication is that the treasures that had
been held within the walls of Domitian’s palace were redistributed amongst
the temples of Rome by either Nerva or Trajan. Pliny, too, reflects the
revised sentiments of Martial. In the Panegyricus (48.3), he describes the
same palace as having been the abode of the tyrant, a place from which
Domitian had plotted the destruction of the senatorial order. Only under
Nerva and Trajan would the imperial residence become a place where there
would be ‘nullae obices nulli contumeliarum gradus superatisque iam mille
liminibus ultra semper aliqua dura et obstantia’ (Pan. 47.5). It is notable
that Suetonius’ sole reference to the palace, which he calls the domus
Palatina, occurs amongst the condemnatory sections of the Domitianus
(15.2). The biographer states that the palace was struck by lightning, a
negative statement that might be taken as indicative of the gods’
displeasure.21

3. Sexual conduct

One of the most successful ways to damn the memory of a Roman emperor
was to attack his sexual proclivities. Both Nero and Domitian suffered this
treatment, even though their sexual tastes were perhaps no more outlandish
than those of the so-called ‘good’ emperors.22 For example, if Hadrian had
not succeeded his adoptive father Trajan, our record of the optimus
princeps might be considerably different. Cassius Dio (68.7.4) refers to
Trajan’s penchant for μετράκια καὶ οἶνος.23 For Dio, these ‘vices’ are a
mere triviality. Fronto, however, actually recommends such activities to

21 This was one of the many prodigies that heralded the death of the emperor.
22 Cf. Suet. Aug. 69.1 and 71.1; Vesp. 21; Tit. 7. On this theme, see Waters (note 3) 59.
23 καὶ οἶδα μὲν ὅτι καὶ περὶ μετράκια καὶ περὶ οἶνον ἐσπαυδάκει. According to
Liddell & Scott, s.u. μετράκιον, this word refers to a ‘lad’ or ‘stripling’. Cf. P. Chantaine,
Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque (Paris 1984) s.u. μετράξι where the
diminutive of the word in question is translated as ‘homme jeune’. Note that Cassius Dio
also uses μετράκιον at 67.6.3, which suggests that both Domitian and Trajan were having
relations with males of a suitable age for sexual penetration.
Marcus Aurelius as a form of relaxation. Yet, if Trajan had suffered *damnatio memoriae* like Nero or Domitian, he would have been condemned by later writers as a sexual libertine and a notorious drunkard. The audience expected that the tyrant be depicted as perverse and immoral – and this is the impression that we receive of both Nero and Domitian.

Suetonius gives a catalogue of Nero’s debaucheries. Amongst other things, he was said to have abused freeborn boys and slept with married women – even Vestal Virgins were not safe from his amatory depredations (*Ner. 28.1*). These activities, of course, were not only excessive but also illicit. Nero was even supposed to have authorised the castration of a boy called Sporus (not in itself an illegal action at the time) in order that he might marry him – which he did with all the usual ceremonies (*Ner. 28.1-2*). This allegation, of course, should not be viewed as a figured-speech attack on Hadrian and his relationship with Antinous (which will be discussed in due course). Rather, Nero’s action is condemned, not because it would have involved sexual activity between males, but because it mocked traditional marriage customs. In addition, the castration of a boy of ‘marriageable’ age was probably regarded by Suetonius as abnormally cruel (boys destined to become eunuchs were usually castrated in their infancy). Domitian, too, reportedly engaged in activities that could be described as sexually excessive. Indeed, the post-Domitianic record of Domitian’s sexual conduct, contrived as it appears to be, has a decidedly Neronian flavour. Cassius Dio (67.6.3), for example, writes that Domitian did not take an active part in the war against the Dacians, but ‘remained in one of the cities of Moesia, indulging in riotous living, as was his wont’; in addition, he claims that Domitian ‘was not only indolent of body and timorous of spirit, but also most profligate and lewd towards women and boys alike.’ Such actions, while hardly incongruous when attributed to a

---

74 Front. *De Fer. Als.* 3.5 (Teubner edition) = 3.4 (Loeb edn): ‘proauros uester summus bellator tamen histrionibus interdum se delectauit, et praeterea potuit satis strenue.’ Cf. S.H.A. *Hadr.* 2.7, where Trajan is said to have had relationships with ‘pueri’.
75 Baldwin (note 54) 215 has suggested that Suetonius’ Domitian ‘is, in part, a compound of Caligulan and Neronian vice.’ Elsewhere, Baldwin (304) notes that Suetonius, as a member of aristocratic literary circles, could hardly have escaped from ‘the chorus of hate’ that was directed against Domitian after his assassination.
76 [ὁ Δομιτιανὸς] ... ἐν πόλει τυφλὴ Μυσίας ὑπομείνας ὑβρίζεν ὅπερ εἰώθει· οὗ γάρ ὅτι τὸ τε σώμα ἀπονος καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀτολμος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀσωτῶτατος καὶ ἀσελγέστατος καὶ πρὸς γυναῖκας καὶ πρὸς μειράκια ἦν.
man such as Nero, do not seem to conform to traditional estimates of the emperor’s personality. Indeed, such a lifestyle hardly accords with the impression that we receive from Suetonius (Dom. 21) that Domitian was an introverted soul who cared little for banqueting and the concomitant debauchery. But even this, however, is used to denigrate the emperor. Domitian’s lack of interest in drinking parties (comissationes) is relegated to the non-commendable section of the Vita, even though temperance toward alcohol would normally be used to indicate uirtus. Instead, Domitian’s reluctance to engage in gregarious activity is used to illustrate the menacing and secretive nature of the man.

Suetonius tries hard to prove the tyrannical charge of libido; and the evidence he provides for the charge has been described as ‘superficial in the extreme’ and ‘comparatively minor’. While Domitian was reported to have had affairs with several married women before his accession (Dom. 1.3), the evidence that Suetonius provides for Domitian’s libido after 81 is rather weak. Suetonius’ assertion that Domitian was accustomed to depilate his concubines with his own hand and to swim with common prostitutes does little to excite our attention, especially as the charge is introduced with the words ‘eratque fama quasi’ (Dom. 22). In any case, sexual relations with ‘concubinas’ and ‘uulgatissimas meretrices’ — which are merely alluded to, rather than affirmed — are much less offensive than intercourse with Roman women of quality. Moreover, references to concubines and whores hardly compromise the emperor’s virility (as opposed to sexual passivity); they are merely introduced in order to

---

77 The passage recalls Tacitus’ description of Nero’s nocturnal depradations (Ann. 13.25). See also Ann. 15.37 and 16.19.
79 See Jul. 55, but cf. Tib. 42; Ner. 27.1; Vit. 13.1.
80 Domitian’s anti-social disposition is first referred to at Dom. 3.1.
81 Even Domitian’s reference to sexual intercourse as clinopale or ‘bed-wrestling’ (Dom. 22) is taken by Suetonius to be an example of libido. On the word clinopale, see G.W. Mooney, C. Suetonii Tranquilli De Vita Caesarum. Libri VII-VIII (London/Dublin 1930) 603.
82 Jones 1996 (note 3) 149.
83 It should be noted that Cassius Dio refers to women whom Domitian punished for adultery, even though they had been debauched by the emperor himself: συνηχόλ δὲ καὶ ἄνδρες καὶ γυναίκες τῶν πλουσίων ἐπὶ μοιχεῖα ἐκολασθήσαν, ἰν ἐνίατ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐμοιχεύθησαν, 67.12.1). Note that men were also prosecuted.
demonstrate excessive sexual behaviour or ‘libido nimia’ (Dom. 22). If this were the best evidence that the biographer could provide for Domitian’s libido, the last Flavian emperor must have been one of the more conservative men to wear the purple.84 ‘Real’ tyrants, according to the literary expectations of the time, were rather more adventurous in pursuing their sexual gratification.85

4. Same-sex relationships and incest

Two further aspects of Domitian’s sexual conduct are worthy of close investigation in that they accord with Neronian precedent: his (alleged) same-sex relationships and his (allegedly) incestuous behaviour.

As has already been stated, Nero was supposed to have regularly engaged in affairs with men and boys. While some of these actions, if true, would have been acceptable, others, i.e. those in which he assumed a ‘passive’ role (Suet. Ner. 29), were clearly not. Let us now see the manner in which Domitian was made to emulate Nero’s precedent of tyrannical passivity. It is in this context that Juvenal’s reference to caluus Nero (4.38) takes on especial significance, for baldness could be viewed as a sign of sexual inversion.86 While long hair, such as that often worn by Nero (Suet. Ner. 51), could be taken as a sign of effeminacy, a lack of masculinity could also be discerned through lack of hair. Domitian, therefore, actually manifested physical traits of his passivity, while those of Nero were but artificial signifiers, which he adopted without shame in order to advertise his Hellenised tastes.

Domitian, as a youth, was supposedly debauched by the future emperor Nerva (Dom. 1.1). Yet even Suetonius refuses to vouch for the

84 Even so-called ‘good’ emperors were not immune to weaknesses of the flesh. See Suet. Aug. 69.1, 71.1; Vesp. 21; Tit. 7.
85 Baldwin (note 54) 302 holds that ‘harmless pastimes ... are transmuted [by Suetonius] into tokens of evil lust.’ Cf. Suet. Tib. 43-45; Calig. 24-25 and 36; Ner. 27-29. Griffin (note 24) 79 believes that ‘evidence for [Domitian’s] ... hypocrisy was clearly dug up or invented.’
86 E. Cantarella, Bisexuality in the Ancient World, trans. C.Ô. Cuilleannán (New Haven/London 1992) 159, points out that baldness is, ‘for the Romans, ... a sign of inadequate virility’ – and thus sexual passivity. L. Antonius (the brother of Mark Antony) is called ‘caluus’ on the lead pellets of Octavian’s troops (CIL 11.6721, 13 and 15), and baldness is associated with a lack of virility by both Martial (3.74.5-6) and Plautus (Amphitr. 462). Note, too, that Julius Caesar (Suet. Iul. 51), who had supposedly sold himself to Nicomedes, was called a ‘moechum caluum’. See note 88 below.
authenticity of the charge. Instead, he introduces the accusation with the phrase ‘nec defuerunt qui affirmarent’. What is important here, though, is that the association of such an activity with Domitian is thoroughly consonant with the traditions of Roman invective. Accusations of youthful corruption are relatively common in Latin literature and usually imply an element of prostitution; i.e. the younger man seeks gain by offering his body to the older man. This is especially the case in Suetonius’ Domitianus, since the charge directly follows a decidedly exaggerated account of the poverty that Domitian experienced as a youth. Such charges of prostitution, which, is must be admitted, are never associated with Nero, are not an attack on same-sex activities. If this were so, Suetonius, pace Ramage and Southern, would not have implicated Nerva, a ‘good’ emperor and the adoptive grandfather of Hadrian, the emperor under whom the biographer was writing. Rather, they are an attack on the

---

7 See Jones 1992 (note 3) 1, Mooney (note 81) 508 and Waters (note 3) 60.
8 See Suet. Jul. 2 and, for greater detail, Jul. 49: Julius Caesar was alleged to have offered himself to Nicomedes, the king of Bithynia, in return for a fleet of warships (at Jul. 52.3 we are told of the elder Curio’s witticism that Caesar was ‘omnia mulierum uirum et omnium uirorum mulierem’); Suet. Aug. 68: Mark Antony (who was himself charged with sexual passivity, as seen directly below) alleged that Octavian had procured his adoption by offering himself to Caesar, while Antony’s brother Lucius asserted that he had also sold himself to Aulus Hirtius in Spain for three hundred thousand sesterces. See also Cic. Phil. 2.18-19, in which Cicero alleges that Antonius sold his favours to Clodius.
9 Suet. Dom. 1.1: ‘pubertatis ac primae adolescenciae temporis tanta inopia tantaque infamia gessisse fertur, ut nullum argentum usum habet.’
10 According to his posthumous literary portrayal, Nero would have been happy to perform such activities for fun rather than payment.
11 Ramage (note 2) 663 and n. 49. According to Southern (note 54) 2, ‘[i]t is difficult to comprehend how this scandalous affair confirms Domitian’s moral turpitude without staining Nerva’s reputation.’
12 Cantarella (note 86) 113 writes that ‘a Roman male, if he engaged in homosexual relations, so long as he did not violate a puer [i.e. a free-born boy], incurred punishment only if he took the passive role.’ On the illegality of adult passivity, see Auson. Epigr. 92 and Juv. 2.36-50. Nerva’s actions, therefore, do not seem to violate the lex Scantinia de uenere nefanda (which prohibited stuprum cum puerò) as Domitian, according to Jones 1996 (note 3) 14, ‘would have been around seventeen and no longer a puer’ when the alleged incident took place. Cf. Suet. Dom. 8.3. For recent commentary on the lex, see Cantarella 106-14; Johnson (note 32) 26-27; and Jones 1996 (note 3) 76. It will be noted that Cantarella (244, n. 40), citing earlier literature such as D. Dalla, ‘Ubi Venus mutatur’. Omosessualità e diritto nel mondo romano (Milan 1987) 71-99, prefers the form ‘lex Scantinia’. For later Roman attitudes to stuprum cum puerò praetextato, see also Dig. 47.11.1.2.
individual who allows himself to be exploited for personal gain. In other words, only the ‘passive’ man is immoral – and that man is Domitian.93 That Clodius Pollio, ‘praetorium uirum’ (Suet. Dom. 1.1), exhibited a letter in which the young Domitian promises him a tryst demonstrates, once again, that the dominant (and thus virile) partner should not incur censure for his promiscuity. Similarly, Valerius Catullus, ‘consulari familia iuuenis’, was not ashamed to reveal publicly that he had sodomised the emperor Gaius (Suet. Calig. 36.1).

In later life, Domitian was reported to have maintained a passion for a eunuch named Earinus (Cass. Dio 77.2.3). And this despite the fact that he had promulgated a law forbidding the castration of any person in the Roman Empire.94 The subject of Earinus is one of the few instances where we have Domitianic literary evidence for life at court, in this case the Silvae of the court-poet Statius.95 It seems that either Domitian or one of his amici had asked Statius to compose a poem on the subject of Earinus sending some hair-clippings to the temple of the god Asclepius in Pergamum.96 Especially significant are lines 14-19 of the poem where Statius introduces a comparison between Jupiter-Juno-Ganymede and

---

93 Same-sex activities in the Caesares appear to be closely associated with tyranny. Still, we are not treated in the Domitianus to a detailed account of such behaviour as we are in the lives of Tiberius, Gaius and Nero (see Tib. 43-44; Calig. 36; Ner. 28-29). Given that Suetonius, despite writing under Hadrian, did not seem to approve of either same-sex relations or Domitian (see Baldwin [note 54] 302 and T. Carney, ‘How Suetonius’ Lives reflect on Hadrian’, PACA 11 [1968] 12, but cf. n. 22), the biographer’s failure to assault the emperor’s supposed penchant for such practices is somewhat puzzling, especially when one considers that Domitian’s ‘passion’ for the eunuch Earinus was notorious (Cass. Dio 67.2.3). It should be remembered, however, that Domitian’s relationships with boys (or youths) of servile origin were an acceptable practice (provided, of course, that they were the passive partners). See note above and Sen. Contr. 4 preface 10, in which it is suggested that it was a freedman’s duty to submit to his patron’s advances.

94 Suet. Dom. 7.1; Cass. Dio 77.2.3; Mart. 2.60, 6.2, 9.6 and 9.8; Phil. VA 6.42; Stat. Silv. 3.4.74-77 and 4.3.13-15.

95 On Earinus, see C. Henriksen, ‘Earinus: an imperial eunuch in the light of the poems of Martial and Statius’, Mnemosyne 50 (1997) 281-94. Henriksen attempts to provide a ‘biography’ of the life of Domitian’s favourite. See also Mart. 9.16; 9.17; 9.36, which are on the same subject as Silv 3.4. Comparison of Earinus to Ganymede occurs at Mart. 9.11.7; 9.16.6; and throughout 9.36.

96 See Hardie (note 37) 70-71 and 144, where it is asserted that ‘patron-guidance’ or ‘patron-initiative’ was behind the production of the work in question.
Domitian-Domitia-Earinus. While Ganymede had earned Juno's displeasure because of his relationship with her husband, Statius writes that 'placida ... fronte ministrum [Earinum] / Iuppiter Ausonius [Domitianus] pariter Romanaque Iuno [Domitia] / aspiciunt et uterque probant' (Silv. 3.4.17-19). While it appears at first glance that Domitia (and Statius) openly approved of the emperor's behaviour, some modern literary critics have thought that the poet may have employed the art of 'subtle criticism' in his execution of Silvae 3.4. Yet there is no guarantee that Statius, in his apparent approval of Domitian's behaviour, was not simply doing his job. Moreover, who is to say that the poet himself did not actually approve of the recreational activities pursued by the emperor? It is impossible to be sure. Statius certainly moved in Hellenised circles: he wrote consolatory epikhrēsia for Atedius Melior and Flavius Ursus, the respective lovers of two pueri delicati (Silv. 2.1 and 2.6). If there is criticism in Silv. 3.4, the criticism is hardly directed against the institution of 'Greek-love' (which is associated in the ancient world with Hellenistic cultural sophistication) — it is directed against the physical emasculation of children, which makes Domitian's prohibition of the practice doubly significant and especially worthy of praise. Of course, analysis of this nature is subjective, and the material remains open to interpretation.

97 For commentary, see Jones 1992 (note 3) 31.
98 For example, J. Garthwaite, Domitian and the Court Poets Martial and Statius (diss. Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. 1978) 87-129 and especially 128; id. 1984 (note 32) 111-24. But Hardie (note 37) 121-24 finds no ironic intent or criticism of the emperor in Silv. 3.4.
99 Bartsch (note 32) 71 admits that since 'I too constitute an audience, I am unable to escape the problems I have outlined above [i.e. the difficulty involved in discerning ambiguity or double-speak], nor can I claim that what I say truly represents practice rather than theory.' Many proponents of 'subtle criticism' point out that the device was regularly used in the Eastern Bloc prior to the Soviet collapse. While this is certainly true, it is pertinent to note that such criticism, be it in literature, music or the visual arts, was often detected by the cultural commissars. A well-known instance is that of Dmitri Shostakovich, whose 9th symphony, while ostensibly intended to celebrate Stalin's victory over Nazi Germany, seems to have been deliberately made much 'lighter' (i.e. sarcastic) than seemed fitting for a theme of such heroic proportions. In 1948, the composer was forced to admit his 'errors' in public, and, as punishment, was forced to compose music for Stalin's post-war propaganda films. Others were less fortunate. On this, see L.E. Fay, Shostakovich: A Life (Oxford 2000) 147-62.
Jones contends that Statius' work 'was taken as a compliment and that no flattery was too outrageous for Domitian.'\(^1\) While this may be so, it should be remembered that Domitian's relationship with the boy Earinus, although offensive \textit{per se} to modern commentators, appears not to have contravened the oft-misunderstood \textit{lex Scantinia}, which had been reintroduced by the same emperor.\(^2\) Indeed, an epigram of Martial on the subject of Earinus' shorn locks appears to allude to Domitian's predilection for same-sex activities (9.36). In this epigram, Jupiter addresses the 'Phryx puer' (i.e Ganymede) and states that the halls of Caesar's palace are filled with thousands of similarly attractive youths: 'Caesar habet noster similis tibi mille ministros / tantaque sidereos uix capit aula mares' (9.36.9-10). These are probably the παῖδες to whom Cassius Dio refers in his tale of Domitian's funereal dinner-party (Cass. Dio 67.9.2).\(^3\) One might also note Suetonius' failure to mention the relationship between emperor and eunuch. If Domitian's relationship with his favourite had been especially abnormal, the biographer would have surely referred to it in the condemnatory section of the \textit{Domitianus}. As is well known, Hadrian's relationship with Antinous, a presumably free-born Greek youth, was of a sexually-comparable nature (Aur. Vict. \textit{Caes.} 14.7-9; Cass. Dio 79.11.2-4 and S.H.A. Hadr. 14.5-7).\(^4\) Are we to believe, then, that the statues and other representations of the Bithynian lad, which were set up around the Empire (especially, but not exclusively, in the East) after his untimely death in October 130, were a 'subtle criticism' of Hadrian's lifestyle on the part

\(^{100}\) Jones 1992 (note 3) 32. Whatever the flavour of Statius' work, Pliny's \textit{Panegyricus} provides a parallel for the excessive (and often unbelievable) flattery that was usually meted out to the incumbent ruler.

\(^{101}\) Domitian reintroduced Augustan legislation on adultery (see Cass. Dio 67.12.1; Mart. 6.7, 6.22 and 6.45; Stat. \textit{Silv.} 5.2.102) and the \textit{lex Scantinia} (see Mart. 9.8; Juv. 2.29-50; Suet. \textit{Dom.} 8.3).

\(^{102}\) See also Cass. Dio 67.15.3 and Henriksen (note 95) 285.

\(^{103}\) Of course, Hadrian, as A.R. Birley, \textit{Hadrian: The Restless Emperor} (London/New York 1997) 2 suggests, was 'behaving in the tradition of classical Greece, the older man, the erastes, and the beautiful youth, the \textit{eromenos}'; cf. B.W. Henderson, \textit{The Life and Principate of the Emperor Hadrian A.D. 76-138} (London 1923) 133 and S. Perowne, \textit{Hadrian} (London 1960) 100, 156-57, both of whom consider, in a rather naïve fashion, that the liaison was platoic in nature. See also R. Lambert, \textit{Beloved and God} (New York 1984) chapter 7. The relationship between Domitian and Earinus, however, was between patron and \textit{libertus} by the time of the poem's composition.
of the persons responsible for their creation? Of course not. The import of these statues would have been apparent to the bulk of society; and those who participated in the glorification of the dead youth, in any case, were probably sympathetic to the emperor’s grief. Clearly, the exposition of supposedly ‘un-Roman’ activities depended largely on the expected reception of the material. If Silv. 3.4 were intended for the private enjoyment of the emperor and his aristocratic clique, the members of which may have shared similar proclivities, Statius’ hypothetical veiled criticism would have been pointless. And, even if the poem had enjoyed a wider audience, there is no reason to assume that it would have had an adverse effect on the public perception of the princeps. While Domitian’s affair with Earinus, who is described by Statius as ‘Caesareus puer’ (Silv. 3.4.7) and ‘famulus amori’ (Silv. 3.4.38), may be construed by modern critics operating within the confines of their own value-systems as adultery at best, or paedophilia at worst, it should be clear enough that it did not compromise the emperor’s virility.

II

It is notable that, although many statues from eastern (i.e. ‘Greek’) parts of the Empire have been identified as Hadrian’s favourite, a considerable number of representations of Antinoüs have also been found in the West. For example, Hadrian established a cult-centre for the worship of Antinoüs and Diana at Lanuvium, not too far from Rome, after the youth’s death (where there would obviously have been images of the new deity); and a relief found at Torre del Padiglione shows the Bithynian in the guise of Silvanus; see B. Andreae, Art of Rome, trans. R.E. Wolf (New York 1977) fig. 438. In addition, Hadrianic tondi reused on the Arch of Constantine may show Antinoüs accompanying Hadrian (see Andreae, figs 445, 459 and 460). Among others, Birley (note 103) 240 and 285; Lambert (note 103) 93, 231 and figs 12-13; and R. Turcan, ‘Les tondi d’Hadrien sur l’Arc de Constantin’, Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres: Comptes Rendus (Paris 1991) 56 believe this to be the case. For a comprehensive catalogue of artistic representations of Antinoüs, see Lambert, Appendix I. Of the 115 examples that Lambert provides, 34 are listed as having been recovered in an Italian context, and many have been found at the Villa Adriana, where they would certainly have been seen by prominent Romans.

104 It is notable that, although many statues from eastern (i.e. ‘Greek’) parts of the Empire have been identified as Hadrian’s favourite, a considerable number of representations of Antinoüs have also been found in the West. For example, Hadrian established a cult-centre for the worship of Antinoüs and Diana at Lanuvium, not too far from Rome, after the youth’s death (where there would obviously have been images of the new deity); and a relief found at Torre del Padiglione shows the Bithynian in the guise of Silvanus; see B. Andreae, Art of Rome, trans. R.E. Wolf (New York 1977) fig. 438. In addition, Hadrianic tondi reused on the Arch of Constantine may show Antinoüs accompanying Hadrian (see Andreae, figs 445, 459 and 460). Among others, Birley (note 103) 240 and 285; Lambert (note 103) 93, 231 and figs 12-13; and R. Turcan, ‘Les tondi d’Hadrien sur l’Arc de Constantin’, Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres: Comptes Rendus (Paris 1991) 56 believe this to be the case. For a comprehensive catalogue of artistic representations of Antinoüs, see Lambert, Appendix I. Of the 115 examples that Lambert provides, 34 are listed as having been recovered in an Italian context, and many have been found at the Villa Adriana, where they would certainly have been seen by prominent Romans.

105 S.H.A. Hadr. 14.7 notes the involvement of the Greeks in Antinoüs’ deification: ‘et Graeci quidem volente Hadriano eum consecrareunr, oracula per eum dari adserentes, quae Hadrianus ipse composuisse iactatur.’ See also Cass. Dio. 79.11.4, in which it is asserted that statues of Antinoüs were set up ‘practically all over the world’ (καὶ ἐκείνου ἀνθρώπον ἐν πάσῃ ὡς εἶπεν τῇ οἰκουμένῃ, μᾶλλον δὲ ἁγάματα, ἀνέβηκε). It may be assumed that this means that images were erected in both partes imperii, i.e. East and West.
We turn now to allegations of incest. Nero was said to have engaged in an incestuous relationship with his mother Agrippina the Younger (Cass. Dio 61.11.4; Suet. Ner. 28.2; Tac. Ann. 2). According to Suetonius (Ner. 28.2), the whole idea of Nero’s incestuous conduct was based on the ‘fact’ that one of his courtesans was said to resemble his mother (‘Agrippinae simillimam’) and that whenever both mother and son rode in the same litter, the latter would emerge with the tell-tale stains of intercourse on his clothing (‘maculis uestis’). The use of a phrase such as ‘fama erat’ in the text reveals that Suetonius, once again, had little faith in the allegations that he reports. That the allegations of incest were undoubtedly false matters little – people are readily inclined to believe the sensational, and fiction is often regarded as fact. More importantly, incestuous behaviour, in the minds of the aristocracy at least, would have been closely associated with Hellenistic despotism. Incest was the prerogative of a rex or a τύραννος. A princeps, the supposed personification of Roman morality, did not have sexual relations with close members of his own family. It is for this reason that Domitian’s supposed relationship with Julia (the daughter of his brother Titus) was introduced by post-Domitianic writers (Cass. Dio 67.3.2; Juv. 2.32-33; Suet. Dom. 22). Philostratus (VA 7.7) even asserts that Domitian, after the murder of Sabinus, considered marrying Julia. Let us remember, too, that Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina the Younger had

---

106 On these stories, see B.H. Warmington, Suetonius: Nero (Bristol 1977) 85.
107 Cassius Dio repeats this story (61.11.4).
108 It should be noted that Domitian had several Vestal virgins put to death for incesta (Suet. Dom. 8.3-4). The chief Vestal, for example, was buried alive and her lovers (with the exception of an ex-praetor) were beaten to death in the Comitium (Dom. 8.4). See also Cass. Dio 67.3.3-4; Phil. VA 7.6; Plin. Ep. 4.11; Stat. Silv. 1.1.35-36. Although Suetonius generally approved of Domitian’s policy of public morality, he did not share the same respect for the emperor’s private conduct. A tyrant, we should remember, was possessed of not only libido, but also of hypocrisy. In order to magnify his depravity, Domitian’s public morality, so evident in early sections of the Vita, is afterwards allowed to contrast with his private immorality. According to Suetonius, Domitian prosecuted those found guilty of adultery, yet he was adulterous himself (Dom. 1.3 and 22). He victimised a man who had taken back his wife after he had divorced her, yet Domitian did the same thing with his own wife (Dom. 3.1 and 13.1). He also ordered the deaths of ‘incestuous’ Vestals, yet he, too, was reportedly guilty of incestuous acts (Dom. 22). Thus, in terms of hypocrisy, Domitian emerges from the condemnatory literary record as worse than Nero, for the latter emperor, at least, did but little to hide his scandalous endeavours. Nero’s behaviour was always a source of scandal for respectable Romans, no matter whether his actions were conducted in the public or the private sphere.
met with little approval. Tacitus held that marriage between an uncle and his paternal niece, even if it had been sanctioned by a *senatus consultum*, was still ‘illicitus’ (*Ann. 12.5*).

Juvenal’s statement that Julia, the niece of the ‘pollutus adulter’, was giving birth to abortions that were ‘patruo similes’ (2.33) has a Neronian precedent. This story, however, alludes not only to incestuous behaviour (and concomitant Hellenistic tyranny), but also to the Neronian theme of abusing pregnant women. According to both Pliny (*Ep. 4.11.6*) and Suetonius (*Dom. 22*), Domitian was the cause of Julia’s death in that he compelled her to get rid of a child of his by abortion. These accounts evoke the story that Nero killed Poppaea Sabina, his pregnant wife, by kicking her in the stomach (*Suet. Ner. 35.3; Tac. Ann. 16.6*). The veracity of both stories is difficult to ascertain, and the only point that we need to draw from such material is that both Nero and Domitian, after their deaths, were believed to have been possessed of the sort of character that could inflict brutal treatment upon a pregnant woman. In any case, there remains no unequivocal evidence from Domitian’s reign to suggest that he had ever committed incest with Julia – and this should not surprise, for Domitian, who seems to have promoted himself as a tireless enforcer of Roman morality, would not want to have sanctioned the publication of material that suggested non-traditional sexual behaviour. Martial, writing under Domitian, saw fit to place an epigram about Julia (6.3) between two epigrams that praise the emperor’s revival of the Augustan *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* (6.2 and 6.4). Once again, the question of whether the poet was ambiguously referring to the emperor’s supposed hypocrisy

---

100 It should be noted that, according to Tacitus (*Ann. 12.7*), only one man, the *eques* Alledius Severus, took advantage of the decree. Cf. *Suet. Claud. 26*, where it is affirmed that only a freedman and a centurion (probably Alledius Severus) followed the emperor’s example.
101 *Suetonius* wrote that the union was ‘contra fas’ (*Claud. 39.2*). *Cassius Dio* records that such marriages were proscribed by Nerva (68.2.4).
102 Waters (note 3) 60 writes that the episode ‘savours too much of Periander and Nero to be anything but stock-in-trade anti-tyrannical invective.’
103 Southern (note 54) 109 dismisses the story as a ‘scandalous fabrication’.
104 Jones 1992 (note 3) 39.
105 This epigram alludes to Julia’s death and deification, and hopes that Domitia will soon give birth to a son, to be named Julius, who would enjoy the divine protection of his aunt.
106 Cf. Garthwaite 1990 (note 32) 14. Garthwaite believes that the *lex Iulia* was ‘probably’ revived in 89. Johnson (note 32) 24 gives c. 85 (i.e. the year in which the emperor began his censorship) as the likely date.
could be raised. But, as with Statius, it is necessary to point out that one cannot be absolutely certain whether the arrangement of Martial’s material was prompted by an ulterior motive. Domitian was certainly not expected to view the material as deprecatory.

In sum, Domitian was largely the victim of circumstance. If his heirs had been allowed to succeed him, it is quite possible that Domitian would have been accorded divine honours – he, like Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian and Titus, would have become one of the ‘good’ emperors. Unfortunately for Domitian, he was the last of his line. Unlike Hadrian, who had also incurred the anger of the Senate in the last years of his reign, he had no one to praise his memory or honour his name. A god in life (Cass. Dio 67.4.7 and 67.13.3-4; Suet. Dom. 13.2), he was made a demon in death. Yet Domitian was probably no more tyrannical than those emperors who preceded him, no more autocratic than those who followed him. Close inspection of the Domitianic and post-Domitianic literary evidence reveals considerable discrepancies between the two traditions. Indeed, the gulf between these traditions is so large that it is difficult to accept either version in its entirety. Instead, we should consider each version in its political context – the bulk of literature written during the emperor’s reign was essentially laudatory, and the bulk of literature written afterwards was essentially condematory (in order to portray the disgraced emperor as a tyrant, or another Nero). While a true picture of Domitian’s reign may forever escape us, the example of his treatment in the post-Domitianic literary record provides a clear insight into the mechanics of predecessor denigration and the manner in which the record of an emperor’s reign could be manipulated for both personal and political gain. True, the posthumous accounts of Domitian’s actions and those of Nero

---

116 Jones 1992 (note 3) 39 remarks that ‘Martial would not wish to suggest so obviously to his readers that Domitian was a hypocrite in renewing the Lex Julia.’ See also Johnson (note 32) 41.

117 The ancient sources credit Antoninus Pius, Hadrian’s adoptive son, with securing the deification of the dead emperor in the face of senatorial opposition. See Cass. Dio 70.1.2-3 (cf. 69.23.2-3, in which Antoninus Pius is not named as the instigator of Hadrian’s consecration); S.H.A. Hadr. 27.24, Ant. Pius 2.5.

118 This is essentially the thesis of K.H. Waters, ‘Traianus Domitiani continuator’, AJPh 90 (1969) 385-406. See also B.W. Henderson, Five Roman Emperors (Cambridge 1927) 181.

119 Cassius Dio notes Domitian’s desire to be flattered (67.4.2).
differ in several important respects (as has been shown on occasion), but the overall similarity of the derogatory literary record is indicative of the contrived nature of the genre, and the mechanical fashion in which it was pursued.
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: