

occasionally the distribution of the constituent parts of the dossiers over the Hellenistic and Roman sections can have a bewildering effect. I add two corrections to the otherwise fine presentation of the inscriptions: the second half of line 22 of the text presented on 75-7 is missing in the translation on 77 ('according to the boundaries that existed before'), and Hesperus, whom the governor of Asia orders to select surveyors (178-9, l.10-11), is himself an imperial *procurator*, not a surveyor (correct at 179 bottom).

Dignas admits that there are numerous elements in the stories presented that do not fit the proposed model neatly, but argues that this 'should rather invite us further to differentiate the triangle than to be content with the bilateral relationship between rulers and cities' (222). She does not aim to have the last word on the categorization of temple complexes in Asia Minor, but she certainly has put important new questions and instructions on the agenda which deserve to be fully absorbed.

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Edward Champlin, *Nero*. Cambridge, MA — London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003. xii + 346 pp. ISBN 0 674 01192 9.

The first thing that must be said about this intriguing, readable, and often brilliant account of all-that-you-ever-wanted-to-know-but-never-dared-to-ask about a Roman Emperor is that it has the wrong title. From a book entitled *Nero*, a reader would normally expect a biography of the Emperor Nero, which treats the events of his life and the motives for his actions, and may even give an inkling of the historical context — of the attitudes, issues, problems of Rome and its empire — which would enable the reader to understand and judge those events and motives. But the author abjures all intention to instruct in these matters (246).

On the other hand, it is hard to suggest a better title. *The Afterlife of Nero* or *Nero the Hero* might seem better, since the fundamental question asked is 'Why is Nero so fascinating?' (236) and the heart of the book is the belief that Nero is a 'folk-hero', defined as a figure believed not to have died or to be able to return from the dead, who incorporates good and bad traits, yet is popular with a large section of the people. But the later tradition about Nero is only surveyed in the first chapter and then only in any detail up to the fifth century. Moreover, though we are initially told that, to explain this 'folk hero', it does not matter what he was like, just what folks believed (23), we later have our attention directed to how Nero might have wished his actions to be perceived (35) and, at the end, the author gives as his aim to explain 'what Nero might have meant by the deeds and misdeeds that have made him notorious for so long' (236). The implication seems to be that Nero's own view mattered because he ultimately put it across, first in his own day because 'much of what he did resonated far more with contemporary social attitudes than our hostile sources would have us believe' (36), then to posterity, though hostile sources and the popular imagination transformed 'the hero of his own story into the monster of history' (237).

In support of this view, Champlin undertakes a scholarly and imaginative analysis of the ancient evidence. He believes that Nero's series of extravagant public gestures made sense, that he was rationally calculating the effects of his actions on his audience, who knew how to read the polytheistic and mythological symbols he employed. Thus Nero's artistic ventures progress explicably, not only from private amateur to public professional, but from lyre-playing to tragic-acting after his departure for Greece in 66 (the contrast between Piso and Nero in *Ann.* 15.65.2 is shrewdly adduced) to pantomime in 68. Similarly, Nero's interest in associating himself with particular gods develops from identification with the lyre-playing Apollo starting in 59, to a further identification with the charioteer Helios after the Great Fire of 64, to an assimilation to Heracles for his labours on behalf of mankind. The price of this second schema is perhaps too high, for it

means regarding Seneca's celebration of the young Nero on his accession as the equal of Apollo in singing and in chariot-racing (*Apoc.* 4) as an insertion made in the sixties (116). When it comes to the Fire, Champlin finally decides that Nero did start it, preferring the contemporary testimony of the praetorian tribune Subrius Flavus, retailed by Tacitus, to the historian's own scepticism: Nero's experience in the temple of Vesta put the idea in his mind that a fire was coming to destroy it again, and he thought he would help Fortune along so he could rebuild Rome (191).

In a fascinating analysis, Nero's remarks in his last hours are shown to conform to a pattern of ironic comment on his own situation: 'This is Nero's boiled water', he says of the pool water he drinks; 'This is loyalty', he says of the treacherous centurion pretending to staunch his wound. Champlin interprets 'Qualis artifex pereo' similarly, as a comment on Nero's gathering of marble chips in an attempt to fashion for himself some kind of tomb. This is certainly possible for Suetonius' version (*Nero* 49), and though at *Nero* 20 *artifex* refers to lyre-playing, Suetonius does use it elsewhere to mean sculptor (*Vesp.* 18). The problem is that this is clearly not how Dio understood it. Having said shortly before (63.27.2) that Nero believed his little skill (τεχνίον) of lyre-playing would support him in exile, Dio attests (63.29.2) that his remark οἶος τεχνίτης παραπόλλυμαι was often quoted, which implies that it was a remark that made sense outside its immediate context. Champlin offers other interesting interpretations of the sources: on the meaning of *de dominico* in Suet. *Vit.* 11.2 (9); on the naming of Sporus in Dio 62.28.3 (150); on the relevance of Andromachus' snake-bite remedy to Nero's interest in Apollo (116-17). His treatment of the meaning of the name *Domus Transitoria* and his reconstruction of the extent and elements of the *Domus Aurea* are penetrating and conclusive.

Champlin claims that he does not intend to justify Nero's actions or to rehabilitate his character (236), but the ingenious publicist he depicts clearly stirs his admiration. Nero controls the story of his mother's death (297, n. 42) by borrowing Seneca's invention in his *Oedipus* whereby Jocasta stabs herself in the womb; 'probably a majority' of the Roman people regretted Nero's passing (7); the punishment of the Christians was part of Nero's 'acting as a good *princeps* should' and offering the arsonists up as a 'sacrifice to the offended gods in the same gardens which were now home to so many of his displaced people' (179). Yet Tacitus (here praised for his account) insists that the punishment of the Christians was *not* one of the *placamenta deum* (*Ann.* 15.45.2), but an attempt to shift the blame from Nero where rumour placed it. Most striking is the author's insistence on Nero's 'remarkable restraint in sexual matters' (161): the only adulterous liaisons attributed to him are with women he wanted to marry; he was not homosexual because the poor castrated Sporus was a substitute for his wife Poppaea; as for his marriage to Pythagoras, that was really initiation into a mystery cult, but a mock initiation because Nero despised all cults (Suet. 56). Otherwise, we have harmless sadomasochist sex games in which Nero practiced oral sex on men and women (for Champlin, adult prostitutes, not children as in Dio 63.13.2) tied to stakes in a pantomime of *damnatio ad bestias* ending with his 'dying' on the 'spear' — all too much for the monk Xiphilinus anyway.

Much that is of interest happens on the way, but is the author's explanation of Nero's enduring fascination convincing? Did Nero really impose his own version on his contemporaries, or, even in distorted form, on posterity? Tacitus shows us that Nero's greatest piece of spin — his punishment of the Christians as arsonists — misfired because it was too sadistic even for Roman tastes. The building of the palace that he said would enable him to live like a human being at last, and whose aristocratic amenities he may have wished to share with the people, was perceived at the time as a takeover of the city for his own use. If Nero really chose to act the parts of Orestes, Oedipus, Canace and Hercules Furens in order to present his matricide as justified, his incest with his mother as innocent, and his killing of Poppaea and her unborn child as an accident for which he felt remorse, the plan failed: the effect was to shock the soldiers on guard and set off a series of pasquinades on matricide at Rome. That is not surprising, as the tragic performances were in

Greece, while the senate in Rome was treated to a letter composed by Seneca that suggested that Agrippina had got what she deserved.

As to posterity, the initial ingredients that went into the creation of this 'folk-hero' are obvious from the Greek intellectual writers, the *Sibylline Oracles* and early Christian sources: a premature death witnessed only by a few minions; matricide; elaborate games and musical performances; the punishment of the Christians; the Jewish war; the attempt to cut the isthmus of Corinth; the personal attention to the Greeks of the eastern empire. The particular identification of Nero with all of these activities (except the Jewish war) was consolidated by the policies and ideology of the Flavians, formed in deliberate opposition to their predecessor. Nero's own contribution may be not so much the creation of myths as the beauty of his coins, his portraits and, initially and again after their rediscovery in the Renaissance, the remnants of his palace. It is a pity that Champlin does not illustrate the over-lifesize gilded bronze bust of Nero in the Sammlung Axel Guttman, the subject of a monograph by Born and Semmler that appears in the bibliography. It shows the full power and splendour of the late portraits better than their appearance in profile on his coins. For the literary perpetuators of Nero's fame, the powerful depiction by Suetonius of his death scene and the expanding tableaux of Tacitus' Neronian narrative must have been the principal source of inspiration. Perhaps *Nero* should encourage us to see these as tributes from one artist to another.

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A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik, *Flavian Rome. Culture, Image, Text*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003. xvii + 754 pp. ISBN 9004111883.

This is a big book, dealing with a large topic. Twenty-five articles by internationally established scholars, in seven hundred pages of text and illustrations, followed by seventy pages of bibliography and indices, the latter in a small font. If only in terms of sheer organisation, this is a massive work. *Flavian Rome* is a collection of specially commissioned papers, all analysing specific aspects of ancient Rome in the period 69-96 CE. The 'potentially misleading character of such temporal demarcations' (p. 1) is emphasised from the very beginning. Still, as is perhaps inevitable, the centrality of the object of research occasionally gains momentum of its own. Mellor, in a splendid piece on the Flavians' creation of a 'new aristocracy of power' (pp. 69-101), may well be right to see that new aristocracy as the principal 'contribution of the Flavian era' (p. 101), but must be overstating when that contribution is deemed to have 'determined the shape and direction of political life until the death of Commodus' (p. 69).

Within the scope of this review, it is obviously impossible to do justice to all the contributions. One of the qualities of the volume that the title announces is its emphasis on dealing with subjects from different disciplines, both large and small. That said, the balance of attention swings firmly towards textual analysis. Twelve pieces focus specifically on individual authors or texts (Plutarch and the Archaic, Statius' *Silvae* 1.6, epic performance in Statius, two papers on Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, two papers on Flavius Josephus, *Romanitas* in Silius Italicus' *Punica* 1 and 2, the *Octavia*, patronage in Martial, Martial's *Epigrams* 10, and a final paper on spectacle in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*). Several of these pieces look at the particular author and/or text in different contexts. Thus, for instance, Beard's paper on 'The Triumph of Flavius Josephus' (pp. 543-58) is as much on the triumph as it is on Josephus, and should, in fact, be read in tandem with her recent contribution to Edwards/Woolf eds., *Rome the Cosmopolis*. Likewise, Gold's 'Poetry, Mendicancy and Patronage in Martial' (pp. 591-612) tells much that goes beyond Martial, explaining the economics of patronage in Flavian Rome. Then again, literature does take a front seat in Hardie's paper on 'Poetry and Politics at the Games of Domitian' (pp. 125-48), Evans' 'Containment and Corruption: The Discourse of Flavian Empire' (pp. 255-76), Penwill's