

(*Historia* 33 [1984], 21ff.) has escaped her; and the repeated references to the 'adoption' of Octavian in Caesar's will irritate. One temptation of a historiography which centres on the choices made by the élite is to underemphasize the rôles that wider political groups—the urban plebs, soldiers—played (contra Nippel; and there is no reference to Vanderbroek's *Popular Leadership*). But can Roman *nobiles* really have failed to see the importance of the *clientela* Caesar had built up (p. 292: 'darüber hat [D. Brutus] vermutlich nie nachgedacht'), or of the 'increasing specialization' in élite careers which she rather dubiously postulates (p. 314)?

English readers will be grateful that D.'s German prose is remarkably easy and uncomplicated.

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S. GÉLY: *Le pouvoir et l'autorité: Avatars italiens de la notion d'auctoritas d'Auguste à Domitien (27 a.C.–96 p.C.)*. (Bibliothèque d'Études Classiques, 3.) Pp. xxvii + 191. Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1995. Paper, Belg. frs. 1200. ISBN: 90-6831-713-X/2-87723-257-3.

This is a rather protean work, but if you can accept it on its own terms, it provides rewarding analyses of some of the central concepts of imperial ideology. G.'s aim is to provide a history of the phrase *totius Italiae auctoritas*, which surfaces first in Caesar and Cicero, but which, she claims, has a far larger significance, both in terms of its evolution and in terms of its realization under the early emperors. However, what sounds like a relatively discrete idea is transformed into a subject with infinitely extendable boundaries, as G. pursues her central topic back in time and takes in a wide range of related concepts. There are sections on the unity or regionality of Italy, on the idea of Italy's boundaries, on the evolution of the word *auctoritas*, and on the presence of Heracles in Italy. In none of these areas can the discussion possibly aspire to anything like completeness, and that is the first reason why the book needs to be taken as you find it. Another reason is that G. wavers between the grandiose generalization, attempting to uncover the history of Roman *mentalité*, and a necessary specificity in aspiring to remain true to the authors who are her sources. She is sensitive in her handling of Pliny, Varro, and Virgil, but the brevity of treatment, the insistence on the isolated phrase as a moment of clear revelation, prevents her giving much more than passing insights into their presentation of her preoccupations. That said, it is challenging and refreshing to see, to take one of many similar examples, Virgil *Ecl.* 4 side by side with Pliny, *Ep.* 9.27 (where he refers to the *numen historiae*) in a discussion of cosmic mysticism and historical consciousness. There are bold conceptions at play here, and that play is bound at times to look as though it is restrained by the traditional scholarly criteria which condition the way in which answers are sought to difficult questions. In essence, texts are being pressed to reveal discourses of an almost psycho-social character, and G.'s work is a demonstration of how troublesome traditional methods can be to this kind of ambition.

This is a book which clearly wants to engage with complex problems of method, and which raises grand and intractable questions about how mythical discourse functions, how texts record what people thought, and how the words available to the historian coincide with lived experience and political circumstance. The tabular chronology of pp. 77–9, juxtaposing dates with political events, linguistic and cultural occurrences, and visual and textual material, is the clearest proof that somehow G. believes that all these different categories can be brought together into a satisfactory unifying analysis. Not that G. ever states it as clearly as that. And somehow the rhetoric of objectivity seems to fail in the face of the mythical, while G. is herself too disposed to indulge in the appeal of the numinous, particularly with regard to the mysterious evolutions which constitute the processes of history. Pronouncements such as the following are not untypical: 'L'histoire *se fait*, pour une bonne part, à partir d'éléments et de figures du discours: nom, métaphore, allégorie. D'où son rapport au mythe' (p. 81). I like the sound of this, but as an analysis of both myth and discourse, it remains itself on the level of metaphor, and, like many of the individual points of exploration, somehow fails to yield anything concrete, especially in terms of political power. Although in the preface G. adduces support from the theories of Benveniste, she does not do this consistently enough in her analyses to forestall the impression that the theoretical work is insufficient to provide the connection that G. is striving for. She is, after all, attempting to sustain that most indemonstrable of claims, that words make history and

history makes words. So G.'s problem is one shared by many working in the field of myth, particularly Roman myth, where the failure to find a clear methodological position can be far more inimical to the success of one's textual readings than is the case for Greek mythologists, with their more flexible anthropological traditions. But even if not definitive, this book is enjoyable and worth attention.

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D. SHOTTER: *Nero* (Lancaster Pamphlets). Pp. xvii + 101, 6 figs. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. Paper, £6.99. ISBN: 0-415-1203-1.

Nero is a good subject for one of the Lancaster pamphlets, which are designed to provide concise, up-to-date introductions to historical topics covered by A-level syllabuses or equivalent courses at universities. The Neronian books of Tacitus' *Annals* and the Julio-Claudian emperors are staple fare for A-level classics and ancient history courses.

S. provides a readable narrative covering Nero's family background and rise to power, the politics of his reign, warfare, and provincial administration, Nero's cultural notions, the growth of opposition to him, and finally the civil war. Even three of the Four Emperors receive a brief treatment.

S.'s general conclusion is that Nero brought the collapse of his rule and his dynasty on himself. His inadequate and immature personality and his habits of self-indulgence led him to abandon the Augustan principles he at first followed and to neglect the armies in favour of more artistic activities which themselves contributed to the alienation of the senatorial army commanders who ultimately brought him down.

In treating Nero's 'Hellenizing', S. ultimately concludes that Nero was a megalomaniac with Greek tastes rather than a Hellenistic god-king (p. 57). He is probably right to come down on this side of the debate about Nero's views on emperor worship, but the discussion of Nero's tastes lacks conceptual clarity. 'Hellenizing' is never defined, and Nero is said to have progressed from 'little more than the cultural interests common to young Romans' to an interest in Greek works of art and a Hellenizing of architectural and interior design indicative of 'a desire to isolate himself from unreceptive Roman tastes' (pp. 8–9). Yet the materials and engineering wonders of the Domus Aurea build on distinctive Roman architectural developments, and the Neronian poets (hardly mentioned) are acutely conscious of their Latin forerunners. Nero's enthusiasm for Greek art was not a departure from Roman cultural developments, which had built on Greek culture since the Republic. What was distinctive about Nero was the value he placed on literature and the visual and performing arts, and on the Greek type of contests which encouraged the upper orders to acquire and display such skills and tastes. Nero particularly prided himself on singing and playing the lyre: 'qualis artifex pereo' at Suetonius *Nero* 49.1 is not likely to refer to his accomplishments in Hellenistic poetry (p. 58), but to such performance, as Suetonius *Nero* 20.1, 40.2, 41.1 suggest.

S. believes that Nero did little damage to the Principate as an institution, but that his conduct raised serious questions about 'dynasticism'. His evidence is Galba's speech at *Hist.* 1.15–16, to which he devotes an appendix. But this speech, as Tacitus presents it, can hardly be taken seriously as expressing the, or even a, senatorial viewpoint on this issue. Galba, adopting Piso in the praetorian camp in defiance of any legal adoption procedure and in the presence of bad omens, produces strong arguments in favour of adoption as a piece of special pleading at a time of desperation. Piso Licinianus had done nothing to show that he was the best man (in fact, as Suetonius shows [*Galba* 17], he was a personal favourite long designated in Galba's will). Tacitus' audience would have been reminded of the similar arguments in the *Panegyricus*, where Pliny also makes a virtue of necessity and then lets the cat out of the bag at the end by praying that Trajan be granted a son to succeed him. There is more, not less (p. 70), reason to attribute a serious constitutional position to Verginius Rufus, whose conviction that the right to choose a Princeps belonged to SPQR is well attested both directly and indirectly through the behaviour of his soldiers in the army of upper Germany (*Hist.* 1.53).

The quotations from ancient writers in the text are to be welcomed: nothing so brings the ancient world to life for students as letting it speak. But, curiously, the references are not given in