

VESPASIAN AND THE SLAVE TRADE*

Around A.D. 62 the future emperor, T. Flavius Vespasianus, returned from his proconsulate of Africa with his finances at a very low ebb. In fact he was so impoverished that his credit was ruined, and he mortgaged all his property to his brother. According to Suetonius (*Vesp.* 4.3) he turned to commerce, and commerce of a particular sort: *necessarioque ad mangonicos quaestus sustinendae dignitatis causa descenderit; propter quae 'mulio' vocabatur*. On the nature of that commerce there has evolved a *communis opinio* which is well represented by a note in the Loeb text:

Mango . . . was the term applied to a dealer in slaves, cattle or wares, to which he tried to give an appearance of greater value than they actually possessed. The nickname applied to Vespasian implies that his trade was in mules.

This is the interpretation adopted in the commentaries of Braithwaite and Mooney,¹ and it has become standard doctrine that Vespasian restored his credit by speculating as a contractor of mules. One recalls the career of the triumviral dignitary, P. Ventidius Bassus, who supplied vehicles and mules to provincial governors and so became familiar with Caesar.² It is clear that Ventidius began on a small scale, and the abusive epigram cited by Gellius implies that he discharged the lowest functions in the stable (*nam mulos qui fricabat*). His business remained a stigma in later life, and he was termed 'muleteer' by his enemies, Cicero and Plancus.³ The parallel is easy to draw, and Syme did so explicitly: 'When T. Flavius Vespasianus . . . went in for transport operations, men called him in derision a "mulio".'⁴

This is a simple enough explanation, though perhaps it makes Vespasian's contemporaries a little simplistic in their choice of nicknames. But the crux of the problem is the interpretation of Suetonius' phrase, *ad mangonicos quaestus*. In the overwhelming majority of instances in Latin *mango* and its derivatives imply slave dealing. With the exception of one single author, all the uses traceable down to the fourth century refer unambiguously to slave dealing, as do the other two instances in Suetonius himself (*Aug.* 69.1, *Dom.* 7.1). The exception is the Elder Pliny, who has a predilection for *mango* and its verbal and adjectival forms and provides thirteen examples of their use. Several are perfectly normal uses of the term, applied to slave dealers,⁵ and one is the only other extant use of the adjective *mangonicus*. Writing of the hyacinth and its medicinal qualities, Pliny adds: 'The root is bulbous, and well known to the dealers in the slave trade [*mangonicis venaliciis pulchre nota*], for when added to sweet wine and

* I am grateful to Elizabeth Baynham, Tim Parkin, Arthur Pomeroy, Thomas Wiedemann, and an anonymous referee for detailed criticism and helpful suggestions. All errors are, of course, my own.

¹ C. Suetoni Tranquilli Divus Vespasianus, ed. A. Braithwaite (Oxford, 1927), 30; C. Suetoni Tranquilli de Vita Caesarum, Libri VII–VIII, ed. G. W. Mooney (Dublin, 1930), 390.

² Gellius 15.4.3: *uictum sibi aegre quaesisse eumque sordide inuenisse comparandis mulis et uehiculis*.

³ Cic. *Ad Fam.* 10.18.3 (Plancus); Pliny, *N.H.* 7.135 (Cicero); cf. R. Syme, *Roman Papers* 1 (Oxford, 1979), 394–6.

⁴ Syme (n. 3), 396. So, most recently, Barbara Levick, *Vespasian* (London, 1999), 24: 'Men nicknamed him "the muleteer", but mule-driving on a large scale becomes "transport operator".'

⁵ *N.H.* 7. 56 (twice), 24.35, 30.41, 32.135, 34.79.

applied as an ointment it checks puberty and prevents its symptoms bursting forth.⁶ This is a significant passage for our purposes, for it identifies one of the notorious features of the trade, to preserve the looks of handsome boy slaves indefinitely, either by castration or (as here) by the use of drugs. A similar passage (*N.H.* 24.35) describes the measures taken to disguise a thin physique; slave dealers use ointments to loosen the skin and then feed up their wretched merchandise—rather like the fattening of Strasbourg geese.⁷ Similar observations can be found in Galen and Dioscorides,⁸ and it is clear that slave dealers were expert in producing robust and healthy-seeming items for immediate sale. That explains the abnormal usages in Pliny. He uses the term more generally to denote any salesman who ‘tarts up’ or adulterates his merchandise. Dealers who adulterate spice and sell it at a high price are termed *mangones*, as are salesmen who artificially age their wine or who refuse to allow the fake gemstones they sell to be violently tested.⁹ One must add that the last two passages are so corrupt that the reading and interpretation must be in doubt. Not surprisingly there are comparable uses of the adjectival and verbal forms; in every case they imply sharp practice or adulteration.

Pliny, then, regards deception and fakery as inherent in slave dealing—slave dealing, we may note, at a relatively low commercial level—and he uses *mango* and its derivatives to denote fakery in other branches of commerce. But the extended use of the term is unique to Pliny. He may have coined it himself, or adopted a colloquialism shunned by other writers. In any case it does not help the interpretation of Suetonius. If the biographer were—uniquely—imitating Pliny’s extended usage, it could only mean: ‘he resorted to profiteering from adulterated goods, which was why he was commonly called “the muleteer”.’ That is much too strained to be read from the text; by contrast, in all the Pliny passages it is made clear that the context is the fraudulent embellishment of wares. There is no real alternative to the regular meaning of the word. Suetonius is stating in plain language that Vespasian was forced to restore his fortunes by investment in the slave trade.¹⁰ How, then, can the nickname be explained? One explanation is possible but prosaic. What the slave dealer and muleteer had in common was the amount of travelling they did. The sepulchral inscription of a retired slave dealer, C. Sempronius Nicocrates, emphasizes the vicissitudes he had experienced battling the waves and on his long journeys by land.¹¹ Against that we may adduce Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* (6.1), where Heracles is said to have covered more ground than any muleteer. And the funerary relief of another slave dealer, A. Caprilius Timotheus, shows the trader herding his wares exactly like a train of mules.¹² Such a

⁶ *N.H.* 21.170: *radix est bulbacea, mangonicis venalicii pulchre nota, quae e vino dulci inlita pubertatem coercescit et non patitur erumpere.*

⁷ Depilatory procedures are described at *N.H.* 30.41, 32.135.

⁸ Galen, *De Method. Medendi* 14 (10.999 Kühn); *In Hippocr. Epidem. VI Comment.* 3.27 (17b.83 Kühn); *Dsc. Eup.* 1.233.2.

⁹ *N.H.* 9.168 (villas), 10.140 (poultry), 12.98 (spices), 23.40 (wine), 37.200 (stones). It is clear from the passages from Suetonius (cited above, p. 350) and Pliny (see n. 5) that the terminology is derived from the slave trade. The characteristic of a specific occupation is generalized as a universal trait of salesmen.

¹⁰ This plain fact has been noted in passing (cf. R. Weynand, *RE* 6.2629; C. E. Heitland, *Agricola* [Cambridge 1921], 327: ‘He was driven to mortgage his landed estate, and to become for a time a slave-dealer’), but it has been systematically overlooked in the scholarly literature of the last half-century.

¹¹ *IG XIV.2.2000 = IGUR 1326: πολλά βυθοῖσι καμών | ὄδοιπορίες δ’ ἀτονήσας*

¹² See the detailed article by H. Duchêne, ‘La stèle d’Aulus Caprilius Timotheus, sómatemporos’, *BCH* 110 (1986), 513–30, republishing the original photographs of Jacques Roger.

comparison is possible, but it is feeble, and the travels of the slave dealer were scarcely sufficient in themselves to suggest an analogy with a muleteer. One expects more wit and less literal-mindedness in imperial Rome.¹³

A more colourful—and sinister—interpretation is to hand. The slave dealer's business was in part to produce human mules, males who were sterile for one reason or another. The most notorious was the trade in eunuchs. Eunuchs and *mangones* go together like love and marriage. When Domitian introduced his famous prohibition on the castration of males (after he had been introduced to Earinus), he put a limit on the price of the stock remaining with the slave dealers.¹⁴ Otherwise, one assumes, values would have risen astronomically. Martial too makes it clear that it was the slave dealers (or rather the surgeons in their employ) who operated upon their stock:

non puer avari sectus arte mangonis
virilitatis damna maeret ereptae. (Mart. 9.5.4–5; cf. 7.80.9–10)¹⁵

Eunuchs might well be described as mules—as far as sterility goes. However, there was a refinement hinted at in Juvenal and Martial. Eunuchs could be created at any age, and, if they were doctored after the onset of puberty, they would retain their potency for a while. Juvenal (*Sat.* 6.366–73) suggests that there was a distinct art in the creation of such merchandise, which was clearly specialized and expensive.¹⁶ Martial (6.67) lampoons one lady who allegedly preferred eunuchs as her sexual companions because the risk of pregnancy was eliminated. He even suggests that there had been a notorious scandal in the past. In one of his encomia for Domitian he remarks that under the emperor's moral regime there will be no eunuch or adulterer: *at prius—o mores!—et spado moechus erat* (6.2.5–6). Nero may even have popularized eunuchs as sexual partners.¹⁷ His notorious and public affair with Sporus could well have inspired members of the upper classes, both male and female, to follow his example, in which case the demand for quality eunuchs might have increased sharply—at a time when Vespasian was active in the trade.¹⁸

Domitian may have prohibited castration, but he did not stamp out the practice. The legislation was reinforced under Nerva to prevent masters offering their slaves

¹³ For another metaphorical use of the term 'mule', see Hdt. 1.55.2, 91.5–6 (offspring of a morganatic marriage). That supports a suggestion made to me by Arthur Pomeroy, that the 'mules' procured by Vespasian were the outcome of liaisons between society ladies and prime slaves whom they acquired for sexual purposes.

¹⁴ Suet. *Dom.* 7.1: *spadonum qui residui apud mangones erant pretia moderatus est.*

¹⁵ See also the interpolated couplet in Juv. *Sat.* 6.373a–b.

¹⁶ On which see E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London, 1980), 309–11. There may have been Greek antecedents. Hippocrates, *De Semine* 2 notes the eunuch's capacity to produce 'semen' (an effusion of the prostate), and Theophrastus may have referred to the phenomenon of eunuchs as adulterers (cited by Courtney 261). If so, it sheds a lurid light on the abusive epigram in which Theocritus of Chios lampooned Aristotle's relations with the eunuch Hermeias (Diog. Laert. 5.11; cf. D. T. Runia, 'Theocritus of Chios' epigram against Aristotle', *CQ* 36 [1986], 531–4). If Runia is right in suggesting sexual immuendo, then, when Theocritus inveighs against Aristotle for choosing to live *βορβόρου ἐν προχοαίς*, he is referring simultaneously to the alluvial plain of the Caicus, inland from Atarneus (Arr. 5.6.4), and the seminal outpourings of Hermeias (*βορβόρου* inevitably suggests *βαρβάρου*).

¹⁷ I owe this suggestion to Thomas Wiedemann.

¹⁸ Nero's association with Sporus became public in 65, after the death of Poppaea Sabina, whom Sporus resembled. It was only then that Nero castrated him. He could not have been supplied to the royal court as an eunuch. However, Nero's sexual proclivities were presumably well known before the death of Poppaea, The notorious banquet of Tigellinus apparently catered for all tastes (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.2), and eunuchs were presumably on call.

for castration.¹⁹ Hadrian subsequently had to issue an imperial ruling, punishing castration as a crime under the *lex Cornelia de sicariis*. Even voluntary castration was prohibited, and doctors who performed the operation were liable to capital punishment.²⁰ Nevertheless eunuchs continued to be provided. In the next generation Galen alludes discreetly to the eunuch's capacity for sex,²¹ and one may assume that the eunuch adulterer was not entirely a thing of the past. From the perspective of a society lady he was lover and contraceptive combined, and it is only to be expected that there was a market for attractive, sexually potent castrati, and such a commodity would have been expensive and profitable for the dealer. These were human mules, with the mule's sexual capacity and sterility, and if Vespasian was involved in their procurement, there was no wonder that he was termed *mulio*. We need not assume that he actually did the buying and selling. Presumably he used the money realized from mortgaging his property to finance the operations of specialist slave contractors, some of whom were in the business of marketing eunuchs. It is not even impossible that he was touched by scandal; if he was indirectly involved in supplying slaves who were alleged to have had immoral relations with their mistresses, he may have suffered some censure, or at least ridicule. And we can understand how the publicly prudish Domitian may have been outraged by his father's commercial activity. He allegedly nurtured a lasting resentment against his father and brother, and according to Dio (67.23) his legislation forbidding castration was a reaction against Titus' notorious fondness for eunuchs.²² It did not, as we shall see, prevent his enjoyment of Earinus, who had been doctored before his salutary legislation, but he presumably looked down upon the trade which had brought him his favourite. Well aware of the means by which his father had repaired his fortunes, he expressed his disapproval implicitly and retrospectively. The epithet *mulio* may well have rankled too. It could have been applied to the entire Flavian house, which derived from Reate, a town celebrated for its high-quality mules.²³

There can be no serious doubt that Vespasian invested in the slave trade and profited sufficiently to maintain his senatorial status comfortably. But how did it affect his standing among his peers? There is a prevalent view that slave trading was a particularly disreputable calling in the Roman world. In the words of Harris, 'from the conventionally decent point of view it was one of the lowest of all ways of making money'.²⁴ It might be argued that part of the coolness that developed with his brother²⁵

¹⁹ *Digest* 48.8.6: dated to the consulship of Neratius Priscus and Annius Verus (97).

²⁰ *Digest* 48.8.4.2. A later rescript of Hadrian to Ninnius Hasta (c. 128/9: cf. Syme [n. 3], 2.631; *PIR*² N 101) extended the prohibition to *thlibiae* (eunuchs created by crushing the testes); cf. *Digest* 48.8.5. There was clearly an eager search for loopholes in the law. In later years Severus' notorious praetorian prefect, Fulvius Plautianus, was supposed to have castrated one hundred Roman citizens of high birth, to provide an exotic and supposedly safe household for his daughter, Plautilla—though Dio adds ingenuously: 'none of us knew of it until after he was dead' (Dio 75.14.4–6). But true or false, the report shows that castration was still believed to be within the power of a depraved despot. On the acquisition of eunuchs in the late Empire, see Thomas Wiedemann, 'An early Irish eunuch?', *LCM* 11.8 (1986), 139–40.

²¹ *De Usu Partium* 4.190 (Kühn). See also Isidore, *Orig.* 10.93.

²² Cf. Suet. *Dom.* 7.2; Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.73–7, 4.3.14–15; Martial 6.2, 9.5.

²³ Strab. 5.3.1 (228); Varro *R.R.* 2.1.14, 6.1, 8.3, 6. The connection is made by Levick (n. 4), 24. The mules of Reate added spice to the epithet, but they do not, of course, explain its origin.

²⁴ William V. Harris, 'Towards a study of the Roman slave trade', in J. H. D'Arms and E. C. Kopff (edd.), *The Seaborne Commerce of Ancient Rome. Studies in Archaeology and History. MAAR XXXVI* (Rome, 1980), 117–40. The brief discussion of slave dealers (129–32) remains the only compilation on the subject.

²⁵ Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 3.65: *credebatur adfectam eius fidem parcius iuvisse domo agrisque pignori acceptis; unde, quamquam manente in speciem concordia, offensarum operata metuebantur.*

derived from something deeper than resentment of being forced to a mortgage. Suetonius too emphasizes that Vespasian ‘descended’ to profiteering from the slave trade. However, the context is elaborate and rhetorical. To keep up his census rating (*sustinendae dignitatis causa*) he lowered himself (*descenderit*) to commerce in slaves. The contrast is deliberate and perhaps exaggerated. And to what, in Suetonius’ mind, was Vespasian lowering himself? Was it to commerce in general or slave trading in particular? If the former, Suetonius is merely expressing the traditional prejudice against commerce. Senators were expected to have their wealth invested in land. Commercial activities were undesirable in themselves, and it was almost a contradiction in terms for Vespasian to have resorted to trade to maintain his senatorial *dignitas*.

Slave dealing in itself does not seem to have been condemned. It provided a vital commodity, and, as with all commerce, if it were practised on a large scale it might rank second only to landed wealth.²⁶ What most distinguished the slave trade was its extreme profitability. Cicero mentions slave traffickers as pre-eminently wealthy.²⁷ In Vespasian’s own day the satirist Persius (6.75) singles out slave dealing as the quickest way of doubling one’s capital. Commerce may be seen as sordid, but there is nothing especially disreputable in the slave trade. In literature the gods themselves can be represented as agents. Particularly relevant to Vespasian is Statius’ poem in honour of Domitian’s concubine, T. Flavius Earinus. Here it is Venus who is the principal. She recruits Earinus from his native Pergamum to grace the imperial palace, and brings him to her royal customer in her swan-drawn carriage (*Silv.* 3.4.21–59). At this point Asclepius takes an interesting part in the proceedings. He leaves his shrine in Pergamum to operate on Earinus (67–72), and ensures that he loses his masculinity without pain or wounding. Castration is portrayed as a necessary part of the slave trade and it is treated as supremely respectable, commerce fit for the gods—or a future emperor.

In real life, as opposed to high literature, men of distinction are attested in the slave trade. Victorious generals clearly impacted on it when they were disposing of the prisoners enslaved during their campaigns. There is material evidence of such activity. One instance is provided by an inscription of Acmonia in Phrygia which records the construction by private initiative of a slave market and altar. The man responsible is a Roman, C. Sornatius of the *tribus Velina*; his *cognomen* is lost except for the initial beta.²⁸ Now, the name Sornatius is rare, localized, it would seem, in Picenum,²⁹ and it emerges in history once only in connection with Lucullus’ campaigns in Asia Minor. Plutarch (*Lucull.* 17.1, 24.1, 30.3, 35.1) records the vicissitudes of Sornatius, Lucullus’ lieutenant in Pontus, while Appian and Memnon of Heracleia mention the activities of a certain Barba, who captured the Bithynian cities of Prusa and Nicaea in 72 B.C.³⁰ It is irresistibly tempting to put together the two traditions, as Syme did, and recognize a composite individual, C. Sornatius Barba, legate of Lucullus throughout his cam-

²⁶ So Cic. *Off.* 1.151: *sin magna et copiosa, multaque undique apportans, multisque sine vanitate impertiens, non est admodum vituperanda*. In the previous section (150) slave dealers are absent from the list of disreputable trades which cater for sensual pleasures.

²⁷ Compare Cic. *Orat.* 232, citing a lost speech: *neque me divitiae movent, quibus omnis Africanos et Laelios multi venalicii mercatoresque superarunt*. Nearly three centuries later Artemidorus (3.17) notes that dreaming of making models of people is a good sign for slave dealers, signifying large business profits to come; again there is no suggestion that the business is disreputable (I am grateful to Arthur Pomeroy for the reference).

²⁸ *MAMA* 6.260: *καὶ τῷ δ[ημῳ]ί Γάιος Σωρνά[τιος Γαῖου(?)] υἱὸς Οὐέλινά Β[.] c.6. . τὸ] σταπάριον καὶ τὸν βωμὸν ἐκ τῶν ἰδῶν κατεσκεύασεν*.

²⁹ For the evidence see Syme (n. 3), 2.601–2. The *tribus Velina* is attested for C. Sornatius, military tribune of X Fretensis (*CIL* 5.3622).

³⁰ App. *Mithr.* 77.334; Memnon, *FGrH* 434 F 1 (28.5–6).

paigns. Plutarch referred to him by his *nomen*, Appian and Memnon by the *cognomen*. In that case his involvement at Acmonia fits well with the historical circumstances. In a central position due south of Prusa the town was conveniently sited for the disposal of slaves captured during the assault, and in later years, while he was lieutenant in Pontus, it could have been a market for slaves acquired there. Acmonia certainly prospered during those years. In 62 B.C. L. Valerius Flaccus is said to have carried off 206,000 drachmae (over 34 talents) from there alone (Cic. *Pro Flacco* 34–8),³¹ and the community seems to have done extremely well from the slave trade.

Sornatius Barba built the Acmonian slave market at his own expense, and it would seem that he intended to traffic there through his agents. He was turning the spoils of war into personal profit, using Acmonia as a kind of laundering centre. This simple conclusion is evaded by Harris, who goes only so far as to suggest a connection with the legate of Lucullus, perhaps a relative.³² If a relative, one may ask, why not the legate himself? Once more, one suspects, there is a reluctance to connect Romans of distinction with the slave trade. But there is more explicit evidence closer to the time of Vespasian, from the city of Ephesus, where there was a large and important slave market. The businessmen operating there honoured their patron, a Roman senator of some eminence, who can be confidently identified from a parallel inscription as C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus.³³ Here we have a most exalted individual, the second husband of the Younger Agrippina, who celebrated his second consulship in A.D. 44 and was an orator and wit of distinction. He also enjoyed a huge estate of 200 million sesterces, and rumour had it that his wife engineered his death to gain his wealth.³⁴ He was proconsul of Asia, it would seem, in A.D. 43, when he was consul designate,³⁵ and while he was in his province, he had close dealings with the slave dealers of Ephesus. ‘We should probably assume common interests of some kind’, avers Harris,³⁶ and so we should. One wonders how much of Passienus Crispus’ vast wealth came from investments in the slave market, financing the operations of lesser entrepreneurs who repaid him handsomely.³⁷ There is no reason to think that his contemporaries looked

³¹ Cicero attempts to discount the story, but the figure, even if invented, is evidence of the prosperity of Acmonia.

³² Harris (n. 24), 129–30. Syme (n. 3), 2.602 had no such reservations: ‘One is now in a position to evoke C. Sornatius Barba, legate of Lucullus from the beginning of his campaigns to the end—with no known senatorial posterity.’

³³ *Inscr. Ephes.* 7.1.3025: [C(aio) Sallustio Crispo Passieno] Equi[-proco(n)s(uli) co(n)s(uli) pr(aetori)] q(uaestori) Ti(berii) Ca[esaris Augusti, VII(septem)]-viro [epulo]nu[m, sodali] Au[g]u[s]t[ali], soda[li] Titio [qui i]n statario ne[g]otiantur pat[rono]. The name is restored from the parallel inscription, no. 3026.

³⁴ The main source is the thumbnail biographical sketch of Suetonius (*Schol. Juv.* 4.81 = *Vita Passieni Crispi*: 2.506 Loeb). See also Suet. *Nero* 6.3; Tac. *Ann.* 6.20.1; Sen. *Controv.* 3 praef. 14 (classified with Pollio and Messalla); *N.Q.* 4 praef. 6 with Syme (n. 3), 665–6; id., *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1986), 159–60.

³⁵ Explicitly attested by *Inscr. Ephes.* 7.1.3026.

³⁶ Harris (n. 24), 130; cf. J. H. D’Arms, *Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 156: ‘would Passienus have permitted such blatant advertisement of the common interests between himself and slave dealers had Ephesus been much closer to Rome?’

³⁷ At a lower social level we may compare Ti. Claudius Secundus, a Roman of freedman status who was honoured at Ephesus by ‘those who do business in the slave market’ (*Inscr. Ephes.* 3.646; cf. L. Robert, *Opera Minora Selecta* [Amsterdam, 1969–90], 2.1365, n. 5; 4.253). For similar dedications by dealers in the slave market, compare the dedication at Thyatira to a certain Alexander, who is described as a slave dealer (σωματέμπορος) and held the office of ἀγοράνομος (*OGIS* 524 = *TAM* 5.1–2.932). At Sardes they honoured an Asiarch, clearly one of the leading figures of the region who had endeared himself to the operators of the slave trade (*BE* 1977.422: unpublished inscription).

askance. Vespasian was in a slightly different category, in that his *dignitas* was entirely restored by commerce, but his social position was in no way threatened. A few years later, in A.D. 66, he was in Nero's close entourage in Achaëa, and shortly afterwards received the commission to suppress the Jewish revolt—which ended in one of the most notorious mass enslavements of Roman history.

Senatorial involvement in the slave trade, then, may well have been more widespread than has usually been supposed. I have assumed that the involvement was indirect, confined to financing rather than dealing in the market with the live commodity. However, there is perhaps one example of such an entrepreneur. The most famous supplier of quality slaves in the triumviral period was Toranius Flaccus, who is defined as a *mango*, and who enjoyed the patronage of both Octavian and Antony. For Antony he was the purveyor *par excellence* of quality female slaves; and Antony himself was taken in when Toranius passed off two unrelated boys as identical twins, and then persuaded the angry triumvir that such a pair was more remarkable than any twins by birth (Pliny, *N.H.* 7.56).³⁸ His dealings with Antony did not disqualify him from the society of Octavian, who received him at his table and exchanged *bon mots* with him.³⁹ The name is rare, and suggests a connection with C. Toranius, who was the colleague of Octavian's father in the plebeian aedileship and later placed on the second list of proscriptions.⁴⁰ There is another possible link with the C. Thoranius (a variant spelling of Toranius), who was tribune of the plebs in 25 B.C. and invited his freedman father to sit with him on the bench (Dio 53.27.6).⁴¹ For Harris 'it is very probable' that this Thoranius had something to do with the slave dealer. He may well be the very man. His father could have been the freedman of C. Toranius, the colleague of Octavius and the purported tutor of Octavian, and he and his son perhaps built on the connection as they prospered in the slave trade. In that case wealth and patronage brought senatorial rank, and the fact that the wealth was acquired as slavers was no barrier. That is of course speculation. However, the fact remains that Toranius the slave dealer rubbed shoulders on intimate terms with the greatest men of his day, and he was certainly not regarded with abhorrence. Roman nobles necessarily knew a fair amount about the trade. Seneca (*Ep. Mor.* 80.9) gives sage advice about the need to inspect a potential purchase unclothed. The Younger Pliny admittedly delegates the purchase of slaves to an agent, a certain Plinius Paternus, but that is only because he is confined to Rome by his duties as prefect of the Saturnian treasury and cannot make the purchases in his native Comum. He adds that one cannot judge slaves by looks, rather by reputation, again some evidence of experience in acquiring them (Pliny, *Ep.* 1.21).⁴² That is hardly surprising, given the importance of his slave household and their day-to-day intimacy. Given a degree of familiarity with the trade, it is not surprising that prominent Romans invested in it and used their capital to exploit one of the most profitable lines

³⁸ Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 69.1, for a witticism of Antony against Octavian.

³⁹ Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.4.28 (the only source to supply the *cognomen*).

⁴⁰ *ILS* 47.3–4; App. *B.C.* 4.12.47, probably to be distinguished from the ex-praetor Turranius (who is confused with C. Toranius by Val. Max. 9.11.5 and Oros. 6.18.9). See, however, F. Hinard, *Les proscriptions de la Rome républicaine* (Paris, 1985), 534–6.

⁴¹ Cf. Syme (n. 3), 1.101; Harris (n. 24), 129 with n. 129.

⁴² For the difficulties of communication with Comum during Pliny's periods of public office, see *Ep.* 3.6.7, 10.8.3–4. Paternus, epigraphically attested as P. Plinius Paternus L. F. Ouf. Pusillienus (*AE* 1916.116) of Comum, was ideally placed to act as agent. In Rome, or wherever he happened to be, Pliny might do the purchasing himself. The factor of distance appears to be overlooked by Harris (n. 24), 132, who seems to assume that Pliny invariably used an agent to acquire his slaves.

of commerce available to them. Vespasian was certainly not unique in his involvement, and he may not have been atypical. When times were hard, the slave trade was an enticing prospect.

University of Western Australia

A. B. BOSWORTH
abbosworth@cyllene.uwa.edu