

*Jones (B.W.) Suetonius: Domitian: Edited with introduction, commentary and bibliography. Pp. xvi + 171. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996. Paper, £10.95. ISBN: 1 85399 454 5*

Until comparatively recently, Suetonius had not received the serious critical attention his biographies deserve and Jones's study of the *Domitian* is a welcome addition to the increasing bibliography on Suetonius. This edition provides a text (p. 1-10) and commentary (p.11-157). J. makes a few textual emendations from the Teubner edition and comments on both issues of linguistic obscurity and the organisation of the *Life*, but this is essentially a historical commentary. J.'s approach to the period is broadly prosopographic and one of the strengths of the commentary is the identification of the various characters. The commentary carefully brings point of historical obscurity and explains areas of scholarly dissent. In some cases, J. seems reluctant to give his opinion, being content to present lucidly and with occasional flashes of humour, the opinions of others. One might have wished for more on literary aspects of the *Life*. J., for instance, sees the placing of the discourteous treatment of Caenis in the 'bad emperor' section as exemplifying the rather hurried composition of the work, but in several chapters, such as that dealing with Domitian's memorable sayings, J. discovers Suetonius escaping from a rigid division of good and bad qualities to the extent that one wonders whether Suetonius is deliberately eroding his own conventions. J. seems disinterested in the broader literary questions concerning Suetonius' treatment of the genre though these must obviously influence our understanding of the work. Nevertheless, the commentary will be of great benefit to those studying Domitian.

J.'s treatment of the politics of the period is familiar from his other works. Hence, for example, Domitia Longina's influence is explained by the connections between Corbulo and a swathe of the Roman aristocracy. Yet, one wonders whether this is even half the picture. Her apparent popularity with the urban plebs, her association with the theatre and her survival and prominence long after the deaths of the sons of Vespasian suggest a formidable personality capable of reshaping ancestral alliances.

Such problems relate, of course, to the prosopographic method cruder applications of which have been much criticised, but here the approach relates to a wider theme since J. is also a revisionist: Domitian, in his view, got a bad press and was unfairly treated by the political faction that dominates our literary tradition. J. systematically deconstructs the anti-Domitianic bias of Suetonius and others. This usefully counter-balances our ancient sources. Yet, one wonders whether we can be so cavalier with the dominant hostile tradition. For instance, J. brings out psychological aspects of Domitian's alleged habit of locking himself away with only flies for entertainment, but Emperors were supposed to live in the public eye and keep open house. Domitian's love of solitude was odd and the breach of convention menacing for those dependent on the 'friendship' of the *princeps*. Domitian's treatment of the consulship and the emperor's supposed use of '*dominus et deus*' are also dismissed as black propaganda but surely the deaths of so many senators in the latter years of the reign mean that we need to take the explicit emphasis on senatorial hostility to this type of activity seriously. Similarly, Domitian's refusal to acknowledge his father's long-term mistress Caenis is presented by J. as being perfectly respectable, but can Suetonius' portrayal of this as overly stuffy really be dismissed (Suetonius does not come over as a social or moral radical)? Also, although we cannot be sure of the nature of Domitian's relationship with Julia, can J. be right in dismissing this as evidence only of Domitian's finer feelings for his family? Julia's prominence was part of the political presentation of the regime and sex and politics had been inextricable since the foundation of the Principate.

J. follows the traditional historian's line in being more interested in facts than presentation and being deeply suspicious of our sources. Yet most of what we have seems to result from contrasting 'spins' on the career of the emperor and trying to put a 'Domitianic spin' on the material merely emphasises the fact that the realities of imperial power will be forever closed to us.