

Suetonio, Vita di Domiziano Introduzione, traduzione e commento a cura di FRANCESCO GALLI (Testi e commenti, 11) Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1991 117 p

Sueton, Leben des Claudius und Nero Textausgabe mit Einleitung, kritischem Apparat und Kommentar herausgegeben von WILHELM KIERDORF (UTB Taschenbücher 1715) Paderborn, Ferd Schöningh, 1992 238 p
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Suetonius is probably one of the most widely read Latin authors. His biographies of the first Roman emperors provide valuable information for historians and literary readers alike. He may be profitably studied at university or in the classroom, but he can also satisfy 'general' readers, who are curious about the private lives of the famous Caesars. Especially the biographies of the 'bad' ones (Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Vitellius and Domitianus) remain fascinating reading, if only for the literary stereotypes in which Suetonius often models his characters.

Sadly, modern scholars still tend to favour the 'good' emperors such as Augustus. This shows itself particularly in the lack of extensive modern commentaries on the 'bad' ones (for a survey of recent literature, cf Perrine Galand-Hallyn, *Bibliographie suétonienne (les Vies des XII Césars) 1950-1988 Vers une réhabilitation*, ANRW II, 33,5, Berlin/New York 1991, p. 3576-3622). In particular, the life of Domitian has been badly neglected. For this, up to now one could consult only the full commentary of Suetonius by Mooney (1930) and a special commentary in Latin by Jansen (1919). This is all the more surprising, considering the renewed interest in Domitian among scholars like B. W. Jones.

Mr Galli has now published an edition of the *Vita Domitiani* with an Italian translation and 47 pages of commentary. Given the void to be filled, the very fact of its publication is to be praised. However, the book itself is disappointing. The commentary concentrates on traditional historical material rather than literary *topoi*. So we find endless notes about wars and problems of administration, elements only briefly treated by Suetonius, but hardly a mention of points the Roman author is really interested in, such as the emperor's cruelty and moral depravation. Suetonius' rhetorical and literary techniques of *character killing* are paid hardly any attention to. In general, Galli seems to underline the 'positive' elements in Domitian's image. (In this, he agrees with B. W. Jones. But whereas the latter blames Suetonius for many of the negative elements, Galli tends to pass them over in silence.)

On the material side, Galli's book has some unpleasant surprises in store for the reader. The Latin text is printed in a xerox of Ihm's text of 1907, carelessly reproduced at that. If the Latin deserves so little attention, why include a text at all? More seriously, the commentary is needlessly difficult to consult. It is organized not by reference to the chapters of the text, as is common practice, but by reference to footnotes included in the Italian translation.

After this, it is almost a relief to turn to Kierdorf's useful edition of the lives of Claudius and Nero. Though commentaries on these lives are available in English, a modern German edition is most welcome. After a brief but excellent introduction, Kierdorf presents a clearly printed Latin text, followed by 162 pages of commentary (80 and 82 pages respectively). Modern literature is mentioned and fruitfully used, notes are short and instructive, both in historical and literary aspects, and present many points of discussion. Kierdorf has no bias against Suetonius, as historians so often show, nor

does he overreact by claiming complex literary structures for the lives, as has been done e.g. by Croisille. Suetonius must be approached neither as a scrupulous historian nor as a sophisticated verbal artist. Rather, we should accept him for what he is: an author desiring to tell good stories and give interesting facts and explanations about the deeds of famous *principes*.

Kierdorf's balanced view and broad scope make his small commentary a reliable and helpful companion for all readers and students of these interesting lives. On a minor point of criticism, one may regret the absence of a German translation, which would have made the book accessible to an even wider audience.

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