Flavian Responses to Nero's Rome

Flavian Responses to Nero's Rome

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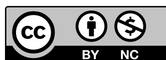

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1 Introduction

Esther Meijer

Nero's suicide on 9 June of 68 CE brought the Julio-Claudian dynasty of imperial Rome to an end. A period of great turmoil ensued, the so-called Year of the Four Emperors, which ended on 20 December 69 when Vitellius was murdered and the Senate acknowledged Titus Flavius Vespasianus as emperor. So began the Flavian era (69–96 CE). Vespasian then faced the challenge of establishing the legitimation and durability of his rule and that of his dynasty in a world marred by civil war and political unrest. An unavoidable aspect of this undertaking was the establishment of Vespasian's rule in relation to that of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, from its first ruler, Augustus, to its last emperor, Nero, who had thoroughly embedded himself in Rome's physical structures, material cultures, arts, and peoples.

A key question when examining Vespasian's rule, and that of the Flavian dynasty more broadly, therefore, is how the Flavian emperors navigated Nero's embeddedness in the Roman mind, cities, and Empire. Scholars have shown how the Flavian emperors, in their propagated desire to bring back peace and stability to Rome, connected their dynasty with the Augustan and more widely with the Julio-Claudian past, while avoiding or 'overwriting' Nero.[1] This volume aims to further investigate and provide nuance to existing explorations of the transition from Neronian to Flavian Rome. By examining a range of Flavian responses to the complicated legacy of Nero's time that reinforce some aspects of his memory and that erase or overwrite others, the papers in this volume highlight the variety of Flavian modes of remembering Nero. In doing so, they demonstrate the integration and appropriation of Neronian Rome by Vespasian, while drawing attention to the situational, selective, and strategic ways in which Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian navigated memories of Nero during their individual eras of rulership.

1 Quotation from Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks (2019) 8. Select important works on Nero and the Flavians include Griffin (1984); Darwall-Smith (1996); Levick (1999) 65–78; Ripoll (1999); Davies (2000); Kragelund (2000) 512–515; Flower (2006); Kramer and Reitz (2010); Bönisch-Meyer et al. (2014); Cordes (2017); Varner (2017); Schulz (2019).

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In their contributions, the scholars take different methodological approaches to varying types of evidence to show that the Flavian emperors did not categorically or uniformly oppose Nero. From Vespasian's claim to power onwards, aspects of Nero's legacy were integrated into the Flavians' policies, building projects, and imperial representations. Through discussions of visual (self-)representations in material culture, literary analyses, and considerations of architectural remains, the contributions to this volume demonstrate how distinctions between Nero's Rome and that of the Flavian emperors were regularly deconstructed and reconstructed, thereby characterizing and (de) legitimizing the individual Flavian emperors and their abilities to rule, and articulating their relation to imperial predecessors. Overall, by highlighting continuities between the Neronian and Flavian eras and by exploring imperial individuality within the Flavian dynasty, we hope that this volume provides a stimulus to our understanding of the evolution of the principate, especially regarding issues of dynasty and succession in the first century CE.[2] At the same time, the papers in this volume highlight the complex nature of many of our different types of evidence for Flavian Rome, offering reflections on the difficulties involved in negotiating these complexities in our acts of interpretation and reminding us of the risks of over-ideologization.[3]

This volume builds on the surge of recent scholarship on Neronian and Flavian Rome that explores the ages in themselves as well as the (dis) continuities and interactions between them. Following Boyle and Dominik's important volume on Flavian Rome, which delineated the Flavian era as a defined and definable age,[4] scholars from different fields have examined a range of aspects of this period. Comprehensive studies on both Neronian and Flavian Rome are offered by recent companions, including those on the Neronian age edited respectively by Buckley and Dinter (2013) and Bartsch (2017), and the companion to the Flavian era, edited by Zissos (2016).[5] These volumes provide valuable overviews on the cultural, political, economic, and social features of Neronian and Flavian Rome and have advanced our understanding of these eras as interpretative categories. Moreover, by collating examinations of different types of evidence, they have brought together different strands of scholarship which have produced a wealth of studies on their own, such as studies of Flavian literature.

2 For a recent discussion of continuities and discontinuities between the Flavian age and Julio-Claudian Rome, see Zissos (2016) 10–13.

3 See Hurlet (2016) for a systematic overview of our sources for the Flavian age, including a discussion of the factors we need to consider in our acts of interpretation.

4 Boyle and Dominik (2003).

5 Buckley and Dinter (2013); Zissos (2016); Bartsch, Freudenburg, and Littlewood (2017).

No longer deemed 'silver' and derivative of Augustan literature, Flavian literature has received an increasing amount of scholarly attention in recent decades.[6] A range of studies have considered different aspects of Flavian poetry and prose, investigating, for example, its literary techniques and its interaction with Greek and Roman literature.[7] Studies of individual texts are complemented by studies of Flavian literary culture more widely, which interpret the texts in their societal and political contexts: particularly well established are examinations of occasional poetry and imperial panegyric in relation to the Flavian court.[8] Recent studies have examined Flavian literature in its socio-political context more widely, too. The volume on *fides* in Flavian literature, edited by Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks (2019), widens the scope from literature to its connections with society by examining the Flavian reconceptualization of Roman *fides* and its importance as a foundational principle of and for Flavian Rome, investigating how this concept 'binds the Flavian dynasty to an Augustan and more broadly Julio-Claudian past, overwriting Nero'.[9]

In addition to the scholarly focus on Flavian literature, we have also seen interdisciplinary studies of the Flavian era and its (dis)connections with the Neronian period and the Julio-Claudian era more broadly, especially in relation to issues of dynasty and succession. Studies of material culture have, for example, explored Flavian imperial aesthetics, from soberness under Vespasian to a return to luxuriousness under Domitian, and compared these to Augustus' rebuilding of Rome and Nero's occupation of Rome.[10] Scholars

6 On the judgemental application of the ages of metal to the periodization of Latin literature, see e.g. Klein (1967); Mayer (1999), and most recently, Bessone and Fucecchi (2017) 1, describing the Flavian era as 'an epoch that nobody today would any longer call "Silver"'.

7 See, for example, the contributions to Nauta, van Dam, and Smolenaars (2006) on Flavian poetry, the volume on Statius' poetry by the same editors (2008), as well as the volume edited by Manuwald and Voigt (2013) on *Flavian Epic Interactions* and the volume edited by Augoustakis (2014) on *Flavian Poetry and Its Greek Past*.

8 For discussions of social and performative aspects of Flavian literature, such as the poet–patron relationship, recitals, and participation in festivals and competitions, see e.g. Markus (2000, 2003), Nauta (2002). The volume on literary genres in the Flavian age edited by Bessone and Fucecchi (2017), examines the system and evolution of genres in the context of contemporary transformations of society and culture, highlighting a marked consciousness of the social and pragmatic function of literature as evidenced by its occasional poetry and celebrations of imperial civilization.

9 Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks (2019) 8. Other recent examples are the volume on *Campania in the Flavian Poetic Imagination*, edited by Augoustakis and Littlewood (2019) and the special issue of *Phoenix* on philosophical currents in Flavian literature, edited by Keith (2018).

10 See e.g. Darwall-Smith (1996) 252–262; Packer (2003) 176–177; Elsner (1994) 123. For more recent views, bringing nuance to this interpretation, see the discussion on Nero's memory in Flavian Rome

have also examined 'imperial image-making',[11] exploring the different ways in which media were employed to secure the stability of the newly founded Flavian dynasty, and looking for innovations, continuities, and breaks in the imperial representations of Nero and Domitian.[12]

Fundamental to all these studies is their focus on engagement with memories, whether that engagement manifests itself through the erasure, appropriation and/or adaptation of visual imagery and material culture, through intertextuality, or in other ways. To many people in the Roman Empire, the concepts of memory and history were inextricably connected with each other and formed an essential way of connecting with the past and constructing identity. The past functioned as a social construction, as a narrative, and as such, stories, histories, and memories deeply informed formations of identities: the identities of individual Roman citizens, but, on a more collective level, also the identity and conceptualization of the Roman state.[13] Consequently, the ability to negotiate and control memories was a crucial component of participating in society and holding political power, especially in relation to issues of dynasty and succession.[14] Thus, the death of Nero and the ending of the Julio-Claudian dynasty meant that those striving to claim power in the Year of the Four Emperors not only competed for imperial rulership, but also for the interpretation of the Neronian past.

In her influential monograph on *The Art of Forgetting*, Harriet Flower provides us with an example that illustrates the plural and divergent ways of remembering Nero immediately after his death.[15] In their claims to imperial rulership, both Otho and Vitellius represented themselves as heirs to Nero in several ways. Their imperial images appealed to Nero's portraiture and politics, and Vitellius even settled his household in the Domus Aurea,

by Varner (2017). On Flavian soberness in relation to Neronian *luxuria*, see also Kragelund (2000), who discusses Neronian *luxuria* in Tacitus, as well as Moormann's contribution to this volume.

11 Tuck (2016).

12 See Kramer and Reitz (2010) and Bönisch-Meyer et al. (2014) as well as Cordes (2017), who discusses the literary and visual strategies used in the 'recoding' of imperial representations of Nero and Domitian.

13 Foundational studies on the formations of collective and state identities in the ancient Roman Mediterranean through stories, histories, and memories include, for example, Assmann (1988); Edwards (1996); Habinek (1998); Citroni (2003); Gowing (2005); Flower (2006); the contributions to Stein-Hölkeskamp and Hölkeskamp (2006); and Galinsky (2014), as well as Connolly (2009); Lowrie (2009); Willis (2011).

14 The most thoroughly researched period in this respect is Augustus' reorganization of the Roman Republic into the principate, which encompassed radical political, social, and moral reforms, for which see most famously Zanker (1988).

15 Flower (2006) 201, 208–209.

thus almost literally assuming the seat of imperial power.[16] These appeals to Nero's memory in support of their claims to imperial rulership must have been well received by some, but not by others: a uniformly positive remembrance of Nero, then, or a rehabilitation, was not successful. But neither was a uniformly negative remembrance of Nero, as the papers in this volume show. By examining the different ways in which individual Flavian emperors engaged with Nero's memory, as well as by considering the variety of Flavian responses to Nero's memory that can be recognized in literary sources, material evidence, and archaeological remains, this volume shows that there is no one way to remember Nero.

On these strands of scholarship, then, does the current volume build, bringing together different disciplinary views on the ways in which Flavians responded to memories of Nero's Rome, highlighting how such responses were situational, selective, and not uniform across the Flavian dynasty. The volume opens with the contributions by Andrew Gallia and Annemarie Ambühl, who introduce us to the complex dynamics between Flavian and Neronian Rome, respectively demonstrating how Vespasian appropriated and integrated Nero's Rome into his own rule, and alerting us to the problem of retrospective constructions, showing us the synthesis and deconstruction of boundaries at work in the (post-)Flavian characterization of rulers. The volume ends with a chapter by Verena Schulz on historiographical responses to Flavian responses to Nero, thus highlighting the volume's reflections on the difficulties of negotiating Flavian and post-Flavian retrojection and bias.

Within this framework, chapters could have been organized into interpretive groupings in different ways. Points of contiguity and strands of thematic continuity can be found across the contributions, including discussions of representations of individual Flavian emperors as part of a cohesive Flavian dynastic identity, analyses of the aesthetic and political charge of material evidence in portraiture, architecture, and the imperial cult, and explorations of the methodological issues presented to us by our sources on the Flavian period. We have chosen to organize the chapters into groups according to disciplines and themes, moving from examinations of Flavian buildings and studies of Flavian poetry to explorations of imperial legitimation in multimedia representations of emperors. Our aim with this division has been

16 On Otho and Nero, see Tac. *Hist.* 1.13, 16, 26, 30, 2.78; Suet. *Otho* 7 (Domus Aurea); Plut. *Otho* 3, 5.2. On Vitellius and Nero, see Tac. *Hist.* 1.50, 74, 2.95.1; Suet. *Vit.* 11.2 (Domus Aurea); Eutrop. 7.18. For discussions of Otho and Vitellius in the Domus Aurea, see also Dio Chrys. 47.15; Dio 64.4 with Morford (1968) 165 and Davies (2000).

to highlight how examinations of different types of evidence complement and inform each other's findings.

Analysis of literary sources, from Flavian epic to post-Flavian historiography, shows that there is no consistent opposition in authors' characterizations of Neronian versus Flavian rulers. Rather, boundaries between Neronian and Flavian Rome are deconstructed and (re)constructed in different situations and in different contexts, usually alongside an Augustan-Neronian-Flavian nexus. This phenomenon occurs in other types of evidence as well. In their examinations of the different ways in which Flavian emperors navigated the physical environment of Neronian Rome, Aurora Raimondi Cominesi and Eric Moormann show how the different Flavian emperors reuse, repurpose, and expand on Neronian building projects, and question how this Flavian appropriation of Neronian Rome works on an ideological level. Likewise, examinations of multimedia representations of Nero and the Flavian emperors by Anne Wolsfeld, Lisa Cordes, and Verena Schulz demonstrate that visual imagery, too, does not feature strong or consistent oppositions between Nero and Domitian, as we may have expected, instead pointing to elements of continuity between the Julio-Claudian emperors and their Flavian successors.

Thus, the examinations of different types of evidence performed in this volume collectively demonstrate the omnipresence and variety of integrating modes of remembering Nero across the Flavian dynasty. Overall, while we do not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of Flavian responses to Nero's Rome, we hope to have produced a volume that offers varied and complementary examinations of the different modes of remembering Nero, that brings to our attention issues emerging from these examinations, and that thereby stimulates further thought in several areas of both Neronian and Flavian studies.

Family Matters

When Vespasian became emperor, the Julio-Claudian chain of inheriting imperial power, and thus of the legitimation of power through heritage, had been interrupted. Vespasian and his successors, Titus and Domitian, were therefore unable to straightforwardly appeal to an immediate Julio-Claudian predecessor to justify their claim to imperial rule. The concept of family did, however, play an important role in legitimizations and characterizations of their individual eras of rulership. Flavian coinage, for example, shows how the Flavian rulers represented themselves as a family unit: Vespasian's coins depict his sons, Titus and Domitian, and proclaim their titles, including

consul, praetor, and princes of youth.[17] This dynastic aspect of coins was continued by both Titus and Domitian.

This representation of the Flavian emperors as a family unit, and the Flavians' calculated appeal to and association with specific predecessors and successors, can be recognized across the different Flavian emperors' eras of rulership. This section, 'Family Matters', examines the characterization and legitimization of the Flavian dynasty through their association with predecessors and female family members. Vespasian's early navigations of Nero's memory demonstrate the appropriation and integration of specific elements of Nero's Rome in the legitimization of imperial power and the construction of charismatic authority. In post-Flavian evidence, too, the concept of family plays an important role in the characterization both of individual Flavian emperors and their respective eras of rulership as well as of the Flavian dynasty in relation to the Julio-Claudian dynasty more broadly.

In the paper on 'Nero's Divine Stepfather and the Flavian Regime', **Andrew Gallia** deals with the complex and contradictory ways in which the Flavians dealt with Nero's legacy – on the one hand distancing themselves from their predecessor, and on the other hand continuing Neronian policies – by focusing on one striking example: the Temple of Divus Claudius on the Caelian Hill. By continuing and finishing this building project started by Nero, Vespasian could claim the monument as Flavian. Perhaps more importantly, he thus ensured his own deification and associated himself with the only two deified Julio-Claudian emperors, Augustus and Claudius, neatly skipping over the family's last scion.

But Vespasian's appeal to Claudius was not a foregone conclusion, and Vespasian did not appeal to Claudius in every respect. Through the (re-) examination of different arguments for Vespasian's appeal to Claudius, Gallia brings nuance to our understanding of the use of Claudius within the broader framework of Vespasian's strategy of legitimization and his use of the imperial cult. By distinguishing Claudius' mortal deeds from his posthumous divinity and only appealing to the latter, Gallia argues, the Flavians did not appeal to Claudius' individual merits, but rather to the category to which he belongs, namely that of a deified emperor. As such, Claudius not only formed a precedent for the eventual apotheosis of the Flavian emperors, but also functioned as a source of charismatic authority – a quality that the Flavians lacked, when compared to the Julio-Claudians' familial *nobilitas*.

17 Carradice (1998) esp. 97. See also e.g. Buttrey (1972); Carradice and Buttrey (2007). Visual (self-)representation of the Flavian emperors, both individually and as part of a dynasty, is discussed in detail by Wolsfeld in this volume.

In her discussion of 'The Flavians and their Women: Rewriting Neronian Transgressions?', **Annemarie Ambühl** then guides us through several late and post-Flavian literary works, exploring how authors use descriptions of imperial women to characterize an emperor as 'good' or 'bad' and to thereby associate an emperor with some emperors while distancing them from others. Ambühl performs a discourse analysis of the literary descriptions of the women at the Flavian court, from Flavia Domitilla and Caenis to Julia Berenica and Domitia Longina, and compares these to their Neronian counterparts, including Agrippina the Younger and Poppaea Sabina. Through this discourse analysis, Ambühl is able to argue that writers such as Pliny, Suetonius, and Tacitus produce stereotypical descriptions of women more so than truthful portraits. With these descriptions, the writers shaped the image of each individual emperor as 'good' or 'bad'.

As other contributions to this volume also demonstrate, there is no consistent opposition between the characterization of Neronian versus Flavian members of the ruling family: Ambühl shows that, whereas we may indeed detect a stark opposition between Nero on the one hand and Vespasian and Titus, who avoid the Neronian model, on the other hand, this defined boundary collapses in writers' depictions of Domitian's relations with women, which are similar to and associated with depictions of Nero through the use of similar phrases and motifs. As such, Ambühl's analysis leads to a better understanding of the biases of post-Flavian literature, and functions as a reflection on the potential difficulties of negotiating Flavian and post-Flavian retrojection when researching the Flavian emperors in relation to Nero and the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Thus, by analysing different phases and aspects of the role of family in legitimizations and characterizations of Flavian rulers and rulership, the papers in this section re-evaluate the opposition between Nero and the Flavian emperors. Moreover, by examining the role of the synthesis and collapse of defined boundaries between the Neronian and the Flavian alongside an Augustan-Neronian-Flavian nexus, these contributions further our understanding of the evolution of contemporary conceptions of the position of the emperor and of the principate more broadly.

Building on Nero's Rome

One of the most notorious and directly obvious ways to deal with the memories of an imperial predecessor was to erase their names and deeds, to damage their properties and busts, and to remove them from public display,

and to overwrite and build over their traces. Sometimes, such strategies may have been ordained by the Senate, but memory sanctions were not always that formal, and decisions about the commemoration of disgraced persons were often made on an individual and local level.[18] In addition to memory sanctions such as erasure and removal, however, there were many more ways to navigate the physical traces reminiscent of predecessors: continuing their unfinished building projects and claiming them as your own, for example, or demarcating physical space and juxtaposing one's own buildings to theirs.

In the second part of this volume, Aurora Raimondi Cominesi and Eric Moormann explore how the different Flavian emperors navigated and negotiated the physical environment of Neronian Rome, and how, by doing so, they characterized their individual periods of rulership. Through paying attention to the building programmes of the Flavian emperors in relation to Augustus' establishment of the Julio-Claudian dynasty as well as to the initiatives of his successors, including Nero, these contributions complement and offer a counterpart to narratives offered by literary discourses, providing further nuance to interpretations of the Neronian-Flavian divide as an opposition. Just as we see in the first section of this volume, the Flavian emperors try to imitate Augustus and initially seem to distance themselves from Nero, but Nero's example is not always erasable or avoided. In the first section, Andrew Gallia already drew attention to the contemporary notion that Nero's Rome was restituted to its citizens.

Raimondi Cominesi and Moormann investigate how the Flavian emperors react to the private and inaccessible character of some of Nero's buildings and collections in different ways. They show how the Flavian rulers in fact sometimes benefit from some of Nero's buildings and possessions, which they reuse, repurpose, and even expand, for example through increasing access to imperial complexes and other constructions to the public, and by publicly displaying their spoils, which played an important role in the establishment and legitimacy of the Flavian dynasty, in clear imitation of Augustus' propagated world peace. Through case studies of the Palatine and the Templum Pacis respectively, the contributors question how such

18 See especially Flower (2006), whose volume on 'the art of forgetting' has been particularly formative to our understanding of memory sanctions in Roman culture. The term 'memory sanctions' emphasizes the variety of penalties designed to limit or erase the memory of someone, and as such better reflects ancient practices than the phrase *damnatio memoriae*, which is not ancient and inaccurately suggests a standardized practice: see Flower (2006) xix-xxi for a brief discussion on the usage of this term by scholars. On potential memory sanctions against Nero and Domitian, see e.g. Varner (2004).

appropriation of Neronian Rome works, ideologically, and they reflect on the difficulties of ideological interpretations based on material remains, warning against the dangers of the over-ideologization of, for example, art collections and statuary.

Aurora Raimondi Cominesi's chapter focuses on the development of the architecture on the Palatine Hill, the ever-expanding residence of the Roman emperors. Considering archaeological evidence alongside information gleaned from literary sources, this case study provides us with an overview of the individual ways in which each Flavian emperor dealt with Nero's remains on the Palatine, including the Domus Transitoria and the Domus Aurea. Thus, Raimondi Cominesi nuances our understanding of Vespasian's engagement with Neronian Rome by highlighting elements of continuity with the Neronian alongside Vespasian's and Titus' public displays of condemnation, which worked to diminish contemporary ideas of the Palatine as the emperor's private palace. When compared to his two predecessors, Raimondi Cominesi argues, Domitian's knowing engagement with and reuse of Neronian innovation in the palace complex is therefore not unprecedented – but it is unique in terms of scale and represents a new evolution of imperial building that resulted in a Domitianic palace that established the imperial residence as the no longer inappropriate home of the emperor, and, by extension, imperial rule as no longer questioned.

Another example of Flavian emperors ostensibly turning to Augustus while appropriating Neronian materials in service of the Flavian dynasty is the construction of the Templum Pacis or the 'Temple of Peace'. In his contribution to this volume, **Eric Moormann** discusses this temple as adhering to Augustus' model of the Ara Pacis, but simultaneously responding to Nero's Domus Aurea. By gathering and discussing all available information pertaining to the monument, from its archaeological remains to the works of art it may have held, Moormann assesses the functions and meanings of the Templum Pacis under the different Flavian emperors, questioning if and how the temple reflects Flavian politics, and if and how it can be understood as a reaction to Nero's political programme.

The answers to these questions are not straightforward. Moormann's analysis of the evidence suggests that the Templum Pacis showcased Flavian soberness combined with an increasingly popular display of *luxus* or luxury through the use of marble and the exhibition of works of art. This repurposing of Neronian materials as *spolia* in the service of *pax* presents us with another appropriation of the Neronian in the service of the Flavian dynasty: one that represents a restitution of Nero's Rome to its citizens, and one that leads us to interpret the Templum Pacis as an instrument for Vespasian

to strengthen his claim to rulership. Moreover, just as demonstrated by Raimondi Cominesi in her discussion of the imperial residences on the Palatine, we may recognize a difference in approach between Vespasian and Titus on the one hand and Domitian on the other hand. While Domitian furthers the Temple's accessibility and legibility as a public monument by adding administrative buildings, Domitian's addition of a library and its focus on art and literature leads Moormann to point towards the inescapability of Nero's memory.

Together, then, the papers by Raimondi Cominesi and Moormann provide nuance to existing ideas about the early Flavians' engagement with Neronian Rome by highlighting modes of reception of Nero that appropriate and integrate the Neronian in the service of the establishment and legitimization of the Flavian dynasty. This ideological assessment of material evidence is informed by methodological reflections on the difficulties of their interpretation, thus complementing Ambühl's reflections on the difficulties of navigating the biases of Flavian and post-Flavian literature. In the third part of this volume, scholars further examine Flavian responses to Nero's Rome in Flavian literature.

Literary Responses to Nero's Rome

Much work has been done recently on different aspects of Flavian literature, including on issues such as literary techniques, genre, and intertextual relations, and on the interpretation of these texts in their wider societal, political, and cultural contexts.[19] Some of these studies have focused on specific ways in which the Flavian dynasty and Flavian society more generally relate to the Julio-Claudian past and/or to Roman cultural consciousness more broadly. The aforementioned volume on *fides* in Flavian literature, edited by Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks (2019), is a good example of this approach, which takes a particular concept or topic and investigates how this concept works to create a connection with some aspects of the Julio-Claudian dynasty but distances itself from others. Another recent and excellent example is offered by Ginsberg and Krasne's edited volume *After 69 CE – Writing Civil War in Flavian Rome* on the theme of *bellum civile* in Flavian literature.[20] This volume furthers our understanding of the enduring legacy of civil war in the Roman imagination and cultural consciousness

19 See p. 13 above.
20 Ginsberg and Krasne (2018).

by examining its prevalence across many different genres, including and beyond epic, and by connecting Flavian civil war writing to Rome's civil war literature more broadly. As such, these edited volumes testify both to the singularity of the Flavian era, but also to continuities between the Julio-Claudian and the Flavian periods.[21]

This section builds on this recent work, examining different ways in which Flavian poets navigated memories and traces of Neronian Rome as represented in the works of Neronian authors. The papers bring us from a relatively early response to Nero's Rome, namely Valerius' Flaccus *Argonautica*, to later Flavian poetic engagement with Neronian texts such as Lucan's *Civil War* and, as Nauta argues, Calpurnius Siculus' *Eclogues*. The analysis of intertextual relations underlies the readings of these texts and facilitates the scholars' examinations of Flavian mediations of Nero. Through their close readings, the papers in this section showcase different (and divergent) uses of intertextuality, exploring its role in the creation of identity confusion and interpreting this phenomenon in various ways, for example as a reflection of traumatic civil war experiences and, conversely, as more ludic engagement with earlier literature in the context of poetic rivalry. Overall, the papers in this section present us with reflections on the use of mythological poetry to explore contemporary and historical Roman realities, and, more broadly, with considerations of the relation between genre and historical, social, and cultural reality.[22]

Firstly, **Mark Heerink** examines the Cyzicus episode in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. In this episode, Jason and the Argonauts, having visited King Cyzicus and the Doliones, are driven back to the Cyzican coast by a sea storm. Failing to recognize each other, the parties engage in battle and many people die. In his contribution, Heerink analyses this episode's interactions firstly with Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Civil War*, and secondly with other civil war narratives in Valerius' *Argonautica*, which evoke and repeat elements of the Cyzicus episode. Building on recent studies of the *Argonautica*'s civil

21 See also e.g. Ginsberg (2016), who, in her study of the *Octavia*, combines intertextual analysis with cultural memory theory to explore the roles played by literature in the transition between the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties.

22 On Flavian genres and their relation to Roman realities, see most recently Bessone and Fucecchi (2017). See Bernstein (2016) for a valuable discussion of the ways in which Flavian epics comment on recent historical developments. See also Rebeggiani (2018) for a thorough and nuanced discussion of Statius' *Thebaid* and its relation to cultural and political life in Rome under Domitian, in which Rebeggiani pays attention to the influence of the memory of Nero on Flavian Rome and to the importance of civil war in imperial ideology and Latin literature.

war episodes by Buckley and Landrey,[23] Heerink suggests that Valerius' intertextual interaction muddles the distinction between good and evil, thus problematizing these concepts and contributing to the poem's depiction of civil war. Moreover, the *Argonautica*'s repetitions of civil war narratives, Heerink argues, immortalize the *experiences* of civil war – instead of the actual, 'unspeakable', historic events – for later generations. As such, this early Flavian epic reflects Valerius' traumatic experiences of the civil wars of 68–69 CE, thus forming a marked contrast to Lucan's narration of the actual civil war events that brought about the end of the Roman Republic.

Tim Stover then provides us with an examination of another Flavian epic that comments on historical civil war through myth, namely Statius' *Thebaid*. Stover performs a close reading of a significant passage from the first book of Statius' epic (1.114–164), in which Tisiphone sows division between Eteocles and Polynices in Thebes. The beginning of the *Thebaid*, Stover argues, engages with Lucan's *Civil War* in a sustained manner: the spectre of Lucan's Caesar haunts this passage, including the epic's first simile, and enhances the epic's theme of identity confusion. But where Heerink's contribution on Valerius' *Argonautica* focuses on the topic of identity confusion as an aspect of traumatic experiences of civil war, Stover shows how, in the opening of the *Thebaid*, this 'ludic allusion' functions in the context of poetic rivalry, injecting playfulness into this generally sombre epic. Through this close reading, then, Stover advances our understanding of fraternal warfare as a trope in Roman poetry, and argues that myth is a superior and safe vehicle for exploring Roman realities.

Finally, **Ruurd Nauta** explores the relation between Calpurnius Siculus and the Flavian poets. Through the careful analysis of parallels between Calpurnius' *Eclogues* on the one hand and the works of Silius Italicus, Statius, and Martial on the other hand, Nauta argues that Calpurnius wrote in Neronian times, thus establishing Calpurnius' importance as a developer of the bucolic genre in ancient literature. This analysis leads Nauta to explore the different ways in which Flavian poets interact with Calpurnius' work: where Statius and Silius Italicus engage with Calpurnius mostly when navigating the relation between epic and bucolic poetry and mediating these genres' associations with war and peace, respectively, Martial primarily draws on Calpurnius' work when centralizing his need for patronage. Notably, most Flavian poets largely avoid the use of Calpurnius' panegyric when praising Domitian. Nauta seeks an explanation for this avoidance in late Flavian negative attitudes towards Nero and in the differences in imperial

23 Buckley (2010); Landrey (2018).

self-representation between Nero and Domitian – despite their perceived similarities. The fourth section of this volume examines the topic of imperial (self-)presentation in detail, closely investigating elements of continuity and discontinuity between the Flavian and Julio-Claudian dynasties and within the Flavian dynasty as a family unit more specifically.

Presenting the Emperor in Early Imperial Rome

In the first section of this volume, 'Family Matters', Gallia and Ambühl demonstrate the important role family played in the Flavian emperors' legitimizations and characterizations of their individual eras of rulership. Building projects and literary evidence are indicative of (self-)representations of the Flavian dynasty as a family unit, presenting us with images and narratives of father Vespasian to be succeeded by his experienced – but relatively young – sons, Titus and Domitian. This section advances our understanding of these (self-)representations by exploring the similarities and differences between multimedia representations of the Flavian emperors on the one hand and Nero, and the Julio-Claudian dynasty more widely, on the other hand. By focusing on imperial (self-)representations, and particularly on their engagement with the theme of youth, Wolsfeld and Cordes take a thematic approach to imperial portraiture and a range of generic literary discourses, thus exploring the role and importance of age in representations of imperial power and legitimizations of imperial rulership.

In the paper 'How to Portray the *princeps*: Visual Imperial Representation from Nero to Domitian', **Anne Wolsfeld** takes a close look at imperial portraiture in statuary and coins. By guiding us through imperial (self-)representations of the three Flavian emperors and examining their relation to Neronian visual imagery, Wolsfeld interprets changes in portraiture as reflective of the evolution of the Flavian dynasty, viewing them as part of the development of portraits from the very beginning of the principate. Crucially, Flavian coinage and statuary do not present us with unequivocal opposition to or dissociation from Neronian imperial imagery. Instead, Flavian responses to Neronian visual representation are multifaceted, unique to each emperor, and subject to change over the course of their respective reigns.

Wolsfeld demonstrates, for example, how Titus' and Domitian's accession portraits show dissociation from Nero, the last youth represented in imperial portraiture before them, while still incorporating iconographical fashion trends that we also recognize in – and that were introduced by – Neronian imagery. These selective choices, Wolsfeld argues, served firstly to set the

Flavian emperors apart from Nero's reign and secondly to consolidate their dynasty. Using perspective and narrative offered by this portraiture, Wolsfeld is therefore able to show that the ways in which the Flavians dealt with Neronian portraiture are not simply a matter of continuation or break, but rather that they form part of a calculated process of adaptation to meet the specific challenges faced by the new and developing Flavian dynasty. Overall, Wolsfeld suggests, these developments in Flavian visual imagery indicate increasing acceptance of the elevated position of the *princeps*.

Lisa Cordes complements Wolsfeld's analysis of imperial portraiture by discussing the different ways in which Nero's youth was treated by Neronian, Flavian, and later writers. Through close reading relevant passages from Seneca, Calpurnius, the *Octavia*, Tacitus, and panegyric poetry, Cordes demonstrates how these writers use the category of age to characterize individual emperors and to comment on their ability to rule. Cordes begins by analysing the presence of different interpretations of youthful age already in Neronian literary discourse: some authors criticized Nero's youth, pointing to his lack of relevant experience, whereas others construed his youth as indicative of his innocence and malleability.

Subsequent, Flavian interpretations of imperial youth are similarly divergent. Cordes demonstrates that early Flavian discourse emphasizes the youthful Nero's failures in the military realm and his ability to live up to the expectations of empire, thus problematizing his effectiveness as a ruler and contrasting him to the older and more experienced Vespasian. Later Flavian texts, however, present us with positive evaluations of imperial youthfulness when they emphasize the young Domitian's outstanding military *virtus* even prior to his coming to power, thus contrasting him to and distancing him from the inexperienced Nero. Conversely, post-Flavian texts depict Domitian as a second Nero. This constant recoding of the emperor's age, Cordes argues, not only contributes to writers' characterizations of emperors and their ability to rule, but also reflects contemporary concerns with the political system of the principate, especially regarding issues of dynasty and succession.

As such, the theme of imperial youth in visual representation and literary discourse alike enables us to consider the transmission of imperial power, and to recognize the Flavian emperors' emphasis on experience rather than on heredity as a principle of succession at a time when succession was still legally unregulated.[24] Moreover, the adaptability of this theme and

24 See Klaassen (2014) for an examination of the transmission of imperial power in the absence of succession laws or procedures in Tacitus' *Histories* and *Annals*.

its presence in both imperial (self-) representations and texts provide us with another example of the repeated and selective synthesis and collapse of defined boundaries between the Neronian and the Flavian that we can recognize across this volume. Furthermore, the contradictions between late Flavian and post-Flavian interpretations of Domitian's youth and his relation to Nero remind us of the factors that we need to take into account when interpreting ancient evidence relating to the Flavian period, an issue that is also explored by Verena Schulz in the final contribution to this volume.

Looking Back

In this volume's final chapter, **Verena Schulz** deals with the earliest reception of the Flavians by the late and post-Flavian historiographers and biographers Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio. Because nearly all Flavian historiography has been lost, the works by these authors form a very important source for our studies of the Flavian emperors and the ways in which they constructed their dynasty in relation to Nero and to the Julio-Claudian dynasty more widely.[25] Schulz systematically examines the ways in which Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio respectively fashion Nero's memory in relation to the Flavian emperors, for example, by creating thematic links between Nero and Domitian, 'the bald Nero'. Their narratives generally seem more concerned with creating distance between the Flavian emperors themselves – dissociating Vespasian and Titus from Domitian – than with constructing a link between Domitian and Nero.

Moreover, despite this similarity in the historiographers' texts, they differ in their details: throughout her analyses, Schulz emphasizes the different contemporary circumstances, points of view, and interests that informed these authors' texts. This observation is then underlined by Schulz' brief discussion of Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii* and early Jewish–Christian literature, which treat the Flavian emperors quite differently from the historiographers, for example, by emphasizing Vespasian's and Titus' roles as persecutors in the Jewish–Roman wars. Thus, Schulz' paper underlines the importance of taking into account the cultural, political, and societal circumstances that may have led writers, sculptors, artists, and craftspeople more generally to create associations between certain emperors while

25 On post-Flavian narratives of the empire's dynasties, and the relation between the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties in particular, see also e.g. Wilson (2003) and Schulz (2019).

distancing them from others. In doing so, her chapter acts as a closural piece for this volume.

Together, the contributions to this volume show that Flavian responses to Nero's Rome were not uniform, and that they did not consistently oppose Nero. Rather, the complementary examinations of archaeological remains, material evidence, and literary discourse undertaken by the scholars in this volume show that distinctions between Nero's period of rulership and those of the Flavians were repeatedly deconstructed and reconstructed, often in service of the (de)legitimization and characterization of the individual Flavian emperors and their rulership. Overall, then, this volume demonstrates the variety of Flavian ways of remembering Nero, thereby providing nuance to our understanding of the relation between the Flavian dynasty and Julio-Claudian Rome. We therefore hope that this volume's explorations of breaks and continuities between the Julio-Claudian and Flavian eras advance our understanding of the Flavian era both as an identifiable and unique period and as part of the evolution of the principate more widely.

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