

Greek and Roman Civilization
Module GC217 (Autumn repeat 2019)
POWER AND THE PEOPLE IN IMPERIAL ROME

FIRST WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Deadline for submission: **Friday, 9 August 2019 by 5pm**

TWO COPIES of each essay are to be submitted **with cover sheets** to the
Department Office

Length: 1,800 – 2,200 words

The first written assignment is **compulsory for everybody except international and occasional students who are only here for the first semester**. It is worth **40% of the total mark** for this module. As usual, ten percentage points will be deducted from the mark of any essay which is handed in late, up to a week after the deadline; essays handed in more than a week after the deadline will not be accepted, unless an extension has been granted **in advance by the Head of Department**.

TITLE: What can Suetonius' biography of Domitian show us about Suetonius' criteria for judging emperors?

The imperial biographies of Suetonius are (to some extent and among other things) prescriptive documents: they communicate ideas about how emperors should and should not behave. Conduct which is criticised by Suetonius is established as conduct which an emperor ought to avoid; conduct which Suetonius positively appraises is established as appropriate or praiseworthy behaviour for a *princeps*. Thus the biographies offer us an opportunity to examine how one Roman of elite status understood the role of *princeps*, and to get a sense of what kinds of factors that elite Roman took into consideration when deciding whether a particular emperor was “good”, “bad” or “middling”. This essay will require you to do several things:

- To read carefully Suetonius' *Life of Domitian*, which will be provided to you in Catharine Edwards's translation on a separate handout;
- To identify which aspects of Domitian's conduct meet with approval or disapproval from Suetonius;
- To think about what this shows us about what kinds of behaviour Suetonius felt characterised good and bad emperors.

The two sessions in Workshop 1 are designed to help you get ready to write this essay. By the end of Workshop 1, you will have read and taken notes on the *Life of Domitian*, assembled and discussed a selection of examples of Suetonius passing judgement on Domitian's conduct as emperor. While it is anticipated that the work that you do for Workshop 1 will be invaluable in preparing you to tackle the question, it must be emphasised that **the work that you do for Workshop 1 will not be enough, on its own, to enable you to answer the question well**. You have a significant amount of time after Workshop 1 to expand on what you did in preparation for and during the workshop sessions; we will also meet up and discuss your progress during Workshop 2. You should use this time to read over and take notes on some of the items in the attached bibliography. You may find it helpful to look at one or two other Suetonian biographies for comparative purposes (if you decide to do this, I would especially recommend Suetonius' biographies of Domitian's father Vespasian and brother Titus), to see how he handles the themes you propose to discuss in your essay in the case of different emperors. You will also certainly need to re-read the *Life of Domitian* again, in the light of the additional reading you have done. On your second read-through, in addition to asking how Suetonius assesses and presents different aspects of Domitian's behaviour, it might be helpful for you to see if you can find any evidence in Suetonius' text of individuals or groups expressing different responses to Domitian than the responses articulated by Suetonius himself, to help you think about how other people might judge emperors differently.

The essay itself is not long. An introduction, a conclusion, and three or four substantial paragraphs should be enough to get you to the word limit. I would recommend that you structure your essay thematically. For instance, you might have one major paragraph on Suetonius' presentation of Domitian's relationship with the Senate, one major paragraph on his presentation of Domitian's relationship with the people and one major paragraph on his presentation of Domitian's relationship with the military (we will discuss structuring more in Workshops 1 and 2; please note this is an example of an effective structure, not a prescription of how you must structure your essay). Each themed paragraph can then be fleshed out with illustrations from a range of episodes in the text which relate to that theme, leading to a general conclusion about Suetonius' approach to judging the performance and behaviour of emperors. Take care to ensure that every episode you discuss from Suetonius relates explicitly and precisely to the theme of that paragraph, and make sure that you remember that the question is asking for more than just a summary of how Suetonius assesses the principate of Domitian.

You are reminded of the importance of ensuring that you take every care to avoid plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, as specified in the Handbook, and that the consequences of plagiarism can be very high.

If you have any further questions about or problems with the essay, feel free to ask me, either by coming to see me during my consultation hours or by dropping me an email.

ASSIGNMENT 1: BIBLIOGRAPHY

*C. Edwards (tr.) *Suetonius: Lives of the Caesars* (Oxford, 2000). This is the specific version that the translation of the *Life of Domitian* which will be given to you comes from, and

therefore this should be cited in your bibliography. This is also the version which you should consult if you decide you want to read other *Lives* for comparative purposes. The introduction is also clear and useful.

B. Jones and R. Milns (tr.), *Suetonius: The Flavian Emperors* (London, 2002) – a translation and historical commentary of the three lives of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. This can help clarify any aspects of the text you may be unsure about. Again, it has a useful introduction.

A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (London, 1983) – slightly dated now, but still a crucial contribution to scholarship on this author. Chapters 6 (The Emperor's Job) and 7 (Virtues and Vices) are most relevant to this essay.

J. R. Dunkle, "The rhetorical tyrant in Roman historiography: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus", in *Classical World* 65 (1970), 12-20. A brief and helpful discussion of traditional ways in which Roman authors went about representing "problematic" rulers, a tradition into which Suetonius' *Life of Domitian* clearly fits.

B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London and New York, 1992) – This essay is more historiographical than historical, so you will not need to go into too much detail on "the historical Domitian", but this book may help you with that aspect of the topic. Moreover, since Jones is largely concerned with trying to rehabilitate Domitian's reputation, there is a good amount of reflection on how he may have ended up in such ill repute, which may be helpful when considering this title.

K. H. Waters, 'The Character of Domitian', *Phoenix* 18 (1964) 49-77, and H. W. Pleket, 'Domitian, the Senate, and the Provinces', *Mnemosyne* 14 (1961) 296-315 are two old but still helpful attempts to examine Domitian's posthumous reputation among our elite narrative sources, and as such they may be helpful in considering how questions of class might influence Suetonius' perspective.

Preparations for Workshop 1, Session 1:

In advance of the first session in Workshop 1, you need to have done the following:

- Read carefully and take notes on Suetonius' *Life of Domitian*, distributed to you as a handout.
- Pick out 3-5 examples of actions reported by Suetonius which reflect Domitian's qualities as an emperor: these may be instances that show him being a good emperor, a bad emperor, or even an indifferent emperor. Your examples may include any combination of these qualities, but keep two things in mind:
 - 1) You should concentrate on actions of Domitian reported by Suetonius, and avoid using as your examples occasions when Suetonius simply expresses an opinion on whether Domitian was a good or bad emperor.
 - 2) Make sure you are focusing on examples that show Domitian being a good or bad **emperor**, which is not the same thing as examples of Domitian being a good or bad **person**. Material to do with what he did in his private life are unlikely to be helpful, unless they have a clear and direct bearing on his conduct as emperor.

Make a note of your examples and what you think they show, and bring them along to the first session. You should also make sure you get a clear overall impression of what kind of emperor Suetonius thinks Domitian was: is it all bad? Are there any positives, and if so what are they? You might also like to pay particular attention to those parts of the biography where Suetonius' perspective seems to you to be affected by his social class, as a member of the Roman elite.

SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Deadline: **Friday, 9 August 2019 at 5pm**

TWO COPIES of each essay are to be submitted **with cover sheets** to the Department Office

Length: 2,500 – 2,800 words

The second written assignment is **compulsory for everybody**. It is worth **60% of the total mark** for this module. As usual, ten percentage points will be deducted from the mark of any essay which is handed in late, up to a week after the deadline; essays handed in more than a week after the deadline will not be accepted, unless an extension has been granted **in advance by the Head of Department**.

TITLE: For what reasons might non-Roman peoples living under Roman rule have embraced aspects of Roman culture?

This essay is a more challenging proposition than Assignment One. While Assignment 1 involved the close study of a single ancient text, this essay will require you to engage with a range of evidence, some literary and some non-literary. In order to be able to answer the question successfully, you will need to understand some of modern ideas about what drives cultural change in imperial contexts, and also demonstrate knowledge of a number of “case studies” of cultural change in the Roman provinces in our period, and be able to make an argument about what you think might be driving cultural change in any given case. This is quite a tall order, but fear not: help is at hand!

Workshop 3 is designed to help get you ready for this essay. By the end of Workshop 3 you will have carefully read and taken notes on one scholarly article which discusses a case study of cultural change in one part of the empire; you will have discussed with your peers and as a whole class further case studies which others will have researched; you will also have read some modern scholarship summarising Romanization and alternative ways of understanding

cultural change, have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and have thought about the application of these models to the case studies with which you are familiar. This will all be a major help in completing the essay successfully, but **the work you do for Workshop 3 will not be enough, on its own, to enable you successfully to answer the question.** In addition to your workshop preparation, there are a couple of things you should do. You should work through some of the attached bibliography. You should also look back over your notes and handouts from several of the lectures in the latter part of the semester which cover the provinces, as those lectures discuss other incidents of cultural change in the provinces which can serve as additional or alternative case studies to the ones set for Workshop 3 (I would particularly direct your attention to Lecture 13, “Governing the Provinces”, and our two provincial case-studies, Lecture 14 on Britannia and Lecture 15 on Judaea). You can find additional bibliography relating to those case-studies in your handbook under the relevant lecture.

The essay itself should consist of an introduction, a number of main paragraphs and a conclusion. Having defined the problem and outlined your approach in the introduction, you should proceed so that each paragraph carefully considers one case study of cultural change under Roman rule. Questions you might like to ask include who is driving the change (is it imposed from above, driven by a local elite, or is it “bottom up”, deriving from the initiative of non-elite provincials themselves), why might this aspect of local culture be changing (is it because of a desire to “become” Roman, or to impress the Roman rulers, or might it be driven more by local factors, by issues of positioning within a local elite or local rivalries, for instance), and are there any factors other than contact with Roman culture which might explain the change. Consider also whether the cultural change involves the wholesale importation of an aspect of Roman culture into a local context, or if it is more a case of the merging of the local with the Roman. In the light of your answers to these questions, you should be able to conclude, in each case, what motivations you think can best explain this instance of cultural change. In terms of balancing the essay, make sure that you have a mix of case studies from the East and the West, and some case studies which do seem comprehensible as instances of “Romanization” and others which expose the limitations and weaknesses of that model.

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If you have any further questions about or problems with the essay, feel free to ask me, either by coming to see me during my consultation hours or by dropping me an email.

Good luck!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Case studies set for Workshop 1:

A. Spawforth, "The early reception of the imperial cult in Athens", in M. C. Hoff and S. I. Rotroff, *The Romanization of Athens* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 183-202 (not in the library: I will make it available as a PDF on Moodle)

A. Schmidt-Colinet, "Tomb architecture at Palmyra", in S. E. Alcock (ed.), *The Early Roman Empire in the East* (Oxford, 1997)

G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman* (1998, Cambridge), chapter. 5, on changes in settlement types and patterns in Roman Gaul

S. Fontana (2001), "The Romanization of a major African city through burial evidence", in S. Keay and N. Terrenato (edd.), *Italy and the West: Comparative Issues in Romanization* (2001, Oxford) (not in the library, I will make it available as a PDF on Moodle)

"Romanization" and other models:

MAKE SURE YOU READ the entry for "Romanization" in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, (2008, Cambridge) pp. 3-37, "Culture, Identity and Power" (not in the library: I will make it available as a PDF on Moodle) – good overview of a variety of models.

R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (2000, New Haven, CT) – the focus is a little earlier than our period but the book is nonetheless notable as an attempt to defend "Romanization" at a time when doing so was deeply unfashionable.

S. Alcock, "The problem of Romanization, the power of Athens", in M. C. Hoff and S. I. Rotroff, *The Romanization of Athens* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 1-7 (not in the library: I will make it available as a PDF on Moodle), includes a nice, concise discussion of some of the shortcomings of the idea of "Romanization".

Some additional case studies to consider:

In addition to the material and reading from earlier lectures which cover cultural change in the provinces, you may want to explore the following:

J. Curran, "*Philorhomaioi*: The Herods between Rome and Jerusalem", in *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 45 (2008), 493-522: examines the Herod family of Judaea as both instances and agents of "Romanization" in the east

E. D. Barreto, "Crafting colonial identities: hybridity and the Roman Empire in *Luke-Acts*", in A. Winn (ed.), *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament* (2016, Atlanta GA), pp. 107-122.

On religion in Roman Britain (including the temple complex at Aquae Sulis), see M. Aldhouse-Green (2003), "Gallo-British Deities and their Shrines", in M. Todd (ed.) (2003), *A Companion to Roman Britain* (Oxford)

On the houses of the Judaeen elite at Jerusalem, see N. Avigad (1983), *Discovering Jerusalem* (Jerusalem), pp, 120-139.