nineteenth-century USA. It is especially the different ways in which 'propaganda' functions and is disseminated that interests him, illustrating possible positive ways of employing propaganda theories in an alien context, be it a very different one from the Roman world.

Overall, though, the theoretical part of the book clearly dismisses 'Propaganda', replacing it by 'Selbstdarstellung' and especially 'Repräsentation'. The contributions by Niquet and Wolters (on inscriptions and coins) could be used perfectly to test such an approach, creating the types of 'filters' for different materials that the editors recommended in their introduction. Interestingly, Niquet focuses much more on the content of the concepts and less on the terminology. In doing so, she allows for different methodological cadres even within epigraphic studies. Imperial inscriptions often fulfil propagandistic functions, whereas for different groups, such as the *ordines*, gladiators, or soldiers, the self-representation through inscriptions, without an expected reception, seems to have been more important. Wolters emphasizes especially the dialogue between presentation and expectation of power through the images of coins. He rightly points at the 'normality' of most types, and thus makes the point that only coin types that broke away from expectation would be publicly noticed. This is a fair observation, which could have been strengthened by noticing how especially in periods of crisis such 'abnormal' coins are minted. Thus, for instance, Galba's gold and silver coinage explicitly refers to his provincial support. Clearly, then, concepts linked to 'propaganda' can and will to some extent be employed in analysing the Roman Empire. Whether it is clearer to replace the word by a less value-laden, but also less recognizable, other term will remain a matter of debate. In that debate, this volume plays a thought-provoking and important rôle.

Merton College, Oxford OLIVIER HEKSTER
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A RATIONAL NERO

E. CHAMPLIN: *Nero.* Pp. xii + 346, maps, ills. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003. Cased, £19.95. ISBN: 0-674-01192-9.

A deliberately upside-down book which produces downright sense. Not a biography, but a series of studies of Nero in which Champlin, operating on the premise that Nero was rational, and that the ancient historical tradition is pervasively biased against him, shows how those actions of Nero which in the sources have won him the greatest notoriety could have resonated far more harmoniously with the contemporary audiences to which he directed them: Nero the creative player and moulder of opinion, rather than hapless victim, is C.'s central thesis.

C. begins by examining how Nero came to have a unique afterlife—an emperor, whose death was received rapturously by all classes at Rome and whose reputation was assailed by his immediate successor, the Flavians and centuries of Christians, nonetheless lived on, attracting imitators and securing an affectionate memory till the fourth century at least. This leads him to attempt to recover the image of the Nero who was loved and missed (p. 10). Nero was no Caligula or a conventional Roman villain.

But that is not the image of Nero we receive in the extant historical and biographical

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accounts of Tacitus, Suetonius, Plutarch, and Dio. C. rightly emphasizes the distance of these sources from Nero's reign and the need to consider the generation of lost histories on which they drew. He concludes that Pliny was virulently anti-Neronian, Fabius Rusticus probably even worse, and Cluvius Rufus was relatively dispassionate. C. demonstrates how they and their sources could disagree in most significant details and yet often they themselves give no hint of this, and concludes that they have deliberately suppressed much that could have presented Nero more positively. In passing, C. convincingly demonstrates that the meaning of Nero's famous *qualis artifex pereo* is 'what an *artisan* I am in my dying', the opposite of the usual translation 'what an artist dies in me' (p. 51).

Having laid a firm foundation on which to treat the Neronian accounts, C. re-examines the picture of Nero the performing artist, scrupulous in obeying the rules of performance, highly competitive, who pushed himself to the limits. C. sets out chronologically Nero's activities as giver of games and performer, demonstrating from the sources the cautious development of his participation and the absence of allegations, let alone evidence, of coerced participation by the élite. Nero's stage career also demonstrates a plausible development from citharody to *tragoedia cantata* in 66 to *tragoedia saltata* in 68, while in his last days 'his devotion to artistic discipline overwhelmed his sense of duty, indeed of reality' (p. 81). So the sources present a logical picture of progression to excess and obsession, the basic framework of which C. shows we can accept. It is, however, with the interpretation of the sources that C. disagrees, and produces several new and compelling explanations.

C. argues that Nero deliberately represented controversial aspects of his private life as modelled on Periander of Corinth, notorious for incest and murder, but also eminent as a wise ruler, Olympic athlete, and patron of literature. Nero's most striking response to his matricide was to take on the rôles of mythological predecessors Orestes, Alcmaeon, and Oedipus. Fundamental to the success of this were the permeation of Roman life by mythology, an ability by the people to understand the messages encoded in imperial and élite use of mythological comparisons, and the freedom of the Roman actor and audience at the theatre to use drama to offer commentary of contemporary events: 'audiences *expected* to find contemporary relevance in the productions; performers *expected* to have their pointed remarks and actions caught, interpreted and appreciated' (p. 96). By deliberately identifying himself with Orestes, Nero was publicly justifying his killing of Agrippina on the grounds of her involvement in the death of Claudius and because Rome was suffering under her tyrannical rule; in using the myth of Alcmaeon he added corruption to her crimes. Nero's mythologizing response to his own fatal kicking of the pregnant Poppaea was to perform *Canace Parturiens* wearing a mask of Poppaea and *Hercules Furens*. The former rôle could be interpreted as a poignant plea for pity and pardon, the latter an acknowledgement of responsibility, but also as exculpation—a divine madness had overcome him. So Nero used drama in a new way and used the powerful language of myth to mould the popular response to himself.

An even more striking application of mythological propaganda was Nero's assumption of the rôle of Apollo, building on the *exemplum* of Augustus, but far exceeding him. In his first public performance as citharode he told the tale of Niobe, on coins from 62 Apollo Citharoedus represented Nero, in 64–5 Nero appears on coins wearing the radiate crown of Phoebus Apollo. It was, however, the fire of Rome which led to Nero emphasizing prominently a cognate relationship with Sol. His Christian human-torches, appropriate mythologically inspired punishments for their crime, provided a fitting light for the dawning of a new Golden Age of the Sun. The Sun King

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received a Sun Palace, the main residential complex of which was aligned so that its golden ornamentation would shine most dazzlingly. In the carefully choreographed obeisance of Tiridates to Nero in 66 the emperor received the most memorable affirmation of his Sunship.

After his return from Greece, Nero's final mythological manifestation was as Hercules, the bringer of peace and undertaker of great labours—canalizing the Isthmus of Corinth, initiating a safe passage for Rome's corn from Puteoli to the Tiber. Nero was able to bring together deities which stood on opposite sides of the ideological divide between Augustus and M. Antonius.

Taking his inspiration from M. Antonius, Nero attempted to bridge the gap between *princeps* and *plebecula* by the institution of a permanent *Saturnalia*: extravagant public banquets were 'politically astute pageants' (p. 159). Rôle-reversal could be taken to apparently distasteful extremes, e.g. his publicly enacted *irrumatio* of condemned prisoners. However, in general, the appreciation of rôle-reversal depended on one's perspective: for the élite generators of the historical tradition on Nero it was shameful; for the 'ordinary people, riotous subversion might be amusing—it might even be liberating' (p. 177). Moreover, when this principle was extended to the monumental reconstruction of Rome, it could bring the pleasures of the seaside to Rome and open to the people an imperial pleasure park, an unprecedented avenue of access to their emperor.

The development of C.'s thesis is problematic in some aspects. C. argues (pp. 182–91) that Nero was responsible for the fire of Rome: Tacitus' doubts are cast aside and a highly circumstantial case is concocted from testimony during his trial for complicity in the Pisonian conspiracy of Subrius Flavus, who claimed that Nero was an incendiary, and from Nero's twice abandoned trip to the east and the omens he received in the temple of Vesta. Are Subrius' allegations any more compelling than those of Apicata against Sejanus?

C. set out to explain why Nero is fascinating. Even if he does not succeed in every detail, his *Nero* is as dazzling an achievement as the Sun King and his creations.

University of Cape Town D. WARDLE
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ROMAN DEMOGRAPHY

W. SCHEIDEL (ed.): *Debating Roman Demography*. (*Mnemosyne* Supplementum 211.) Pp. x + 242, ills. Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 2001. Cased, €94, US$134. ISBN: 90-04-11525-0.

Ever since the beginnings of demographic studies on the ancient world, which started with David Hume's famous essay on the 'populousness of ancient nations' (1752), attempts have been made to overcome the lack of statistical data from antiquity by drawing on comparisons with societies of later periods from which apparently better data are known. Such comparisons are in principle—due to constants of human biology—more promising than in other fields but they have nevertheless produced embarrassingly divergent results.

The present volume aims at depicting the current state of the art in the field of Roman demography. The papers originate from a 1997 Cambridge conference. Its

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