

EPAPHRODITUS, JOSEPHUS, AND EPICTETUS

[I]

‘Epaphroditus’ (= ‘lovely’, ‘charming’) is perhaps the commonest of Roman slave names apart from ‘Felix’, which it sometimes renders as a Greek equivalent.¹ It is also used very extensively under the early empire by those with *tria nomina*, whether freedmen or freeborn, whether descendants of freedmen or not, whether citizens or Junian Latins.² It is also found among decurions and even equestrians, but not senators.³ It thus has a non-elite resonance in the western half of the empire, but, like almost all personal *cognomina*, not exclusively so.

Undoubtedly the best known Epaphroditus, though perhaps not the most charming, was one of the freedman intimates of Nero.⁴ Towards the end of Nero’s reign, he played a key role in the detection of the Pisonian conspiracy in A.D. 65⁵ and, in the company of such unlovely characters as Phaon and Sporus, was with Nero on his last journey in 68. He was credited with having physically assisted his patron-emperor’s hesitant suicide,⁶ an allegation that was used many years later by Domitian as the grounds for his exile and subsequent execution in 95.⁷

Suetonius twice (*Ner.* 49.3; *Dom.* 14.4) attests to his having held the Palatine office of a *libellis* (‘secretary for petitions’). Both texts refer to him simply as ‘Epaphroditus a libellis’. It is here argued that both should be taken to refer to the same tenure of office under Nero, contrary to the widely held view that he also held the post again under Domitian.⁸ The key passage is *Dom.* 14.4:

utque domesticis persuaderet ne bono quidem exemplo audendam esse patroni necem, Epaphroditum a libellis capitali poena condemnavit, quod post destitutionem Nero in adipiscenda morte manu eius adiutus existimabatur.

Epaphroditus is not unequivocally identified as one of Domitian’s *domestici*. Tacitus

¹ Cf. Plut. *Sulla* 34; Appian, *B.C.* 1.97.

² H. Solin, *Die griechische Personennamen in Rom: Ein Namenbuch* (Berlin, 1982), pp. 320ff., for example, records from Rome alone some 284 ‘Epaphrodit’ from the first and second centuries A.D., of whom over 152 are reckoned to be freeborn or of uncertain free status (*incerti*) and, of these, again over half would be from the late-first or early-second centuries. These lists also contain eighteen *Augusti liberti* – including one *ab epistulis* (*CIL* 6.1887), three *T. Flavii Aug. liberti Epaphrodit* (*CIL* 6.5323, 10518, 33468), and six *Caesaris servi*.

³ Over twenty decurions from Asia, Achaea and Macedonia alone and one equestrian tribune of a cohort in Britain (*CIL* 7.432 = *RIB* 1075).

⁴ *PIR*² E 69. It is highly likely that he was freed by either Claudius or Nero, but not certainly by Nero. Two other *Ti. Claudii Aug. l. Epaphrodit* are recorded: *CIL* 6.8759 (*a cubiculo*), 10061 (charioteer). ⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 15.55. ⁶ Suet. *Ner.* 49.3; Dio 63.27.3.

⁷ Suet. *Dom.* 14.4; Dio 67.14.4.

⁸ See *RE* 5.2710, *CAH* 11.32, *OCD*² 386 etc. F. Millar, *JRS* 55 (1965), 141, expresses doubts – somewhat modified in *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1977), p. 78 – as does Stein, *PIR*² E 69, and Samonati, *Diz. Epig.* 4.826. B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London and New York, 1992), p. 211 n. 85, concludes that it cannot be determined whether or not Epaphroditus held office after 68, but still requires him to be a prominent ‘courtier’ of Domitian until late in that emperor’s reign (pp. 189, 193).

and Dio refer to him only as a freedman of Nero, not at all as a *libellis*. Suetonius, on the contrary, does not directly indicate his status in either passage. That is rendered unnecessary here by the context. But not in *Ner.* 49.3, Nero's suicide scene, where it is the ex-slave status, not the occupational post, of the participants that is relevant. It was for failing in his duty as a *libertus* of Nero, not as his a *libellis*, that Epaphroditus was much later charged by Domitian. Suetonius is in fact the only direct evidence we have that Epaphroditus was ever a *libellis* at all, even under Nero, and that is the only way he refers to him. It is at least arguable that the term 'a *libellis*' is as irrelevant in the context of *Dom.* 14.4 as it is of *Ner.* 49.3 and its use is to be attributed to the idiosyncratic preference of the Palatine secretary Suetonius himself. All the other sources see Epaphroditus differently, as Nero's freedman. He need never have been one of Domitian's senior civil servants nor one of his intimate circle of freedmen. His exile and execution may thus be seen in a somewhat different and less dramatic light than is customary. It is suggested that Suetonius, *Dom.* 14.4 should be read in that context. There are mounting difficulties should it be done otherwise.

A further glance at *Dom.* 14.4 might confirm this impression. It is Epaphroditus' patronal relationship with Nero, not his occupational one, nor that with Domitian, that is the point. Freedmen and slaves should do all in their power to save the life of their patron or master, not be accessories even to his suicide. Under the provisions of the *S.C. Silanianum* of A.D. 10, slaves were required to defend their master from attack, even at the cost of their own lives, and should he be killed those 'under the same roof' were subjected to torture and then condemned to death. The penalty applied even in cases of suicide, if the master died in the sight of his slaves and they could have stopped him. Freedmen, except those manumitted after the event by will, are not included in the understandably very detailed provisions of this extraordinary piece of legislation. Rescripts of subsequent emperors appear to have made no significant change in this situation, except for a constitution of Trajan (*Dig.* 29.5.10.1) which provided that freedmen manumitted by the deceased during his lifetime were also to be 'questioned'.⁹

None of this could reasonably be held to apply to Epaphroditus. In his case a *freedman* was being condemned to death on *suspicion* of having assisted his patron to commit *suicide* over a quarter of a century before. Even allowing for the arbitrary and summary nature of some penalties inflicted by emperors on their freedmen, the legal novelty of this as a capital charge is noteworthy. The effect is blurred by the preceding use of the word 'necem' with the insinuation that the case was to be construed as involving not the suicide but the murder of a patron, something altogether more serious. Most serious of all, it involved an emperor and amounted to assassination. All the more surprising, therefore, is the phrase 'ne bono quidem exemplo' which appears to concede that on occasion there might be good grounds for such an action. In the present context it can only refer to Nero. It can scarcely be a reported public utterance of Domitian himself giving his grounds for charging Epaphroditus, though it may possibly reflect his private thoughts on the matter. More likely it was due to the hindsight that was available to Suetonius, not the paranoia of Domitian anticipating assassination.

⁹ The *S.C. Silanianum* is treated at length in the *Digest*, Book 29, Title 5; see esp. ib. 1.22 (suicide); 3.16, 7, 10.1 (freedmen). For a good discussion see A. Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore and London, 1987), pp. 134ff. On the legal basis of penalties imposed by emperors on their freedmen, see G. Boulvert, *Domestique et Fonctionnaire sous le Haut-Empire romain* (Paris, 1974), pp. 107f.

A clearer distinction between Epaphroditus and Domitian's own *domestici* is made by Cassius Dio, in his account of the same events, at 67.14.4:

(Domitian) καὶ τὸν Ἐπαφρόδιτον δὲ τὸν Νέρωνος πρότερον μὲν ἐξεδίωξε τότε δὲ καὶ ἔσφαξεν, ἐπικαλέσας αὐτῷ ὅτι μὴ ἤμυνε τῷ Νέρωνι, ἢ ἐκ τῆς τιμωρίας ἣν ὑπὲρ ἐκείνου ἐποιεῖτο πόρρωθεν τοὺς ἰδίους ἐξελευθέρους ἐκφοβήσῃ μηδὲν τοιοῦτο τολμήσαι.

Epaphroditus is here referred to simply as ὁ Νέρωνος,¹⁰ which emphasizes his original slave status and connexion with Nero, in contrast with Domitian's own freedmen whose separate identity is reinforced by the epithet in τοὺς ἰδίους ἐξελευθέρους.¹¹ The post of a *libellis* is not mentioned. That would have been relevant if Epaphroditus were being picked out because of his seniority as current Palatine secretary. Nor is the possibility of assassination alluded to. Simply the failure to protect one's patron, a former emperor. The execution of Epaphroditus twenty-seven years after the event, when he was then probably over 70 years old,¹² on the 'capital charge' of having helped his patron to commit suicide, was a bizarre attempt by Domitian towards the end of his reign to warn his own circle of intimates of the possibility, but not necessarily the likelihood or imminence, of similar action in the future. This is a sign of deteriorating relations within the household, but scarcely a reign of terror.¹³ Why, in that case, take the trouble to banish him first? Now one emperor was avenging the death of another in order to remind his own household of their vulnerability and of the consequences of disloyalty towards their emperor, or any emperor. As Pliny put it in his *Panegyricus*: 'Have we already forgotten in our troubles how Nero was but lately avenged? Can you imagine that *he* [i.e. Domitian] would have allowed the breath of criticism to fall on Nero's life and reputation, when he avenged his death? Would he not guess that anything said against one so like himself could be applied to him?' (Loeb translation).¹⁴

Unless the emperor was in 94 already anticipating an unprecedented conspiracy from within his Palatine establishment, for him to have cynically sacrificed one of his own top freedmen on such arbitrary and seemingly unjust grounds was unnecessary and likely to be counterproductive. One of Nero's would be just as effective and less dangerous. In the lurid preamble to the final conspiracy in *Dom.* 14, in which Suetonius sets the Epaphroditus episode, no mention is made of Domitian first merely banishing the freedman. If that detail from Dio is to be relied upon – and there are no good grounds for dismissing it – it is not the act of an already desperate emperor, as portrayed by Suetonius. Domitian can hardly have intended gratuitously to provoke rebellion from within. That became a possibility later, in the summer of 95, following the execution of a consul while all but in office who was also his cousin, Flavius Clemens (Suet. *Dom.* 15.1: 'quo maxime facto maturavit sibi exitium'), and a reality a year later, in September 96.¹⁵

¹⁰ VC: τοῦ Νέρωνος.

¹¹ Cf. Eutropius 7.23: 'suorum coniuratione in Palatio'; Aurel. Vict. *De Caes.* 11.7: 'susceptor etiam suis libertorum consilio'.

¹² This calculation depends on the assumptions that he could not have been manumitted much after the beginning of Nero's reign and that he was at least 30 years old at manumission, i.e. that he was born not later than c. A.D. 25.

¹³ On Domitian's relationship with his senior freedmen and on the meaning of 'domestici' in this context, see Jones, *op. cit.* [n. 8], pp. 65ff.

¹⁴ *Paneg.* 53.4: 'an excidit dolori nostro modo vindicatus Nero? permetteret, credo, famam vitamque eius carpi qui mortem ulcisceretur, nec ut in se dicta interpretaretur quae de simillimo dicerentur.'

¹⁵ Jones, *op. cit.* [n. 8], pp. 193ff. and his earlier work, *Domitian and the Senatorial Order* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 46ff., esp. 49; cf. H. Bengtson, *Die Flavii* (Munich, 1979), pp. 236ff., 243. Among others, Jones places considerable emphasis on the effect of the deaths of *both*

It is nowhere attested that Epaphroditus simply continued in office after Nero's death or that he was reappointed by Vespasian or Titus. That should have been worth comment, given the summary treatment handed out to freedman favourites of emperors in the period 68–70,¹⁶ and especially to Nero's freedmen by Galba,¹⁷ and the disrespect which Vespasian himself is reported to have suffered at the hands of Nero's Palatine staff.¹⁸ The freedman officials who successfully survived the Claudian–Neronian period and attained high office under the Flavians, including Domitian, did not fall into that category. These would include the father of Claudius Etruscus as well as Ti. Claudius Atticus, Ti. Claudius Classicus and Ti. Claudius Clemens.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, continuity in Palatine office throughout the transition from Nero to Vespasian was a rarity. It did not include, for example, the *a rationibus* father of Claudius Etruscus, eulogized by Statius in *Silvae* 3.3.²⁰ If the reference in *Dom.* 14.4 is to Epaphroditus' holding the post a second time under *Domitian*, after an interval of perhaps two decades, Suetonius, himself a Palatine secretary under more than one later emperor and one who would be best placed to appreciate its significance, has failed to make this clear. Given Epaphroditus' record under Nero and the absence of any shadow of disloyalty on his part to that emperor at the time, the mere fact of his survival into the late Flavian period might itself have been cause for comment. Further speculation on this point, however, is unrewarding.

Domitian's apparently capricious behaviour, however, was sufficiently alarming to lead his own freedmen to be involved within two years in the real assassination of their emperor-patron.²¹ Dio, 67.15, gives their names in some detail, including one Entellus, the *a libellis* (ὁ τὰ τῆς ἀρχῆς βιβλία διέπων). But there is no indication that he was the immediate successor of Epaphroditus²² or that he had not already been in the post for some time. It merely confirms that Palatine secretaries could still be freedmen late in the reign of Domitian. If he is the Entellus on whose house-vines Martial lavishes such praise in *Epig.* 8.68, he enjoyed both wealth and, presumably, the emperor's favour at least three years before this when Book 8 was dedicated to Domitian.²³ While the freedman *ab epistulis* Abascantus received a consolatory but sycophantic address from Statius and the *cubicularius* Parthenius received epigrams in similar vein from Martial,²⁴ Epaphroditus was favoured with no poem from either. That is a bad sign. Nor is it implied that Epaphroditus had ever been one of the circle of Domitian's intimates. That would depend entirely on the assumption that he held high Palatine office towards the end of the reign. Rather the contrary. According to Dio, he had already been exiled prior to his death in 95. How long before it is

Epaphroditus and Clemens in precipitating the conspiracy, emphasis which he justifies by the participation of so many senior civil servants in the final assassination, a situation that was highly unusual, if not unique, in the annals of the Imperial administration. This interpretation depends on hindsight and the assumption that Epaphroditus was a former intimate of Domitian as well as of Nero.

¹⁶ E.g. Icelus and Asiaticus: *PIR*² I 16; A 1216.

¹⁷ E.g. Helius, Narcissus, Patrobius, Petinus and Polyclitus: Dio 64.3.4; Plut. *Galba* 17.

¹⁸ Suet. *Vesp.* 14; cf. 4.4.

¹⁹ *PIR*² I 114a = C 763; A 1336; *AE* 1972, 574 = *I. Eph.* 852; *AE* 1968, 489 = *I. Eph.* 853.

²⁰ Cf. P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 286–8.

²¹ Cf. Suet. *Dom.* 14.1: 'tandem oppressus est insidiis amicorum libertorumque intorum simul et uxoris.'

²² Despite statements in standard works to this effect, e.g. *CAH* 11.32; A. Garzetti, *From Tiberius to the Antonines* (London, 1974), p. 294.

²³ *PIR*² E 66. He is also no doubt the Entellus who appears on the lead *fistula* dated to the reign of Domitian, post 83/4 (*CIL* 15.7282).

²⁴ Statius, *Silv.* 5.1; Martial 4.45.2 ('Palatinus... Parthenius'); 5.6; 8.28; and 11.1.5 ('libros non legit ille sed libellos').

impossible to say. It may not have been as much as three years but we need not assume that the two events must have followed immediately or even closely upon each other or that his exile was connected with his tenure of the office of a *libellis*.²⁵

A story in Epictetus (1.19.19ff.) could also throw some light on the question, if it does in fact refer to the Neronian Epaphroditus. It concerns one Felicio, a slave cobbler of Epaphroditus, who was sold by his master, on the grounds that he was useless, to one of the *Καίσαριανοί*, a member of the Imperial court, possibly but not necessarily an Imperial freedman.²⁶ Felicio then became cobbler (and cobber?) to the emperor, presumably as an Imperial slave by transfer from the new owner, whereupon Epaphroditus paid obsequious court to him. There is no mention of Felicio having been manumitted by the emperor: that might have lessened the story's impact. First, it is clear that this Epaphroditus cannot have been at the time the powerful secretary a *libellis*, if indeed he was an Imperial freedman at all. The point of the story is that even minor functionaries at the Imperial court, including, besides slave cobblers, such Gilbertian figures as 'superintendent of the chamberpot' (*ἐπὶ τοῦ λασάνου*) and 'superintendent of the dunghill' (*ἐπὶ τοῦ κοπρώνος*), can become sources of patronage to those *outside* and seeking access to the Imperial court. The relationship between former master and slave has been reversed. This situation is inconceivable if Epaphroditus was a real Palatine secretary and is unlikely even if he was a lower-ranking Imperial freedman resident in Rome.

Second, it is implied that Epictetus was still a slave by the wording of 1.19.20: *εἴ τις ἡμῶν ἐπύθετο 'τί ποιεῖ αὐτός;'* ('If someone asked us, "What is your master doing?"') [Loeb] or, perhaps better, 'If one of us asked "What is master doing?"'). If that is the case – and this is the crucial passage in Epictetus that makes him the slave of an Epaphroditus – the scene can only with great difficulty be set under Nero or at best so early in the career of an upwardly mobile Neronian Epaphroditus as to leave Epictetus no more than a very young child. It could perhaps be under Vespasian or Titus, but in any case not much after the accession of Domitian, if it is accepted that Epictetus, the budding philosopher, was born c. A.D. 50²⁷ and did not have to wait longer than usual after the age of thirty for manumission. A setting late in Domitian's reign, before the exile of Epaphroditus and before the expulsion from Rome of philosophers, including Epictetus, no later than 92/3,²⁸ but possibly a few years earlier,²⁹ becomes less likely, as it is implied that Epictetus was still a slave at the time of the story but assumed that he had been manumitted some time before *his* expulsion.³⁰ If the story is about Epaphroditus the *a libellis*, whether before or after his tenure of office under Nero, that fact would have given added point to it. It is surprising that it is not recorded. In any event the Domitianic and even Flavian tenure of office by our Epaphroditus becomes more problematic.

²⁵ Jones, op. cit. [n. 8], p. 65, suggests 'perhaps c. 93'.

²⁶ Cf. H. Chantraine, *Freigelassene und Sklaven im Dienst der römischen Kaiser* (Wiesbaden, 1967), pp. 279f.

²⁷ E.g. H. Schenkl, *Epictetus: Dissertationes*² (Teubner, 1916, repr. 1965), pp. xvff., esp. xxxii; J. Souilhé (Budé ed., Vol. 1, 1943), pp. iff., esp. ii; W. Oldfather (Loeb ed., Vol. 1, 1925, repr. 1967), pp. viiff., esp. xii.

²⁸ Adopting the date of A. N. Sherwin-White, *JRS* 47 (1957), 126f.; cf. id. *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 763–5.

²⁹ C. G. Starr, 'Epictetus and the Tyrant', *CPh* 44 (1949), 21, settles for an even later date when Epictetus actually left Rome – 95, based on Jerome (on which, however, see Sherwin-White, *Letters of Pliny*, pp. 764f.). This is unlikely and would have to coincide with or follow the banishment of Epaphroditus himself.

³⁰ Cf. Starr, op. cit. 21, and the confident statement of Sandbach, *CAH* 11.694: 'After being manumitted, [Epictetus] set up a school in Rome.'

Felicio – a common enough name in the Imperial *familia* – turns up again in Epictetus in a more generalized context, the long discourse on freedom in Book 4.1, at 149–50:

Don't I know how you came to be praetor, how you got your consulship, who gave it to you? As for me, I should not care even to live, if I had to owe my life to Felicio, putting up with his insolence and slavish (δουλικού) arrogance; for I know what a slave is who is prosperous as the world goes and puffed up with pride (οἶδα γὰρ τί ἐστὶ δούλος εὐτυχῶν ὡς δοκεῖ καὶ τετυφωμένος).³¹

Assuming that Felicio here is not just a representative name for any arrogant and corrupt domestic Imperial slave, the setting would have to be the same period as in the preceding story or even later. It need not refer to Epictetus' personal experience as a slave himself under his master Epaphroditus.³² Rather it reflects Epictetus' wider experience of the Imperial court, including a period as freedman and philosopher, before being banished by Domitian, not long before the exile of Epaphroditus himself. Felicio could just as well have flourished under Domitian as Nero, more likely the former, but also under Vespasian, if the 'superintendents of the chamberpot and dunghill' are thought to chime with that emperor's 'clochemerle' reputation.³³ The resentment evinced by Epictetus comes not from below but from above, from a consciousness of status dissonance in a situation where those of rank who should wield power are at the mercy of those in the Imperial *familia* who should not. Thus Martial 9.79.1: 'oderat ante ducum famulos turbamque priorem et Palatinum Roma supercilium', and Pliny, *Paneg.* 88: 'plerique principes, cum essent civium domini, libertorum erant servi, horum consillis, horum nutu regebantur.' To this situation even Epictetus as philosopher and Stoic could not remain indifferent.

Finally, the *Suda*, s.v. 'Επίκτητος,³⁴ records Epaphroditus' post under Nero as τῶν σωματοφυλάκων τοῦ βασιλέως Νέρωνος. It is the only source to do so. This should mean that he belonged to the *corporis custodes*, the emperor's bodyguard of German slaves, which is not impossible at an earlier stage of his career.³⁵ But, in the absence of any further reference to his most senior and best-known post of a *libellis*, this detail, along with others in the entry, must be treated with some caution.³⁶ If Epaphroditus became a *libellis* in 62, on the execution of Doryphorus, Epictetus can have been little over ten years old at most by the time the earlier phase of his master's career came to an end – not the most relevant stage of their relationship unless the episode of Felicio, when Epictetus was the slave of an Epaphroditus, is to be placed in the same period. This story fits Epaphroditus neither as chamberlain nor as bodyguard and, while the latter employment could fit in with a role as one of Nero's thugs, it does little to enhance or give credibility to his supposed later role as literary and/or philosophic patron during the reign of Domitian.

³¹ Loeb translation, omitting commas in the last section.

³² As claimed in the Loeb edition *ad loc.*, p. 295 n. 4.

³³ Cf. Suet. *Vesp.* 23.3.

³⁴ 2.36, no. 2424 *Adl.*

³⁵ Schenkl, *op. cit.* [n. 27], p. xvi n. 3, suggests that the term means 'a cubiculo' (should it not in that case be 'one of the *cubicularii*'?), which supplies grounds for an ingenious emendation of Epictetus 1.1.20. Why not then be tempted to identify him with the 'Epaphroditus Aug. l. a cubiculo' of *CIL* 6.8759, possibly a freedman of Claudius or Nero, whose slave *vilicus* names a Claudia Prima as *contubernalis*? The post of a *cubiculo* (or even *cubicularius*) is certainly much more likely than that of *corporis custos* to have been Epaphroditus' stepping-stone to the top, but if these two posts have been confused at source or somewhere along the transmission line, this suggestion only serves to throw further doubt on the value of the whole *Suda* entry itself.

³⁶ On the sources and value of this entry in the *Suda*, see further p. 477 f. below.

In this context two other assumed roles of our Epaphroditus need to be reconsidered: one as the literary patron of the Jewish historian Josephus, the other as the former master, and presumed legal patron, of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus.

[II]

It should require explicit and persuasive evidence to establish that the somewhat tarnished former freedman of Nero was the eminent Epaphroditus whom Josephus eulogises in the preface to the *Antiquities* and to whom he dedicates the *Life* and the treatise *Against Apion*.

First, there is the chronological difficulty. The final paragraph of the *Antiquities* shows unambiguously that the final version of the work was not completed till A.D. 93–4 (*AJ* 20.267). Its subsequent publication is thus precariously close to, and possibly later than, the exile of the Neronian Epaphroditus. Josephus, in the previous section (266), undertakes in the future *καὶ περὶ γένους τοῦμοῦ καὶ περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον πράξεων βραχεία διεξελθεῖν*. This clearly anticipates the *Life*, which opens with the words: *ἐμοὶ δὲ γένος ἐστὶν οὐκ ἄσημον*. In the final section of the *Life* (430) he addresses Epaphroditus as *κράτιστε ἀνδρῶν*, having just concluded his own story (429) with thanks to Vespasian, Titus and Domitian for having in turn protected him against his Jewish accusers and with the remark that Domitia, the wife of the emperor Domitian ‘never ceased doing me many kindnesses’ (*διετέλεσεν εὐεργετοῦσά με*). The use of the aorist tense throughout this section might suggest that Domitian’s reign is in the past. But the terms in which Domitian and Domitia are mentioned, and the failure to mention either Nerva or Trajan, are at best insensitive if expressed after the violent ending of the Flavian dynasty on 18 September 96, and in particular Domitia’s known participation in those events. But even a date no later than 95–6 is too late for the Neronian Epaphroditus.³⁷

Similarly, in the opening section of the *Against Apion*, while referring to the *Antiquities* as completed (*καὶ διὰ τῆς περὶ τὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν συγγραφῆς*), Josephus uses the same form of address (*κράτιστε ἀνδρῶν Ἐπαφρόδιτε*). At the opening of Book 2 Epaphroditus is ‘my most honoured’ (*τιμιώτατέ μοι*), while at the conclusion of the work (2.296) he is ‘a devoted lover of the truth’ (*μάλιστα τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀγαπῶντι*). If it is accepted that the *Life* in its final version was published later than the *Antiquities*, and the *Against Apion* perhaps later still, it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that one at least of these works, and probably both, were published after the exile and the death of Nero’s freedman. We need a living not a deceased Epaphroditus as their dedicatee.

We also need a change of persona. There is the psychological difficulty of accepting that the Neronian Epaphroditus could be referred to at *any* period after Nero in a serious literary work as a ‘devoted lover of the truth’, not to mention, as in the prologue to the *Antiquities*, in the following terms:

a man devoted to every form of learning, but especially interested in the experiences of history, conversant as he himself has been with large affairs and varying turns of fortune, through all which he has displayed a wonderful force of character and an attachment to virtue that nothing could deflect. Yielding, then, to the persuasions of one who is ever an enthusiastic supporter of persons with ability to produce some useful or beautiful work...I was encouraged... [Loeb translation]³⁸

³⁷ Accepting the arguments of Th. Frankfort, *Rev. Belge de Phil. et d’Hist.* 39 (1961), 52–8, who concludes that Josephus must have published the *Life* between 93/94 and September 96.

³⁸ Josephus, *AJ* 1.8f.: *διαφερόντως δὲ χαίρων ἐμπειρίαις πραγμάτων, ἅτε δὴ μεγάλοις μὲν αὐτὸς ὁμιλήσας πράγμασι καὶ τύχαις πολυτρόποις, ἐν ἅπασι δὲ θαυμαστὴν φύσεως*

Patrons of historians in any age can be expected to have a keen interest in public affairs, but not necessarily to have had personal involvement or to have experienced varying turns of fortune in the process. Under the Flavians there was likely to be no shortage of the latter, whether partisans from the civil war period or not. For Josephus that might have been important. Add to this a notable love of learning and of literature. Is this the person who is also supposed to have deliberately broken the philosopher Epictetus' legs?³⁹ The wonder is that Epaphroditus survived the immediate post-Neronian period at all. To have been Josephus' patron he would need to have survived the whole Flavian period as well. We must look elsewhere for the 'Maecenas whom Josephus found when bereft of his earlier royal patrons, Vespasian and Titus',⁴⁰ perhaps, for example, among the freeborn Epaphroditi of eastern origin in Rome in the later first century,⁴¹ perhaps the freedman grammarian and bibliophile M. Mettius Epaphroditus mentioned in the *Suda* who lived in Rome precisely during the period from Nero to Nerva, and who had extensive scholarly interests in Greek literature and an even more extensive library,⁴² or, if Imperial freedmen are required, among the five surviving 'T. Flavii Aug. liberti Epaphroditi' of the Flavian emperors themselves.⁴³ Literary patronage was not one of the recognized functions of the *Familia Caesaris* in the first century A.D. Nor indeed was literary achievement, unless one includes the safe pursuits of grammarians such as C. Iulius Hyginus and his freedman Modestus.⁴⁴

[III]

What of Epaphroditus as former master of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus? There is no doubt that Epictetus was formerly a slave,⁴⁵ just as had been Epaphroditus himself. It is tempting to see the latter as the vicious ex-slave master who, according to Celsus,⁴⁶ caused Epictetus' lameness early in life by deliberately breaking his legs. Yet he places no explicit blame for his affliction on his master. He repeatedly refers in the *Discourses* to those who have the power to inflict physical pain and injuries of all kinds on others. In most cases he is thinking of a tyrant dealing with subjects in his power, who come from all classes and especially the upper levels of society, not of a master dealing with his slaves. To judge by 1.9.29: οὕτως καὶ 'Ροῦφος πειράζων μ' εἰώθει λέγειν ' Συμβήσεται σοι τοῦτο καὶ τοῦτο ὑπὸ τοῦ δεσπότου', when he was still a slave he began attending the lectures of the Stoic Musonius Rufus, presumably with his master's permission if not encouragement. This was most likely either early

ἐπιδειξάμενος ἰσχὴν καὶ προαίρεσιν ἀρετῆς ἀμετακίνητον. τοῦτω δὴ πειθόμενος ὡς αἰεὶ τοῖς χρήσιμον ἢ καλὸν τι πράττειν δυναμένοις συμφιλοκαλοῦντι.

³⁹ Origen, *Adv. Celsum* 7.53.

⁴⁰ Loeb Josephus, Vol. 4, ed. Thackeray (London, 1930, repr. 1967), p. x.

⁴¹ Cf. Solin, op. cit. [n. 2], pp. 320–4.

⁴² *Suda* 2.334, no. 2004 *Adl.*; cf. *RE* 5.2711–14, and esp. J. Christes, *Sklaven und Freigelassene als Grammatiker und Philologen im antiken Rom* (Wiesbaden, 1979), pp. 103f.; he is advocated by Thackeray, op. cit. [n. 40], p. xi, and suggested by Frankfort, op. cit. [n. 37], 57, who does not exclude as Josephus' dedicatee someone different from either of the two best known Epaphroditi, and most recently by T. Rajak, *Josephus, the Historian and his Society* (London, 1983), pp. 223f. and n. 11.

⁴³ *CIL* 6.1887 = *ILS* 1944 = *PIR*² E 70 *ab epistulis*, 5323, 8439 = *ILS* 1527 *ab auctorita(ribus) ration(is) heredit(atium)*, 10518, 33468 [*tabul(arius) ?*] *a rationibus*.

⁴⁴ *PIR*² I 357; 432. Cf. J. Christes, op. cit. [n. 42], pp. 72–82 (Hyginus), 94–6 (Modestus). I exclude from this canon Phaedrus the first-century fabulist, whose credentials for membership of the *Familia* invite scrutiny.

⁴⁵ *Discourses* 1.9.29; 19.21; and *testimonia* in Schenkl, op. cit. [n. 27], pp. v–xiii.

⁴⁶ Origen, *Adv. Celsum* 7.53, discounting the Christian air of martyrdom about the scene as recounted by Origen.

in the reign of Vespasian or soon after Musonius' recall by Titus.⁴⁷ The references to the burning of the Capitol, in the discussion between Musonius and Epictetus on omissions from syllogisms (!) in 1.7.32–3, can postdate either 69 or 80. If the latter, Musonius' reply, addressing his pupil as 'Ἀνδράποδον', does not prove that Epictetus was still a slave at the time of the discussion, which could have been well after the event. That form was one of Musonius' favourites for putting down interlocutors of any rank.⁴⁸ By 92–3 at the latest, although neither he nor anyone else mentions it directly, Epictetus had almost certainly been manumitted when along with other philosophers he was himself banished from Rome by Domitian and set up his famous school at Nicopolis in Epirus. There is no evidence that he was sold as a slave or had any other master.

It has always been taken for granted that the philosopher's former master (and patron) was the Neronian Epaphroditus. The combination is intriguing. There is only one reference by Epictetus himself to an Epaphroditus as his master, in the story of Felicio the emperor's cobbler (1.19.19ff. at 21: εἴ τις ἡμῶν ἐπύθετο 'τί ποιεῖ αὐτός;').⁴⁹ Even that imputed relationship, depending on the pronouns ἡμῶν and αὐτός, is somewhat opaque. What is clear, however, is that at the time this cannot be Nero's *a libellis*. Nor is it necessary to conclude that he must be that Epaphroditus at all.

The only indubitable reference to Nero's freedman in Epictetus, at 1.1.20, is marred by textual corruption of the Bodleian codex. It is contained in the account of the execution by Nero of the consul designate, Plautius Lateranus, in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy in 65, the point at which Epaphroditus enters history (Tac. *Ann.* 15.55), whether or not he was already Nero's *a libellis*. Before the execution the freedman approached the consul designate and asked him why he had clashed with the emperor. He got the haughty reply 'If I want anything, I'll speak to your master'. The text in the Budé edition of Souilhé reads:

Λατερανός τις... καὶ ἐτι πρότερον προσελθόντι [τις] Ἐπαφροδίτῳ [τῷ κυρίῳ τοῦ Νέρωνος] καὶ ἀνακρίνοντι αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ συγκρουσθῆναι 'Ἄν τι θέλω,' φησί, 'ἐρῶ σοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ'.

Souilhé deletes the second *τις* as repetition so that Lateranus becomes the speaker, and also removes the meaningless τῷ κυρίῳ (following the name of Epaphroditus) as having been copied from the last two words of the sentence. The Loeb text of Oldfather, however, retains the first and accepts a gloss on the second, which results in: ...προσελθόντι τις Ἐπαφροδίτῳ τῷ ἀπελευθέρῳ τοῦ Νέρωνος. This would be the only specific reference in Epictetus directly naming Epaphroditus as Nero's freedman.⁵⁰ It would, however, be a strangely impersonal and distant way of referring to one's own master and is clearly a gloss. Rather this emendation, if accepted, would suggest that Epictetus was *not* the former slave of *that* Epaphroditus. Whether or not that was the case, by association with Nero Epaphroditus is not cast in a favourable light.

Nor is he so cast in another probable reference to the Neronian freedman, this time in a different vein – 1.26.11: 'I know of a certain man who wept as he clasped the knees of Epaphroditus and said that he was suffering hardship; for he had been left with nothing but one-and-a-half million sesterces.' The reply, whether straight-faced

⁴⁷ As Fergus Millar points out, *JRS* 55 (1965), 141, it cannot be proved that Epictetus was already in Rome during the reign of Nero, as the stories in the *Discourses* that can be dated to that period are part of the Stoic martyr tradition.

⁴⁸ Cf. 1.6.30; 1.13.3; 2.7.13; 2.13.18; 3.10.10; 3.24.74; 3.26.19; etc.

⁴⁹ See the discussion above, p. 5. ⁵⁰ Cf. Schenkl, *op. cit.* [n. 27], pp. xvif., n. 3.

or sarcastic, was: 'Poor chap, how did you manage to put up with it?' We may conjecture that the powerful secretary *a libellis* is being petitioned for some redress by someone of senatorial rank who has suffered loss, perhaps through confiscation, but who finds the freedman unsympathetic. Another case of status dissonance. The point that does emerge clearly is the overbearing wealth of Epaphroditus, which would certainly put him in the company of other notorious Imperial freedmen of Claudius and Nero, from Pallas and Narcissus on, whose ill-gotten wealth was legendary. Frontinus, in his description of the aqueducts of Rome, casually mentions in two adjacent chapters (2.68 and 69) the *horti Epaphroditiani* and the *horti Pallantiani*, obviously once owned by the respective Imperial freedmen.

Can this be the same Epaphroditus as the grovelling master of Epictetus in the Felicio story of *Discourses* 1.19.19, who seems at best to be on the margin of the Imperial *familia*? Epictetus himself seems not to have attempted to reconcile the two or even notice such a reversal of fortune and draw any moralistic lessons from it. Even while discoursing at Nicopolis on the power and cruelty of tyrants and in his damning indictment of the reign of Domitian, he maintains a conspicuous silence over the outstanding example closest to home, Epaphroditus. The fact is that the ex-slave philosopher has handed down very little hard data that reflect his personal experience of slavery. Even the passage 1.9.29ff., quoted at the beginning of this section as showing his slave status at the time he attended lectures under Musonius, is not fully satisfactory: '(Musonius) Rufus was in the habit of saying, testing me out: "Such and such (τοῦτο καὶ τοῦτο) is going to happen to you at the hands of your master.'" To which my reply was: "That's life" (ἀνθρώπινα).' Epaphroditus is not named nor are the harsh punishments he is alleged to have meted out to his slave philosopher-in-training. It has the air of a hypothetical exercise, devoid of the tension of imminent reality, as do so many of the pedagogic vignettes contained in the *Discourses*.

Lastly, the *Suda* s.v. 'Επίκτητος:

'Επίκτητος Ἱεραπόλεως τῆς Φρυγίας, δούλος Ἐπαφροδίτου, τῶν σωματοφυλάκων τοῦ βασιλέως Νέρωνος. πηρωθεὶς δὲ τὸ σκέλος ὑπὸ ρεύματος ἐν Νικοπόλει τῆς νέας Ἠπείρου ὤκησε καὶ διατείνας μέχρι Μάρκου Ἀντωνίνου. ἔγραψε πολλά. κτλ.⁵¹

This is the only text that specifically links Epictetus with the Neronian Epaphroditus. It is also, as already seen,⁵² the only text to name Epaphroditus simply as one of Nero's bodyguards. Are we justified in putting faith in one item of this entry while being sceptical of another? Amid many arguments from silence in this discussion, should we reject explicit testimony? Here the *Suda* comes with good credentials – through the fifth-century lexicographer Hesychius of Alexandria, from the second-century philologue Hermippus of Berytus⁵³ who was a slave and pupil of Philo of Byblos who introduced him at Rome to Herennius Severus, 'vir doctissimus',⁵⁴ who was a consul in the reign of Hadrian. Hermippus is the ultimate authority for much information on slaves in the *Suda*, having written a work in two volumes 'On slaves who have been eminent in the field of education' (*Περὶ τῶν διαπρεψάντων ἐν παιδείᾳ δούλων*).

The difficulty is that much of this information is uncorroborated or contradicted by other contemporary sources. Thus, while there is no reason to doubt that Epictetus came from Hierapolis in Phrygia on the sole testimony of the *Suda*, and while it is plausible in attributing Epictetus' lameness to rheumatism although at variance with

⁵¹ 2.365, no. 2424 *Adl.*

⁵² Above, p. 473.

⁵³ *Suda* 2.414, no. 3045 *Adl.*; see esp. J. Christes, op. cit. [n. 42], pp. 137–40.

⁵⁴ Pliny, *Ep.* 28.1.

the other sources, especially the third-century Origen,⁵⁵ it is plainly wrong or misinformed on other points, from whatever sources it draws, such as extending his life into the reign of M. Aurelius (which is impossible), and in referring to his 'many writings' (ἔγραψε πολλά), which is the equivalent of confusing Socrates with Plato or, better, Xenophon.⁵⁶ These items cannot accurately represent the Hermippus source on eminent slaves but show a degree of confusion with Epictetus' pupil and recorder Arrian.⁵⁷

If we cannot rely upon the *Suda* accurately to transmit information about Epictetus himself from a good near-contemporary source such as Hermippus, even less are we compelled to believe it about one from an earlier generation. Both items on Epaphroditus in the *Suda* are uncorroborated elsewhere and have to be judged on the criterion of likelihood. As we have seen, the idea of Epaphroditus as bodyguard of Nero misses the mark and is most likely flawed. As to Epaphroditus as the philosopher's master, this is not implausible in itself, given the certainty that Epictetus was a slave either by birth or sale. It is more plausible if we accept that one of the implications of the story of Felicio is that the Palatine career of Epaphroditus finished with Nero. After that time Epictetus shows little or no concern with his master and patron, whoever he was. His criticism of Domitian's system does not include any mention of an Epaphroditus. Much in the biographical tradition on Epictetus is clearly based on inference from the *Discourses* themselves.⁵⁸ The identification of his master as an Epaphroditus and therefore as *the* Epaphroditus can easily have been part of the same process. This, of course, cannot be proved beyond doubt but, given the plethora of *Epaphrodit*i in the period, some of whom at least must have been suitably qualified by wealth, such as the patron of Josephus, if not by rank, it is by no means improbable that the master and patron of Epictetus was yet another of the same name. It is here argued that there are sufficient grounds for at least suspending judgment.

In the maze of Roman personal nomenclature it is easy, but often misleading, to infer identity of person from identity of name. This is even easier when we are dealing with only a single personal *cognomen*, without *nomen* or *praenomen*. With the little people it usually does not matter. They merge into an indistinguishable mass. With the *Familia Caesaris*, however, the case is somewhat different. If the shadow of the vicious Neronian freedman over the meek Flavian philosopher is simply taken for granted, the danger is that it subconsciously, and sometimes consciously, distorts our reading of the *Discourses* themselves, just as our assumption that Phaedrus the fabulist was a former slave may distort our appreciation of the content and purpose of his fables. In neither case may these assumptions be justified. It is not obvious that Epictetus' world-view is predominantly coloured by his personal experience of slavery,⁵⁹ although that helps to provide a wider picture and a more sympathetic understanding of all classes of society at Rome in the late-first and early-second centuries A.D. As with all his contemporaries, he does not contemplate the abolition or even the amelioration of the slave condition. He is more concerned with moral lessons of value and interest to his pupils, who came from an altogether more elevated social

⁵⁵ *Adv. Celsum* 3.57.

⁵⁶ ἔγραψε πολλά is a common formula in the *Suda*.

⁵⁷ For a full discussion, see Schenkl, *op. cit.* [n. 27], pp. xvff., who shows (e.g.) that Themistius is the source of errors in the *Suda* entry on Arrian. Oldfather (Loeb ed., Vol. 1, p. ix n. 1), discussing Epictetus' lameness, goes several steps further: 'But it requires unusual powers of credulity to believe Suidas *against* any authority whomsoever.'

⁵⁸ Cf. Schenkl, *op. cit.* [n. 27], pp. xvff.

⁵⁹ Cf. Starr, *op. cit.* [n. 29], 28: 'Epictetus does not emphasise the social ailments arising from slavery'.

level. His 'slaves' are those who surrender their freedom to their political 'masters'. As a teacher of Stoic philosophy in an age of emperors and tyrants, his view is much more from above than from below.

ADDENDUM

Werner Eck, *Historia* 25 (1976), 381–4, argues for the identification with the Neronian *a libellis* of the Imperial freedman Epaphroditus who appears in the fragmentary inscription *ILS* 9505, from an imposing funeral monument on the Esquiline. It runs:

[----- *A*]ug. I. Epaphrodit[*o* -----]
 [--- *apparitori* *Cae*]sarum, viatori tribunici[*io* ---]
 [----- *hastis p*]uris, coronis aureis dona[*to* ---]

Eck explains the unusual award of military decorations to a freedman by the key role which the Neronian Epaphroditus played in the detection of the Pisonian conspiracy in 65, citing the precedent set by Claudius with the eunuch Posides on the occasion of his British triumph (Suet. *Claud.* 28) and lavish honours granted by Nero in 65 to celebrate the crushing of the conspiracy (Tac. *Ann.* 15.72.1; Dio 62.27.4).

The suggestion is attractive but not compelling. The inscription is too fragmentary to be conclusive as to date, *nomen* and especially the career details of Epaphroditus. The status indication 'Aug. I.' certainly suggests a first-century date. But only the apparitorial post, *viator tribunicius*, survives. How much more is missing from the inscription to make it suitable for the funeral monument of the once rich and eminent Neronian can only be guessed at. The plural in '[apparitor *Cae*]sarum' (cf. *CIL* 6.1808 = *ILS* 1898) implies that Epaphroditus served at this level under more than one emperor and would thus have acquired the necessary freed status from Claudius at the latest. Equally it could refer to Flavian emperors but not belong to this Epaphroditus. There is no problem with a *viator* or *accensus* at this period advancing to senior rank, even to the Palatine post of *a libellis*. Several among the *Iulii Aug. liberti* became procurators from this level, including C. Iulius Aug. I. Sam[ius], (*CIL* 14.3644 = *ILS* 1942) who had been *accensus* to both the emperors Claudius and Nero; cf. *CIL* 6.1934; *AE* 1945, 113 (on *apparitores*, see esp. N. Purcell, *PBSR* 51 [1983], 125–73). Considering also the number of other first-century *Epaphroditii Aug. liberti*, including the *a cubiculo* of *CIL* 6.8759 (see n. 35 above), it is preferable to regard this identification as doubtful or at least unproven.

University of Tasmania/
 Australian National University

P. R. C. WEAVER