

X.—Vespasian's Patronage of Education and the Arts

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Vespasian assumed control of the Roman world at a time when civil war and irresponsible administration had exhausted Rome's treasuries and when, in consequence, the problem of restoring the state to a sound financial footing was of exceedingly great magnitude.¹ The emperor himself stated that forty billion sesterces were required to make the government solvent.² To meet the difficulty Vespasian had recourse to increased taxation, added care in the supervision and collection of income, and certain other methods which need not be mentioned.³ The general impression given is that Vespasian employed the greatest care and caution in dealing with public funds, and the impression is strengthened by the fact that the stock charge against Vespasian was avarice.⁴ The charge of avarice is undoubtedly due to Vespasian's rigorous control of finance, and at least some of the anecdotes illustrating his close-fistedness may be taken to be apocryphal; nevertheless the truth which underlies it all is that funds were short and the emperor not very open-handed. Generally speaking, Vespasian's expenditures were moderate. Considerable sums were, to be sure, spent on public works, but the expenditure of these sums served a very practical purpose. Altogether apart from the fact that the great public works served as a sort of propaganda for the new reign, Vespasian's remark to the would-be provider of labour-saving devices—*sineret se plebiculam pascere*—indicates that the works programme served a very practical social and economic end.⁵ There is not much here that can be placed under the rubric of liberality.

¹ In addition to the books and articles referred to in succeeding foot-notes, the following works have been of great value: C. Barbagallo, *Lo Stato e l'istruzione pubblica nell' Impero Romano* (Catania, 1911); A. Gwynn, *Roman Education* (Oxford, 1926); R. Herzog, "Urkunden zur Hochschulpolitik der römischen Kaiser," *SPAW* 32 (1935) 967–1019.

² Suet. *Vesp.* 16.

³ T. Frank, *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1940) 5.44–54.

⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 2.5; Suet. *Vesp.* 16–19; D.C. 66.8.

⁵ Suet. *Vesp.* 18. Cf. the explanation given for Vespasian's frequent formal dinner-parties, Suet. *Vesp.* 19. The explanation must have come from a source very close to the emperor.

In the midst of such frugality it is odd to discover examples of generosity which are apparently almost lavish, and, in the narrow sense of the word, unpractical. These examples may be roughly divided into two groups. First, impecunious senators were presented with sums of money to prevent them from losing their qualifications for seats in the senate, and poverty-stricken consulars were given annual subsidies.⁶ The second group is concerned with learning and the arts. Money was spent on *ludi* and *acroamata*; sculptors and actors received gifts; poets and Greek and Latin rhetors enjoyed subsidies.⁷ It has been suggested that these examples are propaganda on the part of the Flavians to counter the charge of avarice, and to establish Vespasian's claim to the virtue of *liberalitas*.⁸ Without going quite that far it may be pointed out that there is only one known case of a rhetor receiving an annual grant, namely Quintilian,⁹ one of a poet receiving a subsidy, namely Saleius Bassus,¹⁰ two of sculptors, and three of actors.¹¹ The suspicion therefore arises that Vespasian was not quite so free-handed a patron of the arts as the general impression created by Suetonius would indicate, and the suspicion is enhanced by the fact that Suetonius concludes his account of Vespasian's *liberalitas* with the words "et tamen ne sic quidem pristina cupiditatis infamia caruit," and two anecdotes to support the statement.¹²

If the concrete examples of Vespasian's generosity which are known may be taken as true in their essentials, further examination will reveal that they are not altogether due to *liberalitas*. There was a precedent for grants to senators.¹³ But the important point is that since senators occupied so many important places in the Roman army and civil service, it was absolutely necessary to keep the senate strong if Vespasian's programme of reconstruction and sound administration was to be carried out. Indeed Vespasian endeavoured to make the senate stronger by promotion within that body and by *adlectio*. He endeavoured also to increase the strength of the equestrian order by similar means, for it too was of supreme

⁶ Suet. *Vesp.* 17.

⁷ Suet. *Vesp.* 18-19.

⁸ H. R. Graf, *Kaiser Vespasian* (Stuttgart, 1937) 98-101.

⁹ *Chron. Jer.* ann. Abr. 2104.

¹⁰ Tac. *Dial.* 9.

¹¹ Suet. *Vesp.* 18-19.

¹² Suet. *Vesp.* 19.

¹³ E.g. Tac. *Ann.* 1.75.

importance in the civil and military service.¹⁴ Thus the motive impelling Vespasian to grant money to senators was the desire to maintain sound government rather than feelings of *liberalitas*.

Vespasian's attitude toward the arts was probably not radically different. To patronize games and dramatic performances had for a long time been a form of insurance against popular disturbances. The artist who repaired the statue of Venus was quite properly rewarded for his work; but since the statue was placed in the new temple of Pax, it was in a sense subordinate to the temple, and subservient to the honourable (and practical) purpose for which the temple was built.¹⁵ The theory has been advanced that Vespasian's aim in changing the colossal statue of Nero into one of Sol, the major god of the eastern world, and setting it up on the *Via Sacra* was to indicate to the eastern half of the empire that it shared, with the western, the capital of the world.¹⁶ Whether or not Vespasian attempted thus symbolically to conciliate East and West, it was only just that he should reward the craftsman. There was a great practical advantage in having the virtues of a reign kept constantly before the public mind by means of good literature, and poets might well have been subsidized by Vespasian to this end. But it has been pointed out that Vespasian was "miserably off for poetic interpretations of his policy,"¹⁷ and although it is possible that this judgment may in some measure be due to the accidents which beset the survival of ancient literature, it is much more likely that it is due to the small patronage bestowed on poetry by the emperor. Saleius Bassus alone, so far as it is known, received a gift. Suetonius' general statement, *ingenia et artes vel maxime fovit*,¹⁸ has been illustrated by a recent editor¹⁹ with a reference to Vespasian's friendship for Paetus Thrasea and Barea Soranus and the distinguished orators T. Clodius Eprius Marcellus and Q. Vibius Crispus. But to say that the emperor before his accession²⁰ was a friend of two minor philosophers is not to state that

¹⁴ Suet. *Vesp.* 9. See also A. W. Braithwaite, *C. Suetoni Tranquilli Divus Vespasianus* (Oxford, 1927) 50-53; A. Stein, *Der römische Ritterstand* (München, 1927) 229-232.

¹⁵ Suet. *Vesp.* 18; Plin. *Nat.* 36.27.

¹⁶ H. R. Graf, *op. cit.* (see note 8) 83. The evidence for the alteration is in Suet. *Ner.* 31; *Vesp.* 18; Plin. *Nat.* 34.45; D.C. 66.15.

¹⁷ A. W. Braithwaite, *op. cit.* (see note 14) 62.

¹⁸ Suet. *Vesp.* 17.

¹⁹ A. W. Braithwaite, *op. cit.* (see note 14) 62:

²⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 4.7.

he patronized philosophy after his accession; and so far as Marcellus and Crispus are concerned,²¹ they were used by Vespasian to carry out extensive reconstructive work in Asia and Africa respectively,²² and the emperor's friendship for them does not necessarily imply that he was interested in them as exponents of the art of oratory.

Had Vespasian been so interested in the arts as the general statements of Suetonius suggest, one would expect to find him, since he well understood the value of propaganda,²³ using the coinage to acquaint the people with his generous interests.²⁴ Actually the coinage gives practically no indication of a desire on the part of the emperor to be considered a patron of the arts. Emphasis is laid upon such concepts as *Pax*, *Securitas*, *Fides Publica*, *Annona Augusti*, *Libertas Publica*, but there are extremely few types in which references may be made to the arts, and in them the reference is very dubious. These types bear representations of Minerva,²⁵ possibly as patron goddess of the arts. In two of them²⁶ Minerva is clearly subordinate; she stands in the background, giving greater prominence to the slogans *Roma resurges* and *Pax Aug.* It may not be entirely without significance that none of these types is in gold or silver.²⁷

Apart then, from a few general statements, there is very little evidence that Vespasian was a generous patron of the arts for their own sake, and some reason at least to believe that he was throughout his reign keeping a shrewd and practical eye upon the great task of reconstruction which faced him. Unless the grant of an annual income from state funds to Quintilian (and possibly other rhetors) is exceptional, it would seem likely that it too had a very practical end in view. And, in fact, if the slogans on the coins were to be realized, and the Roman world were to be efficiently and economically administered and protected, education of a high standard was necessary to prepare candidates for the civil and military service. Some attention had been given to this matter before. In

²¹ Tac. *Dial.* 8.

²² R. K. McElderry, "Some Conjectures on the Reign of Vespasian," *JRS* 3 (1913) 116-126.

²³ H. R. Graf, *op. cit.* (see note 8) *passim*; W. Weber, *Josephus und Vespasian* (Berlin, 1921) *passim*.

²⁴ Cf. M. P. Charlesworth, *The Virtues of a Roman Emperor* (London, 1937).

²⁵ H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage* (London, 1926) 2, nos. 407, 434, 448, 566.

²⁶ Nos. 407, 434.

²⁷ See also H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *op. cit.* 5-10.

the speech put in Maecenas' mouth by Cassius Dio²⁸ Augustus is advised to pay special attention to the education of the senatorial and equestrian classes from which he is to recruit his officials, and he is urged to provide, at state expense, teaching in horsemanship and the handling of arms. This may, of course, be an anachronism. But the institution by Augustus of the *Iuventus* was undoubtedly related to the building up of a class from which the administrative cadres of municipalities and provinces could be filled.²⁹ The Flavians showed some interest in *Iuventus*.³⁰ Was the type of training provided by a rhetor of value in developing a practical administrator? Domitian undoubtedly thought so, for he entrusted the education of his grand-nephews, who were most certainly heading for important administrative careers, to Quintilian.³¹ And throughout his great work Quintilian keeps insisting in the most unequivocal words that the aim of his educational methods is to prepare the student for the practical duties of a practical life. At the very beginning he states: cum vir ille vere civilis et publicarum privatarumque rerum administrationi accommodatus, qui regere consiliis urbes, fundare legibus, emendare iudiciis possit, non alius sit profecto quam orator.³² A little later he gives particular instances of the thoroughly practical achievements of men who have enjoyed this kind of education—Appius preventing a dishonourable peace, Cicero crushing Catiline, generals reviving panicky armies, and so on.³³ Again at the end the finished orator is commended as the man to protect the innocent, repress crime, defend the truth, inspire troops, direct the senate and guide the people³⁴—in other words an almost perfect official. It is perhaps not unworthy of remark that Marcellus Victorius to whom Quintilian dedicates his great work, and whose son, C. Victorius Hosidius Geta, is expected to profit by it, was no literary recluse, but a man active in public life.³⁵ Thus in making an annual grant to Quintilian, Vespasian was fostering a type of education which was considered of great value in the practical world.

²⁸ 52.26.

²⁹ M. della Corte, *Iuventus* (Arpino, 1924) 6–7, 18–19.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 20.

³¹ Quint. *Inst.* 4. pr.

³² *Ibid.* 1. pr. 10.

³³ *Ibid.* 2.16.7.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 12.1.26–28.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 1. pr. 6; Stat. *Silv.* 4.4; T. Mommsen in *H* 13 (1878) 428.

Further evidence about Vespasian's attitude to education has appeared fairly recently in an inscription from Pergamum.³⁶ In the first of the two documents on the stone, an edict of Vespasian grants to *medici* and *praeceptores immunitas*, protection against *iniuria* and the right to form *collegia*. The remark of Asconius—*collegia et S. C. et pluribus legibus sublata praeter pauca atque certa quae utilitas civitatis desiderasset, sicut fabrorum fictorumque*³⁷—indicates that the *ius collegii* had been granted to teachers because their utility to society was recognized by Vespasian.

It may be asked why privileges were granted to rhetors and *grammatici*,³⁸ while *litteratores*, or primary teachers, were expressly excluded.³⁹ The most likely answer is that the normal working of supply and demand provided a sufficient number of *litteratores*. When conditions were unfavourable for *litteratores*, the state could intervene in an exceptional way. This was, for example, the case in a later date in the unattractive mining town of Vipasca, where the state endeavoured to create desirable educational facilities by granting *immunitas* to teachers.⁴⁰ The rhetors, however, were of vastly greater importance for the training of future administrators and statesmen, and were so badly underpaid⁴¹ that some encouragement was necessary if the right men in sufficient numbers were to adopt the profession. This encouragement Vespasian provided. The success of his method is proved by the fact that later some restriction had to be put on the numbers of teachers to enjoy special privileges.⁴²

Of the two-fold programme—*stabilire* and *ornare*—attributed to Vespasian by Suetonius,⁴³ the first part assumed by far the greatest importance during the short decade of his rule. The paramount problem was to restore peace, prosperity, and public confidence, and to the solution of this problem Vespasian proceeded with resolve. It has been argued above that he devoted particular attention to the development of the human resources from which he could draw skilful and careful administrators of the armies, the

³⁶ *Ann. épig.* 1936, no. 128 = R. Herzog, *op. cit.* (see note 1) 967.

³⁷ *In Cornel.* 67.

³⁸ *Dig.* 50.4.18.30.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 50.4.11.4; 50.5.2.8.

⁴⁰ *ILS* 6891, line 57.

⁴¹ *Juv.* 7.150ff.

⁴² *Dig.* 27.1.6.1–3.

⁴³ *Vesp.* 8.

provinces, and the central government. To this end he endeavoured to maintain the senate and the equestrian class at full strength, and to provide facilities for education whereby the young men entering administrative careers would be well-fitted for their future lives. It may be that Vespasian was interested also in the arts for their own sake. But the vague and unsatisfactory character of the evidence, and the shortage of funds which must have hampered Vespasian in no small way would suggest that if he did turn his hand to the second part of Suetonius' programme—*ornare*—he did so with a purely practical goal in view. Successors might enjoy peace, prosperity, and the arts. It was his task to create the conditions for their enjoyment.