

Martial's life and times

1. *Martial's origins and early career*

Some writers remember their roots; others are more concerned with the scene of their success. Marcus Valerius Martialis records that he was born in March (A.D. 38 to 41) in the ancient Celtiberian hill town of Bilbilis, overlooking the river Salo, in Hispania Tarraconensis.¹ The nearest large city was Caesaraugusta (the modern Zaragoza). Martial was to retire to and die in Bilbilis, and his attitude to his birth place was to change from idealisation to disappointment. Nevertheless his nostalgic pride in his native town and indeed in his whole Celtiberian ancestry is a recurrent theme in his epigrams.

Martial's *Españolismo*² was fortified by the fact that Spain was one of the oldest Roman provinces and had contributed richly to the intellectual and political growth of imperial Rome. It had produced Marcus Porcius Latro of Corduba, Marcus Fabius Quintilianus of Calagurris, the orators; Servilius Hena, Pomponius Mela, Junius Gallio, Canius Rufus of Gades, the Annaean family with the Senecas and Lucan, the agricultural author Columella and Martial himself, who would hail the first Spanish emperor in Trajan, born in Italica. Martial's circle included a number of other distinguished Spaniards, whom he addresses in specifically patriotic

¹ Now known as El cerro de Bámbola on the R. Jalón in Aragón; the excavated ruins lie above the road from Zaragoza to Madrid, about 4 km north-east of the modern Calatayud ('Castle of Job', so called from its ninth-century Arab citadel, built with stones from Bilbilis by Ayub, nephew of Musa, governor of north-west Africa, at the time of the Arab invasions). A topographical description of the town is given in ch. 4, pp. 181–3ff. See also map 6, p. 180. Spanish coinage from the early Empire confirms Martial's reference to it as a *municipium* and its official designation, Augusta Bilbilis (cf. 10.103). Its population has been estimated at 50,000. Whether Martial's heart was in the Spanish highlands or whether he was happy enough in Rome will be discussed later; but see Dolç (1974) 109; (1987) 20.

² On Martial and the *Laudes Hispaniae*, see below pp. 175–6.

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terms.³ The familiarity with various places in northern Spain shown in some poems⁴ must have been built up by travelling locally in his early youth, as there is no record of his visiting Spain until his final return home in late 98.

The exact year of his birth is difficult to determine. A poem written on his fifty-seventh birthday (10.24) could have been written at any time between 95 and 98, since the book in which it appeared survives only in its expanded second edition, published in 98. So he was born in March in one of the years 38 to 41, with the later date being slightly more plausible.⁵ Similarly, although he celebrates his birthdays on the Kalends of March (9.52; 10.24; 12.60), he was not necessarily born on the first day of that month.⁶

For a long time, since the identification by Domitius Calderinus in his Venetian edition of 1482, it has been generally accepted that the Fronto and Flaccilla of 5.34, who are entreated to protect the shade of the little slave girl Erotion, were Martial's parents, although some doubts have been expressed.⁷

But whoever Martial's parents were, they were of native ancestry, as his ethnic boast indicates, and prosperous enough to give him the standard education (including a knowledge of Greek) with a *grammaticus* and a *rhetor* (9.73.7–8), although he may have had to travel as far as Caesaraugusta or, more likely, Tarraco to avail himself of the services of the latter. But, like Ovid, Martial was not to put his training to professional use, despite pressure from his peers (1.17; 2.30.5–6; 2.90;

³ See Weinrib (1968) 163. Many of these lived in Tibur; see Syme (1982/3) 241. A considerable number of compatriots are addressed throughout the work.

⁴ Notably 1.49 and 4.55. The topography of Martial's Spain and the modern names of the places mentioned are examined in ch. 4, pp. 176–9ff; see also map 5, Martial's Homeland (p. 178).

⁵ For the chronology of Martial's life and publications, the fundamental work is Friedlaender (1886) 50 (with the references there); cf. Stobbe (1867) 44; (1887) 630; R. Helm, *RE* VIII A 55; later work is analysed by Citroni (1975) ix. Additional precision has been introduced by Syme (1980) 44 and Citroni (1989) 214 (with further references). The later date for his birth is more likely, as Martial wished to stress the length of his stay in Rome and he could easily have altered his birthday poem for the heavily revised second edition of Book x.

⁶ Romans tended to celebrate their birthdays on the Kalends of an appropriate month rather than on the day itself; see Lucas (1938) 5.

⁷ See Scotland (1870) 186; Mantke (1967–8) 234, who suggests that they are Erotion's parents. Fronto is not uncommon as a slave or freedman's name and *CIL* VI 4930 was cited by Mantke (1967–8) 240 as a possible piece of evidence for his identity: *L. Cornelius L.l. Regillus ollam legavit M. Valerio M.l. Frontoni (ollam being here a funerary urn)*. On the other hand, outside the archaeological museum of Tarragona, there is sited a prominent inscription with the name Flaccilla on it, evidence of its use in Spanish families; see Dolç (1953) 94; Kajanto (1965) s.v.; Bell (1984) 23. Fronto was a cognomen among the *gentes* Aemulia, Cornelia and Valeria, of which there were several branches in Spain, e.g. the Valerii Vegeti from Iliberris (Granada). On the presumed status of Martial's parents, see Syme (1958) 618.

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12.68.3); indeed he adopted a somewhat snobbish attitude to that dubious profession (1.17.2; cf. 2.32).

The great metropolises were magnets then as now for talented or ambitious provincials; Spaniards did as well as anybody in the capital city. It is not surprising that Martial came to Rome in A.D. 64 (10.103), the year of the great fire, in his early twenties to seek his fortune. He would remain there for thirty-four years (10.103) and return home with white hair.

His praise of the Annaean family (4.20; 12.36) suggests an introduction to the Senecan circle, but if so he was somewhat unlucky in his timing. The enormous literary activity that centred around the court of Nero, whose imperial generosity to artists of all kinds, whether poets, musicians or gladiators, was notorious, could easily have absorbed the talents of Martial, if his youthful poetic potential may be judged by his subsequent success. Unfortunately his prospective patrons in the Annaean family, Seneca, Junius Gallio and Annaeus Mela, the father of Lucan, and other such Senecan connections as the Pisones, Memmius Gemellus, consul in 63, and Vibius Crispus, suffect consul in 61, were by this time out of favour. Indeed they were shortly to be cut down, along with Calpurnius Piso, in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy of 65. He would have found others, but he remembers these as model patrons (12.36).

Small wonder that Martial's early years in Rome were lean ones (1.117). Since he was not interested in practising law (2.90), he had a lot of stairs to climb in every sense. He may have hated dancing attendance on various patrons for their meagre financial and material support and found the many duties involved burdensome (5.22; 11.24), but he saw nothing offensive in the institution of patronage itself. Nero's suspicions and dislike of the Annaean circle, which barred Martial from the path of prosperity which earlier the Greek epigrammatist Lucillius had hopefully trodden, were to be reciprocated in the hostile comments on that emperor scattered through Martial's work. The most biting is that on the poet Lucan's execution:

Heu! Nero crudelis nullaue inuisior umbra,
debut hoc saltem non licuisse tibi. (7.21.3-4)

Oh, cruel Nero, for no death more hated, this one at least should
not have been allowed you!

Despite this stroke of bad luck, Martial began writing for what

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prosperous patrons he could muster; the mendicant *persona* which Martial found it desirable to adopt should not be taken too literally. His Spanish connections, which included Lucan's widow, he kept up throughout his lifetime in Rome. His villa at Nomentum, 20 km north-east of Rome near the modern Mentana, was probably a gift from Seneca himself or his heirs.⁸ Once established in Flavian favour, the poet had been made an honorary military tribune, which gave him equestrian status, to which accrued the minimum property qualification of an equestrian, 400,000 sesterces (Plin. *NH* 33.32).⁹

That Martial had been practising the vocation of poet as well as client is evident from his claim that a collection of his *juvenilia* were still available in 85 from the bookseller Q. Valerianus Pollius (I.1113). By the time Martial began publishing collections of his miscellaneous poems for the public in 85–6, he may have had a considerable backlog of epigrams, or at least drafts, from earlier days to supplement his current output. It would be hard to believe that Martial arrived in Rome in 64 and only in 80 was he prompted to produce a commemorative volume of ingenious epigrams on the Flavian amphitheatre and its spectacular exhibitions. Martial was already a cultured and expert writer, witness the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta*. The twelve books of Martial's epigrams are the culmination of an earlier writing career, recycling epigrams from time past, as well as incorporating poems, even collections of poems (*libelli*), written for particular purposes and individual patrons in the year or so before their delivery to the general public.

These patrons, indirectly or allusively addressed, would recognise their poems in the new context from previous acquaintance with them from recitations or in their own *libelli*. Such slim volumes would contain poems expressing thanks for past benefactions, transcribed *pièces d'occasion* from a dinner or a stay in a country house, extending invitations, condolences or congratulations on escapes from death and elections to office, commissioned sepulchral epigrams and, for ballast,

⁸ Seneca's holdings at Nomentum are known from his writings (*Ep.* 104.1; 110.1). Nomentum was one of the Latin cities that Anchises prophesied would be founded by Silvius Latinus (Virg. *Aen.* 6.771; cf. Dion. Hal. 2.53); also, for its capture by Tarquinius Priscus around 600 B.C., Liv. 1.38 and DH 3.50. It was under Roman domination from 338 B.C. The site of the ancient town is the modern Casali and occupies the areas called Romitorio, Montedoro, Ara Cacamele and Immaginella, at a height of 21.5 m above the Via Nomentana. Previously, most scholars identified it with the modern Mentana, though M. Vittori chose the Casali site as early as 1550. Pala (1976) 11–18 (s.v. Nomentum) discusses also the distance from Rome, in relation to Eretrum, and finds that the Casali site best fits the data given in the *Tabula Peutingerana*.

⁹ For a plausible estimate of Martial's financial status even in his earlier days, see Allen (1970) 345; Hardie (1983) 51. Martial's irregular income would derive from imperial grants, patrons' regular allowances (*sportulae*), inheritances, pecuniary gifts and loans, which were often forgiven (or forgotten), and useful or expensive presents, which could be easily converted into cash.

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serious or satirically humorous short poems. These last might be given a personal touch by the insertion of a bare *nomen* or *praenomen*, identifiable with ease by the recipients and with difficulty by modern commentators.¹⁰

Why else would Martial have a personal *librarius* (1.101)? He was there to transcribe short collections of suitable epigrams or extempore verses for Martial's patrons, who would be expected to respond in various ways, preferably with hard coin or lavish presents. The epigrams did not need to be entirely new in each case – one obviously personal poem, perhaps even a prefatory presentation, could cast its glow over a number of poems that might have been addressed to anybody. These personal poems then took on additional lustre when published in the larger, carefully structured collections which Martial put out in the eighties and nineties. This wider circulation of polished compliments would increase Martial's reputation and attract the attention and overtures of other potential patrons. Certainly each successive book suggests a widening of Martial's circle of important friends. Books I and II show a dramatic increase, which diminishes as the years go by.

This jamming together in the published books of presentation verses from the *libelli* may seem awkward, but Martial had a number of ways in which these addresses could be varied, and he was careful about the structuring of his books. Moreover, a collection in which several persons are addressed in different poems was no more strange to the ancient audience than it is to us.¹¹

Martial then was circulating miscellaneous epigrams on various subjects in these *libelli*, as well as through recitations, long before Books

¹⁰ See Sage (1919) 168. The most detailed description of the process is by White (1974) 44, with references to Friedlaender (1886) 52, 165, who also assumes this method of initial publication for the epigrams. White (p. 56) notes forty poems which point to this informal mode of presentation; good examples are: 1.52; 1.70; 3.2; 3.5; 4.10; 4.14; 5.5; 5.18; 5.80; 7.17; 7.26; 8.72; 9.26; 9.58; 10.93; 11.15; 11.57; 11.106; 12.11. Informal or public recitations, to which Martial often refers, sometimes in the context of plagiarism (cf. 1.29, 38, 53, 72), should not be forgotten. Introduced into Rome in the middle of the second century B.C. (Suet. *Gram.* 2), the institution was popularised by Asinius Pollio, who was the first to read his own work (Sen. *Contr.* 4 praef. 2). As for extempore compositions, Martial complains about the unimaginative topics proposed for his talents (11.42); on the popularity of the practice, analogous to impromptu *haiku* with brush illustrations, see Williams (1978) 15.

¹¹ Both points are made by White (1974) 56. Martial can offer a *libellus* as a gift; as poetic material for correction and judgement; for defence against critics or further dissemination; or just as a book that needs a friendly and hospitable reception. Horace, Propertius, Ovid and Statius had all published books with different addressees for individual poems in them, quite apart from the main dedicatee, if there was one. Renaissance and modern examples of the practice are easy enough to find, e.g. in Ben Jonson and W. H. Auden.

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I and II were formally published by the booksellers in 86.¹² Consequently the poet can boast:

Hic est quem legis ille, quem requiris,
toto notus in orbe Martialis
argutis epigrammaton libellis... (I.I.I-3)

He unto whom thou art so partial,
O reader, is the well-known Martial,
The epigrammatist... (Trs. Lord Byron)

2. *Liber de spectaculis*, *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*

Martial's sudden break from obscurity comes with the publication, late in the year 80, of the book of epigrams commonly known as *Liber de spectaculis*,¹³ which was perhaps published with the direct encouragement and gratitude of the emperor Titus himself, who had also promoted Josephus. In June of that year Titus had given an elaborate series of games to celebrate formally the opening of the still unfinished Flavian amphitheatre. Begun in 72, it would be known to posterity as the Colosseum, although the enormous statue of Nero which gave it the name had now been moved to a site some distance away and refurbished with a head of the sun-god Helios to replace Nero's radiate visage.

The *amphitheatrum Flavium* was, and still is, in every sense of the word a colossal architectural achievement. Built on the grounds of Nero's *domus aurea* where an ornamental lake was to have been situated, the giant construction towered forty-eight and a half metres high with the two stories of Doric and Ionic columns, dedicated in 79 by Vespasian, now topped with Titus' contributions of a third Corinthian arcade supporting a fourth tier, whose windows were decorated with flashing bronze shields.¹⁴

¹² Although the opening epigram of Book I was perhaps inserted (after Book II was published) in a collected edition of Books I–VII in 93, it may not have been totally unjustified after the publication of his volume celebrating the opening of the Flavian amphitheatre; see Citroni (1975) 12 and the references there.

¹³ The accepted term is used for convenience (= *Spec.*); the most recent editions are those of Ugo Carratello (1981) and Previ (1983); a text and commentary by Kathleen Coleman is nearing completion. The MSS provide no ancient title, since T's *de amphitheatro* cannot be preserving a tradition. The name *Epigrammaton liber* was foisted on the book by the Ferrara edition of 1471–75, but T. Gruter's *spectaculorum liber* or P. Schryver's *de spectaculis libellus* have been adopted by later editors. Boethius (1952) 129 dates the composition of *Spec.* 2 to 78 or 79.

¹⁴ The basic statistics of the building are familiar: the axes are 188 m and 156 m; capacity about 45,000 spectators. The flooring of the arena was wood, covering a labyrinth of animal dens, elevators and drains. The elaborate seating arrangements for officials and the elite, and the Domitianic reinforcement of the equestrians' seating privileges, reflect a growing concern with status. For further detailed information see *RE* s.v. *Flavium amphitheatrum*; Nash (1968) 17; DiMacco (1971).

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The propaganda value of the choice of the site was not lost on Martial, as an introductory poem of the book indicates:

Hic ubi sidereus propius videt astra colossus
 et crescunt media pegmata celsa via,
 invidiosa feri radiabant atria regis
 unaque iam tota stabat in urbe domus.
 Hic ubi conspicui venerabilis amphitheatri
 erigitur moles, stagna Neronis erant.
 Hic ubi miramur velocia munera thermas,
 abstulerat miseris tecta superbus ager.
 Claudia diffusas ubi porticus explicat umbras,
 ultima pars aulae deficientis erat.
 Reddita Roma sibi est et sunt te praeside, Caesar,
 deliciae populi, quae fuerant domini. (Spec. 2)

Here, where Colossus climbs the starry seat,
 And proud abutments part the crowded street,
 A savage despot's halls extended wide;
 There was one house in Rome and none beside.
 Here, where the stately Circus meets our gaze
 High-towering, was a pond in Nero's days.
 Here, where the Claudian cloister spreads its gloom,
 A palace dwindled to its outmost room.
 Rome's night is ended. In the tyrant's seat
 For pastime, Caesar, bid thy people meet.

(Trs. A. L. Francis and H. F. Tatum)

The games given by the new emperor to glorify his father, himself and the Flavian dynasty were on the same lavish scale as their site¹⁵ and lasted a hundred days. There were individual and mass gladiatorial fights; a naval battle on an artificial lake; and thousands of animals, over 50,000 by some accounts, often of exotic provenance, fell to the weapons of the ever popular *bestiarii* – and *bestiariae*, since on at least one day (1 July?) according to Dio only female beast fighters practised their arts.¹⁶ Martial commented:

Belliger invictis quod Mars tibi servit in armis,
 non satis est, Caesar; servit et ipsa Venus. (Spec. 6)

¹⁵ The games are described by Suetonius (*Titus* 7ff.) and Dio (66.25), as well as by Martial. Some reports of them, e.g. that 5,000, according to Suetonius, or, from another account, 9,000 animals were slaughtered in a single day, tax credulity. For the correspondence of the details in Martial and the historical accounts in Suetonius and Cassius Dio, cf. Szelest (1986) 2570 n.11. For the animals exhibited at these games, see Jennison (1937) 22.

¹⁶ For the social significance of the amphitheatre in the Roman consciousness and the strong link between gladiatorial violence and sexuality, see Hopkins (1983) 20 and the references there. The connection was satirised by Juvenal (e.g. 6.82ff., in particular 112: *ferrum est quod amant*).

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That warrior Mars serves amid your unconquered arms, Caesar, is not enough; Venus herself serves too.

The propagandist character of the *Liber de spectaculis* is undeniable, although the reporting of the highlights of these games is no different from the epigrams in later books which celebrate such gladiatorial champions as Hermes, Helius and Advolans (5.24), such racing drivers as Scorpis (10.53), and which applaud similar spectacles put on by Domitian (5.65; 8.80; 9.83) and by Martial's own friend Lucius Arruntius Stella (8.78).

Liber de spectaculis presents some textual problems. It has come down in mutilated and truncated form and, to judge from the more standard lengths of Martial's other books, indeed of ancient books in general, less than half of the volume that Martial had hastily issued to celebrate the historic games has survived (*Spec.* 35). The missing sections were probably dropped from the second half of the work, and, despite editorial hesitancy about the proper division of the epigrams, only thirty-five or thirty-six poems are left.¹⁷

The insoluble problem is whether the missing parts were further descriptions of the games themselves or more directly political material. The present structure of the book consists first of breathless praise for the new amphitheatre as one of the wonders of the ancient world, surpassing all competitors, and for the diverse races of imperial subjects who flocked to the spectacles (*Spec.* 1–3). Interspersed is praise for Titus¹⁸ as a liberator of Rome, at great personal financial cost, not only from the terror of political prosecutions,¹⁹ but also from Nero's unscrupulous land-grabbing for his building schemes (*Spec.* 2; 4). The extensive grounds of Nero's Golden House had been the butt of jokes from its inception: it was going to take over the whole of Rome, it was said. Martial combines his attack on Nero as *dominus* with praise for Titus' 'populism' (*verus*

¹⁷ The arguments for a second, and a priori unlikely, edition of the book in the early years of Domitian's reign to incorporate references to some of the games this emperor gave are very tenuous; see Carratello (1981) 14 and the earlier references there. Lindsay (1903) 49 postulates the loss of half the book. Unfortunately the volume came down in three *florilegia* rather than with the rest of Martial's books, which passed relatively unscathed through the transmission. Epigrams 31 and 32 in our modern editions were added by Junius from *florilegia*, and 33, attacking the Flavian dynasty, was appended by Schryver from the scholiasts to Juvenal 4.38. Carratello (1981) 30 offers a plausible division and arrangement of the surviving epigrams, which comprise no more than 226 lines. The longest and shortest of the miscellaneous books (I and II) have 916 and 544 lines respectively, the average length of the twelve books of miscellaneous epigrams being about 726 lines.

¹⁸ The case made out for the emperor addressed being Domitian is weak; it was standard practice to hail an emperor as a god and allude to his *numen*; see Scivoletto (1963) 14.

¹⁹ Cf. Suet. *Titus* 8. There are only a few allusions in Martial to the atmosphere of suspicion fostered by delation (e.g. 11.38.2; 12.24.4–5). For the fiscal loss entailed, cf. Millar (1977) 496.

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patriae pater, *Spec.* 3.12) and his constitutionalism (*praeses*, *Spec.* 11), a pose which would not be continued by his successor.

The surviving epigrams are part of a skilful political document, a glorification of Titus rather than the Flavian dynasty (there is no mention of Vespasian, for instance). An analysis of its contents illustrates Martial's methods.²⁰ There was a fear that Titus might turn out a Nero *redivivus* (Suet. *Titus* 7); Martial allays this suspicion by contrasting him strongly with the hated tyrant and by suggesting rather a resemblance to the now conventionally revered Augustus, the original *pater patriae*.²¹ Just as Augustus was *Caesar invictus* in Horace's circle (*Sat.* 2.1.11), so Titus is described as *invictus princeps* (*Spec.* 20.4) or *invictus in armis* (*Spec.* 6.1). The deities that protected Augustus, Mars and Venus, are enlisted in Titus' service also (*Spec.* 6).

The imperial virtues that Augustus prided himself on, as recorded in the *Res Gestae*, namely courage, clemency, justice and piety, are subtly attributed by Martial to Titus. He works them into descriptions of individual incidents in the games, often those involving wild animals. So, for example, it is the same *dulce ingenium* of a conqueror that can produce an equitable disposition of the case of two equally matched gladiators (*Spec.* 20) and also insist on, even in wild beasts, an equitable disposition (*mite ingenium*, *Spec.* 10.6). Imperial justice is shown in the decision about the other similarly matched gladiators (*sed Caesar legi paruit ipse suae*, *Spec.* 27.4). Titus' generosity and decisiveness are displayed not only in his lavish games, but also by the speed with which he gave the people their new hot spas (*velocia munera, thermas*, *Spec.* 2.7), again on a Neronian site, the Esquiline wing of the *domus aurea*. His mercy is displayed towards a hapless Leander and a helpless hind alike (*Spec.* 25; 29). His piety appears in his punishment of ingratitude in both criminals and animals (*Spec.* 7.7–9; 10).

A main concern of the Flavian dynasty was to justify its assumption of power from the Julio-Claudian family, to legitimate its claim to imperial status, even to present Vespasian, hastily deified by Titus (cf. Plin. *Paneg.* 11.1), as a new *divus* Augustus and the founder of a royal line. Naturally religion, notably the imperial cult, and superstition about

²⁰ For this aspect of the book, see Weinreich (1928) 21, 74; Sauter (1934) 27, 153, 166; Scott (1936) 55, 113; and Malnati (1985) 250. On the portrait of Titus presented, see Deschamps (1983) 69; Tremoli (1983) 383; and Levi (1983) 161; on Titus' orchestration of his own propaganda, Levi (1954) 288; and Yavetz (1975) 424.

²¹ Nero is characterised as *dirus, ferus rex, dominus* (*Spec.* 28.13; 2.3; 12), a portentous tyrant dominating his subjects as slaves, whereas Titus is *praeses*, president and protector, or *princeps*, first among equals (*Spec.* 2.11; 4.6). Even Nero's famous mock sea-battles are overshadowed by Titus' *naumachia* (Suet. *Nero* 12; *Spec.* 28.13–14).

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alleged portents predicting Vespasian's accession were systematically employed by Vespasian and his sons to invest the Flavians with the appropriate aura of divinity and to confirm their manifest destiny. Martial plays an important role in this. The most striking aspect of the *De spectaculis* is the poet's stress on Titus' divine *numen* or Genius: his *mana*, as it were, which is recognised and worshipped even by the beasts of the field.²² The pious elephant, an almost magical beast in ancient thinking, recognises the god's presence (*nostrum sentiet et ille deum*, *Spec.* 17.4) and makes obeisance to it, as though performing an oriental kowtow (προσκύνησις). The hunted hind halts as a suppliant before Caesar's feet and is left unhurt by the hounds:

Numen habet Caesar, sacra est haec, sacra potestas,
 credite: mentiri non didicere ferae. (*Spec.* 29.7–8)

Caesar has divine force, sacred is this power, sacred,
 Believe it: beasts have not learned to lie.

Not only do beasts instinctively feel his might (*Spec.* 17.3), but nature herself also, as when the waves spare Leander swimming in the mock Hellespont (*Spec.* 25): these are Caesar's waters.

Although Titus, unlike Domitian later, was careful not to insist on being officially hailed as a god in Rome, poetic licence, going back to Virgil and Horace, could be less inhibited in attributing godlike powers and numinous presence to the ruler. Pliny the Elder in the preface to his *Natural History*, dedicated to Titus, is scarcely more cautious about the future emperor's superhuman stature (*religiose adiri etiam a salutantibus scio, praef.* 11).

Martial frequently sets the various spectacles against a background of myth, depicting the emperor as matching in certain ways such gods as Jupiter and Hercules (*Spec.* 16B; 27; 6B); the wonders and feats displayed in his amphitheatre surpass all mythical records (e.g. *Spec.* 5; 7; 12; 15; 21). The interpenetration of myth and reality had a curious attraction for the Greco-Roman mind, which explains the popularity of savage re-enactments in the arena and on stage of ancient tales. The very plasticity of myth lent itself to analogical and aretalogical means of glorifying kings and emperors.

As for the shows themselves, the epigrams limit themselves to the wonders and physical feats to be seen in the amphitheatre which surpass anything recorded in myth. The legend of Pasiphaë mating with the bull

²² As noted by D'Elia (1981) 647. On the relationship between the natural world and the supernatural, and between beasts and the imperial *numen*, see Weinreich (1928) 74; Sauter (1934) 159, 166 on miraculous natural events, Gerlach (1911) and Szelest (1976) 251; on the virtues of a Roman emperor, Charlesworth (1937) 10.