

## Power and Eroticism in Imperial Rome

The relationships between Roman emperors and their objects of desire, male and female, are well attested. The salacious nature of this evidence means that it is often omitted from mainstream historical inquiry. Yet that is to underestimate the importance of 'gossip' and the act of thinking about an emperor's private life. In this book Dr Vout takes the reader from Rome, and Martial's and Statius' poems about Domitian's favourite eunuch, to Antioch and dialogues in praise of Lucius Verus' mistress, to the widespread visual commemoration and cult of Hadrian's young male lover, Antinous. She explores not the relationships themselves but rather the implications of their description. Such description provides a template with which to examine the relationship between emperor and subject, gods and mortals, East and West, centre and periphery. It thus contributes to the fields of imperial representation, court society and the imperial cult.

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*For Mum, Dad, Sue and Sandy*

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## Preface

Crudely this book is about the sex lives of Rome's emperors. But it is neither social history nor straight historical narrative<sup>1</sup>— there is a sense in which Rome's reputation is sleazy enough. It seeks no more to catalogue their debaucheries than to rationalise them or iron them out. Instead this book examines why it is worth thinking about the sex lives of the emperors — why people thought and wrote about them in antiquity. It taps the historical potential of sensationalist stories, the efficacy of 'gossip'. Traces of such 'gossip' take many forms, from 'anecdotes' in Suetonius to graffiti at Pompeii to subversive readings of imperial imagery. Thus the literary and visual material covered in this book has had to be highly selective. In choosing examples to discuss, I have selected those which are sufficiently substantive and multifaceted to have major implications for the ways in which we understand imperial power and its evidence, and to expose the differences in the ways in which liaisons between emperors and other males, emperors and eunuchs, and emperors and women are constructed. The subject of this book is not the sex or sexual attraction but the implications of their description. Although it does seek to contribute to the history of sexuality, its focus is empire. 'Sex' provides the vocabulary with which to interrogate the relationships which shape it: between emperor and subject, gods and mortals, centre and periphery, East and West.

This book began life as a doctoral dissertation written at Newnham College, Cambridge, with the bulk of the research being done there and at the British School at Rome between 1996 and 2000. Though I have kept more or less with the doctorate's shape and structure, all of the contents have been revised and rewritten. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. I have Patrick James to thank for so meticulously checking these for me and for saving me from several errors. Greek and Latin texts are those of OCT editions where possible, most notably for my purpose, the edition of Martial by Lindsay (first published in 1903), Statius' *Silvae* by Courtney (1990) and Lucian by MacLeod (1987). As my focus is very much the Roman world, I tend to prefer the latinised versions of names.

Many people have helped me see this project to publication. Foremost amongst these is the supervisor of my doctorate, Mary Beard, whose

brilliance and friendship have helped me in all aspects of my academic career. I also thank Keith Hopkins for his invaluable input into its original conception, and my examiners, Robin Osborne and Dick Whittaker, for their careful and enthusiastic reading. Lizzie Speller has encouraged and empathised throughout. I also thank Vicky Coltman, Robin Cormack, Catharine Edwards, Jas Elsner, Simon Goldhill, Christopher Kelly, Helen Morales, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill and friends in the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge, Newnham and Darwin Colleges, the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Bristol, and the British School at Rome. I am also indebted to Classics editor Michael Sharp and to the insightful and challenging comments of CUP's anonymous readers.

None of this would have been possible without funding from The British Academy, Newnham College, The Faculty of Classics, Cambridge, and The British School at Rome. While turning this from thesis to book, I was lucky enough to work at the University of Nottingham where I was surrounded by wonderful colleagues and students. I thank them for making the commute worth it. Last but by no means least – I thank Torsten Krude.

Caroline Vout

#### Note

1. For a more social approach to sex in ancient Rome, see Kiefer 1934, Robert 1963, Grimal 1967 or, more recently, Eyben *et al.* 2003, and for compendia of images, Marcadé 1965 and Johns 1982. Other approaches to ancient sex, more influential to this study than these ones, will be referred to in more detail later.