SOME RECENT BOOKS

B. W. Jones, and R. D. Milns: *The Use of Documentary Evidence in the Study of Roman Imperial History* (Sydney University Press, 1984.) pp.xvii + 201. pb. A$15.00

This book, one of the series 'Sources in Ancient History', is intended primarily for training in method: to show students the main types of documentary evidence, what information they give and how this can be used by the historian. The period covered is from Augustus to Hadrian. The documents are given in translation only, but with information about the original language and place of origin. The English style aims at retaining the spirit of the original, and is generally lucid. In this respect one notes the use of the comparatively literal translation of Tacitus by Church and Brodribb in the literary references. Unlike the collections of Lewis and Reinhold and others, this book deals specifically with non-literary sources. But many quotations from literature are given in the commentary, either to support or refute the evidence of the documents.

Although this book is not intended to be a selective 'source book', the documents were chosen because they were felt to be significant and because they involve a minimum of conjectural restoration. The latter requirement has limited the selection. It was necessary because, except for the two historical reconstructions, the authors chose not to complicate the text.

Illustrations are few and not exceptionally clear, but this lack can be readily filled from the major collections. Because of the criteria for selection, the illustrations shown are all impressive examples, well preserved and executed. To give a truer indication of much of the material with which epigraphists work, there could be added a photograph of the more personal and fragmentary monuments referred to in the historical reconstructions.

The work is divided into the three main classes of documentary evidence: coins, inscriptions and papyri. The largest section, that on inscriptions, is subdivided further. Personal documents are separated from official ones, and the latter are classified as having either legal and administrative or military significance. There follow two detailed examples of historical reconstruction, eight Appendices, a Glossary, Bibliography, Comparative Tables and several Indexes.

Part I introduces coins with a useful paragraph on their value to the historian and a caution about the 'message' they give. A helpful addition would be a brief description of the coin types selected, as such terms are not included in the Glossary. Even if students know about the commoner coins, would they be familiar with a *semis* or a *billon*? The authors stress many important points, such as the significance of the mint in the choice of titles and
of the legend ‘in accordance with the Senate’s decree’, e.g. in the unusual case of a gold coin of Nero and Agrippina.

Part II, in the section headed ‘Official Documents’, contains many excellent summaries. The charters of Salpensa and Malaca, of which a selection is given, prompt a discussion of citizen status in the provinces as well as administration in general. The law on Vespasian’s powers focuses on broad aspects rather than controversial technical points. The oath of allegiance taken to Augustus in 3 B.C. by the Paphlagonians is compared with that sworn in 32 B.C. by Italy and the western provinces; though disputed points, such as the possible wording of the western oath and, in particular, whether or not this oath gave Octavian any ‘legal right’ are mentioned only briefly. Military diplomas feature largely, and in Section B, ‘Tributes to Particular Persons’, are some long honorific inscriptions which raise many points about career structures at various levels.

The papyri in Part III are mostly more personal in nature. But among the official ones in Section A are the pay-sheet of two Roman soldiers serving in the Egyptian legions, Hadrian’s letter about the inheritance rights of the children of legionaries and Claudius’ letter to the Alexandrians. The commentary on the last is a neat summary of both Claudius’ attitude to the imperial cult and of the position of the Jews in Alexandria. Section B gives miscellaneous examples of private letters, many on humdrum matters — a refreshing glimpse into other sides of life.

The careful reader of Parts I to III of this book will find a mine of information about the period. Terminology is discussed on p.xvi of the Introduction and the problem of when and how to translate official terms. Many specific areas of difficulty for students are elucidated on their first appearance. I would mention three in particular: the significance of imperial titles such as ‘father of his country’ and the development of a formula for both the Emperor and his designated successor; the difference between imperator when used as a praenomen and as a salutation; and the procedure of dating by tribunician power rather than by consulships.

Both of the ‘Examples of Historical Reconstruction’ are based on passages from E.T. Salmon’s A History of the Roman World: 30 B.C. to A.D. 138. Passage A claims that Salmon’s statement: ‘In 73 Vespasian instructed Cn. Cornelius Clemens, legate of Upper Germany, to annex the region’ (the Black Forest triangle) depends solely on the evidence of archaeology and of numerous inscriptions. While no direct evidence links the building of the Vespasianic forts across the Black Forest with Cornelius Clemens (whose title is corrected to ‘legate of the army in Upper Germany’), the assumption is seen to be ‘inevitable’. I do not share the authors’ doubts about the locality of the Agri Decumates as described in Tacitus’ Germania, chapter 29. A natural reading of the text does seem to
In Passage B we are shown how epigraphy widens the knowledge gained from purely literary sources about the revolt against Domitian in 88. By painstaking detective-work, confusion over the names of commanders is sorted out. Earlier historians are castigated for denying the evidence of legionary tiles, ‘a clear indication of the danger of misreading epigraphic evidence - or rather, of attempting to make it fit with one’s preconceived notions’.

The Appendices and Indexes are very useful. The former cover broad areas, often overlapping, such as Imperial Propaganda, The Army, The Frontiers. The Indexes, as well as covering Names, Places and Major Topics, include a chronological one of each Emperor’s reign.

To sum up: this is a book of value to students for many purposes: for models of how to comment on documents; for summaries of documentary evidence on many aspects of the period; and in general for a vast amount of detailed information on political and military, administrative and cultural matters. The authors’ claim seems justified, that this book covers new ground in the study and evaluation of documentary evidence.

J. M. Smale


Few works have produced the same range of opinions as the plays of the younger Seneca. We may contrast the remark of W. C. Summers (*The Silver Age of Latin Literature*) ‘As literature the plays are contemptible’ with the much more enthusiastic comments of C. J. Herington (in *Arion* 1966) ‘Senecan tragedy, on unprejudiced expectation, proves to possess many of the qualities that we still associate with the greatest drama: speakability; actability; powerful theatrical situations; conflict both between minds and within minds’. Amidst these widely conflicting critical assessments it is Boyle’s view that for a proper understanding of Senecan drama, ‘the centrifugal craving for generalisation on the matter of Senecan tragedy and Senecan style without the support of detailed analytical confrontation with a play or plays needs to be resisted as the anti-critical view that it is. The play, its determinant particularity, is what counts.’ Taking this basic approach, Boyle has collected twelve essays, ten on individual plays, one on a pair of plays, and one on a single theme, from a range of well known and not so well known scholars working in the field. It is by