

## REVIEW

## SENATORIAL IDENTITY IN TACITUS AND PLINY

Johannes M. Geisthardt, *Zwischen Princeps und Res Publica. Tacitus, Plinius und die senatorische Selbstdarstellung in der Hohen Kaiserzeit*. Studies in Ancient Monarchies 2. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015. Pp. 430. Hardcover, €69.00. ISBN 978-3-515-10843-0.

In many ways this is a model *Dissertation*. Produced and published in the context of an *Exzellenzkluster* at the University of Konstanz, Johannes Geisthardt's volume assembles some well-known texts—Tacitus' *Agricola*, *Histories*, and *Annals* and Pliny's *Panegyricus* and *Epistles*—for fresh analysis. His theme is senatorial identity and self-representation in the principate of Trajan; he argues, in a nutshell, that the works of Pliny and Tacitus subscribe to a single political discourse (the 'Optimus-Princeps-Diskurs') which affirms Trajan as an ideal emperor while (and through) vindicating a space for free senatorial participation in his Rome.

The book has many qualities: precise handling of texts, acute judgement, wide reading, polite but firm polemic, an engaging style, and a strong structure. Some heterodox conclusions about Tacitus aside, Geisthardt tends to prefer calm sobriety over radical revisionism. Nothing wrong with that, in my view; but the question presents itself, whether he needed 430 large pages to make his case. Bulk seems to be an unquestioned virtue in a *Doktorarbeit* these days, achieved through scrupulous documentation, careful theorising of all one's terms, and thorough (sometimes laborious) analysis of even the most familiar texts—inviting the reader to join in every step of the writer's legwork. Perhaps only idle Anglo-Saxons balk at the result; but some measure of cutting to the chase need not, in my view, mean cutting corners. In short, this fine book might be even finer at about two-thirds the length.

We take a slightly odd point of departure in the clunkily entitled '*Viri militares* oder die Konstituierung der senatorischen Funktionselite als institutionalisiertes Avancement' (9–20). These pages rework an article, published in 2013, which denies the existence of *virī militares* as a type and calls for the term to be dropped.<sup>1</sup> As a showpiece of argumentation—Geisthardt doesn't hesitate to correct the likes of Anthony Birley and Werner Eck—this makes a

<sup>1</sup> It is supported by the first of three substantial appendices, 'Kaiserliche konsulare Statthalter und ihre prätorische Laufbahn 70–235 n. Chr.' (362–9), which gathers data culled from Birley and Campbell.

strong start, and one can see why he wanted to give the piece fresh exposure. Quite what it is doing at the start of a book on Pliny and Tacitus—and one which pays only slight attention to their careers<sup>2</sup>—is less clear, at least until we reach the introduction proper (‘*Senatorische Selbstdarstellung*’, 21–31), which offers a tolerably convincing excuse: by revealing a failure of quantitative prosopographical method, Geisthardt has shown the necessity of the qualitative analysis to come (21). He then efficiently sets out his positive case: literary evidence (in his view) has been inadequately scrutinised for what it can tell us about senatorial self-representation; Pliny and Tacitus make good case-studies given not just their synchronicity but the inseparability of their public and literary lives; their works should be read as lively interventions in the political discourse of their time (thus with a contemporary audience primarily in view); the interpretation to come will reveal that the senatorial elite under Trajan is anything but depoliticised.

Chapter 1 turns to Tacitus (‘*Strategien retrospektiver Desintegration—der Agricola des Tacitus*’, 32–82), though Pliny *Epistles* 9.13, the belated narrative of his ambush on Publicius Certus in AD 97, sets the scene, a post-Domitianic senate beset by uncertainty and turmoil. The *Agricola* itself is convincingly framed as a combination of personal homage and public engagement; Geisthardt’s primary interest is the latter, specifically Tacitus’ construction of the recent senatorial past (above all the treason trials of 93/94) and its implications for the present. His analysis—partly familiar, partly new, all subtle—reveals several concurrent strands to this intervention: a few *delatores* are isolated as scapegoats (the ‘Desintegration’ of the chapter title); the victims are severely criticised for provoking Domitian and so endangering not just themselves, but their senatorial peers;<sup>3</sup> the senate itself is convicted of ‘kollektive Mitschuld’ on the one hand (they decreed the executions of their colleagues), ‘kollektive Opferschaft’ on the other (they had no choice). With this diagnosis Tacitus urges a collective amnesty aimed at unity and revival in the new, as yet imperfectly established Trajanic age. Geisthardt’s account is broadly convincing if only partial, constructed as it is wholly on the proem and peroration: what of the rest of the *Agricola*, above all Calgacus’ celebrated speech?<sup>4</sup> It will be interesting, too, to see his response to Tony Woodman’s

<sup>2</sup> Geisthardt’s proposal that ‘specialist’ careers are a chimaera is pertinent, for instance, to the common characterisation of Pliny as a ‘financial expert’ (e.g. by R. Winsbury, *Pliny the Younger: A Life in Letters* (London, 2014) *passim*).

<sup>3</sup> Here Geisthardt goes a step further than D. Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2008), ch. 1, with whose analysis he (professedly) shares a good deal. It is perhaps a step too far: Tacitus’ criticism of *ambitiosa mors* (*Agr.* 42.4) must be delicately balanced against his pathetic portrayal of Senecio’s *innocens sanguis* (45.1) and Senecio’s and Rusticus’ weight as biographers in the economy of his own preface (2.1).

<sup>4</sup> Against such partial readings cf. M. Lavan, ‘Slavishness in Britain and Rome in Tacitus’ *Agricola*, *CQ* 61 (2011): 294–305.

new reading of *legimus* (*Agr.* 2.1) as a subtle but clear reminder from Tacitus that, for all the talk of collective guilt, *he* was safely out of Rome at the time of the treason trials.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 2 introduces Pliny ('Der *Panegyrikus* des Plinius—das Hineinschreiben in den Optimus-Princeps-Diskurs', 83–145).<sup>6</sup> We begin with a scenic if somewhat ornamental excursion to Beneventum and a rather later piece of Trajanic image-crafting, the Arch of Trajan (83–8). Most striking here is Geisthardt's benevolent reading of the 'public transcript':<sup>7</sup> in awarding Trajan the agnomen Optimus, the senate was not kowtowing (or doing what it was told) but claiming prestige for itself by asserting its competence to evaluate the emperor (84). Syme would not be amused. Similar benevolence accompanies his reading of the *Panegyricus*,<sup>8</sup> but here Geisthardt adds a distinct and novel twist. As he well observes, when Pliny delivered his *gratiarum actio* to Trajan in September 100,<sup>9</sup> he was speaking to a half-empty house at best (September falls in a senatorial recess)—a relatively insignificant moment, then, by comparison with the reach of the text published later.<sup>10</sup> Surveying interpretations of the *Panegyricus* as *Fürstenspiegel*, rank opportunism, or the crafting of a new political programme, Geisthardt faults all three ap-

<sup>5</sup> A. J. Woodman, ed., with C. S. Kraus, *Tacitus. Agricola* (Cambridge, 2014) 76–7.

<sup>6</sup> A popular dissertation topic in recent years: see notably F. Beutel, *Vergangenheit als Politik: Neue Aspekte im Werk des jüngeren Plinius* (Frankfurt, 2000); G. Seelentag, *Taten und Tugenden Traians: Herrschaftsdarstellung im Prinzipat* (Stuttgart, 2004); C. Ronning, *Herrscherpanegyrik unter Trajan und Konstantin: Studien zur symbolischen Kommunikation in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Tübingen, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> In the terms of J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> The central analysis (101–19) of quite how marvellous Pliny makes Trajan is complemented by Appendix 2 (370–82), which lists all references in *Pan.* to Domitian, and all those to earlier emperors. Domitian naturally dominates, if a little less than one might expect.

<sup>9</sup> He wisely (if silently) avoids committing to the first of the month, the date usually stated but nowhere attested.

<sup>10</sup> Geisthardt is sceptical (90–2) of the two extreme datings of *Pan.* recently proposed, to late 100 (i.e. just weeks after the speech: Seelentag (cit., n. 6), 218) or to c. 107 (E. Woytek, 'Der *Panegyricus* des Plinius. Sein Verhältnis zum *Dialogus* und den *Historiae* des Tacitus und seine absolute Datierung', *WS* 119 (2006): 115–56), without however engaging with either scholar's arguments. His own suggestion of 101 to 103 seems prudent (based on possible dates of *Ep.* 3.13 and 3.18), though nothing rules out 100 for speech or letters, and there is no reason to push, with Geisthardt, towards the later limit of 103. A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford, 1966) made that year a *terminus ante* for Book 3 through a false assumption about the addressee of *Ep.* 3.2 (cf. A. Birley, *Onomasticon to the Younger Pliny* (Munich and Leipzig, 2000), 100) and a raw guess as to when Martial died (not necessarily later than 101).

proaches (and overlooks a fourth)<sup>11</sup> before declaring his own point of emphasis: Pliny's crucial innovation was to publish the speech, so transferring panegyric from the political stage (where praise is obligatory) to the world of *otium* (where senators are supposedly free to do as they like). This 'Kunstgriff' (135 *et alibi*) resolves the dilemma that all post-Domitianic praise risks collapsing in on itself, and allows fellow senators to join in Trajanic praise while retaining their political integrity; here lies the key to the (supposed) success of *Panegyricus*.<sup>12</sup>

This is perhaps the most innovative move in the book, and an interesting one. Two objections, or at least requests for clarification, come to mind. First, can the world of *otium* be so rigorously delimited from that of *negotium*? Even if it could: when one praises the emperor on the written page, thus for a lettered and leisured audience, is one freed at a stroke of all the pressures that attend such utterances on the public stage? The *Panegyricus*—like any published oration—presents itself as a mimetic transcript, making it hard to see how its literary form eradicates its function as 'public' panegyric altogether. Few would grant the same for *Pro Marcello* or *De Clementia*, to mention two loud absences from Geisthardt's discussion. Second, will we really grant that praise freely given and heard (or read) outside the senate house, and thus voluntarily, is free of the quality that attends all panegyric, namely its ultimate dependence on an assertion of sincerity which can only ever be self-justifying? Here as elsewhere Geisthardt is perhaps too charitable a reader—though his broadest conclusion, 'Es war seine [i.e. Plinius'] Intention, ein Produkt seines literarischen *otium* sozio-politisch zu funktionalisieren' (145), is one with which one can only agree.

The middle chapter of the book is the longest ('Zwischen Opposition, Affirmation und Imitation—die Unabhängigkeit des briefeschreibenden Konsulars', 146–219). It is framed by the famous Comum inscription (*CIL* v 5262), but the focus is on the *Epistles* and above all that (still) hot topic, Plinian self-representation. Geisthardt's angle is that the 'Optimus-Princeps-Diskurs' is written into the *Epistles* as into the *Panegyricus*. Its function is not simple praise, but (of course) a complex strategy of self-presentation, and the final product is a perfect, (because) independent, Trajanic consular. That word 'Konsular' in the chapter title points up the greatest insensitivity in a largely sensitive analysis, Geisthardt's flattening of a text whose internal chronology covers a

<sup>11</sup> In rejecting the first three Geisthardt gives too short shrift, I think, to *Ep.* 3.18.2–3, where Pliny pursues both his flattery of Trajan and the claim to didactic intent. The fourth aspect, to which *Ep.* 3.13 is devoted (cf. also *Ep.* 3.18.8–10), is the aesthetic one: *Pan.* is not least a parade of ingenuity in epigrammatic expression, stylistic variation, and clever handling of familiar material.

<sup>12</sup> The influence of *Pan.* in the fourth century is hardly grounds to infer (137) critical success in the second.

dozen years or so into a single, static moment.<sup>13</sup> Pliny does not reach the consulship until Book 3: he can hardly be called a ‘successful consular’ in the opening letter (184), still less a member of the *consilium principis* in *Ep.* 1.9 (165). Similarly Regulus’ death in Book 6, after which Pliny proclaims his sole command of the centumviral court, does not support the blanket assertion, ‘seine [i.e. Regulus’] Zeit als Ankläger ist unter den neuen Principes abgelaufen’ (194). Here the lessons of Roy Gibson and Ruth Morello, who lay much emphasis on the internal chronology of Pliny’s collection, could be better taken;<sup>14</sup> Geisthardt cites their book from time to time, but seems to be ‘raiding’ more than digesting. His insistence that *Epistles* is no autobiography but a literary self-portrait (170–2) perhaps contributes to, and certainly reflects in its metaphor, this static view of a dynamic work—a view which perhaps does not quite do justice to Pliny’s inventiveness with his medium.

Nevertheless, the analysis is always sound and often incisive; the only really off-key moments concern *Ep.* 1.9, where Geisthardt wants Atilius’ epigram *satius est otiosum esse quam nihil agere* to be an ironic parody of Cicero (167), and some strange remarks on *obsequium* (183).<sup>15</sup> Some of the readings (above all of *Ep.* 1.1) are longer than their novelty deserves, as is the treatment of Pliny’s ‘innerer Widerstand’ against Domitian (189–97); and one might prefer other terms than ‘eigentlich’ and ‘uneigentlich’ (a strong whiff of the old *Brief/Epistel* dichotomy there)<sup>16</sup> to distinguish the primary and secondary epistolary planes; but there are smart observations scattered along the way. Above all, Geisthardt draws a convincing picture of Pliny as an emperor of his own text, matching Trajan in miniature while safeguarding his own autonomous sociopolitical existence.

In this cause he leans heavily on the fact that the *Epistles* never name Trajan (and rather underplays the several occasions on which a *Caesar* or *princeps* does cross the stage). This absence is taken as a form of ‘Ernsthaftigkeitsbehauptung’: Pliny grounds his epistolary affirmation of the regime by emphasising his independence in the free, self-governing world of *otium*. (A more cynical reader might (also) see him keeping the big beasts in the wings and the spotlight clear from himself.) With Geisthardt’s view of the *Epistles* as a collection deeply rooted in *otium* I can only agree;<sup>17</sup> but again the question

<sup>13</sup> This internal chronology pertains whatever the date(s) of publication.

<sup>14</sup> R. K. Gibson and R. Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012), especially 68–73 on Regulus and the centumviral court.

<sup>15</sup> Seen here only in vertical (hierarchical) terms; but it was a standard horizontal virtue (complaisance to friends) too; cf. C. Whitton, ed., *Pliny the Younger: Epistles Book II* (Cambridge, 2013) 268.

<sup>16</sup> On which see e.g. P. A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge, 2001) 5–12.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Whitton (cit., n. 15) 10–11.

must arise, how much pressure the *otium/negotium* dichotomy can bear. To be sure, the terms are useful enough in assessing Pliny's presentation of a (more or less) perfectly balanced life between 'public' duties and private pleasure/leisure, but on closer inspection it rapidly starts to dissolve. Leaving Book 10 out of it,<sup>18</sup> what about scenes of Pliny at dinner with Nerva (*Ep.* 4.22) or Trajan (*Ep.* 6.31)? What of his patronal interventions, including intercession with the emperor himself (e.g. *Ep.* 2.9.2)? Are these *negotia* or (as Geisthardt seems to propose, if I have understood the implications of his argument) a part of *otium*? What of Pliny's court work, a public business out of which—through revising his speeches—he produces the literature of leisure? Given such questions, we might well hesitate before writing the *Epistles* (and their 'discourse' of imperial praise) off the public stage altogether.

The fourth and fifth chapters address Tacitus' *opera maiora*, arguing that these too subscribe to a Trajanic 'Optimus-Princeps-Diskurs'. First come the *Histories* ('Selbstbewusste Kaisermacher?—Die Funktionselite in den *Historien* des Tacitus', 220–87) and a nice complement to other recent scholarship, as Geisthardt focuses not on emperors, armies, or the senate, but on senators as individual players. The 'Funktionselite' is defined as senators of praetorian rank or above whose office puts them in a position to support an emperor or pretender;<sup>19</sup> Geisthardt's thesis is that it is these men, not the armies they command, who determine and stage the creation of emperors in AD 69. Here the exposition is at its most drily methodical, as we work from 'A) Fabius Valens' to 'J) Suetonius Paulinus'—twice—observing how these men play out their mostly sordid parts in the messy politics of civil war. Geisthardt draws out a typically precise 'Kernnarrativ' ('Die senatorische Funktionselite bestimmt den Kaiser, der aus ihren Reihen kommt, während der Kaiser wiederum seine Elite konstituiert', 285); but did we need so many pages of analysis to reach it?

That is not to disparage the qualities of that analysis, consistently subtle and elegant; and the chapter ends with three interesting pages tuned to the Trajanic present. For Geisthardt, the sorry tales of the *Histories* are to be read as an inverse reflection of Tacitus' own day: the dysfunctional emperors and 'Funktionselite' of 69 are contrasted with the happy time of writing, when an *optimus princeps*, chosen not by politicking generals but by *conuersus uniuersorum* (287, again taken strangely straight), is matched by an optimal elite playing its part, too, in Rome's new-found stability. Thus we discover (by extrapolation)

<sup>18</sup> Reasonably set aside by Geisthardt as a posthumous publication (though this is no longer agreed by all: cf. e.g. G. Woolf, 'Pliny's Province', in T. Bekker-Nielsen, ed., *Rome and the Black Sea Region: Domination, Romanisation, Resistance* (Aarhus, 2006) 93–108; id., 'Pliny/Trajan and the Poetics of Empire', *CP* forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> Sixty-one in our extant *Histories* (226). Data are set in a short appendix, not easy to decipher (384–7).

a Trajanic ‘Funktionselite’ analogous to the single senator Pliny in Chapter 3. All this is a welcome tonic to the still dominant Symian view, in which past (p)restages the present;<sup>20</sup> and in essentially taking *Hist.* 1.1.4 (the claim of a happy present) straight, Geisthardt is hardly alone.<sup>21</sup> Given the paucity of hard evidence, the debate will doubtless remain open; but some nettles lining the path could usefully have been grasped, as when Tacitus underlines the continuity between 69 and his present (e.g. *Hist.* 1.18.3 ... *cui iam pares non sumus*) or allows Montanus to conclude, *optimus est post malum principem dies primus* (*Hist.* 4.42.6). What, too, of the *Dialogus*? The absence of this text, as of the *Germania*, is perfectly reasonable on pragmatic grounds, but the gloomy view that it seems (to many) to take of the principate, past and present, deserved at least a mention.<sup>22</sup>

The final chapter turns to Tacitus’ last work, and the emperor himself (‘Der Tyrann als Gegenbild—der Optimus-Princeps-Diskurs in den *Annalen*?’ 288–348). A selective reading of the *maiestas* theme in the Tiberian books leads to an argument that here, too, the Trajanic discourse of an *optimus princeps* is inscribed into Tacitus’ narrative. Geisthardt is well aware of the chronological quandary involved in making the *Annals* a Trajanic text, but duly exploits the uncertainty over the time of writing, and confines himself to the Tiberian books, to justify his (welcome) inclusion of it in his study. Many have observed that Tiberius looks too similar for coincidence to the Domitian of the *Panegyricus*; for Geisthardt this reflects not just their status as stock tyrants,<sup>23</sup> but a Tacitean intent to style Tiberius as the inverse of the *optimus* Trajan—which thus reveals the *Annals* as a form of pro-Trajanic discourse. This reasoning seems flawed to me: in agreeing that Domitian was a tyrant, Tacitus does not necessarily sign up to Pliny’s panegyric claim that Trajan embodied the successful antitype; and (again) one does not have to look far for signs that Tacitus does not see his own present with undiluted joy.<sup>24</sup>

Geisthardt is too shrewd to talk of propaganda, limiting his claim to ‘die einfache Affirmation eines Systems’ (323), an affirmation which could indeed

<sup>20</sup> E.g. R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958) 150: ‘The whole setting of Galba’s reign took on a sharp and contemporary significance. When an audience listened to the recitation of Book I of the *Historiae*, scene, persons, and events leapt into life, startling and terrifying.’

<sup>21</sup> Due credit is given (*passim*) to E. S. Ramage, ‘Juvenal and the Establishment: Denigration of Predecessor in the *Satires*’, *ANRW* 2.33.1 (1989) 640–707 (embracing more or less all Trajanic literature), as the fullest and most determined statement of this approach.

<sup>22</sup> For a recent revisionist intervention, see C. van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus’ Dialogus de Oratoribus* (Cambridge, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. especially B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the Writing of History*<sup>2</sup> (Manchester, 1960) 204–34.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. *Ann.* 4.30.3 *delatores, genus hominum publico exitio repertum et <ne> poenis quidem unquam satis coercitum*.

credibly include those drops of gall. Still, he perhaps senses the vulnerability of a strongly ‘optimistic’ reading: the second part of the chapter (‘Der Erzähler der *Annalen* und sein Publikum’, 324–48) modifies the picture, holding up a Tacitus whose implicit praise of Trajan is tempered by a strong pose of independence.<sup>25</sup> In the *Annals* that praise can be ‘sehr subtil’ (334) because Tacitus’ contemporary audience is by now expert enough, from the *Panegyricus* and *Histories*, to recognise Tiberius and his like as Trajan’s ‘diskursive Antagonisten’ (346). Bold theories must simplify, but this story may not persuade all readers; likewise the declaration *ex silentio* that Tacitus enjoyed a positive reception from his readers, including Trajan and Hadrian (340).<sup>26</sup> Certainly it offers an alternative to the longstanding view of a Tacitus who became progressively more disenchanted with the Trajanic principate.<sup>27</sup> But Geisthardt should surely have mentioned that view, or at least considered the possibility of *change* in ‘the’ Trajanic discourse and/or in Tacitus’ response to it. No doubt the prospect of shifting goalposts is unappealing when the evidential base is so precarious to start with, but here—as with Pliny’s *Epistles* above—the argument would surely gain from taking a less static view of both Trajan’s principate and a literary output spanning two decades or more.

The conclusion (‘Senatorische Selbstdarstellung und hierarchische Distinktion—eine Synthese’, 349–61) elegantly weaves together the strands of the thesis, and adds some important considerations. The anecdote of *Ep.* 9.23 (*Tacitus es an Plinius?*) provides both ring-composition for these pages and the best evidence that Pliny and Tacitus enjoyed literary success in their lifetimes—if one agrees that *studia* in that letter means ‘literature’ (so 349).<sup>28</sup> For Geisthardt, at all events, their success is absolute: both authors achieve, in their different ways, ‘totale Unabhängigkeit und Integrität’ (356). This independence, together with any ‘apparent’ elements of republicanism—a topic interestingly, if briefly, broached here (357)—is used not to subvert or question the regime, but ‘systemstützend und affirmativ’ (359). In short, we bask here in the sunniest of Trajanic worlds. In challenging the conventional view

<sup>25</sup> Here as often Geisthardt is broadly sympathetic to Sailor (cit., n. 3), but with modifications: *his* Tacitus may pose as independent, but does not claim to be endangered.

<sup>26</sup> For a different view, cf. M. A. Giua, ‘Tacito e i suoi destinatari: storia per i contemporanei, storia per i posteri’, in A. Casanova and P. Desideri, edd., *Evento, racconto, scrittura nell’antichità classica* (Florence, 2003) 247–68.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. E. Fraenkel, *Kleine Beiträge* II (Rome, 1964) 328: ‘weil er seiner Verdüsterung und seiner Menschenverachtung immer ungehemmter nachgibt ...’. Syme (cit., n. 20) 219–20 debunks it—on the grounds that Tacitus was underwhelmed with Trajan to start with.

<sup>28</sup> Contrast Sherwin-White (cit., n. 10) 506: ‘As commonly in Pliny *studia* means forensic oratory’.

of Pliny and Tacitus as poles apart Geisthardt is not alone;<sup>29</sup> even so, he is surprisingly understated in acknowledging the extent of his heterodoxy, above all in reading Tacitus as (crudely speaking) pro-Trajanic. More explicit recognition of this might have helped him orientate his reading against other views, and provoked a robust defence of interpretations which will be met with scepticism in many quarters. My own sense, four hundred pages and more on, is that he has made a good case for recognising one possible side of the ‘senatorial self-representation’ of the two consulars whose literary productions make them most visible for us today.

Let me end by emphasising Geisthardt’s competence as a guide to his selected texts. Historical lapses are slight and few,<sup>30</sup> as are linguistic embarrassments.<sup>31</sup> Typos are rarely irritating, though Anthony ‘Birely’ and Ellen ‘O’Groman’ might have hoped for more care with their names.<sup>32</sup> Bibliographical range and polyglotism both are impressive,<sup>33</sup> and the meticulous theorising of such concepts as author, narrative, and intertextuality is commendable if a little more than some readers will need. But that belongs firmly in the genre of *Dissertation*, along with the many excellent qualities that this book also evinces. With it Johannes Geisthardt gives valuable food for thought both for ‘literary’ readers of Pliny and Tacitus and for historians of the Trajanic principate—or at least of its public transcript.

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<sup>29</sup> E.g. M. T. Griffin, ‘Pliny and Tacitus’, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 18 (1999): 139–58; C. L. Whitton, “‘Let us tread our path together’: Tacitus and the Younger Pliny”, in V. E. Pagán, ed., *A Companion to Tacitus* (Malden, Mass.) 345–68.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. ‘Carus Mettius’ (65 etc.) and ‘Massa Baebius’ (68 etc.). Tacitus’ nomination as consul by Domitian is given as fact (79) rather than (plausible) supposition. Pliny’s hounding of Certus (*Ep.* 9.13) is not a prosecution (170), nor have we reason to think that it resulted in Certus’ early departure from office (36). Read ‘Claudius’ for ‘Nero’ in 197 n. 257. Quintilian wrote an *Institutio*, singular (214).

<sup>31</sup> E.g. 102 n. 87 (syntactical confusion on *Pan.* 22.2); 108–9 (*Jupiter* twice); 131 n. 220 (*perpeti* as ‘einen eindeutigen Infinitiv passiv’). Geisthardt’s use of *Reklam* (i.e. non-critical) editions explains a few oddities such as *Romano Hispone* in the quoted text of *Ann.* 1.74 (295 n. 23).

<sup>32</sup> Respectively eight and three times (392, 400). Other victims include ‘Lefèvre’ (26 n. 79) and (in the bibliography) ‘Conolly’, ‘Henning’, ‘Nesselhauf’, and ‘Ruhterford’. A more deliberate oddity is the (distracting) italicisation of ancient toponyms.

<sup>33</sup> Some surprising gaps are J. G. Henderson, *Pliny’s Statue: The Letters, Self-Portraiture and Classical Art* (Exeter, 2002) and the huge bibliography surrounding the great historiography debate of recent decades (bypassed at 220–3).