

Glen Bowersock ('The Syriac Life of Rabbula and Syrian Hellenism') follows Cox Miller in the view that late-antique biographers aim to provide a model or icon for the inspiration of future generations, but unlike the *Lives* in her collections, the narrative of Rabbula is traditional and complete: birth, life and career, death. B. demonstrates the important evidence for contemporary Syrian Christianity embedded in this text, which encompasses both the high-class pagan circles of Iamblichus' native Chalcis—also Rabbula's home town—and the specialized world of the Christians: Rabbula encounters in the desert monks whose communities are described as *xenoi*, and later himself assumes the role of spiritual bridegroom of Christ.

Brief survey can but touch on the many interlocking themes of this volume, of which the shift from interest in individual life to lifestyle, the centrality of *paideia*, the desire to provide models for behaviour, parallel developments in Neoplatonic and Christian biography (in defining the holy man, for example), the need to understand texts in context before using them as evidence, are merely among the more prominent. Hägg and Rousseau are unduly conscious in their introduction of the piecemeal way in which collections of essays are generally used. The level at which individual contributions are pitched is inevitably uneven, but this is most certainly a volume which I would warmly recommend to anyone wishing to take initial steps in comprehending common elements in a dauntingly large, difficult and disparate corpus of material.

King's College, London

MARY WHITBY

* * *

Rhiannon Ash, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories*. London: Duckworth Press, 1999. 246 p. ISBN: 0715628003.

Rhiannon Ash has performed a great service for the field of classical historiography in her recent book, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories*. Because the narrative of the *Histories* is often thorny, scholars have most often bracketed questions of style in favour of historical content, following Syme's assessment that the *Annals* is the more 'mature' work and therefore historiographically richer. Ash's analysis sweeps the cobwebs from this particular attic, as she gives careful attention to the narratological details with which Tacitus constructs portraits of the armies and leaders in the civil war of A.D. 69. Her effort lends greater coherence to the narrative as a whole, and in its thematic focus advances our understanding of the text be-

yond the frontiers staked out by Wellesley, who seeks to provide a ‘plain narrative’ of the ‘dark corners into which only a dim light penetrates from feeble candles’ (*The Long Year A.D.* 69: xi). Wellesley’s light, consisting of the background information he feels necessary to make sense of the text, is indisputably useful, but Ash illuminates it from within. And although she does not argue for it herself, one of the things I find most attractive about this book is its latent suggestion that if the *Histories* dissembles sketchiness as part of an overall scheme, it is possible that the apparent randomness of the extant texts—i.e. the difficulty of ascertaining the relationship between the minor works and the historiographical ones—also represents a larger conception of the significance of historiography for imperial ideology.

That having been said, a certain problematic also suggests itself. *Ordering Anarchy* is at heart a narratological study, and as such assumes a certain theory of representation for which it does not argue. Ash’s general technique is to compare Tacitus’s treatment of an event with others’, or to highlight Tacitus’s allusions to the tropes and themes of his predecessors. For example, her conclusion about the *Histories*’ portrait of the Flavians—that it weakens Vespasian by showing that his power rests on Titus’s loyalty, and by depicting Domitian already as a tyrant—rests on comparisons between Titus and Germanicus, coupled with Suetonius’s remarks about the former’s popularity with the soldiers at the fall of Jerusalem, and between Domitian and Sallust’s Sulla. This methodology sketches out the arena, but it does not bring out the combatants. Ash indicates the void in her frequent description of people and events as ‘unsettling’ or ‘disturbing’ without going on to reason why. In fact the whole book is a preliminary to answering this question, which is exactly the right one to ask Tacitus, and exactly the most difficult to answer. The fact that the narrative unsettles us is a sign that something is wrong, like the ominous music in *Jaws* that frightens us when the screen only shows us a girl enjoying a moonlit swim. We have to delve deep to find the problem, and when we do, it isn’t just a big scary shark; it involves corruption and dissonance as the heart of a small seaside town. In other words, to return to Tacitus, perhaps it isn’t the events he narrates that are of interest, but the relationships between them; not the allusions he makes to other authors, but the kinds of connections he makes with them.

Another example: Ash argues that Vespasian looks weak because he has fraternised excessively with his soldiers, picked up their mentality, and believes in omens; similarly, Germanicus was popular with the soldiers and ended up the victim of curse tablets and other magic trinkets under the floorboards. But is Tacitus’s point about superstition only about the character of the commanders in question? The obvious similarity between the two is that both are contenders for power (even if Germanicus does not actively seek it out). The obvious difference is that Germanicus dies and Vespasian

does not. In fact Vespasian is granted success unprecedented since Augustus. Perhaps the concept of *superstitio* also concerns the changing relationship between belief and power as the principate changes hands. If so, Tacitus does not narrate it directly, because to do so would be to make open a historical change that happens unconsciously. He tells us more in the manner of a joke that has an enigmatic punchline; or a Freudian slip. To take Tacitus at face value is to look into an empty arena, or a mirror. You see nothing, or you see what you want to see.

The book is organized quite simply, according chapters to the pairs of combatant armies (Galbians and Othonians; Vitellians and Flavians) and to military leaders (Galba and Otho; Vitellius; Vespasian, Domitian and Titus; Antonius Primus). Ash also provides an introductory chapter in which she reviews the civil war narratives of Caesar, Appian, and Cassius Dio as comparanda for Tacitus's. Setting the *Histories* against its literary backdrop is of course an important part of the study, but in isolating this chapter Ash gives neither the comparanda nor Tacitus's use of them much context: she locates common themes in all three of the predecessors, such as a lack of individuation in the portrayal of the armies, and she notes that the latter two historians stereotype soldiers as fickle where Caesar does not, but comments neither upon the significance of these in the tradition of civil war narrative itself, nor on that of the difference between the tradition and the *Histories*. So, for example, Ash notes that Tacitus's Othonian soldiers are not fickle and that this is surprising, given the fact that they did not have a Julius Caesar to write a flattering account of them, but then does not explore whether Tacitus has chosen a Caesarian trope, and if so, why and to what effect. It would perhaps have been a better choice to integrate the observations of the first chapter into the narrative, as Ash has done on several occasions with other examples and intertexts.

The chapters are laid out very regularly, with introduction, body, and conclusion, which is always a boon in scholarly writing and I thank Ash for it. In each, she focuses sharply on the characterization of armies and leaders and its significance for the development of the war. Each chapter is fairly self-contained, providing a useful study of its own material, but rarely making connections with other chapters to give some sense of Tacitus's larger narrative project. This would be difficult to do, given the brave task Ash has set herself: combining military history with narrative analysis. Nevertheless, this book represents an intelligent and straightforward study of the proverbial 'riddle wrapped in an enigma'.