

REVIEW

A COLLECTION ON TACITUS' *OPERA MINORA*

Olivier Devillers, ed., *Les opera minora et le développement de l'historiographie taciteenne*. Scripta antiqua 68. Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions, 2014. Pp. 223. Paperback, €25.00. ISBN 978-2-35613-119-5.

This volume has its origins in the 7th Celtic Conference in Classics (Bordeaux, 2012). The workshop there on 'Les opuscules de Tacite' was dedicated, as the title would suggest, to examining the connections between Tacitus' minor works (*Agricola*, *Dialogus*, *Germania*). In addition it sought to examine the minor works in light of the subsequent major works (*Historiae* and *Annales*). The volume contains thirteen contributions in English, French, and Italian, a (rather ample) bibliography, and an index of passages cited.¹

1. Introduction

Olivier Devillers' introduction to the volume outlines a number of approaches to the *opera minora* and their place within a global understanding of Tacitus' oeuvre. As we would expect from a seasoned scholar of Tacitus, Devillers ranges widely and gracefully among the primary texts and possesses a remarkable command of the secondary literature. The essay could stand on its own as a bibliographical survey for the *opera minora* in the last two decades, and will be welcomed by anyone desiring a primer of recent scholarship. Devillers is sensitive to Tacitus' artistic presentation of the past and underscores the importance of a major Tacitean theme: *libertas*. In calling the minor works a 'laboratory' for the major works, Devillers notes how Tacitean technique is already well in evidence in his early writings.

The remaining contributions fall into three sections: general approaches, examinations of single works from the *opera minora*, and the connections between the minor and major works.

¹ For a Table of Contents, see: <http://ausoniuseditions.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr/index.php/index-des-auteurs?auteur=Devillers+Olivier>

2. General Approaches

The first contribution, by Holly Haynes, examines the ‘thematic interplay of inclusion and exclusion that is characteristic of Tacitus’ *oeuvre*’ (31). She emphasizes the extent to which certain rhetorical techniques, especially Tacitus’ famed irony, should be seen as part and parcel of ‘a whole philosophical system’ (32). Irony is a means by which to cope with the simultaneous sense of inclusion and exclusion which are so essential to ‘the structure of experience under the Principate’ (33).

Maria Antonietta Giua looks to another scholar’s views of Tacitus, viz. Arnaldo Momigliano’s. Her essay traces Momigliano’s flight from fascist Italy in connection with his writings and reflection on Tacitus, which culminated in the 1961–2 Sather Lecture on ‘Tacitus and the Tacitist Tradition’, posthumously published in 1990 in *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*.

With great subtlety Elizabeth Keitel considers Tacitus’ use of *evidentia* as it intersects with three main subjects: senatorial conduct, the destructive force of bad emperors, and the management of historical memory. Keitel focuses on the *Agricola* and *Annales* and serves as an excellent case study for how one rhetorical technique can appear over and again in different works and to different effects.

3. Examinations of Single Works from the *Opera Minora*

A central Tacitean emotion, fear, is at the center point of the next contribution, by Victoria Pagán. She looks at the theme of fear in the *Agricola*, first assessing the traditional vocabulary of fear and then moving on to consider this vocabulary in the depiction of Agricola and in the theme of *metus hostilis*. Pagán concludes that fear has a positive function in the depiction of Agricola because it acts as a moderating force in his decision-making as a provincial general. Portrayal of this emotion in the *Agricola* likewise ‘reveals anxieties about ethnic hybridity and imperial expansion’ (84).

Next up is the work’s first sustained examination of empire, with José Mambwini Kivuila-Kiaku’s consideration of the forced Romanization of Britain in the *Agricola*. He also considers the *Agricola* in light of Rome’s imperial ambitions. Tacitus, it is argued, first develops in this work a sense of Rome’s imperial greatness and connects it to external conquest and internal peace. The city of Rome itself is the primary physical space in which the integration of foreign peoples takes place.

The themes of youth and rejuvenation in the *Agricola* and *Dialogus* form the topic of Dylan Sailor’s astute discussion. Sailor considers how Trajan, Agricola, Maternus, and Tacitus ‘in the years around forty experience an interrup-

tion in their career and identity and chart a dramatically different course thereafter' (101). The careers of Tacitus' father-in-law in the *Agricola* and of Tacitus himself in the *Dialogus* can be seen as responses to the fifteen or so years that Domitian stole from those subject to his rule. Tacitus, seen in this light, presents to his readers a wishful rewriting of early adulthood from the sullen perspective of the mid-life crisis. Biography in this case is less the simply writing of a life and more the tracing out of the lifetime lost to a tyrannical ruler.

The relationship of eloquence to politics is the subject of Raphaëlle Cytermann's essay on the *Dialogus*. He focuses largely on the speeches of Aper and Maternus, with a keen interest in Maternus' account of decline at the end of the work and Aper's defense of oratory near its middle. The main emphasis is on Tacitus' attempts in this work to conceptualize a clear distinction between Republic and Principate ('[l]a prise de conscience d'une rupture historique' (129)), and to meditate on the effects of the different political systems. Somewhat unexpectedly, Cytermann concludes that Tacitus' comparison of the two political systems, when viewed from the perspective of eloquence, ultimately favors the imperial regime.

The most sustained philological discussion in the collection is provided by Timothy Joseph. He examines 'boldness' in Maternus' first speech, focusing in particular on *audax/audacia* as 'literary critical terms with strong resonances' (131). Joseph is especially good at analyzing Maternus' metaphorical language and the stylistic implications of his lexical choices. This stylistic boldness reflects Maternus' political boldness in his writing of controversial poetry, and may also indicate Tacitus' desire to have us read the stylistic boldness of his own historical writings as politically meaningful.

4. Connections Between the Minor and Major Works

Isabelle Cogitore considers the depiction of *Agricola* as a forerunner for the later depiction of Germanicus in the *Annales*. She traces out the resemblances between the two figures in the works, with a special interest in the virtue of *moderatio* and in the military leadership of both figures. She judiciously includes a long section that notes their differences, in their attitudes towards the peoples they conquered and towards their soldiers, and in their deaths.

Olivier Devillers examines '[a]nalogies, transferts, interactions dans l'*Agricola* et dans les *Annales*'. He notes the ways in which *Agricola* is in competition with the *Princeps*, both as an adherent of the Republican cause and as a foil to the emperor's failures. Provincial subjects are likewise used by Tacitus to reflect on the attitudes of Rome's elite towards the *Princeps*. Devillers notes the close connection (and opposition) of *pax* and *libertas*. Like Keitel's earlier piece in the volume, Devillers shows the larger continuities that stretch from the *Agricola* to the *Annales*.

Two further contributions on the theme of empire round out the collection. First, Ellen O’Gorman employs the depiction of *barbari* as a tool for the simultaneous critique of ancient and modern imperialist tendencies. She is interested in the ways in which modern subjects necessarily adopt (or ‘reinscribe’) the colonial power relations that are first established in Rome’s imperial project. Calgacus’ speech, for example, can be read as a ‘fantasy’ which ‘evokes a range of subject positions in relation to *imperium*, which provoke the reader to reconstruct a developmental history of their own engagement with empire’ (179). The piece is a good counterpart to Kivuila-Kiaku’s discussion of Romanization and to Haynes’ sophisticated evaluation of Tacitus as an inside/outside figure in the imperial system.

Second, Rhiannon Ash compares the depiction of barbarian tribes in the *Germania* with subsequent depictions of them in the *Historiae* and *Annales*. Ash relies on close analysis of the language of the descriptions, making the Batavian revolt and the figure of Julius Civilis into an illuminating case study of her larger argument. Ash remarks that ‘Tacitus clearly expects his readers to be familiar with his own earlier representations of Germans and individual tribes from the *Germania*, particularly the Batavians; and he takes advantage of that pre-existing knowledge in presenting the early stages of Civilis’ revolt’ (198). The valuable conclusion summarizes Tacitus’ awareness of his readers in different works: ‘Tacitus can rely on his readers’ familiarity with the text of the *Germania* in all sorts of creative ways’ (199).

In summary, this volume assembles a broad range of approaches on all of Tacitus’ texts, with a special emphasis on the minor works. The collection is a clear signal of how far Tacitean studies have come in recent decades and the range of methodologies that can be brought to bear on such a complicated and elusive author. The collection considers, though rarely in an explicit manner, the extent to which the *minora* are artistic precursors to the *maiora*. The chronology of an author’s works is not necessarily concomitant with his literary development, and in particular, given that Tacitus wrote quite different works in his later years, the idea that Tacitus ‘developed’ away from his earlier writings to become a full-fledged historian is as tantalizing as it may be misleading; that tendency has been most prominent in biographical readings of the *Dialogus*. Many of the contributions show close connections between two or more works, and in that sense are valuable for helping us read one work to construct meaning in another. Yet no sense of unity of either the *minora* or the entire oeuvre emerges with any clarity. This is probably for the best, since there may

be little reason to see a coherent architectural plan connecting the different structures. As an initial inquiry into Tacitus' *opera minora* this collection offers readers considerable food for thought.

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