Histos 15 (2021) lvii–lxiv

REVIEW

COMMENTING ON VALERIUS MAXIMUS

John Briscoe, *Valerius Maximus, 'Facta et Dicta Memorabilia', Book 8: Text, Introduction, and Commentary*. Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 141. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2019. Pp. xii + 268. Hardback, €99.95. ISBN 978-3-11-066424-9.

With only a handful of seminal publications on the Tiberian author of a collection of exemplary tales, John Briscoe has established himself as a leading Valerius Maximus scholar (a writer he claims (v) as his 'second author' after Livy).[1] While others have attempted to elucidate the *Facta et dicta memorabilia* in terms of its historical and historiographical context, the generic and cultural phenomenon of exemplary literature, or the reception history of the text, Briscoe has confined himself mainly to traditional studies of textual criticism and bibliography. The volume under review represents his most recent thoughts on a specific portion of the text, one which he believes is of interest to the commentator because of its 'variegated subject matter' including (but not limited to) *exempla* on trials, intellectual pursuits, leisure activities, oratory, the arts, and old age—in this regard, therefore, not unlike almost every other book of the work where Valerius presents his readers with the full range of human life—both the good and the bad (cf. 9.11.praef.).

In the preface to the volume, Briscoe outlines the status quo of modern commentaries on Valerius Maximus, to which his work is a contribution. Noting David Wardle's 1998 historical and historiographical commentary on Book 1 for Oxford University Press' Clarendon Ancient History series as well as Andrea Themann-Steinke's full scale commentary on Book 2, based upon her 2006 Ruhr-Universität Bochum doctoral dissertation and published by the Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, Trier in 2008, Briscoe remarks that since 'it is unlikely that any one scholar will contemplate writing a commentary on the whole of Valerius' work, progress will consist of further volumes dealing with

[1] His publications on the author include his Teubner edition in two volumes (Briscoe (1998)), the standard Latin text since Kempf's 1888 *editio minor*; an article containing textual and philological notes (Briscoe (1993)); reviews of other editions and commentaries (Briscoe (1999), (2001), and (2010)); and finally, 'Valerius Maximus' in *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (Briscoe (2017)).

ISSN: 2046-5963 6 April 2021

individual books'.[2] He appears unaware of Alicia Schniebs et al.'s Spanish-language commentary on Book 1—the item is also missing from his *Oxford Bibliographies Online* entry of 2017.[3] In his own commentary, Briscoe makes attempts at more holistic coverage, treating content, textual criticism, language and style, as well as literary matters (vi).

Thirty pages are taken up by the introduction. Little is known of the author's biography, and Briscoe can summarise what is known in one page ('The Author', 1): that he worked during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius is clear from the preface (1.praef.); that he was a friend of a certain Sextus Pompeius (discussed further below) with whom he travelled to Asia Minor; and more speculatively, from the evidence of Book 8, Briscoe suggests a visit for the author to Athens (cf. 8.11.ext.3, 12.ext.2). No mention is made here of the preface to 5.5, a chapter concerned with fraternal devotion, in which Valerius mentions a wife, children, and a brother. In this passage Valerius also speaks of his ancestral *imagines*—a line that has been used to support senatorial, and possibly even patrician, extraction for the author.[4] Briscoe finds it 'unlikely in the extreme' that Valerius was a member of the patrician branch of the *gens*, citing Valerius' claim to parvitude (*mea parvitas*, 1.praef.), the fact that he presents himself as a *cliens* of Sextus Pompeius, and the manner in which he speaks of the *gens Valeria* at 8.15.5.[5] While commenting on Valerius' lack of understanding concerning Republican public law, Briscoe adduces from his knowledge of private law that he had perhaps *some* legal experience.

Next, 'The Time of Writing' (2–4) reasserts the *communis opinio* established by Kempf's 1854 edition (2), placing the final date of publication (esp. of Book 9) after at least October AD 31 and the fall of Sejanus; heterodox opinion (argued mainly by Carter, Bellemore, and Themann-Steinke) has suggested a date from earlier in Tiberius' reign (AD 14–16).[6] There is little to add to Briscoe's meticulous arguments; minor points, which I have argued elsewhere,

[2] In the form of doctoral dissertations, commentaries on other sections of the work are currently available: Matravers (2017) on Book 9.1–10; Murray (2016) on Book 9.1–11; and Westphal (2018) on Book 4.1. Tanja Itgenshorst (University of Fribourg) is also currently heading up a collaborative research project to produce a German translation and historical commentary of the entire work, *Im Spiegel der Republik: Valerius Maximus'* Facta et Dicta Memorabilia—*Vollständige Neuübersetzung und historischer Kommentar*.

[3] Schniebs et al. (2014).

[4] Skidmore (1996) 113–14; Saddington (2000) 166–72, through the comparative evidence of inscriptions, has suggested the possibility of Valerius being of equestrian status.

[5] Valerius' economical references to his patron could be understood in the light of Sextus Pompeius' connections with Piso (as has recently been suggested by Atkinson (2017) 3–4).

[6] This section rearticulates the arguments of Briscoe (1993) 398–402 and (2010) 380–1; in agreement cf. also Helm (1955) 90–3; Wardle (1998) 1–6; Shackleton Bailey (2000) 1–3. Proponents of an earlier date include Carter (1975) 30–3; Bellemore (1989); Combès (1995–7) 8–11; and, most recently, Themann-Steinke (2008) 17–28.

bolster the case even further: 9.11.ext.4, as Briscoe rightly points out (*contra* Carter and Bellemore), while seemingly placed among the *exempla externa*, should rather be thought of as a conclusion to the chapter as a whole—and perhaps (at more of a stretch) the entire work itself, as the *exemplum* restates various themes from the work's preface. If this were the case, the remaining four chapters of Book 9 could represent a miscellaneous 'afterword'.[7] Furthermore, as I have suggested in the same article, Valerius refers to his work as *opus nostrum* (4.8.1; 5.4.7) or *hoc opus* (8.13.praef, 14.praef). Non-differentiation of parts may suggest an author conscious of a unity, even if its parts were published (or written) at different times (cf., e.g., 9.15.1 where Valerius inserts a cross-reference to his earlier treatment of Equitius at 9.7.1 and by using *huiusce libri* strongly indicates that we have to conceive of the whole of our extant Book 9 as a *liber*). Additionally, I have pointed out that the context of Cicero's condemnation of Catiline and the language of his Catilinarian orations are behind Valerius' own denunciation of the unnamed conspirator in 9.11.ext.4 (in fact the entire chapter demonstrates Ciceronian allusion); historically, this provided Valerius with an uncanny parallel: Sejanus was condemned in the Temple of Concord, the same site of Cicero's impassioned condemnations of Catiline's co-conspirators. This adds further proof to the claim that the negative exemplar of 9.11.ext.4 is indeed Sejanus. Furthermore, a chapter such as 9.15, placed at the very end of the *Facta*, might present the best evidence for the final dating of, at the very least, this section of the work as it could reflect on the crisis of the false Drusus who appeared in AD 31 (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 5.10; Dio 58.25.1) shortly after the Sejanus affair—Valerius tactfully omits recent shock but provides the very useful parallel of Augustus' actions against impostors (9.15.ext.1–2).

The following sub-section, 'The Work' (5–6), outlines the general architecture of the *Facta et dicta memorabilia*. Following the best manuscripts, Briscoe retains the standard title of Valerius' work as *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, noting that it is not certain that this was Valerius' own title for his work. Comparanda, however, strengthen the case that it (or something similar) should be retained as the standard title: the preface of the entire work provides us with *facta simul ac dicta memoratu*; cf. 4.1.12 (*facta … ac dicta*); 6.2.praef. (*dictis … et factis*; along with the chapter title, *libere dicta aut facta*); 6.4.praef. (*dicta … aut facta*; along with chapter title, *graviter dicta aut facta*); 7.2.praef. (*dictis factisque*; along with chapter title, *sapienter dicta aut facta*); 7.3.praef. (*factorum dictorumque*; along with chapter title, *vafre dicta aut facta*); 9.3.praef. (*aut dicto … aut facto*); 9.5.4 (*facto … ac dicto*); and 9.11.praef. (*dicta … et facta*; along with chapter title, *dicta improba aut facta scelerata*).[8] Briscoe divides the work into 'nearly one thousand short sections'

[7] See Murray (forthcoming); cf. also Römer (1990) 106 for a similar suggestion.

[8] Briscoe (5 n. 25), cites the preface of Paris (P; ed. 638) for comparison: *Valerii Maximi libros dictorum et factorum memorabilia*. Variation between *et* and *aut* occurs across the work, as

(correcting Bloomer's previous total of 967, based upon Kempf's edition, either down to 957 or up to 971, depending on how one chooses to cut up the *exempla*); more recent attempts at arithmetic suggests a total over a thousand, placing Valerius' *exempla* at 1051.[9]

Briscoe side-steps the perennial debate of the purpose of Valerius' work—and the question of just who his imagined audience was (*documenta sumere volentibus*, 1.praef.)—neither solely a handbook for orators and declaimers usually made up of Italians and provincials (Bloomer (1992)), nor a tract of moral guidance (Skidmore (1996)), but rather 'a wider audience, including those interested in the material for its own sake' (5). What follows is a very brief layout of the chapters of Book 8; no attempt is made at providing a rationale for the ragbag mix of topics: e.g., trials, study and work, leisure, oratory—its deliverance and body-language, the desire for glory, etc.

In the following section, 'Valerius' Sources' (6–9), Briscoe starts by providing a bibliography of studies that concern themselves with *Quellenkritik*—the main focus of Valerius studies in the second half of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries—and delineates some of the key features of debate: whether Valerius used authors like Cicero or Livy directly, or accessed his material through an earlier *exempla* collection (or two); whether or not Valerius used Greek sources. Briscoe's contribution to this exercise for the individual *exempla* of Book 8 is found in the commentary, usually in the opening lemma for each *exemplum*; he is largely in agreement with Helm and Bloomer that Valerius used a limited range of earlier Latin sources, and no Greek ones (Pompeius Trogus is often the likely candidate for external material). Where no source can be securely identified owing to verbal similarities, Varro, Pomponius Rufus, Hyginus, and the lost books of Livy appear to be reasonable suggestions. Briscoe also suggests for Valerius' own near-contemporary history, that he may not have relied upon written sources at all (7). Pages 7–8 provide summaries of Valerius' sources for Book 8, extracted from the commentary itself, where Briscoe treats each in greater detail, with Cicero and Livy the clear contenders as those most used.

Matters of 'Language and Style' (9–14), are taken up next by Briscoe. He highlights the pioneering research done in the 1906 Uppsala dissertation of Ehrenfried Lundberg and more recently Bloomer (1992) and Themann-Steinke (2008) in this regard. Enrique Otón Sobrino's lexicon (1977–91) aids this aspect of research, also singled out by Briscoe; add to this, however, C. J. Carter's concordance in four volumes, self-produced at St Andrews in 1973. Briscoe limits his analysis of Book 8 to (1) 'Innovations', (2) 'Words or Usages

well as in chapter titles; it is most likely, however, that the chapter headings are not original: see, e.g., Briscoe, p. 28; Helm (1955) 97; Wardle (1998) 6 n. 22; but cf. the comment of Bloomer (1992) 18 n. 7. Also note Bellemore (1989), which inverts *facta* and *dicta* in the title.

[9] Wardle (forthcoming).

Found in Cicero and/or Livy, But Rarely or Never in Other Writers Before V.', and (3) 'Words or Usages Found Before V. But Not in Cicero or Livy', concluding that 'in matters of lexicology … V. was extremely innovative and that to a considerable extent he was influenced, consciously or not, by Cicero and Livy' (14).

Briscoe is at his best when discussing the text and transmission (the 'Text', 15–23, and 'Editions of Valerius Maximus', 24–8). Much of this section is a revised English translation of his Teubner edition's introduction, helpfully making his comments more widely accessible. As this review article is intended for a journal whose readership's interest is in the field of ancient historiography, I will refrain from any detailed analysis, citing only Heiko Westphal's comments that Briscoe has made several improvements to his text, but also unwittingly incorporated several new errors.[10]

One of the more radical changes that Briscoe has made concerns his 'Methods of Citation' (28–30). The commentary now refers to line numbers in the new text (for the sake of convenience (29)) rather than to the previously accepted reference system of citing book, chapter, and individual *exemplum*. While the problems with the previous system are clear from Briscoe's discussion, one cannot help but feel that the introduction of line numbers will confuse rather than clarify.

The introductory material ends with a brief word on *testimonia* for individual *exempla* ('the business of collecting *testimonia* was never ending and that has continued to be the case', 30) and a note on the sigla used. Next, the text of Book 8 takes up almost thirty-two full pages (33–65), followed by 172 pages of commentary (67–239).

In the commentary itself, Briscoe provides the basic historical details necessary for a reader to correctly interpret an *exemplum* (standard reference works on personalities and places are used throughout: *RE*, *MRR*, and the Barrington Atlas); he is usually quick to identify Valerius' source when possible; and his lemmata reveal close philological analysis. Very little of the commentary is given over to historiographical analysis, though, or interpreting the contents of the *exempla* within the context of Tiberian Rome. At the mention of L. Scribonius Libo at 8.1.absol.2 Briscoe notes that 'V.'s early readers will have been reminded of M. Scribonius Libo Drusus, who in AD 16 was accused of conspiracy against Tiberius and committed suicide' (69); Valerius is also shown to be using anachronistic language 'invented under Tiberius' at 8.1.amb.2, following Holford-Strevens (97); in Valerius' closing remarks at 8.3.3, Briscoe detects that the author has in mind Hortalus, the grandson of the orator Hortensius, whose application for funds the miserly Tiberius initially opposed in order to safeguard the treasury (Tac. *Ann.* 2.37)

[10] Westphal (2020); Briscoe also provides an appendix (241–3) with corrections to his Teubner edition.

(112); at the end of the preface to 8.13—a chapter on old age—Briscoe rightly finds in the language 'an obsequious expression of V.'s wish for Tiberius' longevity' (193); and finally, further fawning in the preface to 8.15: 'V. is explaining, in an obsequious and contorted way, that the *exempla* that follow do not include Augustus or Tiberius' (222).

To further illustrate Briscoe's method, take, for example, his commentary on a single *exemplum*. In the first one of Book 8—in a chapter concerned with ill-famed individuals who were either condemned or acquitted—Valerius' readers are presented with an anecdote on the conviction (and later acquittal) of M. Horatius for his sister's murder. Briscoe succinctly points readers to Valerius' other mention of the episode in the work (6.3.6) and highlights what is different there; he pinpoints Livy as Valerius' main source, provides parallel passages (Cicero and Dionysius of Halicarnassus), and directs his readers to Münzer's *RE* entry. In the subsequent lemmata, he addresses issues of nomenclature, scribal errors, language usage, the correct translation of key terms, textual criticism, and more. But Briscoe is not, however, interested in Valerius' *exemplum* as a medium for moral reflection, nor in the way that Valerius has shaped his version of the event to explore its 'ethical controversies'.[11]

The volume concludes with a substantial set of indices subdivided into: 'General' (245–53); 'Language and Style' (253–4); 'Authors and Passages' (254–65); 'Latin' (265–8); and 'Greek' (268). Full-scale commentary on several of the other books of the *Facta et dicta memorabilia* remains a *desideratum*.

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[11] The phrase is taken from Langlands (2018) 301; cf. also her discussion of this *exemplum* in Langlands (2008) 167–8. Strangely, Langlands' scholarship on Valerius is entirely missing from Briscoe's bibliography.

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