TACITUS' USE OF COLUMELLA'S
*DE RE RUSTICA**

Abstract: This article argues that Tacitus used Columella's *De re rustica* as a source text across his oeuvre. Probable allusions to *De re rustica* appear in each of Tacitus' five texts, including in important digressions and methodological chapters in *Annals*. Setting out these allusions and drawing out their narrative significance, the article draws attention to a hitherto unrecognised source of influence on the Roman historian. It further proposes directions for future scholarly analysis of Tacitus' engagement with technical texts and of how such texts participate in wider conversations about politics, power, and nature.

Keywords: Tacitus, Columella, historiography, intertextuality, agriculture, nature, metaphor

I. Introduction

This article argues that Tacitus used Columella's *De re rustica* as a source text across his oeuvre. In terms of both language and ways of conceptualising particular areas of Roman life, the work of the agricultural specialist seems to have influenced the historian, and we should consider the possibility of such influence if we wish to properly gauge Tacitus' outlook on subjects like Rome's provincial governance as well as his historical methodology and literary techniques. My argument for Columella's influence on Tacitus—an influence not advanced in past scholarship on either author[1]—is based both on allusions

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[1] Columella, as far as I have been able to ascertain, has not been identified as one of Tacitus' sources, either in general studies of the historian (Syme (1958); Paratore (1962); R. H. Martin (1981); Woodman (2009a); Mellor (2012); Pagán (2012); Suerbaum (2015); ten Berge (2023)) or in studies focussed on his sources (Fabia (1891); Sage (1990) 893–900, 997–1017; Devillers (2003); Potter (2012); (2023)). In scholarship on Columella, Tacitus features quite frequently—as a representative of early imperial Roman thought, as one whose outlook or concerns correspond, in places, with those of Columella, as one who offers

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and echoes, consisting mainly of the shared use of unique or rare words and combinations, and on particular narrative emphases and tendencies (including the use of agricultural metaphors). My chief aim is to demonstrate the likelihood that Tacitus consciously recalled Columella's *magnum opus*, that is to alert readers to the probability that *De re rustica* figured as one of Tacitus' sources and to open up future avenues of scholarly inquiry. Although it is hard to prove, in places I also suggest the likelihood of shared concerns and socio-political attitudes. I should clarify up front that it is not my aim to fully unpack the wider implications of Tacitus' use of Columella in terms of his historical or socio-political outlook or his methodology. The evidence laid out below, however, will, I hope, pave the way for more in-depth analyses of Tacitus' engagement with technical texts and of the way that both he and other Roman authors use agriculture and nature as conceptual frameworks for thinking about different aspects of imperial domestic and provincial life.[2]

The evidence presented here further suggests that the literary and perhaps political influence of Columella's text was greater than we tend to assume today (cf. n. 65). What brought *De re rustica* to Tacitus' attention, I conjecture, was not only the reputation of the text and its author in Neronian and post-Neronian Rome, but also the special place that agriculture and agricultural literature may have enjoyed within the Agricola family ('Farmer' family extraordinaire). This conjecture, presented in a coda at the end of the article, is based on a nexus of individuals (including the agricultural author Julius Atticus, whose 'pupil' Agricola's father Graecinus is said to have been, and Agricola's subordinate officer (Julius?) Aulus Atticus) and on the likelihood of shared values and ideas about agriculture.

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crucial background to relevant social, economic, or historical developments in the early Principate or to the Neronian environment in which *De re rustica* was composed, or as someone whose language can be used to identify common rhetorical expressions among Roman authors (examples: R. Martin (1971) 11, 15, 16 n. 2, 322 n. 4, 331–3, 361–2 n. 4; Lomas (1997) 183–4; Noè (1998) 119, 124–5, 129–30; (2001) 321 n. 16, 326; (2002) 23 and nn. 87–8, 29–30, 32 n. 151, 34, 36 n. 181, 37 nn. 184 and 186, 59 n. 314, 65 n. 33, 73 and n. 81, 113 n. 349, 139 n. 506; Diederich (2007) 210, 319 n. 1712, 332 n. 1796, 351 n. 1904, 368 n. 1973, 374 n. 2010, 385 n. 2067, 386 n. 2069, 392 and n. 2107). For an annotated bibliography of scholarship on Columella up to the year 2014 (including references to older annotated bibliographies), see Diederich's entry in Oxford Bibliographies online. At times, linguistic or thematic resemblances between Columella and Tacitus are noted (R. Martin (1971) 11; Noè (2002) 30–4; Diederich (2007) 385–6, 332 n. 1796), but nowhere is the agricultural specialist identified as a source for the historian or as one who exerted any special influence on him (on Columella's reception: Schindler (2010)).

[2] On Roman agricultural authors: R. Martin (1971) (289–373 on Columella); Diederich (2007) (53–68, 209–58, 368–95 on Columella). For a comprehensive analysis of Columella's economic and agricultural vision, socio-economic and historical outlook, and literary presentation: Noè (2002).

II. Methodology

Since Roman authors share many thematic and intellectual concerns—a fact that makes it all too easy to 'see' conscious allusions where in fact there are none—any argument for Tacitus' use of Columella's *De re rustica* should be based on the most direct and secure evidence of such use: meaningful allusions and shared diction. Now, intertextuality, a subject that remains somewhat undertheorised, especially as regards Latin prose literature, is tricky business, and it does not convince all and sundry.[3] In light of this, and of the aims of this article, I should start by laying out the methodological principles upon which my argument rests.[4] As noted above, this article serves to demonstrate the likelihood—not to claim with absolute certainty—that Tacitus used Columella's *De re rustica* as a source text. Given that so little of classical literature has survived, it is often impossible to prove beyond doubt that linguistic correspondences—for instance, a unique or rare word or combination shared by two authors—reflect an author's conscious allusion to a predecessor. Establishing conscious allusion is especially difficult when the language in question is common and likely to have featured in now lost texts. An additional challenge is posed by online databases and search engines, which have made it easier than ever before to spot linguistic correspondences, but which also come with a caveat. The modern reader ought to keep in mind that some

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[3] On Tacitean intertextuality: Woodman (2009b) (p. 14 for a rich bibliography); (2009c); Ash (2012) 12–13 (with plentiful references); Whitton (2019); ten Berge (2023). König and Whitton (2018) explore the engagement of Trajanic and Hadrianic authors, including Tacitus, with their Flavian forerunners. For Latin intertextuality in general (focussed on poetry, not prose), the seminal studies are West and Woodman (1979), Conte (1986), and Hinds (1998).

[4] Given the great variety of terms used in scholarship on intertextuality, I should also clarify the terminology I use in this article. I use the term 'linguistic correspondence' to refer to the shared use of words, collocations, or combinations (regardless of authorial intention). When Tacitus seems to consciously recall a particular context in *De re rustica*, I use the terms 'allusion' and 'conscious imitation' as well as the verbs 'to allude to', 'to recall', 'to borrow', 'to look back to', and 'to use' (I variously use these terms based on contextual or grammatical need/demand; I avoid the verb 'to refer to' and the noun 'reference', since these terms suggest direct citation or mention of a source text or author). It is difficult to determine, in any given case, whether an allusion serves to guide readers to a target passage for interpretative guidance/help or whether it reflects stylistic imitation or acknowledgment of the target author's authority on a particular subject. In the interest of transparency, most of the linguistic correspondences discussed below, regardless of Tacitus' motivation or intent, reflect, I believe, his conscious use/imitation of Columella. In the few instances where it is more likely that Tacitus is unconsciously/intuitively imitating Columella, I use the terms 'reminiscence', 'resemblance', or 'echo' (and their verbal equivalents).

correspondences found with online search tools may be more recognisable to us than they were to native readers.[5]

Establishing an allusion, or one author's influence on another, with any degree of probability, therefore, requires additional 'help' or 'evidence', that is a set of criteria that allow us to 'grade' linguistic correspondences on a scale of allusive 'probability'. One way to determine the probability of conscious allusion is to consider the way in which a particular word or combination is expressed. Even if the terms in question are common, their expressive mode may have been unusual. Below, I present a few examples where Columella and Tacitus—alone among surviving Roman authors—express common terms or combinations in unusual ways, changing the expected word order, attaching a prefix to add a particular emphasis, or producing otherwise unattested combinations. Such unusual expressions presumably were noticeable to well-read and attentive native readers and thus may reasonably be taken as allusions, especially since the expressions in question appear in analogous or conceptually relevant contexts and, in some cases, are accompanied by further correspondences.

These last two aspects constitute further criteria for determining the probability of an allusion. If a linguistic correspondence—especially one containing common terms—occurs in dissimilar and conceptually irrelevant contexts, conscious allusion *a priori* is less probable. Conversely, if two authors share unique or rare language *and* this language appears in similar or conceptually relevant contexts, conscious allusion *a priori* is more probable. What makes the case for conscious allusion even more robust is the presence of other correspondences nearby or in the same book or text. Below, I present several examples of terms or combinations that appear either only in Columella and Tacitus or in both authors and one or a few others, and although we cannot prove beyond doubt that Tacitus borrowed these terms from Columella, the probability of such borrowing is increased by the presence of other correspondences nearby or by the fact that he alludes to other sections of the same book of *De re rustica* elsewhere. In general, the presence of multiple correspondences involving unique or rare diction *a priori* makes it more likely that we are dealing with conscious imitation than with a series of coincidences.

To determine, in turn, what narrative purpose(s) an allusion serves to advance, we may consider two guiding questions, that is (a) whether the use to which a target passage would be put accords with the author's practice elsewhere, and (b) whether the 'meaning' or 'message' that would be generated

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[5] I am indebted to the Brepols Library of Latin Texts database and to the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI) Latin Texts database, which I used to verify hunches about, rather than to fish for, Tacitean allusions to Columella. The idea that Tacitus might have used the agriculturalist as a source first came to me when reading through the general preface and the first book of *De re rustica* (more on these sections below).

by the allusion is in line with the author's outlook as we know it. Gauging a text's broader influence on the outlook and attitude of a later author is considerably more difficult. It is prudent to argue for an author's formative influence on another author only if there is ample and robust evidence of such influence. To note but two examples, Columella and Tacitus advance analogous views about informers (*delatores*) and their destructive influence on Roman political life (as scholars of Columella have noted[6]). Since Tacitus does not recall any of Columella's language in the passages in question, however, it would be rash to conclude that Columella influenced Tacitus' outlook in this respect; both men simply advance the traditional outlook on *delatores*, who indeed are characterised in our extant sources with a remarkable consistency.[7] Similarly, Columella's criticism of the increasingly powerful position of freedmen within the imperial system of government[8] resembles Tacitus' attitude as it emerges from his oeuvre.[9] Since, again, Tacitus does not recall Columella's description of freedmen, both men are simply engaging with another subject that was important to equestrian and senatorial authors.

Finally, some correspondences involving unique or rare terms do not serve to guide readers to a target passage for interpretative guidance but rather reflect the imitation of the diction and stylistic preferences of an author one has read closely or extensively (such imitation may be either conscious or unconscious).[10] Such correspondences (examples include *frequens* + genitive (only at Col. *Rust.* 3.6.2 *frequentia palmitum* and Tac. *Ann.* 4.65 *silvae frequens*) or *multos ante annos* (only at Col. *Rust.* 12.12.1 and Tac. *Ann.* 14.19.3; the variant *multis ante annis* appears five times elsewhere)) may be helpful in corroborating that one author has closely read another. These sorts of expressions, however, probably featured in now lost texts. Moreover, they possess no special 'meaning' or interpretative 'weight' and so are unlikely to have advanced any intertextual narrative purpose (the above combinations presumably are simply the way that native speakers said such things). For these reasons, I have omitted such examples (others include combinations like *fama* + *prosequor* (only at Val. Max. 2.7.12, 9.8.*praef*, Col. *Rust.* 8.16.3, and Tac. *Ann.* 4.38.3) or *flumen* + *transcendere* (only at Col. *Rust.* 6.29.1 and Tac. *Ann.* 4.44.2), which contain common terms that appear elsewhere in other variants and thus are unlikely

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[6] Noè (1998) 125; (2002) 29–31; Diederich (2007) 391–3.

[7] Rutledge (2001) remains essential. See also ten Berge (2023) chapter 3 and p. 332.

[8] Diederich (2007) 393–4.

[9] See ten Berge (2023) 41–3, 63, 107, 117, 137–8, 150–1 and n. 71, 213–14, 217, 226, 236–9, 319, 331 and nn. 64–5, 334. On the role of freedmen in the early Principate: MacLean (2018) (especially chapter 4).

[10] Think, for instance, of *Dialogus*' 'Ciceronian' or Syme's 'Tacitean' style. Woodman (2009b) 7 calls an author's adoption of the language of a predecessor solely on stylistic grounds expressive 'enhancement' or 'embellishment'.

to be unique to the above authors). These examples should be distinguished from those that stand out because of their genuine originality (e.g., the noun *infecunditas*, a rare antonym of the common noun *fecunditas*, shared by Columella, Tacitus, and a few other authors).

   With these caveats in mind, I present below a range of linguistic correspondences between Columella and Tacitus, consisting for the most part of words and combinations that occur either only in our two authors or in our two authors and one or a few others. I move through Tacitus' oeuvre sequentially, explaining both the basis on which these correspondences may be taken as allusions and their narrative purpose(s). I end by summarising what Tacitus' engagement with Columella suggests about his historiography and by proposing directions for future scholarly analysis of the historian's engagement with technical texts and of the broader use of agriculture and nature as conceptual frameworks by Roman authors writing in different genres.

III. *Agricola*

The first apparent correspondence with *De re rustica* in *Agricola* comes at *Agr.* 12.3–5, in the well-known ethnographic digression on Britain.[11] Here, Tacitus reports the following on the country's climate and soil:

> caelum crebris **imbribus**[A] ac nebulis foedum; asperitas <u>frigorum</u> abest (12.3)

> solum **praeter**[B] oleam <u>vitem</u>que et cetera <u>calidioribus</u> terris oriri sueta **patiens**[C] <u>frugum</u> <u>pecudumque</u> <u>fecundum</u>: **tarde mitescunt**,[D] **cito proveniunt**[E]; **eademque**[F] utriusque rei causa, multus <u>umor</u> terrarum caelique (12.4–5)

> The climate is miserable, with frequent rain and mists. But extreme cold is not found there.

> The soil bears crops, apart from the olive and the vine and other natives of warmer climes, and has an abundance of cattle. The crops ripen slowly but shoot up quickly. The cause is the same in both cases, the abundant moisture of land and sky.

This passage appears to simultaneously recall two sections of the second chapter of Book 3 of *De re rustica*, which deals in detail with the same subject:

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[11] Tacitus also seems to recall *De re rustica* at *Agr.* 9, but that chapter stands in close connection to *Agr.* 19 and therefore will be discussed below.

sed ea tum praecipua est, si <u>nec nimis celeriter</u> frondet, et primo quoque tempore deflorescit, nec nimis **tarde mitescit**^D; quin etiam pruinas et caliginem et carbunculum facile propulsat, **eademque**^F nec **imbribus**^A putrescit, nec siccitatibus abolescit. (3.2.4)

But such a vine is especially good if it does not put forth leaves too quickly, if also it casts its flowers very early in the season and does not ripen too slowly; moreover, if it easily withstands frosts and fog and blight, does not rot in rainy weather, and does not shrivel up in times of drought.

ventos et **imbres**^A valenter sufferunt, et celeriter deflorescunt, et ideo **citius mitescunt**,^{D/E} omnis incommodi **patientes**^C **praeter**^B <u>caloris</u>. (3.2.15)

They endure winds and rains valiantly, drop their flowers early, and therefore ripen sooner. They bear up under every adversity except that of heat.

Tacitus and Columella are the only extant authors to combine the verb *mitescere* with the adverb *tarde*. On the same page, Columella also has *mitescere* with *citius*,[12] which is another rare combination (elsewhere only at Plin. *HN* 15.42.2, of plums and peaches). Both Pliny the Elder (*HN* 17.172.6; 19.114.3; 21.20.5) and Seneca the Younger (*QNat.* 7.31.1.2) have *tarde* with *provenire*. While Sen. *QNat.* 7.31.1.2, referring to intellectual, not natural, productivity, does not seem relevant here, Plin. *HN* 17.172.6 concerns vines (*HN* 21.20.5 mentions vines as a comparison in a section on the planting of roses). Pliny, then, may be in Tacitus' sights here. But only Col. *Rust.* 3.2.4 and 3.2.15 have all the terms combined by Tacitus. *Provenire* in the above sense is also common in Columella (appearing later in the same book: *sua sponte proveniunt*, 3.11.5), and so the sequence ***tarde mitescunt***, ***cito proveniunt*** is suggestive and may reasonably be taken to reflect Columellan influence.

The case for such influence is strengthened by various other correspondences (underlined above). In addition to the above sequence (Columella also has *tarde mitescunt* in an antithesis (*nec nimis celeriter frondet*) just before), Tacitus has the agriculturalist's ***patiens*** + genitive, the preposition **praeter**, the combination ***eademque*** (in both cases in the subsequent sentence), the noun ***imbribus*** (~ ***imbribus*** and ***imbres***), the adjective <u>*calidioribus*</u> (~ <u>*caloris*</u>), and <u>*fecundus*</u> + genitive, another rare combination shared

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[12] Lundström's edition of Book 3 has *cito*.

by both authors[13] (variations of *fecundus/fecunditas* appear nine times in *Rust.* 3.2). Moreover, Tacitus' claim that the moisture level of the soil influences crop development is one that Columella makes with regard to vines both right before and later in the current chapter (3.1.9, 2.20), using terms (*umorem/umores*, *frigora*, *caloribus*) that Tacitus also has at *Agr.* 12.3–5. Per the methodological principles laid out above, we have both multiple linguistic correspondences, including several unique or rare combinations, and contextual overlap. While the inclusion of an ethnographic digression goes back to authors like Caesar (cf. *BG* 6.1.1) and Sallust (cf. *Iug.* 17.1), for the particular information here—on climate, soil, and crops—Tacitus seems to have gone straight to an authoritative author on such matters (and not for the last time, if the correspondence between *Germ.* 26.3 and *Rust.* 5.10.18 reflects a conscious allusion: more below).

The second example of Tacitus' use of *De re rustica* in *Agricola* comes at *Agr.* 9 and 19, where the historian describes Agricola's gubernatorial qualities in terms that are reminiscent of Columella's maxims on how to run a large estate. Tacitus' description of Agricola's behaviour towards his subordinates …

> parvis **peccatis** veniam, magnis **severitatem** commodare[A]; nec poena semper, sed saepius paenitentia contentus esse[B]; officiis et administrationibus potius non **peccaturos** praeponere, **quam damnare cum peccassent**.[D] (*Agr.* 19.3)

> He condoned minor offences, major ones he dealt with strictly. He did not always impose a penalty, but was often content to accept an expression of remorse. He preferred to appoint to staff and administrative posts men who would not transgress rather than to have to punish those who had transgressed.

… variously resembles *Rust.* 1.8.10, where Columella stresses a similar balance on the part of the *vilicus* (a slave estate-manager) towards the estate's slave staff:

> nec tantum operis agrestis sit artifex, sed et animi, quantum servile patitur ingenium, virtutibus instructus, ut neque remisse neque crudeliter imperet[A] semperque aliquos ex melioribus foveat, parcat tamen etiam minus bonis,[B] ita ut potius timeant eius **severitatem**, quam crudelitatem detestentur.[C] id contingere poterit, si maluerit custodire subiectos, ne **peccent**, **quam** neglegentia sua committere, **ut puniat delinquentes**.[D]

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[13] As Woodman (2018) 300 notes, '*fecundus* + gen. is at *H.* 1.11.1, Col. 9.4.2, 11.2.90, Plin. *NH* 33.78; such combinations are typical of T'. To this list should be added *Germ.* 5.1; *Ann.* 6.27.4; 14.13.1.

> He should be not only skilled in the tasks of husbandry, but should also be endowed, as far as the servile disposition allows, with such qualities of feeling that he may exercise authority without laxness and without cruelty, and always humour some of the better hands, at the same time being forbearing even with those of lesser worth, so that they may rather fear his sternness than detest his cruelty. This he can accomplish if he will choose rather to guard his subordinates from wrongdoing than to bring upon himself, through his own negligence, the necessity of punishing offenders.

Unless we wish to ascribe to chance the linguistic and conceptual correspondences between these two passages, the inference must be that Tacitus continues to recall *De re rustica*. To be sure, what we have here is not exactly the same thing as in our first example. For there Tacitus uses phrases that are similar in both idea and expression (even lexical distribution) to those used by Columella, whereas here we have phrases that are similar in idea but that, while sharing some key terms, are different in expression and lexical distribution. This more 'oblique' type of imitation continues in the same chapter, with Tacitus opting for three horticultural verbs that are common in Columella—*excidere*,[14] *coercere*,[15] *circumcidere*[16]—to describe Agricola 'rooting out' the causes of war, 'keeping in

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[14] This verb appears five times in *De re rustica*, once (5.8.7) in the sense of 'cutting down trees or vines' (*OLD* 1b), four times (8.2.15, 3.4; 9.*praef.*, 8.9) in the sense of 'to cut out' (*OLD* 1a). Tacitus uses the verb metaphorically (in the first sense) at *Agr.* 19.1, literally (in the second sense) at *Ann.* 1.65.7. Elsewhere, he uses the verb—in the sense of 'to raze, destroy (towns, buildings, etc.): to lay waste (territory)' or 'to destroy, exterminate (peoples, etc.)' (*OLD* 5a/b)—nine times (*Germ.* 33.1; *Hist.* 2.38.1; 3.31.1; 4.32.3, 34.1; 5.16.2.; *Ann.* 12.39.2 (possibly recalling *Germ.* 33.1); 14.23.1, 30.3) and the corresponding noun (*excidium*) twenty-three times (*Agr.* 31.2; *Hist.* 1.63.1, 69.1, 80.1; 3.32.1, 53.2, 67.1, 76.1, 84.1; 4.13.3, 15.3, 61.2, 63.1, 72.1; 5.25.3; *Ann.* 1.36.1, 68.4; 2.19.1; 11.28.1; 12.17.2, 45.1; 13.56.2; 15.39.3).

[15] Columella uses this verb 13 times in *De re rustica*, in all but three cases of checking the growth of vines and other plants (*OLD* 3): 3.1.9, 21.7; 4.1.5, 10.1, 11.2; 5.5.9, 6.23; 6.2.4 (of restraining bulls), 10.13; 9.8.10 (of checking a swarm of bees); 11.3.27, 3.34; 12.47.4 (of checking the rot in a fruit). Tacitus uses the verb frequently, once as a horticultural metaphor (*OLD* 3a–b: *Agr.* 19.1, with Woodman (with Kraus) (2014) 192), three times in the sense of 'to suppress, inhibit (growth or other natural processes)' (*OLD* 3c: *Ann.* 1.11.4, 76.1; 13.53.2), and elsewhere with its more typical meaning of 'to restrain', 'to control', 'to curb/check', or 'to punish': *Agr.* 4.3, 19.1, 20.2, 33.1; *Germ.* 11.2, 25.1; *Hist.* 1.11.1, 17.2, 31.3, 35.2, 82.1, 85.1, 89.2; 2.18.1, 23.2, 27.2, 29.1, 48.1, 51.1, 82.1, 94.2, 96.2; 4.8.4, 19.2, 56.2; 5.9.2; *Ann.* 1.11.4, 64.4, 76.1; 2.25.1, 34.3, 40.1, 43.4, 85.1, 85.4; 3.41.1, 52.3, 54.1, 60.1; 4.5.2, 14.3, 30.3; 6.11.2, 13.1; 11.9.2, 13.2; 12.54.2, 65.1; 13.13.2, 26.3, 47.3, 53.2; 14.13.2, 33.1, 44.3; 15.46.1, 62.2; 16.22.1. The technical political-legal term *coercitio* appears at *Ann.* 3.26.1, 52.3.

[16] Columella uses this verb eight times, with three exceptions (6.12.2 and 6.15.1, both of treating an ox's bruise, and 12.36, of making squeezed must from grapes) as a horticultural term: 5.6.26, 9.9, 11.9, 11.10; 7.5.13. Tacitus uses *circumcidere* three times, once to describe the

check' his household, and 'cutting out' the gubernatorial abuses of his predecessors. In light of the above correspondences and of those in our first example, it is difficult to see the use of these horticultural verbs here as coincidental.

Tacitus seems to recall Columella's maxims not only at *Agr.* 19—which, in recounting Agricola's reforms of the grain collection, bears in part on agricultural matters—but also at *Agr.* 9, where he offers a mini-treatise on the conduct of the ideal governor. Here, too, we see an affinity with Columella's remarks:

> ubi conventus ac iudicia poscerent, gravis intentus, **severus** et saepius misericors[A]: ubi officio satis factum, nulla ultra potestatis persona; tristitiam et adrogantiam et avaritiam exuerat. nec illi, quod est rarissimum, aut facilitas auctoritatem aut **severitas** amorem deminuit.[C] (*Agr.* 9.3)

> When the assizes and the courts demanded [Agricola's] attention, he was serious and attentive, strict but often merciful. When he had completed his official duties, he no longer wore the mask of power. Sullenness and arrogance and greed he had cast aside. And in his case, what is very rare, his familiar manner did not lessen his authority nor did his strictness reduce his popularity.

The same emphasis recurs at *Agr.* 22.4, where Tacitus reinforces the notion that the ideal governor should maintain a balanced attitude towards his subordinates:

> apud quosdam acerbior in conviciis narrabatur; ut erat comis bonis, ita adversus malos iniucundus.[B]

> According to some accounts he was rather harsh in delivering reprimands. He was courteous to good men, but equally he could be unpleasant towards those who behaved badly.

In the previous chapter (*Rust.* 1.7.1), Columella had recommended the same balanced approach on the part of the estate owner (the *dominus*) towards his tenants (*coloni*), again using language that Tacitus also has at *Agr.* 9 and 22 (***comiter agat*** *cum colonis,* ***facilem****que se praebeat, Rust.* 1.7.1 ~ ***facile*** *iusteque* ***agebat*** *… nec illi, quod est rarissimum, aut* ***facilitas*** *auctoritatem aut severitas amorem deminuit, Agr.* 9.3; *ut erat* ***comis*** *bonis, ita adversus malos iniucundus, Agr.* 22.4).

Jewish practice of circumcision (*Hist.* 5.5.2), twice as a horticultural metaphor (*Agr.* 19.4; *Dial.* 32.4).

There is a clear affinity between both men's views of what attitude those in positions of power (whether a *dominus*, *vilicus*, or governor) should display towards their subordinates. Although the notion that those in positions of power ought to behave with balance and moderation was common—indeed, *Agr.* 9 variously engages with Sallust's paired characterisation of Cato and Caesar and with Cicero's letter to his brother Quintus regarding the latter's governorship of Asia[17]—the linguistic and conceptual correspondences among *Rust.* 1.7.1, 1.8.10 and *Agr.* 9, 19, 22 suggest that Tacitus, as he was at work on those chapters, recalled what he had read in *De re rustica*.

What further increases the likelihood that Tacitus had read *Rust.* 1.8 is the fact that Columella both opens that chapter with a rare collocation—that of *circus* and *theatrum*—that would appear repeatedly in *Histories* (more below) and employs still further terms that also appear at both *Agr.* 9 and 19. So, Columella claims that an estate owner should not employ as a *vilicus* a slave who has abandoned himself to such urban pleasures as the *circus* and the *theatrum* but rather one who has been toughened by farm work from childhood and has been tested by experience (***eligendus*** *est rusticis operibus ab infante duratus et inspectus* ***experimentis***, *Rust.* 1.8.2). The notion that early experiences shape one's adult character and fitness for public office is a Tacitean concern that is enunciated in *Agricola* and that recurs across the historian's oeuvre.[18] In light of the various correspondences among *Rust.* 1.7.1, 1.8.10 and *Agr.* 9, 19, it is quite possible (though, of course, unverifiable) that Tacitus also recalls or echoes Columella in using both the noun ***experimentum*** (which he does not use very often) at *Agr.* 19.1 (and again at 8.2) to describe Agricola's accumulated experience and the verb ***eligere*** at *Agr.* 9.5 (and again at 5.1, 6.5, 7.3, in the same manner) to suggest that his father-in-law was the appropriate candidate for the governorship of Britain based on his prior experiences in that province[19] and his record as governor of Aquitania. It is striking, finally, that one of Agricola's defining qualities ('moderation' or 'measure': *modus*, *Agr.* 4.3; cf. *moderatio*, 7.3, 42.3)—is underlined twice by Columella a few chapters earlier (*Rust.* 1.3.8, 12) as constituting a chief virtue not only in agriculture but in all other matters. Unless, again, we wish to ascribe to chance the assemblage of linguistic and conceptual correspondences discussed so far, the natural inference is that *De re rustica* was among the sources that informed Tacitus' depiction of Agricola and his qualities.

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[17] See ten Berge (2023) 56–8 and the references there.

[18] See ten Berge (2023) 32–4, 57, 88–9, 156–64, 192, 216–17, 317–18, 354.

[19] He had served as military tribune under Suetonius Paulinus from 58–61 (cf. *Agr.* 5) and as legionary legate under Marcus Vettius Bolanus in 70 (cf. *Agr.* 8.1, 16.5) and Petilius Cerialis from 71–3 (cf. *Agr.* 8.2–3, 17.1). Agricola is the only case we know of in which a Roman official served as military tribune, legionary legate, and governor in the same province: Birley (1975) 139.

In addition to the above correspondences, there are other remarks by Columella about how to manage a large estate and slave staff that were applicable to the management of a province and of those subject to Rome's *imperium* (whom Tacitus describes as 'slaves' at *Agr.* 21.2). These remarks, which Tacitus does not explicitly recall but which variously resemble what he writes about provincial management, cannot be fully unpacked here. I nonetheless list them because they may help elucidate what virtue the historian may have seen in Columella's analysis. Anyone reading *Agricola* and Book 1 of *De re rustica* in conjunction will at once recognise that there are analogies between the flexibility with which an estate owner should exact labour and payment from his tenants (*Rust.* 1.7.1–2) and that with which a governor or procurator should exact tribute from provincial populations (*Agr.* 15.2, 19–20.1, 31.1, 32.1, 32.4; cf. 9.4); between the necessity for an owner to attend his estate frequently and for a governor to regularly visit different parts of his province, on the ground that distance and absence inspire corruption and boldness on the part of one's subordinates or subjects (*Rust.* 1.1.18–20, 7.6, 8.20; *Agr.* 14.3–15.1, 15.5, 18.1–3, 20.2–3, 31.3; on continued military presence as inspiring compliance: *Agr.* 24.3, 25.2, 29.2, 30.2–3, 30.4–5, 38.2–4, 40.4); between the necessity for both estate owners and generals to be physically present to ensure that business gets done (*Rust.* 1.8.20; 2.1.1; *Agr.* 16.3, 16.4, 20.2, 21.1; cf. *Rust.* 1.7.11), and not to leave overseers or subordinate officers fully in charge (*Rust.* 2.1.1; *Agr.* 15.1, 16.2, 20.2); regarding both the virtue of appointing honest and competent staff members or subordinates (*Rust.* 1.7.5; *Agr.* 19.2) and the responsibility of the estate owner or governor to remove those who commit offenses (*Rust.* 1.7.5; *Agr.* 19.3); regarding the virtue of reprimanding misbehaviour and rewarding diligence (*Rust.* 1.8.5, 8.19; *Agr.* 5.1, 8.2, 9.2–3, 21.1, 22.4); and regarding the untrustworthiness of slaves in the management of a farm (*Rust.* 1.*praef.*3, 1.20, 7.3, 7.5–7; 2.1.1) and in the administration of a province (*Agr.* 15.2, 19.2).

Columella himself draws the analogy between estate owners (*domini*) and generals (*imperatores*) at *Rust.* 1.1.18–20, noting that when they are absent, work on farms and in armies ceases (1.18.1). He then writes that when men purchase lands in distant locations or, worse still, overseas, they render themselves dependent on slaves, who 'are corrupted by reason of the great remoteness of their masters (*tam longa dominorum distantia*) and, being once corrupted and in expectation of others to take their places (*sub expectatione successorum*) after the shameful acts which they have committed … are more intent on pillage than on farming' (*rapinis magis quam culturae student*, 1.1.20). Among the offenses committed by slaves on distant estates, according to Columella, are the theft of grain and dishonest record-keeping (1.7.7). The conceptual analogies with the corruption that, on Tacitus' account, characterises Rome's provincial administration are suggestive, the most salient example from *Agricola* being the way that procurators artificially raised the price of grain and purposefully

placed granaries at far-away locations, accepting bribes from Britons who wished to avoid lengthy transportation journeys (*Agr.* 19.4). That Tacitus appreciated these analogies may be inferred from his use of one of the aforementioned agricultural metaphors to describe Agricola 'cutting out' such abuses.

If we accept, then, that Tacitus, as he composed his account of Agricola's governorships, recalled the preface and Book 1 of *De re rustica*—in his later works, he will continue to recall these portions of Columella's work—one intriguing observation follows: the historian has transposed Columella's practical advice about slave-master relations in agriculture to the efficient running of a provincial administration.[20] Given Tacitus' fondness for agricultural and natural metaphors,[21] this application of *De re rustica* is in line with his methodology and intellectual approach.

Finally, in addition to Tacitus' allusions to Columella's remarks about land and estate management, there may be other aspects of *Agricola* that reflect Columellan influence. It is well known that the text's opening words (*clarorum virorum facta moresque **posteris tradere***: 'to relate famous men's deeds and characters for posterity') contain several agricultural terms that recall both Cato the Elder's *Origines* and, via a window reference,[22] Xenophon's *Symposium*.[23] In turn, the text's closing words (*Agricola **posteritati** narratus et **traditus** superstes erit*: 'Agricola's story has been told for posterity and he will survive'), in addition to recalling the opening ones in an elegant ring composition, seem to recall Col. *Rust.* 1.1.14 (*duo volumina similium praeceptorum de vineis Iulius Graecinus composita facetius et eruditius **posteritati tradenda** curavit*: 'Julius Graecinus has taken care that two volumes of similar instructions on vineyards, composed in a more elegant and learned style, should be handed down to posterity'). While *posteris tradere* is a common expression, the verb in combination with the abstract noun *posteritas* is rare, used elsewhere only by Curtius Rufus (*posteritati famaeque tradetis*, 6.3.17; *posteritatis memoriae traditum est* at Quint. *Inst.* 1.10.9 is close but works differently). Whether Columella had read the combination in Curtius and whether Tacitus recalls Curtius or Columella or possibly both (via another window reference) is impossible to determine. Both the passage in Curtius (which concerns the handing down of Alexander's achievements to posterity) and the one in Columella (which concerns

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[20] That Tacitus describes Rome's provincial administration in terms of slave-master relationships is well known: Lavan (2011); (2013) 127–42; cf. ten Berge (2023) 37 and nn. 40–1. The present article serves in part to add intertextual nuance to this conception.

[21] Cf. Woodman (with Kraus) (2014) 352 (see index, s.v. 'metaphor'); Woodman (2018) 326; Shannon-Henderson (forthcoming).

[22] A textual echo, through an intermediary, of an earlier common source: Thomas (1986) 188.

[23] Woodman (with Kraus) (2014) 68–9.

Graecinus' handing down to posterity his volumes on viticulture) are directly relevant to the points Tacitus makes at *Agr.* 1.1 and 46.4, respectively. An allusion to Curtius is improbable in the absence of other correspondences nearby. An allusion to Columella *a priori* is more probable given Tacitus' repeated engagement with Book 1 of *De re rustica* elsewhere and given the suitability of ending the biography with an allusion to the intellectual work of the honorand's father (whom Tacitus and others respected a great deal: *Agr.* 4.1; Sen. *Ben.* 2.21.5; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 29.6). But there may be more. Woodman speculates that Col. *Rust.* 1.1.14 itself recalls the opening or closing words of Graecinus' volumes on viticulture.[24] That we cannot prove. Still, it is an intriguing possibility that not only would nuance the closing words of *Agricola* and Tacitus' attempts to honor both son and father, but that would also elucidate the possible connections among men like Graecinus, Columella, Agricola, and Tacitus and, consequently, the origin of Tacitus' interest in *De re rustica* (more below). However that may be, both the agricultural terms that open the text and its closing allusions enunciate agriculture as being one of the text's underlying conceptual frameworks.[25]

Before moving to Tacitus' other texts, I should stress the possibility that the correspondences between *Agricola* and *De re rustica* discussed above may be coincidental. That is, I may be reading into terms and combinations that appeared in now lost texts and that Tacitus therefore did not derive from Columella. I would argue, however, per the methodological principles laid out above, that the combined weight of the evidence—viz., the presence, in a relatively short text (*ca.* 1,000 lines), of numerous linguistic and conceptual correspondences with Books 1 and 3 of *De re rustica*, correspondences that in several cases involve unique or rare terms and combinations—suggests that Columella's text featured as one of Tacitus' sources for his opening act.

One aspect of the historian's intellectual approach that is highlighted by his interactions with Columella is his assimilation of political subjects and natural phenomena. The way that Columella writes about nature in political terms seems to have resonated with Tacitus, who, here and elsewhere across his oeuvre (cf. nn. 21, 46, 69), writes about politics, foreign policy, and

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[24] '*Posteritati … traditus* may itself be a compliment, being a likely allusion to the work of A.'s father: the phrase recurs elsewhere at Colum. *RR* 1.1.14 … where Columella may very well be quoting from the preface or epilogue to Julius Graecinus' volumes on viticulture': Woodman (with Kraus) (2014) 330.

[25] The agricultural terms in the opening lines also underscore Agricola's military ability. As Woodman (with Kraus) (2014) 69 notes, 'thus T., embarking on the biography of a man who was called "Agricola" and whose distinction rested entirely upon his soldiering, has begun his work with a combined allusion to two writers who believed that farmers made the best soldiers (Xen. *Oec.* 5.14–16, Cato *Agr. praef.*4 *ex agricolis et uiri fortissimi et milites strenuissimi gignuntur*)'. Agricultural terms also feature in the opening lines of *Histories*: n. 69.

provincial government in natural terms.[26] The historian's use of language describing the management of nature reflects his interest in the latter as a metaphor for what needs governing or what escapes governing. Since agricultural metaphors are common in Roman literature (cf. n. 69), it would be rash to suggest that it was Columella's text that first suggested to Tacitus the relevance of agriculture as a conceptual framework. It would be more prudent to conjecture that reading *De re rustica* alerted him to the particular relevance of Columella's observations about estate and land management for his own outlook on Roman gubernatorial and military leadership.

IV. *Germania*

Columella's possible footprints can be discerned in two passages in *Germania* that concern Germania's soil and the Germani's horticultural practices. The first is *Germ.* 26.3, where Tacitus describes the Germani's indifference to planting orchards (*nec enim cum ubertate et amplitudine soli labore* <u>contendunt</u> ***ut pomaria conserant***, *ut prata separent, ut hortos rigent*: 'in fact, however, for all that their land is fertile and extensive, they make no effort to work at planting orchards, fencing off pasturage, or irrigating gardens') with a combination that appears elsewhere only in Columella (<u>curandum est</u> *autem*, ***ut*** *quam generosissimis pyris* ***pomaria conseramus***, *Rust.* 5.10.18: 'we must take care to plant our orchards with the most excellent pear-trees that we can find'). In both cases, the combination is introduced by an *ut*-clause that itself is introduced by verbs that, though not synonymous, work similarly. The one other passage that has a similar expression—*non vivunt contra naturam qui* ***pomaria*** *in summis turribus* ***serunt***?, Sen. *Ep.* 122.8.4–5 ('do those who plant orchards on top of a wall not live contrary to nature?')—neither has the same emphasis nor the same grammatical structure.

The second passage is *Germ.* 5.1, where Tacitus writes that '[the land] is wetter on the side facing the Gauls, windier opposite Noricum and Pannonia. It is fertile for sown crops but will not grow fruit-trees. It is rich in livestock …' (*humidior qua Gallias, ventosior qua Noricum ac Pannoniam aspicit*; *satis ferax*, <u>*frugiferarum arborum*</u> ***inpatiens***, <u>*pecorum*</u> ***fecunda*** …). This passage, it seems, alludes to *Agr.* 12.5–6, where Tacitus has ***patiens*** <u>*frugum pecudumque*</u>

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[26] This intellectual approach was common. Ash (forthcoming) shows how various authors (including Curtius Rufus, Pliny the Elder, Suetonius, Tacitus, Juvenal, Cassius Dio, and the anonymous author(s) of the *Alexander Romance*) assimilate political and natural subjects, exploring themes to do with power and imperialism from the perspective of marine life, rivers, and pools. Marzano (2023), moreover, demonstrates that large-scale arboriculture (including the movement of plants to Italy and the development of new cultivars) was closely connected with imperialism (exotic plants featured in triumphs and were part of the language of international rule) and elite interests.

fecundum. Above, we noted the various correspondences between that passage and Col. *Rust.* 3.2.4, 15. It is difficult to escape the impression that Tacitus, who composed *Agricola* and *Germania* at the same time and in close conjunction,[27] recalled *Rust.* 3.2.4, 3.2.15, 5.10.8 when describing the climate, soil, and agricultural and pastoral potential of Britain and Germania.[28]

V. *Dialogus*

Those reading *Dialogus* and *De re rustica* in conjunction will at once notice that the prefaces to both texts have certain elements in common: the strategy of presenting as a work's *raison d'être* a recurrent complaint, observation, or question to which the author offers an answer or response; the author's professed anxiety about his ability to provide this response or to handle a subject of great complexity; the distinction between past and present (to the advantage of the former), and the decline of a formerly vigorous *ars* (agriculture and oratory, respectively); and traditional explanations for such decline (including a decline in education, knowledge, training, and public morality, *inter alia*).[29] Although both prefaces also have some language in common (for instance, the verb *florere* and the noun *causidicus*: *Rust.* 1.*praef*.6; *Dial.* 1.1), all the above features are found in the oratorical texts of Cicero (i.e., in the prefaces to *De inventione*, *De oratore*, *Orator*, and *De natura deorum*), with whom both Columella (who cites *Orat.* 1–2 at *Rust.* 1.*praef*.29) and Tacitus engaged extensively.[30] We thus need not argue for Columellan influence on Tacitus to explain the presence of the above elements or indeed others (e.g., the agricultural collocation *circumcisa et amputata* at *Dial.* 32.4, which appears elsewhere only at Cic. *De or.* 1.65).

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[27] See ten Berge (2023) chapters 1 and 2.

[28] In addition to these probable allusions, *Germania* and *De re rustica* share various concerns and emphases. Some of the flaws of imperial society which Tacitus criticises by stressing their absence among the Germani are also condemned by Columella: the deleterious effects on morality of public entertainment and luxury (*Germ.* 5.2–3, 16.1–2, 19.1, 20.1, 24.1, 26.2–3; but cf. 21.1, 23; *Rust.* 1.*praef*.14–20; 10.*praef*.2–3) and, implicitly, of the prolonged peace imposed by the Principate (*Germ. passim* but esp. 37.3; *Rust.* 1.*praef*.19); usury (*Germ.* 26.1; *Rust.* 1.*praef*.8); the unreliability of slaves (*Germ.* 25.1; *Rust.* 1.*praef*.3, 1.20, 7.5–7, 8.1–2, 8.5–7, 8.18, 9.4–5); and secret correspondence and other types of clandestine maneuvering characteristic of imperial *delatio* (*Germ.* 19.1; cf. 20.5 on the lack of wills and on the notion that childlessness is not a problem; *Rust.* 1.*praef*.9). Since Tacitus does not recall any of the above passages, we must infer that the above commonalities simply reflect both men's engagement with common Roman concerns.

[29] On the conventions of Latin prose prefaces: Janson (1964) (60–4 for *Dialogus*).

[30] For Tacitus' use of Cicero in *Dialogus*: van den Berg (2014).

There are two passages in *Dialogus* that on the face of it may recall *De re rustica*. The first is *Dial.* 29.1, where Tacitus has Messalla ascribe oratory's decline to the fact that the upbringing of Roman children, which under the Republic was overseen by strict and careful mothers, now is entrusted to 'some worthless Greek maid, who has the assistance of one or at most two of all the slaves, and they are generally the ones of poorest character and unsuited for any important duty' (*at nunc natus infans delegatur Graeculae alicui ancillae, cui adiungitur unus aut alter ex omnibus servis, plerumque vilissimus nec cuiquam serio ministerio adcommodatus*). This passage is cited in scholarship on Columella as a comparandum for the author's claim that any decline in agriculture is due not to problems with the soil's fertility or the climate but to a general indifference to, and a lack of proper instruction in, the art of husbandry, which is delegated not to best people (as was the custom under the Republic) but to 'all the worst of our slaves, as if to a hangman for punishment' (*pessimo cuique servorum, velut carnifici noxae, Rust.* 1.*praef*.3).[31] Both Columella and Tacitus single out the role that not just slaves but the worst of slaves enjoy in central areas of contemporary Roman life, stressing their destructive influence on the art of husbandry and oratory, respectively. We thus have an affinity in outlook and narrative focus. The linguistic correspondences (*servis … cuiquam ~ cuique servorum*), however, are minimal and hardly meet the 'requirements' for an allusion. Tacitus' concern with the delegation of children's upbringing to nurses and paedagogues, moreover, was a common one.[32] It is therefore more prudent for scholars of Columella to cite *Dial.* 29.1 as a pertinent comparandum that elucidates the agriculturalist's outlook than it would be for scholars of Tacitus to take that passage as alluding to *Rust.* 1.*praef*.3.

We are on surer ground, I think, with *Dial.* 14.3, where Tacitus seems to recall a rare combination[33] used by Columella in his summary history of agricultural literature. The way that Columella ends this summary history appears to have garnered Tacitus' attention, which makes good sense given that this is where the agriculturalist praises Agricola's father Graecinus. Columella, after praising the eminent agricultural authors of old, writes:

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[31] For example, R. Martin (1971) 11; Diederich (2007) 385 and n. 2067.

[32] Mayer (2001) 179.

[33] The combination **_nostrorum temporum_** is surprisingly rare, appearing 3x in Cicero, 1x in Quintilian, 1x in Pliny the Younger, but 4x in Columella (*Rust.* 1.1.6, 14; 12.*praef*.10, 52.16) and 3x in *Dialogus* (1.4, 17.1, 21.9). Only at Col. *Rust.* 1.1.14 and Tac. *Agr.* 1.1 does the combination stand in close proximity to the noun **_vir_**. Tacitus uses the reverse combination—**_temporum nostrorum_** (again rare: 1x in Pliny the Elder, 1x in Quintilian, 1x in Pliny the Younger)—at *Dial.* 14.3, 26.2, 27.1, in the first instance again with **_viri_**. We ought not let the ostensible banality of a phrase like 'our times' close our mind to the evidence: that in this particular form the combination was rare and presumably noticeable to well-read and attentive native readers.

No less honour, however, is due to men of our own time (*non minorem tamen laudem meruerunt **nostrorum temporum viri***), Cornelius Celsus and Julius Atticus; for Cornelius has embraced the whole substance of the subject in five books, while the latter has published just one book on one kind of agriculture, that concerned with vines. And his pupil, as it were, Julius Graecinus, has taken care that two volumes of similar instructions on vineyards, composed in a more elegant and learned style, should be handed down to posterity (***posteritati tradenda curavit***) (*Rust.* 1.1.14)

The notion that imperial Romans are inferior to their republican counterparts, but that some modern Romans deserve as much praise as their ancient forerunners, recurs in *Dialogus*, where Tacitus, recalling Columella's words but inverting the noun and the adjective, describes Marcus Aper and Julius Secundus as 'men of the highest character and also the best orators of our times' (***viri*** *optimi et **temporum nostrorum*** *oratores*, 14.3). The historian repeats the combination twice more, introducing Aper as the interlocutor who 'preferred the eloquence of our times to that of antiquity' (***nostrorum temporum*** *eloquentiam antiquorum ingeniis anteferret*, 1.4; trans. Benario (1991), slightly modified) and later describing him as praising the 'richness and glitter of our times' (*laetitiam nitoremque **nostrorum temporum***, 21.9). Moreover, the closing words of Columella's summary history (***posteritati tradenda curavit***), which, as we have seen, are rare in this peculiar combination, are recalled by the closing words of *Agricola*; just as Graecinus had handed down to posterity his volumes on viticulture, so the biography hands down to posterity the memory of Graecinus' son Agricola. Tacitus' repeated use—in virtually the same manner as does Columella—of the above combinations strongly suggests that at *Agr.* 46.4 and *Dial.* 1.4, 14.3, 21.9[34] he is recalling *Rust.* 1.1.14.[35]

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[34] That Tacitus is recalling the same Columellan passage in these different contexts makes good sense given that, as Whitton (2019) (chapters 6 and 11) argues, the earliest drafts of *Dialogus* probably were already in circulation by the time Tacitus finalised *Agricola* and *Germania*, meaning that all three texts were conceptualised at the same time.

[35] If this is correct, we may conjecture that Columella's summary history—which serves to situate his text within a longer tradition, to illustrate the development of agricultural knowledge over time, and to point farmers and landowners to the materials they ought to study—is reflected in the way that Tacitus situates his different texts within the longer traditions of biographical, ethnographic, oratorical, and historiographical literature. Moreover, Columella's concern to chart the development of agricultural knowledge is mirrored by the way that *Dialogus*, across its speeches, charts the longer development of Roman oratory. See Levene (2004) on *Dialogus* as constituting a literary history.

VI. *Histories*

The one apparent sign of Columellan influence on *Histories* is Tacitus' repeated use of the rare collocation of *circus* and *theatrum* (*Hist.* 1.4.3, 32.1, 72.3; 2.21.4, 91.2; 3.2.2). The collocation first appears in the preface to Book 2 of Varro's *De re rustica*.[36] Columella productively mined Varro's sentence, citing the first part (nearly verbatim) at *Rust.* 1.*praef*.15,[37] recalling the second part (again very closely) at *Rust.* 1.*praef*.20,[38] and using the collocation once more at *Rust.* 1.8.2.[39] Aside from Varro, Columella, and Tacitus, the only other author to use the collocation is Seneca the Younger.[40] Another passage that comes into play is in Plutarch's *Life of Galba*. Plutarch, describing the same episode as does Tacitus at *Hist.* 1.72.3, uses similar language, including the collocation θεάτροις

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[36] *Rust.* 2.*praef*.3: *igitur quod nunc intra murum fere patres familiae correpserunt relictis falce et aratro et manus movere maluerunt **in theatro ac circo**, quam in segetibus ac vinetis, frumentum locamus qui nobis advehat, qui saturi fiamus ex Africa et Sardinia, et navibus vindemiam condimus ex insula Coa et Chia*: 'As therefore in these days practically all the heads of families have sneaked within the walls, abandoning the sickle and the plough, and would rather busy their hands in the theatre and in the circus than in the grain-fields and the vineyards, we hire a man to bring us from Africa and Sardinia the grain with which to fill our stomachs, and the vintage we store comes in ships from the islands of Cos and Chios'.

[37] *Omnes enim, sicut M. Varro iam temporibus avorum conquestus est, patres familiae falce et aratro relictis intra murum correpsimus et **in circis potius ac theatris** quam in segetibus et vinetis manus movemus*: 'For, even as Marcus Varro complained in the days of our grandfathers, all of us who are heads of families have quit the sickle and the plough and have crept within the city-walls; and we ply our hands in the circuses and theatres rather than in the grainfields and vineyards'.

[38] *Itaque in* 'hoc Latio et Saturnia terra', *ubi di fructus agrorum progeniem suam docuerant, ibi nunc ad hastam locamus, ut nobis ex transmarinis provinciis advehatur frumentum, ne fame laboremus, et vindemias condimus ex insulis Cycladibus ac regionibus Baeticis Gallicisque*: 'So, then, in "this Latium and Saturnian land", where the gods had taught their offspring of the fruits of the fields, we let contracts at auction for the importation of grain from our provinces beyond the sea, that we may not suffer hunger; and we lay up our stores of wine from the Cyclades Islands and from the districts of Baetica and Gaul'.

[39] *Socors et somniculosum genus id mancipiorum, otiis, campo, **circo**, **theatris**, aleae, popinae, lupanaribus consuetum, numquam non easdem ineptias somniat; quas cum in agri culturam transtulit, non tantum in ipso servo quantum in universa re detrimenti dominus capit*: 'The lazy and sleepy-headed class of servants, accustomed to idling, to the Campus, the Circus, and the theatres, to gambling, to cookshops, to bawdy-houses, never ceases to dream of these follies; and when they carry them over into their farming, the master suffers not so much loss in the slave himself as in his whole estate'.

[40] *Ep.* 76.2: **in theatrum** *senex ibo **et in circum** deferar et nullum par sine me depugnabit ad philosophum ire erubescam?* ('if I, an old man, go to the theatre and am carried to the circus and let no gladiatorial bout finish without my presence, shall I blush to attend a philosopher's lecture?'); *Vit. Beat.* 28.1: *sicut plurimi, quibus **in circo aut theatro** desidentibus* … ('like the many who lounge in the circus or theatre …').

καὶ σταδίοις (*Galb.* 17.4). The *communis opinio* is that Tacitus and Plutarch followed a common source (perhaps Pliny the Elder or Cluvius Rufus; Syme postulated an *Ignotus*).[41] If that is correct, it is possible that Tacitus got the collocation not from Varro, Columella, or Seneca but from the *Ignotus*. Tacitus' repeated use of it elsewhere in *Histories*, however—in episodes not recorded with analogous language in the parallel tradition—makes it more plausible that he derived it from one or more of the other authors.

Given the rarity of the collocation—whose centrality in Varro's prefatory remarks and direct citation by Columella may have made it stand out more to Seneca, Tacitus, and other now lost authors than we can appreciate today— and Tacitus' allusions to Book 1 of Columella's *De re rustica* elsewhere, it is probable that the historian is at least recalling Columella. That he is simultaneously recalling Varro (via a window reference) is also likely given his proclivity for complex imitation,[42] given that he uses the collocation to make the same point as do both authors, and given that he recalls the same passages again at *Ann.* 12.43.2 (more below). As for Seneca, there is little reason to assume that Tacitus is recalling *Ep.* 76.2, which has both a different focus and a different expression. *Vit. Beat.* 28.1, however, has the same expression and contains a verb (*desidentibus*) that Tacitus also has (in cognate adjectival form) at *Hist.* 2.21.4, which suggests that the historian there has Seneca in his sights (more below).

Assuming, then, that Seneca and Tacitus, even if the latter used the *Ignotus* at *Hist.* 1.72.3, got the collocation, and its moralising associations, from Varro and Columella, several observations follow. Both Varro and Columella had used the collocation in their prefatory claims about the moral degeneration of their respective societies as contrasted with past generations.[43] That outlook plainly accords with Tacitus' own. The contrast between the corruptions of urban life and the virtues of the countryside and, relatedly, that between the corruption of the City and the simplicity of provincial life recurs across his oeuvre (cf. *Agr.* 4.2, 21.2; *Germ. passim*; *Dial.* 28.3, 29.3; *Hist.* 4.64.2; *Ann.* 15.44.4; 16.5.1). In their respective prefaces, Varro and Columella blame Rome's

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[41] Hardy (1890) (introduction); (1906) 294–333; Syme (1980) 110 (= Syme (1984) 1257); R. H. Martin (1981) 190; Bowersock (1998) 203–4; Damon (2003) 23–4 (with n. 21; also see the appendix at 291–302); Levick (2013) 555 n. 36.

[42] See most recently Whitton (2019) and ten Berge (2023). Note, for example, the opening lines of *Dialogus*, which recall multiple Ciceronian and Quintilian passages, or Maternus' description of *eloquentia* as being *alumna licentiae* ('a nursling of license', *Dial.* 40.2), which simultaneously recalls three Ciceronian contexts (*De or.* 2.35; *Rep.* 1.68; *Brut.* 45). See ten Berge (2023) 130–7 and the references there.

[43] On Columella's critical (and complex) attitude towards the *luxuria* of imperial Rome and its influence on nature and agricultural practice: Noè (2000); (2002) 178–85; Diederich (2007) 372–95.

diminished agricultural production, and its consequent dependence on the provinces for its food supply, on the City's moral corruption and an attendant disinterest in agriculture. These problems are seen to be caused chiefly by people's obsession with public entertainment, that is by their spending more time in the circus and the theatre than in grain-fields and vineyards. As we shall see, Tacitus, who already in *Agricola* (21.2), *Germania* (19.1–2) and *Dialogus* (28.3, 29.3) emphasises the destructive influence of public entertainment on a people's morality, both recalls the Varronian and Columellan collocation and, in one case, recalls both Columella and Seneca to make analogous claims in *Histories*.

The collocation first appears in the preface. Tacitus, describing the divergent responses to Nero's death on the part of the equestrian and senatorial classes, on the one hand, and of the plebs, slaves, and those who had wasted their property, on the other, characterises the plebs as 'low-life types who had grown accustomed to the circus and theatres' (*plebs sordida*[A] *et **circo ac theatris**[B] **sueta**,[C]* 1.4.3), a characterisation that seems to recall Columella's 'lazy and sleepy-headed' slaves (*socors et somniculosum genus*[A] *id mancipiorum, otiis, campo, **circo, theatris**,[B] aleae, popinae, lupanaribus **consuetum**,[C] Rust.* 1.8.2) and that itself is recalled at *Hist.* 2.91.2 (*omnem infimae plebis*[A] *rumorem **in theatro**[B] ut spectator, **in circo**[B] ut fautor adfectavit*). This prefatory description of the plebs sets the stage for several interconnected episodes across Book 1. *Hist.* 1.4.3 is picked up at 1.32.1 (*universa iam plebs Palatium implebat, mixtis servitiis et dissono clamore caedem Othonis et coniuratorum exitium poscentium ut si in **circo aut theatro**[B] ludicrum aliquod postularent*: 'the whole populace now was mobbing the palace together with some slaves. With discordant shouts they demanded Otho's head and the execution of the conspirators, as if the crowd were clamouring for some sort of entertainment in the circus or theatre') and 1.72.3 (*populus … concurrere ex tota urbe in Palatium ac fora et, ubi plurima volgi licentia, in **circum ac theatra**[B] effusi seditiosis vocibus strepere, donec Tigellinus accepto apud Sinuessanas aquas supremae necessitatis nuntio*: 'people ran from the whole city to the palace and the squares, and overflowing into the circus and theatres, where the mob can demonstrate with the greater impunity, raised a seditious clamour. In the end, Tigellinus received the order to commit suicide at Sinuessa Spa'). The plebs here emerge as spectators and in some cases engineers of political discord and violence, their chief characteristics being a moral depravity and a lack of self-restraint that in part were shaped by, and that were most clearly expressed in, the *circus* and *theatrum*.

Tacitus likewise uses the collocation in several interconnected episodes in Books 2 and 3, highlighting both the Vitellians' failure to anticipate how City's corruptions will influence them and Antonius Primus' shrewd understanding of that very influence, which allows him to see the virtue of invading Italy at once instead of waiting for Mucianus. Tacitus, it seems, has embellished these

scenes with allusions to both Columella and Seneca. At 2.21.4, the Vitellians are described as mocking the Othonians at Placentia, calling them 'flabby layabouts who had been ruined by the circus and the theatre' (*illi ut <u>segnem et **desidem**</u>*[A] *et **<u>circo ac theatris</u>**[B] corruptum militem*), a depiction that likens them both to Columella's lazy and sleepy-headed slaves, who busy themselves with the 'voluptuous occupations of the city' (<u>*urbanas ac delicatas artes*</u>[C]) and who are accustomed to lounging in those same venues (<u>*socors et somniculosum*</u>[A] *genus id mancipiorum, otiis, campo, **circo, theatris**[B] … consuetum, Rust.* 1.8.2), and to those whom Seneca describes as 'lounging in the circus or theatre' (*sicut plurimi, quibus **<u>in circo aut theatro</u>**[B] <u>desidentibus</u>**[A]** (Vit. Beat.* 28.1).

This mockery rebounds on the Vitellians when they reach Rome ahead of the second Battle of Bedriacum: the City's corruptions (<u>*inlecebras urbis*</u>[C]) debilitate them physically and morally (2.93.1),[44] and Primus urges the Flavian generals at the war conference at Poetovio to invade Italy at once, in part because the Vitellians 'had been softened up by the circus, the theatres, and the charms of the capital, and they were exhausted by illnesses' (**<u>circo quoque ac theatris</u>**[B] *et <u>amoenitate urbis</u>[C] emollitos aut valetudinibus fessos*, 3.2.2). In addition to the repetition of the collocation of *circus* and *theatrum*, both *inlecebras urbis* and *amoenitate urbis* discreetly gloss Columella's *urbanas ac delicatas artes* and *aleae, popinae, lupanaribus*, while *emollitos*[45] furthers the comparison between Columella's slaves and the Vitellians, who have ruined their bodies and consequently are unfit for agricultural labour and battle, respectively.

Tacitean Rome, then, is a place of debilitating luxury and entertainment, and the historian's outlook on the City as a locus of corruption and on the plebs as being *sordida* and *infima* seems to have been informed in part by the prefatory remarks of two eminent agrarian authors, whose emphasis on the circus and the theatre as a conjoined generator of vice, immorality, and idleness seems to have been more striking than the ostensible banality of the collocation of *circus* and *theatrum* at first suggests.[46]

[44] <u>*Inlecebras*</u> *urbis* recalls *nullis spectaculorum <u>inlecebris</u> … corruptae* at *Germ.* 19.1, an ethnographic allusion that is relevant to Tacitus' characterisation of Vitellius' German legions and Germanic cohorts: ten Berge (2023) 253–4.

[45] *Emollitos* recalls *emollierit* at *Agr.* 11.4 (the verb's only other appearance in the extant corpus), where it is used to describe the enervating effect on native populations of long-term subjection to Rome: ten Berge (2023) 258.

[46] Further agricultural metaphors and allusions to Columella may have appeared in the lost books of *Histories*. As Shannon-Henderson (forthcoming) notes, Ps.-Hegesippus, Sulpicius Severus, and Orosius, in their respective narratives of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, use an analogous horticultural metaphor—that of tearing something (here, Judaism) out by the root—that may go back to Tacitus' lost account of the same events.

VII. *Annals*

Allusions to *De re rustica*—particularly, as in Tacitus' earlier texts, to the preface and Book 1—continue in *Annals*, including in the digression on the first nine years of Tiberius' reign (4.6) and in the well-known methodological chapters at 4.32–3. Among the virtues that Tacitus ascribes to Tiberius was his management of Rome's food supply: 'the plebs kept being exhausted by an admittedly acute food supply, but there was no blame for that on the princeps's part: in fact he confronted the problems of infertile lands and rough seas as much as he could by his expenditure and assiduousness' (*plebes acri quidem annona fatigabatur, sed nulla in eo **culpa** ex **principe**, quin **infecunditati terrarum** aut <u>asperis maris</u> obviam iit, quantum impendio diligentiaque poterat*, 4.6.4). On various grounds, it is likely that Tacitus here is recalling *Rust.* 1.*praef*.1, the very words with which Columella opens *De re rustica*: 'again and again I hear the leading men of our state condemning now the unfruitfulness of the soil, now the inclemency of the climate for some seasons past, as harmful to crops' (*saepenumero civitatis nostrae **principes** audio **culpantes** modo <u>agrorum</u> **infecunditatem**, modo <u>caeli</u> per multa iam tempora noxiam frugibus <u>intemperiem</u>*). The noun *infecunditas*, a striking antonym of the common noun *fecunditas*, appears elsewhere at Sall. *Hist.* 3.46 M 3.12 R; Plin. *HN* 11.50; Apul. *Mund.* 36. But only Columella and Tacitus have it with a genitive noun (an analogous one at that: *terrarum ~ agrorum*), and both passages contain further correspondences (**culpa** ~ **culpantes**; **principe** ~ **principes**) and contextual overlap.[47] Columella, recalling Varro (nn. 37–9), goes on to decry Rome's dependence on the import of grain from overseas, a point which *asperis maris* discreetly glosses and which is recalled more explicitly in Book 12 (more below).

Tacitus' allusive efforts here may be more intricate, however, than they appear at first sight. For Columella, who we know engaged extensively with Cicero, seems to have reworked a section in *De natura deorum* (*fecunditate **terrarum** … <u>caeli</u> <u>temperatione</u>, Nat. D.* 2.13), recalling Cicero's remarks about the 'fertility of the soil', the 'temperate climate', and the 'other blessings' granted by the gods, but doing so by twice taking a positive noun and switching it to its negative equivalent (*fecunditas* → *infecunditas*; *temperatio* → *intemperies*). Since Tacitus has *infecunditas* with *terrarum* rather than Columella's *agrorum*, might he have followed Columella back to Cicero and restored *terrarum* from

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[47] Tacitus could have used the common noun *sterilitas* (which he uses at *Hist.* 4.74.2 and *Ann.* 14.63.1 and which Columella himself uses eleven times) or used a construction with the equally common noun *fecunditas* (see below). Instead, he opted for *infecunditas*, which Columella has in an analogous context concerning the quality of Italy's soil. *Ann.* 12.43, which recalls *Ann.* 4.6.4, stresses the same point as does Columella, namely that Italy's soil is not barren (despite protestations to the contrary). Cf. Woodman (2018) 95.

Nat. D. 2.13?[48] That may be the case. But there is more. *Terra* with *fecunditas* appears elsewhere only at Plin. *HN* 17.148.1 (*terrae fecunditatem*) and Plin. *Pan.* 32.1 (*terrarum fecunditatem*). This last passage, in which Pliny the Younger praises Trajan for his management of the earth's resources in feeding the provinces, is directly relevant to Tacitus' remarks about Tiberius at *Ann.* 4.6.4 and may offer further guidance. Pliny uses *sterilitas* four times in the broader section in which *terrarum fecunditatem* appears, while Cicero had used *fecunditas* at *Nat. D.* 2.13. Varro, moreover, has *agros fecundissimos* at *Rust.* 2.*praef.*2, the other passage that is in the intertextual mix both here and at *Ann.* 12.43.2. It is thus significant that Tacitus, who was well acquainted with both *De natura deorum*[49] and *Panegyricus*,[50] preferred *infecunditas*, borrowing the latter from Columella but retaining the noun with which *fecunditas* was typically coupled (*terrarum*).[51] Whether Tacitus, in addition to looking to Columella and Varro, also looked to Cicero and/or Pliny (something that, again, would be in line with his *modus operandi*: n. 42), or whether he used *terrarum* simply because that was the more common expression with *fecunditas*, we cannot know. That at least Columella was one of his sources here is highly likely.

Tacitus has *infecunditas* once more, at *Ann.* 12.43.2, where he describes a famine that occurred in 51 due to a shortage of crops. Popular protests broke out, and, ultimately, after it had been ascertained that Rome had only fifteen days of food left, the city was saved by the grace of the gods and a mild winter. At this point, the historian intrudes upon the narrative to offer an emotionally charged comment: 'yet, as Hercules is my witness, at one time Italy transported supplies to distant provinces for the legions! Nor is barrenness the trouble even now: rather, we work the land of Africa and Egypt, and it is to the risks of ships that the livelihood of the Roman people has been entrusted' (*at hercule olim Italia legionibus longinquas in provincias commeatus portabat, nec nunc* **_infecunditate_** *laboratur, sed Africam potius et Aegyptum exercemus, navibusque et casibus vita populi Romani permessa est*). Tacitus here simultaneously recalls Tiberius' comments about Italy's dependence on the provinces (3.54.4),[52] his own description of that emperor's handling of the food crisis in 23 (4.6.4: see above), Varro's comments at *Rust.* 2.*praef.*3 (Tacitus here uses words that appear in the relevant section in Varro but not in the relevant section in Columella), and Columella's prefatory response (1.*praef.*1–3, 20) to the common

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[48] I owe this potential link with Cicero to Christopher Whitton, who suggested it to me after reading an earlier draft of this article.

[49] See van den Berg (2014).

[50] See Bruère (1954).

[51] *Fecundus* or *fecunditas* with *ager* appears only at Varro, *Rust.* 2.*praef.*2 and Liv. 38.15.9.

[52] 'The verbal resemblance is remarkable': Syme (1958) 708. We thus have two passages in *Annals* regarding Italy's agricultural productivity that may look back to Columella.

conception that Italy's soil was exhausted and that Rome was forced to rely on the provinces for its food supply.[53] The historian, in order to accentuate his resentment about Rome's dependence on the provinces—a theme of contemporary significance, as Plin. *Pan.* 30–1 shows[54]—recalls what appear to have been two *loci classici* for this particular Roman concern. When we also take into account his engagement, in *Histories*, with Varro's and Columella's prefatory remarks about the destructive influence of Rome's moral corruption on the art of husbandry—remarks that are part of those men's broader disavowal of the notion that agricultural productivity had declined because of the depletion of Italy's soil—we have accumulated evidence of his engagement with Columella's preface.[55]

Let us return now to Book 4. Tacitus, in his well-known digression about his subject matter, contrasts both the rich material and the freedom of thought and speech enjoyed by republican historians with the more circumscribed material and the more restrictive socio-political environment with which imperial historians are faced (4.32–3). To underline the freedom with which republican historians could record foreign and domestic affairs and move between them (***libero egressu*** *memorabant*, 4.32.1), Tacitus seems to recall a unique combination that Columella had used four times to describe the free movement of animals (*Rust.* 6.23.3; 8.8.1, 8.6; 9.1.9).[56] This description is likely to have been expressive when heard by sensitised Roman ears. As Mayer notes, 'the Romans felt metaphorical usages of their language more strongly than we do in ours, and commonly qualified any novel departure'.[57] In any case, Tacitus' use of an animal metaphor to conceptualise the development of an *ars* accords with his practice elsewhere: he uses a similar metaphor—that of race horses moving freely through a spacious race track (*nam quo modo nobiles equos cursus et spatia probant, sic est aliquis oratorum campus per quem nisi **liberi** et soluti ferantur debilitatur ac frangitur eloquentia*, *Dial.* 39.2: 'for, just as a spacious race

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[53] Scholars of Columella (R. Martin (1971) 263; Noè (2002) 31–2; cf. Noè (1998) 119) are alert to the analogies between Columella's and Tacitus' outlook here, but do not entertain the notion that the former was probably the latter's source.

[54] Cf. *Hist.* 3.8.2, 3.48.3, 4.52.2, where Tacitus describes Vespasian holding back grain ships from Egypt during the civil wars.

[55] Unless we wish to ascribe to chance Tacitus' repeated use, in multiple passages across two texts, of several rare terms and combinations that appear elsewhere only in Columella's preface or in the latter and a few other authors, we should follow the evidence and conclude that Tacitus is recalling the agriculturalist's prefatory remarks.

[56] As Woodman (2018) 176–7 notes, '*liber egressus* is found elsewhere only in Columella (4×), where it is used literally to refer to the free movement of animals and birds (6.23 'freti uiribus per nemora uagantur liberosque egressus et reditus habent' (of bulls), 8.8 (bis), 9.1); here in T. the phrase is being used metaphorically to explain that republican historians could move freely between and within domestic and foreign narratives'.

[57] Mayer (2001) 102.

track proves high-born steeds, so too there is a kind of testing ground for orators; unless they are borne through it free and unhampered, eloquence is weakened and then broken')—to describe the decline of oratory,[58] and other animal (and hunting) metaphors to characterise Agricola's British foes as wild animals (*Agr.* 34.2–3; cf. 24.1, 32.2, 33.3, 33.5, 37.3–4) and Vitellius as a sluggish animal (*Hist.* 3.36.1).[59]

In the next chapter, Tacitus stresses the utility of investigating and transmitting imperial history (*sic converso statu, neque alia re Romana, quam si unus imperitet, haec* **conquiri tradi***que in rem fuerit*, 4.33.2: 'now that the situation has changed and there is no salvation for affairs other than if one man is in command, it will be apposite for these matters to have been investigated and transmitted'; trans. Woodman (2004), slightly modified: cf. n. 60). Here, too, the historian may have borrowed from *De re rustica*, again from the preface. Columella had justified, and encouraged his readers to undertake, the investigation of vast and complex subjects by paraphrasing Cicero's *Orator*: 'nevertheless, as Marcus Tullius has very properly said in his *Orator*, it is right that those who have an earnest desire to investigate subjects of the greatest utility for the human race, and to transmit to posterity their carefully weighed findings, should try everything' (*verum tamen, quod in Oratore iam M. Tullius rectissime dixit, par est eos, qui generi humano res utilissimas* **conquirere** *et perpensas exploratasque memoriae* **tradere** *concupierint, cuncta temptare, Rust.* 1.*praef.* 29). The distinctiveness of the combination of *conquirere* and *tradere* (which both authors have as paired infinitives and which occurs nowhere else[60]), its proximity to the apparent allusion at 4.32.1, the presence of contextual affinity (both authors stress the complexity of their materials, the utility of their investigations for posterity, and the intellectual payoff of their efforts), and Tacitus' allusions to Columella's preface elsewhere suggest that we have another allusion here. If that is correct—again, we cannot be absolutely sure, especially given the commonality of both verbs—Tacitus alludes to both Cicero and Columella to highlight the challenges of his task and the benefits to be gained from recording, and reading about, the minutiae of imperial history.

Later in Book 4, Tacitus uses several horticultural metaphors that look like the kind of thing he might have derived from Columella. At 4.68.3, he describes Germanicus' family—whose changing fortunes are traced across the

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[58] To demonstrate the same point, he also uses the metaphor of a field of wildflowers (*Dial.* 40.4) and of a flame nourished by its own material (*Dial.* 36.1).

[59] See ten Berge (2023) 231–3.

[60] As Woodman (2018) 181 observes, '*conquirere* evidently means both "to search out" and "to investigate" (*OLD* 2 and 3): since *tradi* clearly looks back to *rettuli … referam … memoratu* at the start of the digression, it is natural to conclude that *conquiri* looks back to *introspicere* and hence that it means, at least primarily, "to investigate" (as at Col. 1.*praef.* 29, where it is again combined with *tradere*)'.

book[61]—as 'a tree or plant, once thriving but now laid low',[62] using the horticultural verbs *florere* and *adfligere*. That description recalls both the book's opening line, where the historian, using the same verb (*florentis domus*), writes that 'Tiberius was experiencing his ninth year with the state calm and his household flourishing (Germanicus' death he reckoned among the successes)', and 4.12.1, where the senate and the people, during Tiberius' eulogy for his son Drusus, are described as inwardly rejoicing because the house of Germanicus was 'recuperating' (*revirescere*; cf. *Galbae … partes revirescere crederentur*, *Hist.* 3.7.2). At 4.71.4, Tacitus continues this horticultural imagery by describing Livia as having 'overturned at the base' (*subvertisset*, *OLD* 1) her stepchildren Gaius and Lucius Caesar and Agrippa Postumus. Since the verbs in question are common and nowhere used by Columella in conjunction, there is no good reason to assume that Tacitus, in any of the above cases, is recalling *De re rustica*. I have nonetheless listed these passages, which readers (like the author) may think of when considering Columella's possible footprints in *Annals*.

The next (and more secure) example of Tacitus' borrowing from Columella comes at *Ann.* 13.57.3. To explain that a fire that had sprung up amongst the Ubii could not be extinguished by any source of water—whether rain-water, river-water, or any other source of moisture (*non si imbres caderent, non si **fluvialibus aquis** aut quo alio humore perfunderentur*)—Tacitus uses a unique combination[63] that Columella had used at *Rust.* 6.22.2 to explain that '[cows] do not require rivers and streams so much as artificial ponds, since river-water, which is generally colder, causes abortion, while rain-water is pleasanter to the taste' (*nec tam fluvios rivosque desiderat, quam lacus manu factos; quoniam et **fluvialis aqua**, quae fere frigidior est, partum abigit, et caelestis iucundior est*). Given both the distinctiveness of the combination and its relevance to the current context—which demanded a way of describing water drawn from a river—the natural inference is that Tacitus here is following Columella.

Our final example comes at *Ann.* 16.14.1–2, where Tacitus describes how Antistius Sosianus, seeing the substantial benefits to be reaped from turning *delator*, set out to ensnare Publius Anteius. The latter, as Sosianus knew, made an especially good victim:

> Anteium caritate Agrippinae invisum Neroni opesque eius **praecipuas**[A] **ad eliciendam cupidinem**[B] eamque causam multis exitio esse. igitur interceptis Antei litteris, furatus etiam libellos, quibus

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[61] See ten Berge (forthcoming).

[62] Woodman (2018) 315.

[63] The adjective *fluvialis* itself is rare (nine times before Tacitus but thrice in Columella: 6.22.2; 8.15.5, 16.4), and the combination with *aqua* appears elsewhere only in Apuleius.

dies **genitalis**^C eius et eventura secretis Pammenis occultabantur …
scribit ad principem …

Anteius was resented by Nero on account of his affection for Agrippina
and his wealth was a principal means of enticing that covetousness
which was the reason for the extermination of many. So, intercepting a
letter from Anteius and stealing also a document in which his natal day
and (according to Pammenes' secrets) future were concealed … he
wrote to the princeps …

However bizarre it may seem, Tacitus here may be recalling *Rust.* 6.24.2 and
6.27.10, where Columella explains the following:

si aut femina recusat, aut non appetit taurus, eadem rationem, qua
fastidientibus equis mox **praecipiemus**,^A **elicitur cupiditas**^B odore
genitalium^D admoto naribus.

If the female refuses intercourse or the bull feels no desire for her, the
same method is employed as we shall presently prescribe for the stallion
who shows distaste for the mare, namely desire is stimulated by bringing
to the nostrils the odour of the genital parts.

quod si admissarius iners in venerem est, odore proritatur, detersis
spongia feminae locis, et admota naribus equi. Rursus si equa marem
non patitur, detrita scilla naturalia eius linuntur, quae res accendit
libidinem. Nonnunquam ignobilis quoque ac vulgaris **elicit
cupidinem**^B coeundi.

But if a stallion is disinclined for intercourse, he can be roused by the
odour of a sponge, with which the parts of the mare have been wiped,
applied to his nostrils. On the other hand, if the mare refuses to submit
to the stallion, her parts are anointed with crushed squill, and this
kindles her desire. Sometimes, too, a badly-bred ordinary horse is used
to arouse in the mare a longing for copulation.

The combination of *elicere* and *cupido* (in the second passage) occurs nowhere
outside of the above passages. *Elicere* with *cupiditas*, which Columella has in the
first passage, occurs once elsewhere, at Liv. 45.19.5, where Livy relates that evil
advisers in Rome urged Attalus II to move against his brother (this passage
contains no further correspondences with *Ann.* 16.14.1–2). Although variation
in imitation is routine practice, Tacitus' preference for *cupidinem*, rather than
Livy's *cupiditatem*, with *elicere*, coupled with the additional correspondences with
Rust. 6.24.2 (**praecipiemus** ~ **praecipuas**, **genitalis** ~ **genitalium**; these

correspondences seem to reflect the kind of unconscious or 'irrational' imitation mentioned in part II of the article), suggests that the historian, if he is indeed recalling a predecessor here, is recalling Columella.

If this is correct, the allusion would serve to compare Nero's greed for money as a driver of violence with the smell of genitalia as a driver of animal intercourse. This comparison not only would be conceptually damning, depicting the emperor as an animal (a)roused by the slightest hint of financial gain, but also would be in line, again, with Tacitus' practice elsewhere. As we have seen, he depicts Agricola's British foes and Vitellius as animals, and the image of Nero as possessing disordered (sexual) proclivities has been fully developed by the time the reader gets to the current episode.

I end by including a passage from *Annals* that may contain a further correspondence with Columella. Since this correspondence is supported neither by further correspondences nor by contextual overlap, we cannot pin it down as an allusion. I nonetheless add it here for completeness' sake. The passage is 14.64.2, where Tacitus records the murder of Claudia Octavia: 'she was chained up, and the veins were cut in all her limbs; and because the blood, arrested by her fear, flowed too slowly, her life was terminated by the steam of an excessively heated bath' (*restringitur vinclis venaeque eius per omnes artus exsolvuntur; et quia pressus pavore sanguis tardius labebatur,* **_praefervidi_** *balnei vapore enecatur*). This description of Octavia's death stands in connection to the description of Seneca the Younger's death at 15.64.4, the only other passage in the extant corpus that has a death scene involving the steam of a bath: 'thereafter, having been carried into the bath, where he was asphyxiated by the steam …' (*exim balneo inlatus et vapore eius exanimatus …*). The rare adjective *praefervidus*—the intensified form of the common adjective *fervidus*, elsewhere only in Accius (*Trag.* 652), Livy (9.18.5), and Columella (*Rust.* 3.1.1; 5.5.1, 6.22, 8.5)—apparently serves to highlight the extraordinary cruelty with which Octavia was murdered. Contextually, the most relevant use of the adjective is in Columella, who has it four times to describe excessively hot climates and environments. If Tacitus did borrow the adjective from Columella—as we have seen, he engaged with the opening chapters of Book 3 and with Book 5 in *Agricola* and *Germania* and may have remembered its appearance there—the allusion would serve to liken the extreme temperature of the steam that killed Octavia with the extreme temperatures of the equatorial zone. The contextual similarity is superficial at best, however, and there are no further correspondences (linguistic or thematic) that would support a conscious allusion. It is, of course, possible that Tacitus, having read the adjective multiple times in *De re rustica*, echoed it here intuitively. The weight of the evidence, however, suggests that he came up with the term himself.[64]

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[64] This would make good sense: Tacitus uses adjectives with the intensifying prefix *prae-* once in *Dialogus*, nine times in the extant *Histories*, and twenty-four times in the extant *Annals*.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

The preceding discussion has served to make a case for Tacitus' use of Columella, presenting a number of linguistic correspondences that, based on the methodological principles laid out at the start of this article, would seem to constitute allusions to selected passages in *De re rustica*. In addition to explaining why I think those correspondences constitute allusions, I have discussed what seem to me to be the narrative purpose(s) that these allusions serve to advance. I do not have space here to fully develop the wider implications of Tacitus' engagement with an agricultural handbook and of his conceptualising different subjects through the lens of agriculture and nature. Below, I set out several observations that emerge from the above discussion and that I hope will serve as a jumping-off point for future scholarly inquiry:

1) Columella's linguistic and conceptual footprints can be discerned in each of Tacitus' five texts, including in important digressions and methodological chapters in *Annals*. The agriculturalist's conceptions resonated with Tacitus, and *De re rustica* should be included among the many texts that informed the historian's oeuvre.[65] Tacitus' engagement with Columella, in turn, should urge us to pay greater attention to the latter, who, as Forster once put it, 'is an exceedingly serious writer'[66] and whose conceptions about politics and nature may have enjoyed greater influence in Neronian and post-Neronian Rome than we tend to assume today.

2) Although Tacitus' intertextual acumen has been widely recognised, our longstanding assumption has been that certain texts and subject matters are inconsistent with the dignity of historiography. As the present article suggests, Tacitus had no qualms about using agricultural materials in his different works, regardless of their genre, focus, or subject matter.[67]

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[65] Typically, scholarship on Columella focusses on Pliny the Elder as the only author who avidly used *De re rustica*. So, Forster (1950) 123, hoping to generate greater respect for the agricultural specialist, writes that 'the elder Pliny (A.D. 23–79) quotes freely from Columella'. The present article complements Forster by suggesting that Tacitus, too, was an avid reader of Columella.

[66] Forster (1950) 125.

[67] This should not surprise us given his use of Varro (at least in *Germania* and probably, via several window references, in *Histories* and *Annals*; cf. *Dial.* 23.2–3), Virgil's *Georgics* (cf. Baxter (1971) 99; (1972); Joseph (2012a) 19–28, 57–8, 142 n. 54; (2023)), and Pliny the Elder (Ash (forthcoming)).

3) His engagement with *De re rustica* shows Tacitus to be a widely-read intellectual who did his homework and used his sources carefully and creatively. Recent scholarship on the historian has shown that his reading was much wider than had previously been appreciated, including Augustan and Flavian epic and the works of authors like Velleius Paterculus, Valerius Maximus, Pliny the Elder, the Senecas (prose and verse), and Silius Italicus.[68] The present article suggests that Tacitus' diligence included the technical handbook of an agricultural specialist.

4) Tacitus' use of Columella confirms that agriculture and nature remained important conceptual frameworks for thinking about different subjects. Those frameworks are shared by authors writing in different genres, including oratory and historiography (cf. Liv. 6.1).[69] It is critical that we do not shoehorn literary texts into their respective genres and assume that generically different texts cannot meaningfully communicate with and intellectually influence one another.[70] One fruitful avenue for future scholarship will be to explore how technical works like Columella's *De re rustica* and Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia* participated in wider conversations about politics, power, and nature.[71]

[68] On Tacitus' use of Virgil: Baxter (1971); (1972); Joseph (2023); of Virgil and Lucan: Joseph (2012a); of Velleius: Pagán (2011). Tacitus may have used the epic poem of Albinovanus Pedo, one of Germanicus' officers, at *Ann.* 1.60.2 and 2.23–4 (Joseph (2023)). On Tacitus and Silius Italicus: Manolaraki and Augoustakis (2012). On Tacitus' use of epic poetry in general: Joseph (2012b); (2023). On Tacitus and Valerius Maximus: Whitton (forthcoming). On Tacitus and Pliny the Elder: Ash (forthcoming). See König and Whitton (2018) on the engagement of Trajanic and Hadrianic authors with Flavian literature (the chapters of Rimell and Buckley focus on Tacitus). Tacitus' wide use of Cicero is well known: Syme (1958) 116, 198; van den Berg (2014). For further references: Woodman (2009b) 14.

[69] On agriculture in Roman rhetoric: Connors (1997). In addition to the agricultural, horticultural, animal, and hunting metaphors discussed above, Tacitus often employs the agricultural metaphor of 'seeds' to describe the beginnings of (civil) war, discord, rebellion, and other commotions or movements. For the combination *semina belli/bello* or *semina discordiae*: *Hist.* 1.53.2; 2.76.4; 4.18.4, 80.1; *Ann.* 4.27.1; 16.7.2. Note also the agricultural terms in the preface to *Histories*: <u>uberiorem</u> securioremque materiam (1.1.4), <u>opimum</u> casibus (1.2.1), *virtutum* <u>sterile</u> saeculum (1.3.1). Further examples come at *Ann.* 3.41.1; 4.60.3; 6.47.1; 11.19.3; 12.48.2. Cf. *semina veteris eloquentiae* at *Dial.* 33.4.

[70] This is one of the main arguments in ten Berge (2023).

[71] Marzano (2023) and Ash (forthcoming) are the most recent examples of this line of inquiry.

IX. A Prosopographical Coda: Why *De re rustica*?

It remains to consider why Tacitus was drawn to *De re rustica*. The answer to this question must remain speculative—based as it is on several loosely connected data points—but nonetheless is worth pondering given the historian's apparent engagement with the text. The most obvious and probable answer is (a) that agriculture was a central concern in ancient Rome and Tacitus' interest in *De re rustica* self-evident and (b) that Columella's text enjoyed greater literary and perhaps political influence than we imagine. An additional explanation pertains to Tacitus himself, namely that agriculture enjoyed special pride of place within the Agricola family. Agricola's father Graecinus had produced two volumes on viticulture that were consulted by Columella, who possibly alludes to Graecinus' preface or epilogue at *Rust.* 1.1.14 (Pliny the Elder, too, used Graecinus as a source: *HN* 14.4, 16.90; Graecinus is mentioned five times in Pliny's table of contents). The family's interest in agriculture may also be reflected by the cognomen (nickname?) 'Agricola' that Graecinus or, after his death, Procilla gave to their son Gnaeus Julius. Among Columella's other agricultural sources were the Gallic authors Cornelius Celsus and Julius Atticus (*Rust.* 1.1.14). Graecinus was familiar with both, citing the former's thoughts on the nature of a particular vine in Italy (Plin. *HN* 14.4) and being 'a pupil as it were' (*velut discipulus*, Col. *Rust.* 1.14) of the latter. We may infer, then, that agriculture and agricultural literature were subjects of interest for Graecinus and his family.

Did they continue to be after Graecinus' death and, crucial for our purposes, after Tacitus joined the family? *Agricola* may offer some hints. The first comes at *Agr.* 37.6, where Tacitus records the number of Roman casualties at the Battle of Mons Graupius: 'three hundred and sixty fell, among them Aulus Atticus, prefect of a cohort, whose youthful eagerness and spirited horse had carried him into the enemy's ranks' (*nostrorum trecenti sexaginta cecidere, in quis Aulus Atticus praefectus cohortis, iuvenili ardore et ferocia equi hostibus inlatus*). This Atticus is the only one of Agricola's subordinates to be mentioned by name in the biography. Birley offers an intriguing explanation: '[Tacitus] only gives *praenomen* and *cognomen*, not the family name, which was probably Julius. This young man could, for instance, have been son of the Julius Atticus who wrote on viticulture, 'more or less as a pupil' of Agricola's father Graecinus … The prefecture of a cohort was the first grade in the equestrian officer's career. Such prefects were often very young.'[72] If this conjecture is correct, Tacitus may have known Atticus personally (if the latter was in his mid-twenties when

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[72] Birley (1999) 90. Cf. Pagán (2023a).

holding his prefecture, both men were around the same age) and wished to honor both him and his father with the above mention.[73]

As Tacitus repeatedly tells us in *Agricola*, he and his father-in-law had frequent conversations about a range of subjects, including the latter's upbringing (4.3), foreign policy (24.3), political developments (44.5), and other public and private matters (45.5, 46.3). We may infer that agricultural matters were part of those conversations as well. Whether Agricola was familiar with the eminent agricultural authors and urged Tacitus to give *De re rustica* a read, or whether Tacitus himself had read the works of men like Celsus, Graecinus, and Atticus and via this route reached Columella's text, or whether that text simply was a well-respected one that a diligent historian would have perused anyway, we will never know. The above scenario, however, may offer one way to understand the historian's initial interest in *De re rustica*.

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[73] Given the above connections, the shared origins of the respective individuals, and the increased agricultural and viticultural output in Spain and Gaul during the Republic and early Empire (Lowe (2020); Marzano (2023) 100), we may even posit a circle of intellectuals from those areas with special interests in agriculture and viticulture, a circle that included Graecinus, Columella, Celsus, and Atticus, and, later, Agricola and Tacitus.

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