This excellent new commentary will enrich and enliven the learning experience of students, regardless of whether they are approaching Tacitus for the first time or are already familiar with other parts of the corpus. Before this publication, the standard resource for the Anglophone world was R.M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond’s 1967 commentary, itself bearing an umbilical cord reaching back to H. Furneaux’s commentary of 1898. Naturally, the needs and interests of students have changed fundamentally since 1967 (let alone 1898). This collaboration between A.J. Woodman and C.S. Kraus (themselves both veterans of the ‘green and yellow’ series) is well placed to offer assistance in all manner of areas and should certainly become the first port of call for those wanting to understand and enjoy the Agricola (and beyond). The project was originally planned as a joint venture, but regretfully the reality of pressures generated by life in Universities today meant that Woodman in the end commented on the whole work, apart from Agricola 10–12, which was undertaken by Kraus. Hence I will refer to the editors as ‘W.k.’.

The introduction should whet appetites effectively for the commentary to follow. It offers six sections on (1) the author and his work, (2) Tacitus’ Britain, (3) imperialism, freedom, and servitude, (4) the Agricola as history, (5) language and expression, and (6) the manuscripts. The presentation is consistently clear and helpful, perceptively aware of what students might find difficult or perplexing (e.g. the difference between consules suffecti and consules ordinarii p. 6, n.22, with cross-reference on p. 124) and marked by intriguing and vivid details which transcend the immediate world of the text (e.g. the nugget that Eric Birley, the distinguished historian of Roman Britain, himself owned the land which incorporates the site of Vindolanda, p. 15, n.57; and similarly in the body of the commentary e.g. a statue of the 4th-century BC geographer Pytheas overlooks the harbour of Marseille, p. 98; the phenomenon of ‘dead water’ as a consequence of salinity, p. 139; Alston, the highest market town in England, p. 155; Aldborough, a delightful village in North Yorkshire with surviving Roman mosaics, p. 178; Hector Boece naming the Grampians, the mountain range in the Scottish Highlands, p. 234). Students reading this introduction will come away with a clear sense of the complex relationship between the Agricola and ‘what really happened’. The case-study (pp. 26–29) of the Caledonians’ nighttime attack on the Ninth legion’s camp (Agr. 25.3–26.2) is used to illustrate succinctly not only Tacitus’ practice of drawing points of detail from earlier accounts of different operations in Sallust and Livy, but also his exploitation of Caesarian patterning more broadly in constructing his own narrative. Likewise, the section on language and expression (pp. 30–35) considers different examples ranging from a perfect periodic sentence (Agr. 35.4) to a typically Tacitean appendix sentence (Agr. 43.3) foreshadowing techniques which will come to fruition in the Annals. Features such as uariatio, abstract for concrete nouns, poeticsisms, compound for simple forms of the verb, and inconcinnity are also highlighted, as is Tacitus’ practice of embedding in his Latin varied allusions to a range of authors (including Xenophon, Catullus, Caesar, Sallust, Livy, Virgil, Lucan, Silius Italicus, Sta-
tius), although W.k. advise caution in assessing how exclusive and relevant particular verbal similarities might be and urge considering each example on its individual merits. A particularly illuminating snapshot considers the series of agricultural metaphors at Agr. 19.1–4 which has «Agricola ‘rooting out’, ‘pruning’ and ‘lopping off’ as if he were acting out his name» (p. 35). Two broad features of this compelling introduction are especially powerful. Firstly, the way in which W.k. put the Agricola centre-stage and consider it on its own terms as an authorial debut, rather than filtering it through the Histories and the Annals. This point extends to the commentary too: «it is too easy to read back into the Agricola the authorial attitudes which are commonly associated with the Histories and, especially, the Annals...» (p. 84). Secondly, there is the thoughtful way in which comparative cultural analysis features meaningfully (e.g. comparison with Kipling’s attitudes to colonised peoples, p. 24, n.83; Nazi interest in the manuscript known as the Codex Aesinas which contained the Agricola and Germania, pp. 35–36), as it does in the body of the commentary (e.g. the comparison with dissidents in Soviet Russia incarcerated in psychiatric ‘hospitals’, p. 81; the quote from Gerard Manley Hopkins, p. 99; the reference to R. Sutcliff’s novel ‘The Eagle of the Ninth’ [1954], p. 223); and W.k. do not shy away from the more unsettling aspects of our text (e.g. the fact that Tacitus was apparently not troubled by «his father-in-law’s genocidal advance across Britain», p. 16).

In considering the commentary, constraints of space inevitably mean that I must be selective, although my reflections here are also informed by my own ‘test-drive’ of the commentary with a third year Classical Archaeology and Ancient History undergraduate who began learning Latin at University: she found the linguistic support offered by W.k. invaluable, but she also appreciated their illuminating remarks on cultural, social, and historical aspects, which enhanced her reading of the Agricola at every turn. It is important to highlight too that the Latin text itself is different from others currently available and comes with its own apparatus criticus, preceded by a list of sigla which is fully explained in the introduction. Where W.k. have modified transmitted readings, individual lemma-ta articulate why the text is problematic and provide a rationale for W.k.’s interventions, or for their support of earlier editors’ interventions (e.g. intercepti, p. 105; deleting tristitiam...exuerat at Agr. 9.3 as a gloss, p. 122; distribruntur, p. 150; fecundumque, pp. 154–5; auctor tanti, p. 162; in ipsa Britanniae terminus, p. 212; naue primum transgressus, pp. 213–14; impellitut, ut saepe, p. 218; uno remig<impemer>ante, p. 229; in libertatem non in paententiam <arma in>laturi, p. 249–50; auspiciis populi Romani, p. 258; boreos totum, p. 283), although they do concede that in some cases the correct reading is irrecoverable (e.g. Agr. 20.3, †ante Britanniae nova pars†; Agr. 24.2, †in melius†; Agr. 36.3, †jugere comnar-i†). The Latin text itself has helpful paragraphing which sensibly reflects meaning and organisation (e.g. the insertion of a new paragraph at Igitur in the middle of 13.1).

W.k. have the needs of their particular student readership clearly in mind. Tacitus’ narrative is divided into sub-sections (Agr. 1.3, 4–9, 10–17, 18–28, 29–38, 39–43, 44–46), each with its own mini-prefix. Potentially unfamiliar terminology is carefully explained (e.g. window-reference, p. 68; coniunctio, p. 71; e sequentibus praecedentia, p. 77; ‘climax’, p. 91; enallage, p. 98; syllepsis, p. 107;
teichoskopia, p. 252; enargeia, p. 267; mimetic syntax, p. 274; traductio, p. 322), although there is still very occasionally an instance where some further clarification might be useful (e.g. the reference to heroic clausulae, p. 92, 118, 167; autopsy, p. 99; hyperbaton, p. 130). All Greek quotations are translated and the English translations associated selectively with particular lemmata are invariably helpful in pinpointing the meaning of the Latin. Usage particularly associated with Tacitus is clarified (e.g. quamquam without a final verb, p. 70; variatio of adjective and prepositional phrase, p. 72; pregnant participial constructions, p. 75; second-person singular potential subjunctive, p. 87; ellipse of forms of esse, p. 96; his boldness in using the dative of agent, p. 104; in + accusative to indicate purpose, p. 105; his extension of the meaning of erga, p. 106; genitive after a neuter substantival adjective, p. 112; the use of a technical term in a non-technical sense, p. 121; munia imperii, p. 157; quo in a final clause without a comparative, p. 186; medio as a plain ablative without a preposition, p. 214; his preference for infensus over infestus, p. 294), as are mannerisms of other authors (e.g. Pliny the Elder’s liking for aetas + uidere, p. 81; Seneca the Younger’s liking for mortae aevum [p. 89] and his association with the ‘divided self’ as a mode of characterisation, p. 95; Livy favouring annus as the subject of a transitive verb, p. 113; agito as a Sallustian favourite, p. 161; Curtius Rufus’s favourite ancipiti malo, p. 223; the possibly Ennian campos compleere, p. 270; Virgilian exterreo, p. 276; Seneca the Younger’s expression uera bona, p. 311; Cicero favouring in animis hominum, p. 329). Standard Latin usage is also helpfully illuminated (e.g. when a relative clause contains a predicate + esse, the pronoun takes its form from the predicate rather than from the antecedent, p. 114; the present passive infinitive regularly used in oratio obliqua instead of the supine +iri, p. 124; in inverted cum-clauses the historic present is regular, p. 222; perfect participles of deponent verbs often being the equivalent of a present participle, p. 233). There are some elegant and appealing comments on points of detail (e.g. the commendable balance typifying Agricola’s life being mirrored in the co-ordinated Latin used to describe him, p. 94; Tacitus attributing to the inhabitants the knowledge that Britain was an island, although the Romans do not know this until Agricola’s circumnavigation, p. 171; the etymological pun embedded in the Welsh tribe Ordouices / obtruerat, p. 182–3 [a personal favourite]; Roman perceptions of the relative sizes of Ireland and mainland Britain, p. 215; the Usipi, having acted like pirates when they commandeered the ships, belatedly in their depleted state now being regarded as pirates, p. 231; Agricola’s unparalleled expression casting his soldiers’ eyes as witnesses in court, p. 264; the double allusion to Virgil, p. 278; the significance of a ‘palindromic’ sentence, p. 288; an allusion in the work’s final sentence to Agricola’s father Julius Graecinus’ volumes on viticulture, p. 330) and some telling observations likely to resonate with students in illuminating the reality of the ancient world (e.g. that in the Roman world infant mortality before the age of one stood at 30–40%, p. 110; Roman swords were getting longer over the course of the first century AD, p. 272; during the Republic only generals who had killed at least 5,000 of the enemy in a single battle were permitted to hold a triumph, p. 280).

In conclusion, W.k.’s commentary is an impressive contribution to an impressive series. It covers a huge range of issues from the philological to the historical,
and brings to life a rich text which sometimes still gets overshadowed by the monuments of Tacitus’ later career as a writer. In some quarters recently Woodman has been characterised as imposing an excessively literary turn on Roman historiography, but as this commentary well demonstrates, Woodman’s ability to analyse Tacitean Latin as a bridge to the historical reality represented in Tacitus’ texts should not be underestimated. For example, his engagement with non uidit at Agr. 45.1 clarifies how the verb is often used of living to see unpleasant experiences before observing that «Since A. did not live to see the horrors which T. is about to list, it follows that none of them took place before 23 August 93» (p. 315). Indeed, many other notes anchor the text of the Agricola robustly in the historical and military realities of the period (e.g. the note on Liburnicae p. 228, or the discussion of the Cohors I Tungrorum, p. 272). To see Woodman’s interests as ‘purely literary’ seems oddly to ignore his tangible interests in history which are such an important part of this commentary. In short, W.k. have produced a helpful and thoroughly enjoyable commentary which stands out for its impressive breadth of coverage across a whole range of topics, as well as offering telling illumination on points of detail through close readings of the text.

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