
XIV, 324 S. 3 Ktn. (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics.) 47, 50 (Ppb. 16, 95) £.

After R. H. Martin’s and A. J. Woodman’s Annals 4 (1989) and R. Mayer’s Dialogus de oratoribus (2001) this is the third Tacitean volume published in the Cambridge ‘green and yellow’ series. Its appearance gives further evidence of the growing interest in the Histories as shown by, for example, M. G. Morgan’s numerous papers and the important book by R. Ash published in 1999 (Ordering Anarchy. Armies and Leaders in Tacitus’ Histories). However, the students of T(Tacitus) may reasonably grumble at a rather limited supply of full-scale commentaries on his first major work at their disposal; in the last fifty years there appeared just two volumes dealing with Book 1, by H. Heubner (1969) and by G. E. F. Chilver (1979). Moreover, while Chilver’s focus is avowedly historical, Heubner tends to concentrate on the details of T.’s syntax and diction, so the publication of a new commentary giving balanced coverage of various aspects of T.’s writing (textual questions, language and style, literary techniques, historical matters, sources and models) is most welcome. For D(amon), «the aim of the present commentary is to reintegrate Histories 1 into the corpus of teachable Latin texts» (VII); let it be said from the outset that she has done a remarkably good job to attain this aim.

Histories 1 gives an account of, first, the last days of Galba’s principate and Otho’s successful ‘coup d’état’; then, of Vitellius’ proclamation as emperor and the first stage of the confrontation between the two pretenders (Vespasian is kept out of T.’s narrative, for the time being). The survival of the parallel tradition (Plutarch, Suetonius, Cassius Dio) makes it possible to examine T.’s methods of dealing with his material as well as his standards as a historian and writer; it is no surprise that the comparison between these accounts figures prominently in D.’s commentary and the issue is discussed, in more general terms, in the introduction (22–30; D. prudently does not take up the much disputed question of the identity of the common source preferring instead to focus her attention on T.’s treatment of it). The introduction’s (1–31) other topics (T.’s life, his works prior to the Histories, historical views, style, the text) are dealt with neatly and lucidly. Although some of the issues tackled here are obviously standard in introductory chapters, D. takes care to present them in her own individual way; her treatment of T.’s appendix sentences (16–19) may be cited as a case in point (she does not repeat the observations made by Martin and Woodman in their edition of Annals 4, 23 f).

Unlike Martin and Woodman, and many other editors of the Cambridge series, D. prints the Latin text (35–76) without the apparatus; textual questions are discussed in the commentary.

Her choices include opimum (2,1), retained despite doubts voiced by a number of scholars (D. points out to a link between opus ... opimum casibus and non ... virtutum sterile...
saeculum at the beginning of the next chapter); et statim missa (2,1), rightly preferred to Lipsius’ omission, but not discussed (compare Chilver’s note ad loc.; apud signa (31,1); petierunt (37,1); aviditate imperandi (52,2), retained also, but for different reasons, by G. Morgan, Philologus 146, 2002, 339–349. At 18,1 she prints comitii dirumpendis, alleging it to be the reading of the Mediceus; but it has in fact dirumpendis («the vox propria for the dissolution of public assemblies for religious matters», as D. herself admits, 143), whereas the otherwise confidently dirumpendis appears in the Leidensis. It seems strange to cling to the manuscript version at 53,1 cito sermone and not to adopt Lipsius’ scito (admittedly, D. has her doubts, 210); note that s might have been easily dropped after immodicus. At 79,2 D. prints Sarmatae dispersi cupidine praedae aut graves onere sarcinarum without even mentioning that this word order goes back not to the apodosis (which has aut cupidine praedae graves, a reading retained in the OCT edition by Fisher) but to Acidalius. And it is a pity that readers are sometimes kept in ignorance about to whom an emendation adopted by D. is owed (178: Constans’ petierunt at 37,5; 207: Rhenanus’ <vit> Vitellius at 52,2).

The present text’s most conspicuous difference from those of Koestermann, Heubner and others lies in its punctuation. D. is much less stingy than her predecessors with full-stops (which replace colons or semi-colons); as a result, to give one example, we have now fourteen sentences in ch. 2 as opposed to six to eight in the previous editions. However, there are occasional discrepancies between the punctuation adopted in the text and that (or even printed) in the commentary.

On 76,3 D. notes: «three words for the main clause, thirty-five for the appendix» (552), although in the text she puts a full-stop, not a colon, between auctoritate and Crescens, thus leaving just nine words for the appendix. At 44,2 no comma between more and meminsum is printed in the text, but it appears in the commentary; despite appearances, this is not a trivial issue, since it affects the understanding of the whole sentence.

The commentary (77–292) seems to have no particular focus and, as already said, strikes a good balance between different aspects of T.’s writing, most importantly between literary (also linguistic) and historical matters; witness D.’s fine comment on Vitellianus exercitibus claudebantur of 87,1 (281). She writes for both advanced students of T. and beginners; with the latter in mind she takes care to supplement auxiliary verbs so often omitted by T. and frequently refers to OLD for the particular meaning of a more difficult word (a reference to OLD s.v. audio 5 b would be appropriate on p. 122; vacationes as ‘exemptions from fatigues’ is misleading at 46,2 where the term is used metonymically, 193). Histories 1 is divided by D. into fifteen units, each having its own general introduction (usually rather brief). The overviews of chh. 4–11 (a comparison with Sallust) and ch. 86 (prodigies and omens: T. and historical tradition at Rome) are particularly good and there is a splendid description of the book’s opening chapter as «a masterpiece of indirection» (77). It may be expected that such introductory notes are the proper place for supplying bibliographical references: five are given for ch. 11 and even more for ch. 86, but in the majority of the overviews no literature is cited.

1 Among them J. Marincola, Latomus 58, 1999, 191–404, a paper honoured by D. with three more citations. It does not deserve such distinction: much of its argument is based on an evident misunderstanding of the second sentence of the Histories.
More distressingly, a number of important works on Histories 1 are not mentioned at all in the book, not even in the bibliography (307–318), including F. Klingner, SBSächs 92, 1940, 1; E. Koestermann, Historia 15, 1966, 213–237; M. Labate, Maia 29–30, 1977–1978, 27–60. Apart from the overviews, there are also extensive introductory notes to the speeches of Histories 1 (there are four, two by Otho and one each by Galba and Piso). D.’s treatment of the speeches is both interesting and persuasive, and she also pays attention also to their style (remarkably distinct from that of the surrounding narrative: 137, 162). On the much debated adoption speech of Galba D. is relatively brief (136 ff) which is, perhaps, a reasonable option.

A distinctive feature of this commentary is its emphasis on «repeated incidents», that is to say events or situations which in the same or different form come back later in T.’s account of A.D. 69.

For example, Otho’s handling of a general loyal to Galba (45,2 with 71) should be treated in conjunction with similar incidents under Vitellius and Vespasian (191, 222; the motif of fidei crimen); the opening words of the narrative of the praetorian riot under Otho suggest a link with a parallel event under Vitellius, reported in Book 2 (262). In Appendix 3 a useful list of notes relating to parallel incidents is given and there is a brief discussion of the question in the introduction (10 ff). For D., «the mistakes of Vespasian’s predecessors help explain Vespasian’s success». That is generally true, but the present reviewer cannot agree with what she later says about the supporters of the successive emperors (Mucianus and his friends far better than those who backed Otho or Vitellius). For one thing, we have this very important statement at 2,95,3 in which Mucianus is juxtaposed with the base partisans of Galba and Vitellius (magis alii homines quam alii mores); for another, T. implicitly associates the adherents of Vespasian with those of his adversary: note praevo magistris (2,84,2) which recalls irrepetitus dominations magistri of the Vitellian narrative (2,63,1 with M. G. Morgan, CLPh 89, 1994, 172).

Even a full-scale commentary on an ancient author cannot be expected to cover everything. Some issues are not discussed because they are too obvious, others are left to the inquisitiveness of the reader.

So it is perhaps unreasonable to complains that D. has nothing to say about recentis ... veteres ... nuncius of 52,1, about the chiastic arrangement of amorem ... cartissi ... fortitudinis ... cartissii at 83,2, or about such plays on words as dux ... abducto (8,3) and plebs ... implibet (12,1); contrast 237 on raperant as a probable pun on Rapax, a legion’s name). Yet, on the other hand, some words of comment would be appropriate, for instance, on Laco’s unexpected vigour and determination in ch. 33 (he is introduced at 6,1 as mortalium ... ignatissimum) or on the fine arrangement of chh. 71–73 (Celsius, Tigellinus, Crispinilla: two of them punished, one pardoned; a ur followed by a mollis homo and a mulier; a marked contrast between the loyalty of Celsius and the treachery of Tigellinus); also, it should have been noted that T. is our only authority on Junius Blaesus, the governor of Lugdunensis (223).

The four appendices (291–306) serve mainly to set the parallel tradition side by side with T. (all Greek is translated); there is also a useful list of epigrams and sententiae (on which see 15 f in the introduction). It is not difficult to supplement it; the present reviewer’s favourites are pessimum facinus audeant pauci, piaves vellent, omnes paterventur (28) and praemia virtutum, quia velocis erat, vittis aedeptus (72,1). There are some fifty misprints, most of them in Latin (but luckily only two in the text, and minor ones).
Despite the criticisms voiced above, there should be no doubt about the book’s merits. That it will become a standard commentary on *Histories* 1 is an easy prediction.

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Dopo un’introduzione generale, l’argomento si snoda in sette capitoli, in cui le opere sono discusse perlopiù in ordine cronologico, mentre le fonti frammentarie fino al 332 a.C. (Ecateo, Ellanico, Aristagora, Eudosso) sono opportunamente relegate in Appendice, e proposte nella traduzione inglese curata dall’autore. Purtroppo, i costi editoriali e le necessità di divulgazione hanno impedito, in questo come in altri validi volumi, la stampa del testo completo in lingua originale, fatta eccezione per qualche rara parola-chiave.


L’occhio dei Greci sul mondo fu sempre quello del viaggiatore curioso, ma pronto a prendere le distanze dall’‘altro’, e non dell’antropologo moderno informato al principio del relativismo culturale. Nonostante la presenza greca sul territorio egiziano fin dal 6° secolo a.C., e i frequenti contatti tra le due civiltà, il discorso letterario ellenico sull’Egitto pertiene sempre al mondo del simbolico e dell’immaginario culturale: le fonti non presentano mai un Egitto contemporaneo, ma un mondo cristallizzato in un’antichità millenaria, in un eterno presente. Culla della sapienza, della religione e delle memorie più antiche della storia ellenica e ateniese – secondo il principio per cui il proprio passato è qualcosa di ‘altro’ e dunque ‘altrove’ –, l’Egitto è, nel contempo, anche terra del dispotismo monarchico, assetato di controllo sullo spazio e sul tempo, luogo delle inversioni, dell’immobilità, dell’esperata fertilità e della morte. In generale, comunque, l’Egitto rappresenta per le fonti greche pre-ellenistiche l’archetipo del ‘diverso’ positivo, non ostile, benché il suo territorio facesse parte politicamente dell’impero persiano, il nemico per eccellenza dei Greci. L’Egitto è, insomma, fin...