

R. ASH, *Tacitus: Histories Book II*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. IX + 415, ISBN: 9780521891356.

The *Histories* of Tacitus are a fascinating work, intriguing, fast-paced, and filled with battles, captures of cities, and sudden *coups de théâtre*, elements which make the narrative as enjoyable to us today as it was expected to be for the ancients. History was a literary endeavor, and Tacitus, in writing his historical works, was not so much concerned with a 'scientific' research of his sources as with the degree of pleasure that his audience would derive from reading his works, so as to so as to maximize their usefulness (the known principle of *docere et delectare*). This, at least, is how the most recent Tacitean scholarship tends to look at both the *Histories* and the *Annals*.

Just like several books of the *Annals*, the four (entire) surviving books of the *Histories* need commentaries that allow them to become 'teachable' again. Heubner's monumental commentary is still invaluable, but its use is limited to specialists. Moreover, it is in German, very expensive and not always available even in university libraries. Chilver's and Townend's commentary, being as it is 'historical', and lacking any proper system of referring to the Latin text, is useless in teaching a Latin language class. On the other hand, translations abound, and, to limit it to the English-speaking world, both Wellesley and Fyfe/Levene provide excellent tools. Until 2003, the only modern scholarly English commentary was Wellesley's on Book III. However, even Wellesley's commentary is unfit to teach an undergraduate class; moreover, it is unfortunately out of print.

C. Damon published her commentary on *Histories I* in 2003, in the same series that now sees the appearance of Ash's commentary, the so-called 'Green & Yellow', whose goal is to make important classical texts again available for the classroom, at both the undergraduate and graduate level (cf. also Martin-

Woodman's commentary on *Annals* IV). Damon's commentary was well received, and comparison with it is unavoidable in the case of Ash's book. Both commentaries are preceded by a general introduction; they both provide a Latin text, a commentary, and indexes. However, the two works complement each other, and, with the obvious exception of a brief section on Tacitus' life and career, which is necessarily very similar in both, Ash's commentary touches upon different aspects of Tacitus, and she rarely repeats things that one could already find in Damon's.

In the introduction, a section (1) is devoted to Tacitus' life, career, and works (from the *Agricola* to the *Annals*), which is at the same time moderate, informative, and short. There follows a section (2) in which Ash explains the significance of ancient historiography, and well delineates its development from Fabius Pictor up to Tacitus, stressing the different kinds of narratives that one can read in, e.g., Sallust and Livy. The next section (3) deals with civil war and Roman identity, showing how Rome, whose foundation had already been attended by that most typical phenomenon of civil war, a fratricide, continued to be afflicted by civil conflicts. Many of these conflicts elicited literary responses, and Tacitus' *Histories* are one such: Tacitus made "it easier for readers to rationalise the civil war by perceiving the morally flawed protagonists as outsiders" (p. 7). In section 4 Ash provides an outline and structural analysis of the whole book, stressing its peculiarities, and how Tacitus' narrative employs specific techniques so as to achieve the goals of the moral historian (e.g. in depicting Vitellius' journey to Rome in such a way that the reader has the impression that, just as Vitellius was sluggish and lazy, so was his journey to the capital). The following section (5) provides a very useful feature for the modern reader. Given the 'messiness' of the book, with all its battles and characters, Ash thought it appropriate to list all the 'dramatis personae' under four headings (*Othonians*; *Vitellians*; *Flavians*; *Others*), the first three of which also have three sub-headings (family members; major supporters; other supporters). One of the most peculiar Tacitean characteristics, namely his style, is the subject of section 6. Much has been written on this subject, and very specific scholarly works have been devoted to almost every aspect of Tacitus' language and style. The commentator should therefore

try to give a comprehensive and, above all, clear overview of the main problems. Ash admirably accomplishes this. She manages not to repeat previous works and is a good complement to the introductions of both Damon and Martin-Woodman. Section 7 deals with ‘*sententiae* and allusions’. While the use of the former is a well established feature of Tacitus, particularly in the *Histories*, not all scholars will agree with the allusions that Ash believes she detects.<sup>1</sup> In the chapter on sources (8), a notoriously difficult and insoluble problem, Ash does her best to give as clear a picture as possible. It is a pity, however, that, while for every other section the bibliography is very extensive, for the sources Ash refers to very few works in her notes. Section 9 discusses Tacitus’ parallel tradition, that is, Plutarch’s *Life of Otho*, Suetonius’ biographies, Dio’s *Roman History*, and Josephus’ *BJ*. In section 10 Ash explains how Tacitus’ *Histories* cannot be accused of pro-Flavian propaganda. Although works that ‘justified’ Vespasian’s claim to power were necessarily published under the Flavians, Tacitus, whose career benefitted from that dynasty, nevertheless tried to give an objective account of events, making it clear that, even when Vespasian made his first move, Otho was still the emperor. The last section (11) explains the textual tradition of the *Histories*, and provides the editor’s criteria in the matter of textual choices.

As far as the introduction is concerned, Ash has produced a sound, clear, and well balanced piece of scholarship that both students and scholars will find very useful. The bibliographical references are numerous, justly relegated to the notes, and mostly limited to English works (but this causes little problem with Tacitus since many of the best works of the last fifty years of Tacitean scholarship are in English).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Just to give some examples: I agree with 47.3 *incusare ... uelit* (Ash compares *Verg. Aen.* 2.745). On the other hand, Ash detects a double allusion to Sall. at 76.1 *omnes ... adquiratur* (cf. *Hist.* 4.69.1, *Cat.* 51.1): while the first allusion is possible, the second seems to me unlikely. (Ash seems to have overlooked a clear allusion to Sall. at 56.1 *Vitelliani spoliare, rapere ... polluere*; cf. *Cat.* 11.6, with Vretska ad loc.)

<sup>2</sup> I have found one typo at p. 28 n. 81 (*religiosissime*); at p. 24 the abbreviation ‘Vir.’ for Virgil is odd: it should be ‘Virg.’, as Ash herself writes

The Latin text, as is the case in Damon's commentary, does not have an *apparatus criticus*, and reproduces Heubner's Teubner (1978), with minimal changes. Ash adopts a different reading in ten places. Eight of these are explained in the notes, two are not (1.1 *quod*, 18.2 *quin*), and perhaps they should have been.<sup>3</sup> Although the standard chapter division is not altered, Ash changes the paragraph division in accordance with her interpretation of the text.<sup>4</sup>

The commentary, which represents the bulk of this work, is a fine piece of scholarship, which will satisfy students and scholars alike. Certainly, Ash could rely on the previous works of, among others, Heubner and Chilver, but her notes are not simply derivative, and are equally strong in literary and historical interpretation. Her explanations of all the subtleties of Tacitus' language and style are exemplary, and I found particularly

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everywhere else; at p. 35 n. 97 Ash, quoting Wellesley 1972, writes that there are thirty-one *recentiores* of the *Histories*. But in his subsequent Teubner edition (1989), Wellesley realized that he had omitted some manuscripts, and, following Römer 1976, gives the correct number of thirty-four.

<sup>3</sup> Ash's text is very sound, and I agree with most of her textual choices, such as 76.3 *concupisse*, 84.2 *quo*. Regrettably, although the Latin text is virtually typo-free (with the exception of *auctoritas* for *auctoritatis* at 92.1), there are numerous cases in which a lemma shows a different spelling and/or punctuation from the printed text. Although this does not hinder comprehension, it is disturbing and could have been easily avoided. I have detected the following cases (I give in parentheses the lemma in the commentary): 1.3 *set* (*sed*); 2.2 *inclitum* (*inclutum*); 11.1 *roboris e fiducia* (*roboris, e fiducia*); 21.3 *molis* (*moles*); 29.2 *ipsum quod nemo regeret pauentes* (*ipsum, quod nemo regeret, pauentes*); *silentio patientia* (*silentio, patientia*); 33.1 *missi qui* (*missi, qui*); 47.1 *felicitati qua* (*felicitati, qua*); 48.1 *nauis* (*naues*); 64.2 *a se sed* (*a se, sed*); 66.3 *ire iubet quo* (*ire iubet, quo*); 78.4 *quicquam* (*quidquam*); 95.3 *miliens* (*milliens*).

<sup>4</sup> Also in this case, not everybody will agree with Ash's paragraph division. I agree with most of it, e.g. at 8.2, where Ash 'moves' the sentence beginning with *gliscentem* to the new paragraph, and at 95.1, where the words *laetum foedissimo* start a new paragraph. But at, e.g., 32.1, I would start a new paragraph with *tunc Suetonius*.

welcome the fact that Ash did not take anything for granted, and always provided a detailed explanation at its first occurrence of any rhetorical device (from the common alliteration to the less common cases of zeugma, syllepsis, etc), and how Tacitus exploits such devices for dramatic effect. Cross-references are also very useful.

There are, unavoidably, some matters that a reviewer needs to point out. Book 2 of the *Histories* is a very 'crowded' book, with numerous characters. Ash usually refers to the standard works whenever a new character is introduced: the entry in *OCD* is given on every occasion when a character is listed there. But *OCD* only has major characters. So for minor characters she uses *PIR* (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.),<sup>5</sup> or *RE*, but she is not always systematic.<sup>6</sup>

In the literary, grammatical, and historical analysis of the text, the single lemmata are on the whole very helpful, with a good balance of all aspects. I found myself in agreement with Ash in most cases; there are, however, a few points to which I would like to draw attention, whether to stress my difference of opinion with the author, or to point out that Ash's note was somewhat unsatisfactory, or simply missing.

As a general observation on the whole commentary, I do not think that it is the best practice to refer to another commentary by page number. E.g., when referring to Woodman-Martin's commentary on *Annals* III, Ash gives, e.g., WM 157 (the number referring to the page). While this is clear enough, it would perhaps be preferable to give the section of text on which Woodman-Martin are commenting. Also, the commentator, as is the style

<sup>5</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> has replaced *PIR*<sup>1</sup>, but it is not complete yet. Nevertheless, in all those cases in which *PIR*<sup>2</sup> is available, *PIR*<sup>1</sup> becomes outdated and references to it should be avoided. Thus at 86.3 for Pompeius Silvanus Ash refers to *PIR*<sup>1</sup> P 495, whereas she should have given *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 654.

<sup>6</sup> At 85.2, for Saturninus the reader is referred to *PIR*<sup>2</sup>, for Iulianus to *RE*, while for Tampius Flavianus at 86.3 there is no reference at all; similarly, for Titus (p. 75) and Calpurnius Asprenas (p. 100). *RE* is a difficult work to consult, especially for undergraduates. Since an English translation of the smaller Pauly has now become available (and it is almost complete), perhaps it would be advisable to give references to it whenever possible.

of the 'Green & Yellow', translates the most difficult sentences. In the case of Ash's commentary, I praise the fact that she in fact limits her translations to complex parts, but at times her renderings are very (perhaps sometimes excessively?) free: e.g. 32.1 *multa bella impetu ualida per taedia et moras euanisse* ('that many campaigns which were forceful at the first onset had dwindled to nothing through tedious delays'), 56.2 *alienae etiam culpae dissimulator* ('was prepared to turn a blind eye to others' transgressions as well'), 95.3 *uaria et pudenda sorte agebat* ('suffered humiliation of every kind').

As to specific points, I will proceed in order, with references to the Latin text. 1.1 *petendis honoribus*: there is no note on the very Tacitean construction of the dative gerundive of purpose. 33.3 *dum ... credit*: the *dum* has perhaps a causal force (for this use of *dum*, see Woodman-Martin on 3.19.2, with references). 37.1 *noscebantur*: the indicative within indirect statement is striking. Perhaps Ash could have pointed that out for the sake of students (cf. M-W on 4.10.2). 47.2 *tenuerint ... reliquerit*: while the first form is certainly a (concessive) perfect subjunctive, *reliquerit* is more debated. It is a (potential) subjunctive for Irvine (cf. also Draeger § 28b), a (jussive) subjunctive for Heubner, and future perfect for Ash. Although agreement cannot be reached, Ash may be right here. 47.3: in this famous scene (Otho's suicide), which, as Ash justly points out, shows marked Stoic features, note that also the use of 'constantia' (*constantiam meam*) is strongly Stoic: cf. e.g. *Annals* 14.59.1 (Rubellius Plautus), 15.63.2 (Seneca), 16.34.2 (Thrasea). 49.4 *non noxa neque ob metum*: although Ash is very good at pointing out all the most striking instances of *uariatio*, perhaps a note here would have been advisable (also at 87.2 *quidam ... multi ... ceteri*); 61 *pagos trahebat*: the meaning of the verb here is unclear. The usual interpretations are either as OLD 5b 'to plunder', or OLD 10a 'to win over'. Ash, however, is inclined to interpret *traho* here = *attraho* 'coerce' (OLD 2), a case of *simplex pro composito*. Personally, I agree with Heubner and Chilver who, following Gerber-Greef, interpret it as 'to plunder'. 65.2: since Ash adopts the emendation *L. <Arruntii. sed> Arruntium*, perhaps she should have explained in her commentary who emended the text (Haase) and why she adopts it. 66.2 *Augusta* (typo: it should be *Augustae*): Ash

justly points out that *Augustae* is locative (there was, however, an instance of locative already at 63.1 *Ostiae*, which was not identified). 93.1 *principia*: since this noun here has a technical and uncommon meaning (*OLD* 10a), perhaps a note would be helpful. 95.1 *invidiae fuit*: the case of *invidiae* deserves a note. 98.1 *haec illaue defensurus*: Ash thinks that the pronouns refer to the communications mentioned shortly before, but I think that the *communis opinio* here (that *haec illaue* refer to the cause of Vitellius or Vespasian) is correct (Gerber-Greef 266a, B). 99.2 *seu perfidiam meditant*: this sudden switch to a dative, still referring to Caecina, but after the genitive of the previous clause, perhaps needs some explanation.<sup>7</sup>

As to the bibliographical references, in the ‘Abbreviations’ (p. ix) there is no entry for either edition of *PIR* (however extensively quoted in the commentary). In the ‘Select Bibliography’ (pp. 382 ff.), I have noticed that Ash does not mention the translations of either Fyfe/Levene or Wellesley, both of which she often quotes in her commentary. Also, Schöntag 1872 (quoted at p. 345) is not in the bibliography. In the list of Syme’s contributions, she sometimes gives cross-references to *Roman Papers I-VII*, sometimes not. Lastly, the *Concordance* of Blackman and Betts (Hildesheim 1986) seems to be nowhere mentioned.

To sum up. R. Ash’s commentary is a commendable work of scholarship. I have tried to point out its merits (many), but also to acknowledge its faults (very few indeed). To write a commentary on Tacitus is an enormous task: the bibliography is endless, but

<sup>7</sup> There are, unfortunately, a few too many typos. At p. 111, listing some parallels, the order given is Ov., Luc., Virg., whereas Virg. should precede; at p. 116 (“Whether this ... switch”) ‘is’ is missing; at p. 119 ‘Sienna’ should be ‘Siena’; at p. 208 *necat* should be *nec*; at p. 211 (first line) there should be a parenthesis after ‘334-5’; at p. 252 (*Triaria ... ferox*) both the word order and the punctuation are different from the Latin text; at p. 257 (*Arruntium ... Cluvium*) *Cluvium* should be *Cluuium*, and the abbreviation for ‘Tiberius’ (which, however, is not abbreviated in the Latin text) is not ‘T.’ (= Titus) but ‘Ti.’; at p. 270 the period (full stop) after ‘especially’ is misplaced; at p. 367 the lemmata *Marcellus* and *Mucianus* should be transposed; at p. 381 ‘Narbonesis’ should be ‘Narbonensis’.

Ash really seems to have read all the most relevant works (I am sure there are many more works, especially in languages other than English, that she has consulted but not added to her already vast bibliography to avoid clogging). This work has all the qualities that we expect from the series in which it appears: it is clear, student-oriented, well produced, and fairly inexpensive. There are numerous references to secondary works from which students and scholars alike will benefit. And also the indexes are very exhaustive and well organized. Hopefully, the numerous typos will be corrected in the subsequent editions and/or reprints.

I can say with confidence that, the next time I teach a book of the *Histories*, I will be able to choose between two excellent commentaries, those of Damon and Ash<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Most of this review was written during a very pleasant sojourn at the Fondation Hardt in June 2008. I would like to thank the staff of the Fondation for making that experience most enjoyable.