

*Tacitus, Histories Book II.* Edited by RHIANNON ASH. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 415. Cloth, \$99.00. ISBN 978-0-521-81446-1. Paper, \$39.99. ISBN 978-0-521-89135-6.

This review will fall into two parts. I shall first discuss the present volume and then consider what kind of text it is. Be it noted from the very beginning, that this is a fine piece of scholarship. Ash (hereafter A.) is one of the leading Tacitean scholars of the present day. The book is incisive, well-written, and extremely learned. Yet as a college or university text it is somewhat of an incongruity, for it offers much more exegesis than is customary in college texts. Many students will, I fear, be overwhelmed.

There are eleven short sections in the Introduction: (1) *Tacitus*; (2) *Ancient historiography*; (3) QVO QVO SCELESTI RVITIS? *Civil war and Roman identity*; (4) *Histories 2*; (5) *Dramatis personae*; (6) *Style*; (7) *Sententiae and moralising allusions*; (8) *The sources*; (9) *The parallel tradition*; (10) *Pro-Flavian historiography*; (11) *The text*. This is a large number of subjects to discuss in three dozen pages, and a student who has digested the material presented herein will possess sufficient background for reading and understanding this important year in Rome's imperial history. Further, in the commentary A. introduces sections of the text with fine essays.

The *Histories* are a masterpiece of Tacitean narrative, with the four and a half books that have survived covering less than two years. Tacitus has here the opportunity to delve deeply into discussion and analysis of events and people, in a way that he rarely had in the later *Annals*. This book contains some of Tacitus' most brilliant presentations, such as the evolving character sketch of the emperor Vitellius, the rise of Flavian aspirations, the suicide and obituary of Otho, and the terrible events of civil war. To all this and more A. does justice, with great detail and learning, and, in a book of this scope, remarkable accuracy in presentation. [[1]] A commentary of this scope and learning will invariably elicit approval or a bemused nod of the head from its reader. A. has produced a major contribution to Tacitean studies, for which all students of Latin literature will be grateful. It is, without rival, the best available commentary on *Histories 2*. The question remains whether it belongs in the series in which it appears, the *Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics*.

In her Preface, A. uses the word "students" several times. But I think she has set her goal much higher. I have four other commentaries on the entire *Histories* or on Book II before me. These are W.A. Spooner's complete text and commentary, dating from 1891, which for over a century has been the only complete English commentary;

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A.D. Godley's *The Histories of Tacitus. Books I. and II.*, a volume in Macmillan's Classical Series, published in 1887 and reprinted a dozen times by 1942; A.L. Irvine's *Tacitus: Histories, Books I & II*, one of Methuen's Classical Texts, first published in 1952 and reprinted several times; and H. Heubner's vast scholarly edition, in German, offering only commentary, published in five volumes between 1963 and 1982 by Carl Winter Universitätsverlag in Heidelberg. Spooner's edition was meant to rival Furneaux's text and commentary on the *Annals*, but, alas, fell short. Heubner's was a match for Koestermann's splendid *Annales*, published by Winter in four volumes, prepared with admirable speed, from 1963 to 1968. Godley's and Irvine's books were school texts and performed their jobs well, as the numbers of reprints indicate.

Where does A.'s volume fit into this canon? For a simple comparison, I selected four passages of two chapters each [[2]], dealing with important themes and subjects, and compared the number of lemmata, i.e. in a very basic sense, the extent and depth of the editors' comments. The total number of lines in these texts is about 129. Irvine has the smallest number of lemmata, 71, followed by Godley with 82 and Spooner with 97. Heubner, unsurprisingly, has a quantum increase, with 226. But A. substantially surpasses him, with 275. Does such coverage suit a college textbook? Some may feel that it does not. In addition, the physical appearance of the book is very different from its predecessors in the same series. [[3]] When I opened the package in which it was sent to me, I was stunned at its weight. Then its size caught my eye; it was more than an inch taller and more than half an inch wider. Compared with Cynthia Damon's edition of *Histories I* (2003) and R.H. Martin's and A.J. Woodman's *Annals Book IV* (1989), this volume is of a different order. I would not want to be a student carrying it around in a backpack or briefcase.

Any volume that outdoes Heubner in coverage and matches him in the quality of essays within the commentary is certainly more than a text. It seems a misfit in Cambridge's green and yellow series, but would, I think, find an appropriate home and suitable companions in the Orange series, which already offers F.R.D. Goodyear's two volumes on *Annals 1 and 2* and Woodman's and Martin's *Annals 3*. Rhiannon Ash has produced a big book, and a very good one indeed. Every devotee of Tacitus has reason to rejoice.

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[[1]] At the very beginning of the book, in the list of Abbreviations, appeared an error which grated on me, as an old Johns Hopkins man: the initial of Basil Gildersleeve's first name is "B," not "G." In 2.2, it would be worth noting that Titus was not only taking risks by sailing in open water but by traveling by sea at all in the winter; also the text has the word *inclitum*, the lemma *inclutum*. At 5.1, discussion of *acer militiae* gives several similar expressions, but fails to identify the kind of genitive (surely one of specification) and directs the reader to Kühner-Stegmann's great German grammar. But how many students, graduate or undergraduate, will have this book readily available, and will command enough German to consult it? At 11.1, the spelling *Boudicca* surprised me, since it is now routinely accepted, after Webster's work (G. Webster, *Boudica: The British Revolt against Rome AD 60*, (Totowa, NJ, 1978) 13), that the name has only one "c." At 11.2, the text has the word *alae*, the lemma *ales*. A brief discussion of the word *deforme* would have been welcome. In 11.3, the expression *ante signa pedes ire* not only describes Agricola but more immediately Vespasian at the beginning of Chapter 5. At 13.2, the young lady's name is *Anne Frank*. At 14.1, the participle *adactae* suggests compulsion, not free will. At 31.1, the words which describe Otho, *luxu saevitia audacia*, form a splendid tricolon, which underscores Otho's vicious character. He possesses three bad qualities, Vitellius merely two, which are actually one. Otho is certainly more to be feared. At 48.1, the text reads *nec*, the lemma *necat*. At 76.3, *trucidatus*, which is a much more powerful word than others like *interfectus* or *occisus*, might have been briefly discussed. At 77.3, Mucianus mentions four of Vespasian's good qualities and balances them with three of Vitellius' vices.

[[2]] Tacitus' digressions, 37–8; the death and obituary of Otho, 49–50; Vitellius at Bedriacum and his visit to the battlefield, 69–70; and Mucianus' address to Vespasian, 76–7.

[[3]] The series has changed its physical format in the hopes that the binding will last longer.