

Ripensando Tacito (e Ronald Syme): Storia e storiografia. Edited by MARIA ANTONIETTA GIUA. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2007. Pp. 231. Paper, €18.00. ISBN 978-884672023-8.

The rationale of this slender volume is presented on the back cover. The first sentence reads, "The volume collects the contributions of an international meeting at the University of Florence, November 30—December 1, 2006, dealing with historical and historiographical aspects of Tacitus' works and his greatest 20th-century interpreter Sir Ronald Syme" (my translation). This is an intriguing approach, yet a reading leads to some disappointment.

There are twelve papers, divided into four triads: "Tacito e Ronald Syme"; "Questioni di metodo"; "Fra storia e storiografia"; and "Conquista e gestione dell'impero." Only the first deals with the relationship Tacitus-Syme, and only the second paper, by Giua herself, treats the subject with any depth. It can essentially be said of most of the other papers that they could have been delivered and published in any context, and Syme generally appears only in footnotes. Here too appear some difficulties, since the Italian scholars tend to cite Sir Ronald's great work in the Italian translation, which has far more pages than the original. References are therefore useless for readers who have *Tacitus* at their sides.

Another peculiarity, for an international conference discussing Syme, is the absence of any Anglo-Saxon participants, the people who likely knew Syme longest and most intimately, his students and colleagues in Great Britain and the United States. There are nine Italians represented here, three French scholars (two of whom collaborated on one paper), and one German, whose text is presented in Italian. All papers are in and of themselves interesting, although Dieter Timpe's is an updated version of a piece published only a few years ago in German.

The most intriguing and valuable of all, to me, is Giua's "Osservazioni sul *Tacitus* di Ronald Syme." Her leitmotif is that Tacitus and Syme shared a basic pessimism, and that over the years the two became almost one being. She offers a good discussion of the origin and development of Syme's book, but does not mention (if indeed she is aware of it) the steady increase in its coverage and size. Before 1950, Syme had planned 15 chapters. In 1952, the number had risen to 36, a year later to 40, in 1954 to 44. (This information privately from Sir Ronald.) The book appeared in 1958 with 45 chapters and 95 Appendixes, which themselves offer a detailed outline for study of Tacitus.

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The first contribution, "Syme e Tacito: qualche ricordo," by Emilio Gabba, very brief and really a eulogy, mentions the relationship between Syme and himself, one of the surviving reviewers of Syme's book, a half-century or so later. Both Tacitus and Syme wrote of the end of republican Rome and the growing influence of provinces and provincials. It was for long commonly known that Syme's intended first book dealt with the provincial at Rome. As time passed, that was largely absorbed into *The Roman Revolution* and *Tacitus*; indeed, the last section of the latter bears the heading "THE NEW ROMANS." Nonetheless, the publication of the original manuscript in 1999, entitled *The Provincial at Rome*, by Anthony Birley, was a signal event for Symeians.

The third paper in the first section is by J. Dizez, "*Capax imperii*, un fil rouge de Tacite à Syme," discusses the leitmotif of *capax imperii*, which played such an important role in Syme's interpretation. Tacitus is the only ancient author to use this expression. The concept depends upon high birth as well as personal abilities.

The three papers of the second triad deal with aspects of Tacitus' approach to history. M. Pani, "L'innovazione tacitiana: una rivoluzione a metà," emphasizes one of Tacitus' great introductions into the writing of history, *introspicere*. The historian must not only seek the apparent truth, but reveal the *dissimulatio* of the times. Consideration of *rumores* is important. His chief concern is the state, above all the state ruled by one man. M. Ducos, "Portée et signification des questions juridiques dans les Annales de Tacite," emphasizes Tacitus' interest in laws, their application and the evolution of justice. Tacitus' originality lies in inserting juridical problems into an analysis of the principate, and of justice, as is particularly apparent in the importance given jurists. Yet institutions are fragile when faced by the overwhelming power of the emperor. C. Franco, "Dal documento al racconto: i libri claudiani," discusses Syme's insistence upon Tacitus' use of the *acta* and other documentary material in these books. There is often a contrast between senatorial meetings and the *consilium principis*. Claudius' own (now lost) works also come into play.

Triad three comprises papers differing greatly from each other. G. Firpo, "Antioco IV di Siria e l'onolatria nell' 'Archaeologia giudaica' di Tacito (Hist. V 2-13)," gives particular attention to 5.8.2, the attempt by Antiochus IV to transform the Jews and the episode of the Jews being saved by the appearance of asses. Tacitus is unimpressed by this story. O. Devillers and F. Hurlet, "La portée des

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impostures dans les Annales de Tacite: la légitimité impériale à l'épreuve," discuss the "pseudos" of the Julio-Claudian era: Agrippa Postumus, Germanicus' son Drusus, the Neros. Tacitus devotes more attention to imposture than does any other ancient author, and is most concerned with the question of dynastic legitimacy. B. Scardigli, "Corbulone e dintorni (Tac., *Ann.* XV 15)," notes that the chapter appears to contain incongruities, such as the construction of the bridge and the various terms of capitulation. These in all likelihood came from Corbulo's *Memoirs*.

Up to this point, the volume contains no discussion of Tacitus' minor works. But the first paper in the final collection of three essays partially remedies that omission. This paper, which I found very interesting, is by C. Gabrielli, "Insularità e impero nell'*Agricola*." The author discusses the cultural presuppositions concerning the perception of Britain and its conquest, its island nature, and the impact of new conquests, above all political consequences and ethno-geographic understanding. The *Agricola* shows a cultural model, center-civilization/periphery-barbarism, of the representation of space and of humanity. I. Mastrorosa, "Politica suntuaria ed economia imperiale in un intervento di Tiberio (Tac., *Ann.* III 52–55)," closely examines Tacitus' treatment of the equilibrium between politics and the economy, with particular attention to Tiberius' intervention in the crisis of AD 22. D. Timpe, "L'insurrezione dei Batavi nell'interpretazione di Tacito," again discusses the Batavi, Civilis and other prime participants in the great uprising against Rome, one of the most significant parts of the surviving *Historiae*.

All the papers in the collection are worth reading, but on the whole it disappoints. When I saw the title, I rejoiced. But there is too little Syme, and nothing that can be called a *bahnbrechende Arbeit*. Readers unfamiliar with the person, character and achievements of Sir Ronald will do better to read the appreciations of him, such as F. Millar, "Style Abides," *JRS* 71 (1981) 144–52; A.M. Devine, "Sir Ronald Syme (1903–1989): A Roman Post Mortem," *AncW* 20 (1989) 67–75; M.T. Griffin, "Sir Ronald Syme 1903–1989," *JRS* 80 (1990) xi–xiv; K. Christ, "Ronald Syme," in *Neue Profile der Alten Geschichte* (Darmstadt, 1990) 188–247; G. Alföldy, "Two Principes: Augustus and Sir Ronald Syme," *Athenaeum* 81 (1993) 101–22; and G.W. Bowersock, "Ronald Syme, 1903–1989," *PBA* 84 (1994) 539–63.

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