

BOOK REVIEW

A Tacitus Reader: Selections from Annales, Historiae, Germania, Agricola, and Dialogus
By STEVEN H. RUTLEDGE. Mundelein, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers,
2014. Pp. xlvii + 198. Paperback, \$19.00. ISBN 978-0-86516-697-4.

Compact and affordable, this anthology of excerpts from all of Tacitus' extant work functions as a college-level introduction to Tacitus in Latin. The background material in both the introduction and commentary support the selections very well both in terms of grammar and historical context. The selections themselves represent a variety of excerpts that display Tacitus' style, mostly in his *Annales*. In short, if this were to be a student's only contact with Tacitus in Latin, then the student would be well served.

The format of this textbook is certainly portable and self-contained, with its own vocabulary section at the back of the book. The central section of the book contains back-to-back selections from Tacitus' corpus listed in chronological order more or less, followed by the commentary section. In his introduction, Rutledge has prepared the groundwork well for the reader's acquaintance with Tacitus, both in terms of his life, his literary output, and the political context of his time. Since Tacitus' biography is severely fragmented to say the least, Rutledge's references to renowned writers and scholars in piecing together what we know about Tacitus' life accomplishes two things: a realistic portrait of Tacitus and an introduction to the most important names in the field of Tacitean study from antiquity up to the present. This is a praiseworthy benefit for both the teacher and student. Indeed, the direct references to each of Tacitus' own writings that accompany this introduction help the reader connect to the following Latin selections in this textbook. In addition, Rutledge's focus, when not on Tacitus himself, is on the evolution of the Principate, the same vision that Tacitus himself all too often swings back to in his writing.

The individual summaries of each of Tacitus' books are good, concise assessments and introductions in themselves, combining that same blend of content and context that Rutledge uses in the earlier biographical section of the introduction. For example, in describing the *Annales*, Rutledge touches on some of the main

stepping-stones of Tacitus' narrative in terms of actual historical events and structural organization. This leads into "Tacitus' Place in Roman Historiography," which is a solid overall introduction to the historiographical tradition leading up to Tacitus. After this, with comments on Tacitus' sources and near contemporaries, Rutledge addresses what makes Tacitus so interesting to our context through Tacitus' style, embedded speeches, and character assessment. The intricacies and quirks of Tacitus' writing style then bear mention, followed by a list of rhetorical devices that will help readers pay even more attention to the novelty of Tacitean prose. Lastly, for the Tacitus novice, the "suggested reading" list will be a more than adequate treasure chest of references on which he or she can rely to explore Tacitus further. The Introduction runs roughly 34 pages, but covers all the ground that any college-level reader needs to get started on Tacitus.

In his earlier preface, Rutledge mentions: "Although some might find that the selections in the present volume are excessively slanted at times towards episodes that linger on violence, promiscuity, and death, this needs no apology: James Joyce through Stephen Daedalus famously referred to history as a nightmare from which he was trying to wake" (xi). Although these words apply more directly to the selections chosen from the *Historiae* and *Annales*, Rutledge makes judicious decisions about passages from the *Agricola*, *Germania*, and *Dialogus*. For example, the selections from the *Agricola* represent two key items of Tacitus' historiographical focus: the political question of *libertas* during the Principate, and the testing of it in a speech made by the British chieftain Calgacus. Selections from *Germania* include the opening chapters' topographical focus as well as essential sections from chapter 37 regarding the German tribes' relation to Rome's empire.

It is nice to see selections from *Dialogus* as well, since this might be the least popular of Tacitus' books to be taught. Rutledge includes two excerpts taken from the beginning of the *Dialogus* to give a sample of Tacitus' Ciceronian dialogue style mixed with the general theme of oratory's place in Imperial Rome. Brief passages from *Historiae* focus on both the political and military aspects respectively with Galba's 'rise' and fall (Book 1), then jumping to Book 3 with street fighting between the Flavians and Vitellians. Rutledge justifiably favors selections from the *Annales* for the rest of the textbook, these matching in amount all the other selections put together and more. While including selections related to each of the Julio-Claudian emperors' reigns, he also includes juicy excerpts titled "witchcraft used against Germanicus" and "Nero's matricide" to name just two. The selections represent a good variety of material that spans what we have of the *Annales*.

Pictures and maps are sparse, while three genealogical charts help untangle the family lines of the Julio-Claudian clans. Compared to the actual Latin text of 28 pages, the commentaries span 119 pages, and help the reader understand the political and historical context of the text as well as complex grammatical constructions, well-suited to the needs of a college student. Overall, Rutledge's edition is a much needed addition to teaching Tacitus in Latin. This is a well written and formatted textbook that will be difficult to surpass.

ANDRE STIPANOVIC

The Hockaday School, astipanovic@hockaday.org