

BOOK REVIEW

Tacitus Annals XVI. Edited by Lee Fratantuono. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Pp. vii + 184. Paperback, \$20.95. ISBN 978-1-3500-2351-2.

Fratantuono's commentary on Book 16 of Tacitus' *Annals* fills an important gap. Book 16 is of great interest for many reasons, and includes two very famous accounts: the suicide scenes of Petronius and Thrasea Paetus. Yet it lacked a commentary that made this text available to a school audience. Finally, undergraduate students can read this narrative with the benefits of expert guidance and balanced judgment.¹

The commentary proper is preceded by an informative introduction, in which Fratantuono provides all the essential facts on Tacitus' life and works, on the latter's placement within both the historiographical and epic traditions, and on the content of Book 16, with particular emphasis on the function of memory in Tacitus' historical narrative. The Latin text Fratantuono prints is Fisher's OCT, which lacks the now customary paragraph divisions. There is no apparatus, and textual problems are normally not discussed, as is to be expected in this type of commentary.² For the sake of students, an essential vocabulary, followed by a short bibliography and a general index, concludes this edition.

Although Fratantuono's commentary remains, at its core, a "school commentary" aimed at undergraduates, it provides useful observations for graduate students and scholars alike, particularly in its informed introduction and rich

¹ The commentaries of Furneaux (Oxford, ²1907), in English, and of Koestermann (Heidelberg, 1968), in German, are not suitable for teaching undergraduates, in addition to being expensive and difficult to access. The same applies to the Italian commentaries of Zuccarelli (Naples, 1946) and Franchi (Rome, 1948).

² Fratantuono, however, often refers to the Teubner editions of Heubner and Wellesley when they depart from Fisher's text. While most emendations are correctly attributed (e.g. at 19.3 *novitate*<*m*>, which is Neue's correction), at times they can be misleading: e.g. at 1.1 *re*<*i*> *traxit*, 1.2 *demonstra*<*ba*>*t*, Fratantuono tells his readers that this is what Heubner prints. This is true, but these are not Heubner's emendations.

bibliographical suggestions, spread throughout the notes.³ It is 3rd- and 4th-year undergraduate students, however, who will benefit from this commentary the most. Overall, the notes provide a balanced mix of scholarly and more school-oriented materials, though some *lemmata* will overwhelm undergraduates (e.g. the long discussion of 1.1 *Inludit dehinc*, or the bibliographical suggestions at 2.2 *secundo lustro*), while others are unduly elementary. Does a student who is reading Tacitus need to know that *accenderentur* (1.2) is an imperfect subjunctive? Rather, the student should be told why it is imperfect subjunctive (similarly, at 9.1 *statueret*, and elsewhere). In most cases, however, Fratantuono offers the right amount of grammatical aid, even though at times the explanation could have been clearer. To gloss *missis* at 2.1 as a substantive use of the adjective is misleading: it is an ablative absolute with an understood antecedent (indeed Fratantuono compares *oblatis* (3.1), where the participle is perfectly explained). Despite some minor disagreements,⁴ I have found most notes very suitable for their intended audience. The commentary explains equally grammatical, literary and historical issues, while the numerous characters that appear in this section of the *Annals* receive suitable introductions that will not overwhelm students (the section on Petronius at 18-19 is nicely done, as is the philosophical background on Stoicism with regard to Thrasea Paetus). Fratantuono is not very generous with translations of difficult expressions, although he glosses several unusual words. While extensive translations are to be discouraged in a school commentary, I think that some difficult passages, such as Tacitus' famous authorial intervention at Chapter 16, could have benefitted from more guidance. Something one would not expect to see in a commentary of this kind, but which is instead most welcome, is Fratantuono's references to Nero's *Nachleben* (e.g. to Monteverdi's opera and the 1951 film *Quo Vadis* in the Poppaea chapter).

³ Since this is a school commentary, references are mainly to works in English.

⁴ *opibus vetustis* at 7.1 is surely an ablative of respect. At 10.4, *iuxta* does not mean "just as," but "alike, equally" (*OLD* 2). At 13.1, *urbi* is defined as a dative of respect, reference or direction. More simply, it is the use of the dative with a word denoting nearness: see Gildersleeve & Lodge § 359. At 20.2, *luere* is glossed as historical infinitive. It could also be perfect 3rd plural. At 22.2, *audiant* is subjunctive because it is in indirect statements, just as *habuisset* at 24.1, as Fratantuono points out (cf. also *insisteret* at 25.2). At 25.2, the subjunctives *aspiceret* and *audiret* are jussive rather than potential (cf. *detraheret* at 26.2). At 31.1, *humi* is glossed as either a locative or a local ablative. I do not think that the latter is possible.

The book is nicely produced, well written and user-friendly. There are a few typos, but mostly insignificant.⁵ If an updated edition should ever be published, I would recommend a list of “references” where the author could include, e.g., the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Pinkster’s *Oxford Latin Syntax*, Smallwood’s *Documents* and some other standard works (as, e.g., Woodman does at p. xxx of his translation of the *Annals*). In the notes, commentaries of this type usually refer to a standard grammar, such as Allen-Greenough. It would perhaps be helpful. Lastly, I think that, since Tacitus’ language is particularly idiosyncratic, a section of the introduction could have been devoted exclusively to this subject (cf., e.g., pp. 22-27 of Ash’s edition of *Annals XV*).

This commentary will finally make *Annals 16* a teachable and affordable text in the undergraduate curriculum.

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⁵ P. 35, *praegravi[da]s*; p. 42, *adseverat* is not a pluperfect; p. 52, “describes [of] the flight”; p. 55, “that [read] appears”; p. 82, the reference to Comell, p. 639, should be to p. 630; p. 89, the lemma *ista* should follow *defensionem*; p. 96, “might call [be]”; p. 106, read “Barea” for “Borea”; p. 109, “mentioned <in> the Senate”; p. 114, “a condition [is] of the utmost”; p. 119, the lemma *ultra* should precede *extimuit*; p. 122, read *angusti* for *angusti*; p. 147, *Dissoc<i>atio*; p. 151, <h>*as*.