

text only as material for exercises on literary theory. On the other hand K.'s fundamental assumption risks not distinguishing between characters of the text and real individuals at all, neglecting the constraints of the literary genre (therefore historians and sociologists should still exercise prudence in using Martial as their source): undoubtedly, K. would not fall back to too simple biographical interpretations of the epigrams, but perhaps he underestimates his concession that there may be elements of self-fashioning ('Mag dieser seine eigenen Auftritte auch zum Zweck der Leserlenkung mit Elementen einer Stilisierung versehen haben', p. 203). We should steer a middle course. Taking names and information more seriously than has previously been the case and seeking coherence can be helpful for the interpretation of single epigrams the point of which has not been clear so far (e.g. 8.41 and 9.95 with Athenagoras and 12.42 with Callistratus for the interpretation of 9.95b, pp. 86–7, 89–90, 147: *vester peccat Athenagoras* in 9.95b, 6 indicates sexual deviance set free after the death of the wife). Therefore, K.'s objections to skipping too quickly over the reality outside the text and concentrating only on literary games inside the text will bring benefits to scholarship on Martial and Classics in general.

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### TACITEAN *MIRACULA*

M McNAMARA (J.), P AGÁN (V.E.) (edd.) *Tacitus' Wonders. Empire and Paradox in Ancient Rome*. Pp. x+281. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £65, US\$90. ISBN: 978-1-350-24172-5. doi:10.1017/S0009840X22002128

Tacitus has enjoyed great esteem among literary scholars as an author who distinguished between appearance and reality to access layers of subtext and reveal hidden truths under a regime that favoured secrecy. This new book engages with this evaluation of Tacitus' sceptical historiography in constructive and novel ways. Its reflection on *miracula* illuminates the many roads that are left unexplored when scholars take Tacitus' scepticism at face value. By examining 'the wondrous' in Tacitus' works, this book shows the rich and unforeseen breadth of his historiographical project when we redirect our gaze to elements that have been commonly put aside for being anecdotal, fantastical or false.

In the introduction the editors explain the apparent contradiction in subjecting 'the sceptical Tacitus' to the study of the wondrous, making a case for looking at *miracula* as a meaningful component of his works. Building on recent studies on paradoxography in ancient literature, the editors justify their project by pointing out that Roman historiography has not been paid attention as a *locus* for the investigation of wonders. By examining instances where Tacitus' introduction of *miracula* may undermine his authority, the chapters explore the strategies whereby the historian handles potential challenges to the credibility of his narrative. More importantly, they show the different ways in which Tacitus implicates his audience in a joint effort towards interpretation, from the adoption of an 'anti-paradoxographer' approach to the suspension of disbelief when reporting Vespasian's miracles in Alexandria.

In Part 1, 'Paradoxography and Wonder', Chapter 1 by K.E. Shannon-Henderson looks at Tacitean wonders through the lens of Hellenistic paradoxographical collections,

favouring an understanding of *miracula* that is based on the typologies employed by paradoxographers when organising material in their treatises (p. 20). Shannon-Henderson identifies items in Tacitus' works that were typically contained in these collections, and then reflects on how his handling of *miracula* compares with the procedures adopted by paradoxographers. Shannon-Henderson suggests that Tacitus operated in a twofold manner when reporting *miracula*: first, in a way typical of paradoxographers, i.e. reporting a wonder and omitting a rational explanation (which implies the possibility that the item may be true); second, by adopting an 'anti-paradoxographer' approach whereby a rational explanation or the correction of a previous account deprive the *miraculum* from its wondrous status (which I would compare to Seneca's 'rhetoric of science' in *Natural Questions*). Shannon-Henderson concludes that Tacitus' handling of *miracula* mirrors broader concerns about the authenticity, reliability and interpretability of the historian's work.

In Chapter 2 R. Peters reviews the relationship between truth and wonder as articulated by Greek historians from the Hellenistic period and explores how Tacitus may have engaged with the tropes employed by said authors. By looking at Tacitus' reflections on wonders against the backdrop of the polemics between true and wondrous stories in Greek historiography, Peters argues that Tacitus performed 'calculated scepticism, delegating responsibility to others and maintaining an ethos and a persona of critical seriousness ... to exploit wonders for literary effect' (p. 54). Peters goes on to suggest that Tacitus' agenda for a rational comprehension of the world is comparable to Lucretius' didactic agenda in *DRN*. Though Peters offers insights into fundamental debates in ancient historiography, it is striking that, by stating 'Tacitus is a child of a Hellenistic tradition' (p. 72), he bypasses Tacitus' Latin predecessors, overlooking the ways in which Roman discourses on history-writing developed their own views on the matter.

In Chapter 3 A. Pomeroy focuses on the way in which in the *Dialogus* Tacitus' character Aper employs the term 'admiration' in his reconstruction of the history of Roman oratory. Compared to Messalla's antiquarian thesis on the decline of oratory, the modernist Aper criticises those who admire the past and scorn the present without acknowledging the change of the times – even Cicero's oratory departed from what was practised by those whom he admired. Pomeroy concludes that Aper's second speech functions as 'an answer to any nostalgic view of the heyday of oratory, suggesting that one can marvel at the past, but hardly take it as a model for present behaviour' (p. 84).

In Chapter 4 B. Jones examines the politics of praise in Imperial Rome in the *Dialogus* and the *Agricola*. Jones employs the category 'social marvel', suggesting that speakers in the *Dialogus* identify in the exceptional orator a distinctive type of human *miraculum* – an object of wonder due to the supernatural power of oratorical performance. As for the *Agricola*, Jones focuses on the dichotomic representation of Agricola's celebrity abroad, where his status as *miraculum* emerged naturally in recognition of his virtue, and his cultivation of a low profile when in Rome. Jones concludes that the occurrence of these 'social marvels' is paradoxical: in the *Dialogus* Maternus represents an object of wonder in a context that, in Maternus' view, denied that very possibility, whereas the *Agricola* memorialises the *fama* of a general who gained *gloria* under a regime that limited the status of 'social marvel' to the emperor alone.

In Part 2, 'Interpreting Wonders', Chapter 5 by G. Baroud analyses the narrative function of Tacitus' reports of wonders at the end of the Tiberian *Annals*. According to Baroud, in these episodes Tacitus reflects on the task of history-writing and on the impossibility of sound knowledge. Baroud first analyses the 'false Drusus' episode (*Ann.* 5.10), concentrating on how Tacitus explains the uncritical circulation of the rumour: according to the historian, the Greeks were too eager to believe in *nova* and *mira*, a trait

that in the end made them the masterminds behind their own deception. The discussion then moves to Tiberius' fondness for astrology and the sighting of the phoenix in Egypt, episodes for which Baroud identifies Tacitus reflecting on the epistemological limits of disciplines that deal with interpretation. Baroud concludes that Tacitus frames interpretation as a process of human mediation that acknowledges the possibility of failure.

In Chapter 6 C. Aldiss focuses on the supernatural as wondrous phenomena that require elucidation. Aldiss analyses different episodes in the *Historiae* where Tacitus points at (mis)interpretations of signs, which in his view convey an evaluation of the expertise and authority of those attempting to translate said phenomena. Referring to *religio* and *superstitio* as two competing epistemic frameworks, Aldiss argues that interpretation of the supernatural became an extension of the battleground during the Civil War and offers valuable insights into how Tacitus' representation of emperors as interpreters of the supernatural in a context full of *prodigia* is a reflection on their capacity to rule.

In Chapter 7 McNamara outlines that *miracula* in the *Agricola* and the *Germania* do not appear as the product of ignorance only, but that Tacitus advances a sense of wonder that can also emerge from an intellectually informed process. McNamara argues that the lack of wondrous phenomena in the *Agricola*, and the subsequent demystification of *Britannia*, illustrates the Roman understanding of knowledge as the consequence of the conquest. As for the *Germania*, McNamara suggests that Tacitus adopts a dual approach that allows him both to retain the wondrousness of the subject and to distinguish between proper knowledge and phenomena that remain in the realm of belief. According to McNamara, the absence of an *Agricola*-like figure would explain the fact that *Germania* remains a place where reports about wonders proliferate – to which I would add the explicit rebuttal of Domitian's claims to have conquered this territory (*Germ.* 37.5: *Germani triumphati magis quam victi*; cf. *Agr.* 10.1: *Britannia perdomita*).

In Part 3, 'The Principate as Object of Wonder', Chapter 8 by P. Christoforou examines Tacitus' representation of the emperor Tiberius during his retirement on Capri as an object of wonder that triggered both fear and fascination. Christoforou argues that Tacitus accomplishes this by foregrounding Tiberius' secretive and misanthropic personality and through his engagement with Roman imaginaries of islands as wondrous places (Capri representing both a *locus amoenus* and a place of intrigue). Christoforou then analyses how characters in the text respond to Tiberius' ambiguity and his non-verbal communication, suggesting that this uncertainty turned into fear and triggered all type of wondrous stories after the emperor relocated to Capri.

In Chapter 9 H. Haynes offers a sophisticated reading of the emperor's *miracula* in Alexandria. Haynes suggests that Tacitus' narrative asks readers to suspend disbelief to enter the poetic world and to look at the episode through a tragic lens. According to Haynes this narrative strategy makes the dichotomy true/false irrelevant, redirecting the reader's attention to the collective *hybris* resulting from transgressions. The tragedy, Haynes argues, lies in the muddling of the human and the divine: the Roman people willing to give credence to the *miracula* and Vespasian accepting his own divinity. Haynes concludes that this tragic transgression engenders a new twist in the imperial cult as 'the emperor god' is now believed to have supernatural powers – a Flavian excess that culminated with 'Domitian's self-display as *dominus et deus*' (p. 222).

In Chapter 10, which works as a conclusion to the book, Pagán redirects the focus from novelty to normality, arguing that 'the wondrous is best perceived in contrast to the ordinary' (p. 247). Pagán's observations on Tacitus' sense of 'the new normal' are meaningful and engage obliquely with the enduring *topos* in ancient historiography on the disarticulation of society to the point where language is corrupted – words are emptied of their meaning, and what was once thought immoral begins to be praised as virtuous.

According to Pagán, in Tacitus' texts 'wondrous is the behaviour of men, even decent men, for whom moral cowardice is no longer exceptional but necessary' (p. 249). By looking at *miracula* as contextually situated phenomena, Pagán highlights the importance of the ordinary/extraordinary dialectic in Tacitus' works to detect the 'political forces that may otherwise pass unnoticed' (p. 248).

The book offers meaningful reflections on the assumptions underlying Tacitus' status as a sceptical author. Scholars of historiography and literary scholars working on ancient paradoxography will find useful discussions on the methods and techniques employed by Tacitus when processing unverified reports. Likewise, Tacitean scholars will benefit from fresh close readings of passages on which much has been written. Overall, this book goes beyond the apparent artistic/anecdotal function of wonders in innovative ways and sheds light on how knowledge of the world is constructed in Tacitus' works through *miracula*.

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### SUETONIUS' *LIVES OF POETS*

STACHON (M.) (ed., trans.) *Sueton, De poetis. Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den erhaltenen Viten nebst begründeten Mutmaßungen zu den verlorenen Kapiteln*. Pp. 580. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2021. Cased, €98. ISBN: 978-3-8253-4852-6.

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Suetonius has had few champions of his own. Often he is studied by Classicists whose proper background and expertise are rather in annalistic historiography or Roman history, such as R. Syme and F.R.D. Goodyear, with understandably misguided results (see my introduction to T. Power and R.K. Gibson [edd.], *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives* [2014], p. 2; cf. K.R. Bradley, *Latomus* 61 [2002], 486, 696–702 on C. Edwards; also T. Power, *Collected Papers on Suetonius* [2021], pp. 1–7 and *passim*, esp. pp. 207–12, 229–37 for D. Woods, whose ideas have been annulled *in toto*; see e.g. D. Wardle, *Arctos* 40 [2006], 175–88; M.B. Charles, *Latomus* 73 [2014], 667–85). Unless one is familiar with the conventions of ancient biography from the earliest Greek fragments to the *Augustan History*, one is inevitably doomed to produce a precarious reading of Suetonius' work, especially his *Illustrious Men*. Fortunately, S. makes a break from such misinterpretations with this major edition of Suetonius' *De poetis*.

This is the first complete text in over 75 years, following landmark efforts to rescue Suetonius' other extant writings besides the *Lives of the Caesars* by J. Taillardat (*Insults and Games* [1967]) and R.A. Kaster (*Grammarians and Rhetoricians* [text and commentary 1995; OCT 2016]). The present edition of these fascinating ancient *Lives* of Terence, Virgil, Horace, Lucan and Persius contains a new Latin text of all five biographies as well as a German introduction, translation and commentary. In its selection of readings S.'s text is an original contribution to the previous editions of C.L. Roth (1858), A. Reifferscheid (1860, with a commentary on the *Vita Terenti* by F.W. Ritschl), A. Rostagni (1944) and J.C. Rolfe (1914; 1997<sup>2</sup>, revised by G.P. Goold), although not all of his editorial decisions will be accepted, and it does not improve very