

FRONTINUS' CAMEO ROLE IN TACITUS' *AGRICOLA*

et Cerialis quidem alterius successoris curam famamque obruisset: subiit sustinuitque molem Iulius Frontinus, vir magnus quantum licebat, validamque et pugnacem Silurum gentem armis subegit, super virtutem hostium locorum quoque difficultates eluctatus.

Indeed, Cerialis would have outshone the efforts and renown of any other successor; but Julius Frontinus shouldered the burden next. A great man as far as he was allowed to be, he subdued the powerful and bellicose tribe of the Silures with his arms, overcoming both the courage of his enemy and the difficulties of the terrain. (*Agricola* 17.2)<sup>1</sup>

Frontinus appears only once in Tacitus' *Agricola*, at a moment in the text where Tacitus is filling in some background, sketching a rough history of the Roman occupation of Britain up to the time when Agricola took over as governor of the province. His appearance is brief, and the momentum of the whole section makes it tempting to see him as a mere footnote in the tale of Agricola's life and career.<sup>2</sup> I will argue, however, that Frontinus' role in the text is more significant than that. Indeed, it is my contention that he is closely bound up with – and helps Tacitus and his readers to explore – one of the text's most pressing concerns: namely senatorial conduct, status and identity, in Domitianic and post-Domitianic Rome.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 122, B.C. McGing, 'Synkrisis in Tacitus' *Agricola*', *Hermathena* 133 (1982), 15-25, at 18, and R.H. Rodgers, *Frontinus. De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae* (Cambridge, 2004), 2 all note how 'rapidly' Tacitus passes over Frontinus' governorship of Britain; this has led them, and others, to do likewise. They are among the very few scholars to comment on it at all.

## I. TRANSITION AND UNCERTAINTY AFTER DOMITIAN

The difference between Domitianic and post-Domitianic is significant, or so the *Agricola* asserts – at first glance. Indeed, it plays a role in creating these two categories, and in setting them up in opposition to each other. For it was not only Nerva and Trajan who found it expedient to distinguish their reigns from that of their unpopular predecessor; on Domitian's death, the whole of the Roman elite participated in a process of 'political periodisation' which took pains to distance 'now' from 'then'.<sup>3</sup> Though Tacitus does not go to the same lengths as some of his contemporaries, the picture he paints of life under Domitian contributes to a widespread *damnatio memoriae* of the assassinated emperor.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile his very act of writing 'enact[s] the difference between Domitianic and post-Domitianic', for the *Agricola*'s existence proves (or sets out to prove) that the oppressive conditions which made biography (and therefore life) so difficult previously no longer prevail in the Trajanic present.<sup>5</sup> The *Agricola* thus reinforces a story of stark contrasts that was central to the rhetoric of Rome's new imperial government, helping to establish

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<sup>3</sup> There was nothing new in this, of course; the same emphasis on discontinuity and transformation can be observed at the start of the Flavian 'era', Nero's 'golden age', and when Augustus came to power (Syme (n. 2), 217). On political periodisation in Trajanic literature, see esp. E.S. Ramage, 'Juvenal and the Establishment: Denigration of Predecessor in the *Satires*', *ANRW* II 33.1 (1989), 640-707; also C. Whitton, *The Rhetoric of Accession: Tacitus' early historical works as Trajanic legitimation* (Diss., Cambridge University, 2008), 19-28, whose particular focus is the *Agricola*; cf. M. Wilson, 'After the Silence: Tacitus, Suetonius and Juvenal', in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003), 523-42.

<sup>4</sup> On this point, see esp. D. Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2008), 52, 60-2, 110-12; also C.W. Hedrick, *History and Silence. Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin, 2000), 113-130, 153-69.

<sup>5</sup> Sailor (n. 4), 53. Tacitus' makes the suppression of writing and speech an important feature of his depiction of Domitian's reign (*Agr.* 1-2). His publication of a biography which (he claims) could not have been written under Domitian thus marks a striking difference between the two eras. On this, see esp. Sailor (n. 4), 67; T. Whitmarsh, "'This in-between book": language, politics and genre in the *Agricola*', in B. McGing and J. Mossman (edd.), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006), 305-33, at 311; H. Haynes, 'Survival and Memory in the *Agricola*', *Arethusa* 39 (2006), 149-70, at 153-4; B. Gibson, 'Contemporary Contexts', in P. Roche (ed.), *Pliny's Praise: The Panegyricus in the Roman World* (Cambridge, 2011), 104-24, at 109.

Domitian's principate as a period of corruption, persecution and tyranny, and the succession of Nerva and Trajan as the start of a new age of (or a long-awaited return to) integrity, freedom and benign monarchy.<sup>6</sup>

The reality, of course, was rather more complicated. Nerva may have promised change, but his short reign was characterised by instability and uncertainty, as Romans grappled once more with the spectre of civil war and the vexed question of what was to happen next.<sup>7</sup> And when the *Agricola* was published, Trajan's reign had only just begun; moreover, he had not yet returned to Rome from the provinces, and would not do so for another year.<sup>8</sup> Rome, then, was still in political limbo, waiting to see how this 'new age' would turn out;<sup>9</sup> and the *Agricola* reflects this sense of transition and uncertainty, even as it celebrates differences between past and present. It expresses optimism, but cautiously: Tacitus welcomes the changes that have begun under Nerva and Trajan, but with syntax (in particular, the striking concessive clause

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<sup>6</sup> On the *Agricola*'s celebration and promotion of the new Nervan/Trajanic 'era', see, e.g., Syme (n. 2), 125; D. Sailor, 'Becoming Tacitus: Significance and Inconsequentiality in the Prologue of *Agricola*', *ClAnt* 23 (2004), 139-77, at 140; and Whitton (n. 3), 42-3 (who suggests that it may even have served as a model for Pliny's *Panegyricus*). Of course, the literature of the period exaggerates the extent of the discontinuity between Domitian and his successors, though (as R. Saller, 'Domitian and his Successors: Methodological Traps in Assessing Emperors', *AJAH* 15 (2000), 4-18, underlines) the limited extent of other evidence makes it difficult to know by how much. For an overview of the propaganda and policies of Nerva and Trajan – and the tricky balance they each struck between repudiation of and continuity with various aspects of Domitian's reign – see esp. M. Griffin, 'Nerva to Hadrian', in A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 11 (2000<sup>2</sup>), 84-131, at 86-92 and 98-108.

<sup>7</sup> On the political crises and conspiracies which marked his short reign, see, e.g., Syme (n. 2), 8-11, 220-1; T.C. Brennan, 'Principes and Plebs: Nerva's Reign as Turning-point?', *AJAH* 15 (2000), 40-66; A. Berriman and M. Todd, 'A very Roman Coup: the hidden war of imperial succession, AD 96-8', *Historia* 50 (2001), 312-31, at 315; J.D. Grainger, *Nerva and the Succession Crisis of AD 96-99* (London, 2003), 51, 67. And on the uncertainty surrounding who or what was to succeed him: Griffin (n. 6), 91, 94-6; Berriman and Todd (op. cit.), 324-31; W. Eck, 'An emperor is made: senatorial politics and Trajan's adoption by Nerva in 97', in G. Clark and T. Rajak (edd.), *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 2002), 211-26; Grainger (op. cit.), 96-108.

<sup>8</sup> Syme (n. 2), 17-18; Griffin (n. 6), 102; Grainger (n. 7), 111-17.

<sup>9</sup> Whitmarsh (n. 5), 313: 'Trajan's new age is liminal, inchoate. Uncertain, even.'

at 3.1) and imagery (of sickness and decay) which stress the slow and fragile nature of that change:

Nunc demum redit animus; et quamquam primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerva Caesar res olim dissociabiles miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem, augeatque cotidie felicitatem temporum Nerva Traianus, nec spem modo ac votum securitas publica, sed ipsius voti fiduciam ac robur adsumpserit, natura tamen infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala; et ut corpora nostra lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur, sic ingenia studiaque oppresseris facilius quam revocaveris: subit quippe etiam ipsius inertiae dulcedo, et invisae primo desidia postremo amatur.

(3.1-2)

Now finally our old spirit returns; and although Nerva, at the very start of this blessed new age, united two things which for so long had been separated – the principate and liberty; and although Trajan daily adds to the happiness of the times; and public confidence has begun to put its trust in hope and prayer again, and has become confident that these prayers will be answered and so grown in strength; even so, the remedies for human weakness are naturally slower to work than the diseases themselves; and just as our bodies grow slowly, but die quickly, so it is easier to crush people's minds and spirits than to bring them back to life; for indeed, the pleasure of inaction can insinuate itself, and the laziness we hate at first we end up growing fond of...<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On this passage, see esp. W. Liebeschuetz, 'The theme of liberty in the *Agricola* of Tacitus', *CQ* 16 (1966), 126-39, at 133; J.P. Bews, 'Language and Style in Tacitus' *Agricola*', *G&R* 34 (1987), 201-11, at 204; Sailor (n. 6), 153-4; Whitmarsh (n. 5), 311-12. Haynes (n. 5), 158-60 notes a parallel with Plin. *Ep.* 8.14.9, where Pliny also 'uses the metaphor of the body to express the distressed state of the body politic under Domitian', but seems more optimistic about a swift recovery. On this letter (and its

The *Agricola* may crystallise an image of the Domitianic past, in other words, but it does not fully inaugurate the new era. In fact it positions itself at a decisive moment in Roman imperial history when Rome is still hovering precariously between the two ‘periods’.<sup>11</sup>

For some, this is a sign that Tacitus may not be wholly committed to, or convinced by, the rhetoric of the new regime;<sup>12</sup> but others have noted that his anxiety seems to be focused particularly on ‘us’, Rome’s senatorial elite, who are still languishing in Domitianic mode.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the *Agricola* has sometimes been read as a wake-up call, an exhortatory, even challenging text, in which Tacitus comes across as something of a trailblazer. He sets the ball rolling by breaking the long silence that accompanied Domitian’s reign with his ‘newly recovered’ voice (3.3). With the publication of his biography he tests out the acclaimed freedom (especially of speech) which Nerva and Trajan are supposed to have restored.<sup>14</sup> And in so doing he

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engagement with the *Agricola*) see also C. Whitton, ‘Pliny, *Epistles* 8.14: Senate, Slavery and the *Agricola*’, *JRS* 100 (2010), 118-39.

<sup>11</sup> Tacitus’ claim (*Agr.* 1.4) that he has to seek permission ‘now’ (*nunc*) to write his biography, ‘so savage is the age and so inhospitable to virtue’, has also been read as a sign that he is not entirely persuaded by the rhetoric of change: e.g., Liebeschuetz (n. 10), 133; Whitmarsh (n. 5), 312. Cf. R.M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond (edd.), *Cornelii Taciti de vita Agricolae* (Oxford, 1967), ad loc.; also C. Kraus and A. Woodman, *A commentary on Tacitus’ Agricola* (Cambridge, forthcoming), who will argue that the ‘now’ at 1.4 can only refer to the Domitianic past, not the Trajanic present. On the difficulty of deciding exactly when this *nunc* refers to, see esp. Whitton (n. 3), 31-4. For me, attempts to pin it down overlook the salient point; as Sailor (n. 4), 58-9 notes, the ambiguity is there; and whether it is intentional or not, it is telling.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., A.J. Turner, ‘Approaches to Tacitus’ *Agricola*’, *Latomus* 56.3 (1997), 582-93, at 592; Wilson (n. 3), 533; Haynes (n. 5), 162; Whitmarsh (n. 5), 313.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Sailor (n. 4), 66; and Sailor (n. 6), 158-60. Whitton (n. 3), 34-6 also stresses Tacitus’ critical focus on his senatorial readers, especially at *Agr.* 2.3, where ‘our’ ‘passivity’ under Domitian comes under scathing scrutiny (*dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum...*); it is precisely this slavish mentality which Tacitus suggests ‘we’ are still struggling to shake off at 3.1. See also M. Lavan, ‘Slavishness in Britain and Rome in Tacitus’ *Agricola*’, *CQ* 61.1 (2011), 205-16, at 211-12.

<sup>14</sup> As Wilson (n. 13), 533 argues, ‘In complementing Nerva and Trajan for their restoration of *libertas*, [Tacitus] puts pressure on the new Emperor to live up to the high standards of tolerance for which he is being acclaimed.’ See also Sailor (n. 6), 153, who notes that the connection which Tacitus establishes between hostility to texts and ‘bad’ or oppressive emperors ‘leaves the present *principes* little to do but positively to support the present text’ – or appear Domitianic themselves. Ramage (n.

encourages his peers to follow suit – to stop behaving as they did under the old regime and live up to the opportunities and aspirations of the new age.<sup>15</sup>

This need not make him a mouthpiece for the new emperor, spouting an uncomplicated endorsement of imperial propaganda. In fact, it underlines a problem brought about by that very propaganda, for the clear divide which it insists upon between past and present not only gives Rome's senatorial class the chance to reinvent themselves, it obliges them to do so; but that is easier said than done. On the one hand, much (in theory) has changed: the tyrant is gone, and Rome is now ruled by an emperor who can be styled *imperator* and 'the best of senators',<sup>16</sup> and who is praised for restoring good relations with the senate<sup>17</sup> (and who, indeed, was recently a mere senator himself, and owes his position to handful of fellow senators, who master-minded his accession to the throne<sup>18</sup>). On the other hand, Rome is still ruled by an emperor, and one who, for all his *civilitas*, may turn out (as Tacitus' readers are all too aware) to be as autocratic as some of his predecessors.<sup>19</sup> That is perhaps why it

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3), 643-4 makes a similar point in connection with Pliny's *Panegyricus*; on the coercive, or at least protreptic, nature of Pliny's praise of Trajan there, see also, e.g., B. Radice, 'Pliny and the *Panegyricus*', *G&R* 15 (1968), 166-72, at 168; M. Morford, '*Iubes esse liberos*: Pliny's *Panegyricus* and liberty', *AJP* 113 (1992), 575-93, at 578; S.M. Braund, 'Praise and protreptic in early imperial panegyric: Cicero, Seneca, Pliny', in M. Whitby (ed.) *The Propaganda of Power: the role of panegyric in late antiquity* (Leiden, 1998), 53-76, at 66-8; M. Griffin, 'Pliny and Tacitus', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 18 (1999), 139-58, at 153.

<sup>15</sup> Turner (n. 12), 592; Sailor (n. 6), 140, 154, 160; Sailor (n. 4), 70-2. Syme (n. 2), 125 also described the *Agricola* as a 'manifesto... for the new imperial aristocracy', as well as for the emperor Trajan.

<sup>16</sup> Mart. 10.72; Plin. *Pan.* 2.3: *non enim de tyranno sed de cive, non de domino sed de parente loquimur*.

<sup>17</sup> See esp. Plin. *Pan.* 62-77.

<sup>18</sup> See above, n. 7; and below, n. 48.

<sup>19</sup> On the autocratic reality behind the 'republican façade', see esp. A. Wallace-Hadrill, '*Civilis Princeps*: between citizen and king', *JRS* 72 (1997), 32-48, who notes that while '[d]oubtless there was a real contrast between the reign of a Domitian and a Trajan' (39), the rhetoric of *libertas* and display of respect for the senate tended, above all, to confirm the supremacy of the emperor, without conceding any real power to his subjects (37); on gaps between Trajanic rhetoric and reality (and contemporary awareness of them), see also, e.g., Syme (n. 2), 12, 131, 220-1; K.H. Waters, 'Traianus Domitiani Continuator', *AJPh* 90 (1969), 385-405, at 394; S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: theatricality and doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian*,

is all the more urgent for Tacitus and his contemporaries to become ‘Trajanic’ (and establish what that means) before it stops meaning ‘non-Domitianic’. The *Agricola*, in other words, explores senatorial paradigms and senator-emperor relations at a time when its readers are faced with the chance – and the challenge – of recalibrating them, if only a little. It is not simply about (or for) senators who suffered the ‘nightmare’ of the Domitianic past (as its focus on Agricola may initially suggest); nor simply for (or about) senators who are enjoying the ‘new age’; but for a senatorial class which is still straddling the two, which has yet fully to make the transition from ‘past’ to ‘present’ and turn some of the new rhetoric into reality, if it can.

## II. AGRICOLA’S LIMITATIONS AS A ROLE-MODEL FOR THE NEW AGE

Agricola himself plays an important role in helping Tacitus and his readers to navigate this difficult transition, to think through the differences (and continuities) between ‘Domitianic’ and ‘Trajanic’, and to re-imagine themselves accordingly. He serves as a lens through which we may squint uncomfortably back, of course: a vehicle through which we may re-examine the (difficult) choices that were available to members of Rome’s aristocracy while Domitian was emperor; and an *exemplum* who may help to justify – though not in straightforward terms – certain paths taken, in particular the path of *obsequium ac modestia* (‘compliance and restraint’), which after all was the path probably taken by Tacitus himself, and by Frontinus, and the emperors Nerva and Trajan, and countless others too.<sup>20</sup> He is not restricted

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(Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 166-7; J. Bennett, *Trajan Optimus Princeps: a life and times* (London, 1997), 71-73, 106, 208; Griffin (n. 14), 154-5; Griffin (n. 6), 98-9, 103-8.

<sup>20</sup> On the *Agricola* as a personal or collective apologia for those who kept their heads down under Domitian, see, e.g., Syme (n. 2), 25; Ogilvie & Richmond (n. 11), 17; Hedrick (n. 4), 166-9. The fact that Agricola is not a clear-cut hero complicates this reading (S.J. Bastomsky, ‘The not-so-perfect man: some ambiguities in Tacitus’ picture of Agricola’, *Latomus* 44 (1985), 388-93; Whitmarsh (n. 5), 306; Haynes (n. 5), 163-9; Lavan (n. 13), 215-16). In fact Whitmarsh suggests that the tensions in the text (especially between the different models championed in the British and Roman

exclusively to the past, however; indeed, in places in the biography he might almost be seen as a man ahead of his time. Like the British leader Calgacus, he embodies some good old-fashioned Republican *virtus*,<sup>21</sup> but he also displays qualities which would not be out of place in AD 98. Though quiet and retiring when he comes into contact with oppressive emperors,<sup>22</sup> he becomes a model leader away from Rome: keen, hard-working, self-disciplined and incorruptible,<sup>23</sup> he takes his public responsibilities seriously,<sup>24</sup> he combines a strict sense of justice with a humane degree of leniency, and he restores order to people and places.<sup>25</sup> These are qualities which other Roman authors have praised in other Roman heroes at different times, but they have a particular resonance in the context of some of Nerva and Trajan's celebrated 'reforms', which promised (among other things) to tackle the corruption of the previous regime (without punishing past wrong-doers too heavily)<sup>26</sup> and promoted

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sections) and the ambiguity surrounding its central character are so marked that it may amount to 'a self-subverting critique [rather than a defence] of Tacitus and Agricola's complaisance' (310).

<sup>21</sup> See K. Clarke, 'An island nation: re-reading Tacitus' *Agricola*', *JRS* 91 (2001), 94-112, at 105-6, on Calgacus as a representative of 'Old Rome' and 'Old Roman virtues'; 106, n. 34, on Calgacus as an embodiment of 'what Agricola himself might have been like if he had not been a Roman general at the time of Domitian'; and 108, on Agricola as a 'a hero of the old style'.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., 6.3, where Tacitus characterises Agricola's behaviour under Nero (Bastomsky (n. 20), 389-90; Whitmarsh (n. 5), 319-20); also 40.3-4, for an example of Agricola's unobtrusiveness under Domitian. Bews (n. 10), 208-10 discusses the 'verbal pattern' which Tacitus weaves around Agricola, and notes a contrast between the passivity which characterises him when in the environs of the imperial court and his 'energy, competence and incisiveness' when campaigning in Britain.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. 5.1, 6.2, 6.5, 9.2-3.

<sup>24</sup> See esp. 19.2-3, where we learn that he led by example, transacting no public business via freedmen or slaves, making appointments not on the basis of personal bias but on merit, and finding out everything he needed to know.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., 7.3, 9.2-3, 19.3-20.1, for examples of his combination of justice and humanity, his work against corruption, and his imposition of order on chaos.

<sup>26</sup> There is a strong anti-corruption thread running through, e.g., Plin. *Ep.* 10, but reminders too that the new regime is not excessively severe (e.g. 10. 32, 38, 48, 82, 97, 111; P. Stadter, 'Pliny and the ideology of empire: the correspondence with Trajan', *Prometheus* 32 (2006), 61-76, at 61); see also Frontin. *Aq.*, esp. 130 (discussed below).



diligence as well as integrity in the performance of public office.<sup>27</sup> Agricola, then, does not merely embody long lost ideals, but also recently resurrected ones,<sup>28</sup> and he may therefore function in the biography as a character who points ahead to better times, who figures even as a prototype of the upcoming/ideal ‘Trajanic’ senator.

We cannot escape the fact, however, that, though he may have been more at home there than in his own day, Agricola does not survive to see the Trajanic new age. This is a point which Tacitus stresses emphatically (44.5). Although he comforts himself and his readers with the thought that Agricola’s spirit will live on (46.4),<sup>29</sup> he structures his narrative so that his father-in-law dies just at the moment when Domitian’s terrorisation of Rome begins to reach fever-pitch (45). Indeed, he rejoices in the timing of Agricola’s death, which prevented him from seeing the senate house ‘besieged’ and witnessing the murder of many leading men (45.1-3). Agricola, then, not only does not live long enough to see Trajan crowned emperor; he is killed off before Domitian and (significantly) the rest of Rome’s elite get their hands really dirty, before everyone becomes mired in the savage horror of the times.<sup>30</sup> Of course, this allows our hero to hang on to his victim status, shielding him (mostly) from the taint of collaboration; but it also prevents him from becoming an effective bridging figure, for – though he shows Trajanic potential – he ultimately remains locked not just in the Domitianic but in the pre-Domitianic past, in so far as he does not live

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<sup>27</sup> Again, see esp. Plin. *Ep.* 10 (e.g., 10. 20, 38, 62, 99, where Trajan appeals to or commends Pliny’s *diligentia*); and *Frontin. Aq.* passim, esp. 1, 64.1, 103-113, 119-123.

<sup>28</sup> One virtue which Tacitus particularly associates with Agricola is *moderatio* (5.1, 7.3, 42.3; Liebeschuetz (n. 10), 126-7; Clarke (n. 21), 108); Wallace-Hadrill (n. 19), 41-2 notes that this is the quality which Pliny attributes most often to Trajan in the *Panegyricus*.

<sup>29</sup> On the role the text (self-consciously) plays in ensuring Agricola’s immortality, see esp. Hedrick (n. 4), 115, 153; S. Harrison, ‘From man to book: the close of Tacitus’ *Agricola*’, in S.J. Heyworth, P.G. Fowler and S. Harrison (edd.), *Classical Constructions: papers in memory of Don Fowler* (Oxford, 2007), 310-19; Sailor (n. 4), 103-10.

<sup>30</sup> On Tacitus’ implication of everybody (except Agricola) in the desecration of Rome, see esp. Syme (n. 2), 25; Liebeschuetz (n. 10), 133-4; Bews (n. 10), 204; Whitton (n. 3), 35-6; and Whitton (n. 10), 126.

through the defining excesses of that reign. He is of limited assistance, then, for Rome's 'survivors'; if we are looking to him to help us reinvent ourselves as *post-Domitianic* senators, we could be forgiven for feeling a little lost. This, however, is where Frontinus comes in.

### III. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING *MAGNUS* (*QUANTUM LICEBAT*)

As I explained above, we meet Frontinus in a section of the biography where Tacitus is paving the way for his discussion of Agricola's governorship of Britain by reviewing the previous incumbents of that post.<sup>31</sup> The focus of the text thus remains Agricola; but this section is structured in a way which also makes Frontinus stand out, for Tacitus presents his (and his immediate predecessor's) time in Britain as a highpoint in the history of the province – and, indeed, in the history of Rome. Britain's earliest governors, we learn, had acquitted themselves well (14); but they were followed by a succession of men whose management of Britain was characterised by arrogance, injustice, indolence and impotence (16). Then, Tacitus tells us, Vespasian took charge, and the fortunes of the province (and the empire as a whole) enjoyed a revival: Rome's generals became 'great' (*magni*), her armies were outstanding, and the enemy lost hope (17.1).<sup>32</sup> This paves the way for a mention, first, of Petilius Cerialis, who waged a successful campaign against one of Britain's largest tribes (17.1). And then we come to Frontinus, whom Tacitus compares favourably with his predecessor, as the one man whom Cerialis could not outshine (17.2).

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<sup>31</sup> McGing (n. 2), 16 notes that Tacitus' synopsis is both brief and inaccurate, 'and dwells as far as possible on the unsuccessful features of the Roman administration', with a view to underlining Agricola's strengths by comparison; see also Sailor (n. 4), 83.

<sup>32</sup> More political periodisation, of course. Indeed, not only does Vespasian's arrival herald a sudden return to order and good government after the upheavals of AD 69; those governors whom Tacitus describes as less than satisfactory had all, significantly, been appointed by Nero (with the exception of the last, Vettius Bolanus, who was sent out by Vitellius [Tac. *Hist.* 2.65.2], and whose achievements – in Britain and elsewhere – had recently been lauded by Statius [*Silv.* 5.2, 30-60]).

Frontinus is thus introduced in strikingly positive terms, as an admirable governor in his own right and an example of a more widespread return to good government across the empire. Indeed, he is not only classed as one of Vespasianic Rome's *magni duces*; he is described as a *magnus vir – quantum licebat*: 'a great man – as far as it was permitted.'

That qualification, *quantum licebat*, is a classic piece of Tacitean innuendo, which adds an extra dimension to – and invites readers to see a much bigger story behind – the description which Tacitus gives of Frontinus' period in office: for it draws attention to the restrictive political system in which he was operating.<sup>33</sup> Though Vespasian was not regarded as one of Rome's particularly oppressive emperors, it seems that Tacitus cannot refrain from pointing out that the existence of all emperors necessarily had (has?) a limiting effect on the behaviour of Rome's elite.<sup>34</sup> The phrase *quantum licebat*, in other words, does not detract from Frontinus' successes; rather, it may enhance them, for it reminds us (if reminder were needed) that all such men had to contend with the controlling and often jealous interference of their imperial masters. It thus establishes Frontinus as a victim of the imperial system, as well as one

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<sup>33</sup> Ogilvie and Richmond (n. 11), ad loc. note a parallel at *Ann.* 14.47.1; see also Sailor (n. 4), 52, 79. Surprisingly, most of those who have discussed Tacitus' description of Frontinus have overlooked this qualification, focusing only on the phrase *magnus vir*: e.g., R. Mellor, 'The new aristocracy of power', in *Flavian Rome* (n. 3), 69-101, at 89; R.H. Martin, 'Tacitus on Agricola: truth and stereotype', in J. Bird (ed.), *Form and Fabric: Studies in Rome's material past in honour of B.R. Hartley* (Oxbow Monograph 80, 1998), 9-12, at 9; J. DeLaine, '“De aquis suis”? The “commentarius” of Frontinus', in C. Nicolet (ed.) *Les littératures techniques dans l'antiquité romaine: Statut, public et destination, tradition* (Entretiens Hardt 42, Vanoevres-Geneva, 1995), 117-45, at 137; and McGing (n. 2), 18.

<sup>34</sup> His choice of an impersonal verb, *licebat*, is telling, for it makes Frontinus the passive object of some external, institutional force, not (just) Vespasian personally. That said, Tacitus' claim at *Agr.* 3 that Nerva 'has brought together things previously incompatible, namely the principate and freedom' reminds us that imperial rule has always involved the loss of freedom, until now; and his mention of Helvidius Priscus at 2.1 even connects Vespasian (under whom he was executed) with the oppressive kind of tyranny (against both men and books) embodied by Nero and Domitian, who are not named but evoked in Tacitus' list of imperial victims.

of its heroes: he was not free to do just as he pleased, but in spite of this he achieved ‘greatness’.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, aside from Agricola, he is the only person in this biography whom Tacitus explicitly describes as *magnus*; and this forges an important connection between the two men. Prior to this moment in the text, the adjective *magnus* has been associated with the kinds of assets which might make a man ‘great’ (virtue, glory, fame), but not with any particular character. As I have noted, we are told at the start of *Agricola* 17 that under Vespasian Rome’s generals once again became ‘great’ (and Cerialis is clearly included in this generalisation, though not singled out as Frontinus is for Tacitus to press the point home), before Frontinus is described in the terms discussed above. Then, in chapter 18, we move on from Frontinus to examine the approach and achievements of his successor. Not surprisingly, we discover that Agricola tackled the governorship of Britain with a competence which bordered on brilliance: from the start, he was decisive, proactive, strategically inspired and successful (18.1-4). But these early achievements did not turn his head; touching on a leitmotif which runs throughout the biography, Tacitus insists that Agricola never courted fame (18.5-6).<sup>36</sup> Yet, in spite of this – and this paradox is an integral part of that leitmotif – his reputation grew (18.6). Indeed, this is the moment, we are told, when Agricola began to be considered ‘eminent and great’: *clarus ac magnus haberi Agricola* (18.5).<sup>37</sup> Thus for a second time in two chapters, Tacitus applies the adjective *magnus* to a specific individual.

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<sup>35</sup> Tacitus’ emotive statement thus puts a particular, and rather misleading, spin on Frontinus’ career, which flourished under the Flavians, especially Vespasian (indeed, it may even have been Vespasian who brought him into the Senate: Syme (n. 2), 592, 790; W. Eck, ‘Die Gestalt Frontins in ihrer politischen und sozialen Umwelt’, in *Wasserversorgung im Antiken Rom*, vol. 1 (ed. Frontinus-Gesellschaft, Munich, 1982), 47-62, at 50-1; Mellor (n. 33), 88-92).

<sup>36</sup> See also e.g. 8.3, 9.4, 22.4.

<sup>37</sup> *Magnus* is used again of the deeds about which Agricola had maintained a modest silence just a few lines later (...*tam magna tacuisset*).

As the biography moves on, the rebel leader Calgacus is allowed to use the term slightly differently, to refer to his mounting courage in a speech (30.1), but it is only Agricola whom Tacitus again describes with this adjective; and on each occasion he suggests that his father-in-law's 'greatness' was threatened – but not suppressed – by a hostile emperor. When rounding up his account of Agricola's activities in Britain, for example, Tacitus characterises his conquests in the province as 'a truly great victory' (*at nunc veram magnamque victoriam...* 39.1) in stark contrast to the sham triumph which Domitian had celebrated a few months previously;<sup>38</sup> and he underlines the fact that it was precisely Agricola's greatness which earned him the hatred of his *princeps*, for, although Agricola did not boast (we return again to this theme), his qualities and achievements could not be ignored (41). Thus Agricola is forced to adopt even more modesty than comes naturally to him, slinking back to Rome by night and doing everything in his power to efface himself (40.3-4). And this paves the way for Tacitus to conclude his biography with a new definition of heroism. He has been reshaping notions of heroism throughout the text, highlighting Agricola's modesty, diligence and sense of public duty alongside his qualities as a soldier and general; but it is at 41-42 where he drives his point home. First, he comments scathingly on false ideas of 'greatness' which place too much emphasis on display: 'most people, who tend to assess great men (*magnos viros*) on the basis of their ostentation, saw and watched Agricola and wondered why he was famous, and few could make sense of it;' (40.4). Then, after pointing out the tragic irony of the fact that Agricola's attempts to stay out the limelight were unsuccessful (41.4), Tacitus famously states the moral of his story:

sciunt, quibus moris est inlicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus  
magnos viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor

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<sup>38</sup> Ogilvie and Richmond (n. 11), 285; Sailor (n. 4), 93-4.

adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abrupta sed in nullum rei  
publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt. (42.4)

Let those who have a habit of admiring unlawful acts know that it is possible even under bad emperors for great men to exist, and that compliance and self-restraint, so long as industry and energy accompany them, may achieve the same fame which most men achieve through more precipitous courses, dying an ostentatious death without serving the state.

With this sudden intrusion into the text of an almost aggressively didactic voice, Tacitus confronts his readers with his most explicit declaration of the text's underlying argument: that it is possible in times of oppression to retain one's dignity and integrity without having to vaunt one's opposition to the emperor, and that men like Agricola who plug away quietly on behalf of their country (may) deserve greater glory than the famous but ineffective martyrs we meet at the beginning of the work (2).<sup>39</sup> He follows this up with an account of Agricola's death (which was welcomed, if not hastened by Domitian),<sup>40</sup> and then enters upon his final summation of Agricola's life, where he again engages the attention of his readers, this time with a gentler, though still coercive, potential subjunctive: 'You could easily think him a good man, and might gladly think him great' (44.2: *bonum virum facile crederes, magnum libenter*). As he draws the biography to a close, in other words, Tacitus returns once

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<sup>39</sup> On Tacitus' 'controversial' argument, and his attitude to the martyrs he seems to denigrate here, see esp. Syme (n. 2), 24-5; Liebeschuetz (n. 10), 127-32; McGing (n. 2), 22-3; Turner (n. 12), 590-2; Whitmarsh (n. 5), 308-10.

<sup>40</sup> As Sailor (n.4), 114-15 points out, Tacitus has a tricky balance to strike here: 'On the one hand, he needs Agricola to have been killed by the *princeps*, to prove that relations between the two were not too cozy... Yet Tacitus also needs Agricola *not* to have been killed, in order to make a distinction between the paths of prestige, that is, in order to make clear that there is a glory that does not consist only in the moment of death at the hands of the *princeps*.'

more to that adjective *magnus*, inviting his audience to join him in using it to describe Agricola (in a way which assumes their ready compliance).<sup>41</sup>

*Magnus*, of course, is not the only noteworthy descriptor which Tacitus uses to characterize his father-in-law. But it is deployed at some important moments in the text when Tacitus invites us to see Agricola as a model for the age; indeed, when he offers us a definitive assessment of what constitutes heroic (or good senatorial) behaviour in tyrannical times. And that is why it is significant that he applies it also to Frontinus; for it suggests that Frontinus may be a forerunner of Agricola in more than one way. Agricola literally follows in his (and Cerialis') footsteps as governor of Britain, improving on their already impressive examples. But the striking qualification *quantum licebat*, which makes the whole phrase at 17.2 stick in the mind, and therefore ripe for recall when Tacitus uses *magnus* again so soon afterwards, establishes a more important link between them, for that sets Frontinus up as an earlier example of precisely the same phenomenon we go on to explore with Agricola: that of a man who became great (or as great as was possible) in spite of the oppressive political system in which he served. The plural nouns in Tacitus' defiant declaration that *posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse* (words which closely echo his earlier description of Frontinus) are therefore apt, for his biography points us (gently, perhaps even subconsciously) to more than one instance.<sup>42</sup>

#### IV. FRONTINUS IN THE AGE OF NERVA AND TRAJAN

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<sup>41</sup> Sailor (n. 4), 107 and Martin (n. 33), 11-12 note Tacitus' repeated use of *magnus* for Agricola. When Tacitus first employs it (18.5) it is to tell us that others thought him great; Tacitus then calls Agricola 'great' himself, but in the context of others not fully appreciating his greatness; by the end, he seems confident that his readers will have been convinced and be themselves happy to use the adjective for him.

<sup>42</sup> Sailor (n. 4), 79 suggests that Tacitus' 'passing observation' on Frontinus 'conjures up Nero's relationship to Agricola's early career'; I hope I have shown that it does much more than that.

That is not the only reason, however, why Frontinus' appearance might resonate with Tacitus' readers. For, while Agricola perished before the end of Domitian's reign, Frontinus lived on to become one of the most important political figures of his generation. Tacitus' own political career was not doing too badly at this point: indeed, he had served as consul in AD 97, the year before the *Agricola* was published, and the timing of his consulship means that he must have played a prominent role in the fall-out after Domitian's assassination and Nerva's succession, and probably also in Nerva's adoption of Trajan as his heir.<sup>43</sup> It seems that Frontinus was even more intimately involved, however, if we are to judge by his subsequent career.<sup>44</sup> For when Frontinus became consul the year after Tacitus (in February 98),<sup>45</sup> this was his second time in the role and his consular colleague was no less a person than Trajan himself (who, as it turned out, was just taking over the reins of power at the time, Nerva having died at the end of January). Moreover, Trajan was his colleague again just two years later when Frontinus served as consul for an almost unheard-of third time, this time as *consul ordinarius*.<sup>46</sup> Triple consulships in this period were almost exclusively the preserve of the imperial family, so Frontinus' testifies to an exceptional honour.<sup>47</sup> And the fact that he was chosen to be Trajan's partner twice (the first time by Nerva, the second by Trajan himself), as Trajan made the transition from heir to emperor, marks him out not just as a leading senator but as one of the emperors' closest allies. It seems likely that he was singled out for such distinctions because he had helped

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<sup>43</sup> For Tacitus' career, see Syme (n. 2), 59-74; A.R. Birley, 'The life and death of Cornelius Tacitus', *Historia* 49 (2000), 230-47.

<sup>44</sup> On Frontinus' career, see esp. Eck (n. 35), 47-52; Rogers (n. 2), 1-5.

<sup>45</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin, 1863-), 16.42; *Inscriptiones Italiae* (Rome, 1931-), 13.1.

<sup>46</sup> *CIL* (n. 45), 6.2222, 8.7066; *II* (n. 45), 13.1, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Rogers (n. 2), 3-5; Eck (n. 7), 225-6; Grainger (n. 7), 124; A.R. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), 72; Bennett (n. 19), 76.



Trajan (and possibly Nerva, too) to secure his (/their) accession to the throne.<sup>48</sup> But his influence did not end there. For when Trajan stayed away from Rome for more than a year after Nerva's death, Frontinus must also have been a prominent member of the small group of senators who temporarily took control of the day-to-day running of the state.<sup>49</sup> By the time the *Agricola* was published, then, Frontinus was fast becoming one of Trajanic Rome's most successful, conspicuous and influential statesmen. And that is why the brief reference to him at *Agricola* 17 could not have passed Tacitus' readers by in the same way as it might do us.

Moreover, in AD 98 Frontinus was cultivating a particular public persona which adds another dimension to the role he might be playing within Tacitus' text. The previous year Nerva had appointed him *curator aquarum* (superintendent of Rome's water supply system), and this had inspired Frontinus to write a treatise about the city's aqueduct network, the *De Aquaeductu urbis Romae*, which was published in 98 or very shortly thereafter.<sup>50</sup> The purported aim of this text, as articulated in its preface, was to gather together all the information which Frontinus might need as he took up his new post;<sup>51</sup> but the text clearly has other agenda. Precisely what they are remains a matter of debate, but it is generally agreed that it is a highly politicised work, which offers important insights into some of the rhetoric and ideals which circulated during

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<sup>48</sup> On Frontinus' role in Nerva's adoption of Trajan as his heir, see, e.g., Syme (n. 2), 16-7; Eck (n. 7), 219-26. Grainger (n. 7), 14 and 100 wonders if Frontinus had also been involved in choosing Nerva as the new emperor to take over from Domitian.

<sup>49</sup> Rodgers (n. 2), 8; Grainger (n. 7), 118; DeLaine (n. 33), 132. Prior to that (in 97) Frontinus had also been part of a senatorial commission set up by Nerva to identify possible economies in the management of the state (Rodgers (n. 2), 3-4; Grainger (n. 7), 56). On Frontinus' more general influence with Trajan, see also Syme (n. 2), 49-50.

<sup>50</sup> See Rodgers (n. 2), 5-8 on the likely publication date.

<sup>51</sup> See esp. *Aq.* 2.2-3, where Frontinus goes out of his way to present the treatise as a self-instruction manual.

Nerva's reign (and at the very beginning of Trajan's, too) and particularly into senator-emperor relations in this period.<sup>52</sup>

From its opening sentence, the text marks itself out as being both in tune with and inspired by Nerva's reign, for Frontinus attributes his decision to write it not only to his own conscientious character but also to the model and standards set by the emperor (whose diligence and devotion to the state match those of Frontinus – or vice versa).<sup>53</sup> Claims to shared ideals and mutually beneficial connections between author and emperor are a common enough trope in imperial period prefaces; but while many authors sideline their imperial masters as soon as they have paid homage to them, Frontinus continues to invoke Nerva and Nerva (and Trajanic) ideals throughout the text. The diligent approach to public office which his entire treatise embodies, for example, not only embraces the hard-working model enshrined by both emperors, but may also endorse another new(ish) policy – that of putting senators back into the forefront of imperial administration (and diminishing the influence of imperial freedmen in the process); for it underlines how very seriously Frontinus took his new responsibilities, and thus how right Nerva and Trajan were to trust him (and the rest of his class).<sup>54</sup> His interest in restoring order and justice to a chaotic and corrupt water supply system meanwhile, echoes and engages with the emperors' wider interest in addressing the corruption and mismanagement of the (Domitianic) past and restoring

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<sup>52</sup> See esp. H.B. Evans, *Water Distribution in Ancient Rome. The evidence of Frontinus* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 53-64; DeLaine (n. 33); M. Peachin, *Frontinus and the Curae of the Curator Aquarum* (Stuttgart, 2004). Rodgers (n. 2), 12-14 provides a useful survey of the most recent interpretations of the text.

<sup>53</sup> *Aq. 1: cum omnis res ab imperatore delegata intentiorem exigat curam, et me seu naturalis sollicitudo seu fides sedula non ad diligentiam modo verum ad amorem quoque commissae rei instigent sitque nunc mihi ab Nerva Augusto, nescio diligentiore an amantiore rei publicae imperatore, aquarum iniunctum officium ad usum... primum ac potissimum existimo, sicut in ceteris negotiis institueram, nosse quod suscepi.*

<sup>54</sup> On this possibility, see P. Grimal, *Frontin: les aqueducs de la ville de Rome* (Paris, 1944), xv; A.T. Hodge, *Roman Aqueducts and Water Supply* (London, 2002<sup>2</sup>), 16-17; Peachin (n. 52), 116, n. 95; Rodgers (n. 2), 16; Gibson (n.5), 110. Cf. C. Bruun, *The Water Supply of Ancient Rome. A study of Roman imperial administration* (Helsinki, 1991), 15, n. 13.

Rome to good order (and Frontinus takes care to show himself and Nerva working together within the text to achieve this).<sup>55</sup> The image which the text presents of a cleaner, more salubrious Rome – the result of their joint efforts (88) – helps to conjure up a sense of Rome entering upon a new and more prosperous age. And the text’s closing chapter – which reminds us once more that the irregularities and malpractice of the past will no longer be tolerated, though they are being dealt with as humanely as possible (130) – reinforces the impression that Rome is poised at the start of a new era, with a new ethos to match.<sup>56</sup> From beginning to end, in other words, the *De Aquaeductu* engages with ideals that were central to the promotion of the new regime. Indeed, it plays a significant role in the creation and propagation of that rhetoric, taking an active part in the same process of political periodisation as Tacitus’ *Agricola* by helping to establish a clear dividing-line between ‘the bad old days’ and the prosperous present.<sup>57</sup>

However, it also promotes its author in ways which must nuance our understanding of Frontinus’ political agenda. For at the same time as showing great deference to Nerva, the *De Aquaeductu* takes care to present Frontinus as his partner and colleague – and even, on occasion, as his equal. This happens in its opening sentence, where

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<sup>55</sup> Frontinus returns time and again to the theme of past incompetence and corruption: e.g., 31-34, 65-67, 72-73, 75-76, 91 (Evans (n. 52), 57-8; S. Cuomo, ‘Divide and rule: Frontinus and Roman land surveying’, *SHPS* 31 (2000), 189-202, at 193-4; Peachin (n. 52), 109-13 and Appendix 7). But he reminds us repeatedly that he and Nerva are busy combating it (e.g. 9.4-7, 64 and 87.1-3); and the order which he systematically imposes on all of his data supports the impression that there is a new level of order and accountability in the running of the water supply (Cuomo (op. cit.) 193-4). See also 118.3, where – in a neat parallel of what they have been doing with the water itself – we see Nerva and Frontinus redirecting income from water rentals away from the emperor’s private ‘coffers’ (which is where, Frontinus claims, it had ended up under Domitian) and back into public funds (on this passage, see M. Griffin, ‘The Flavians’, in A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 11 (2000<sup>2</sup>), 1-83, at 74; A. Turner, ‘Frontinus and Domitian: *laus principis* in the *Strategemata*’, *HSCP* 103 (2007), 423-49, at 438-9; Gibson (n. 5), 111).

<sup>56</sup> On this chapter, see esp. Peachin (n. 52), who underlines (among other things) the importance the text seems to place on re-establishing ‘proper’ relations between the emperor and the elite (138, 140).

<sup>57</sup> Ramage (n. 3), 658; Whitton (n. 3), 21.

Frontinus' diligence and devotion to the state conspicuously parallel that of Nerva, making the two men almost indistinguishable.<sup>58</sup> And it continues right through to the close of the text, where Frontinus figures not merely as an intermediary between the emperor and his subjects, helping to implement the new imperial policy, but as the active authority behind the changes which he is announcing; it is Frontinus, after all, who can be thanked for the way past misdemeanours have been handled (he spells this out, 130.3), and it will be Frontinus who descends with the full majesty of the law behind him on any miscreants in future (130.4).<sup>59</sup> His praise of Nerva is thus framed by key moments in the text which establish not only how indispensable he is to the emperor (indeed, he makes subtle connections between himself and Agrippa, Augustus' right-hand man<sup>60</sup>) but also how similar he is in terms of both approach and importance.

In fact, the extraordinary depth – and exclusive nature – of his expertise on the water supply system, which he flaunts throughout the text, gives him a degree of authority (over this particular branch of the imperial administration, at least) which

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<sup>58</sup> Frontinus uses the same vocabulary – *diligentiam, amorem; diligentiore, amantiore* – to characterise his and Nerva's approach (see n. 53). DeLaine (n. 33), 129-30 argues that the comparatives place Nerva slightly above Frontinus. Even so, the sentence works so that Frontinus' diligence and devotion come first, and are then matched by his emperor's, almost as if Nerva is taking the lead from Frontinus (as well as the other way around). Thus the syntax, which alternates between the two men, shows them bound up in a mutually instructive relationship. See also 64.1 and 118.3, where further references to Nerva's 'diligence' and 'justice' are similarly preceded or followed by mention of Frontinus' own *cura* and *sedulitas*; and F. Del Chicca, *Frontino. De Aquae Ductu Urbis Romae* (Rome, 2004), ad loc.

<sup>59</sup> Frontinus' language here is revealing: the 'officially plural verbs' (Rodgers (n. 2), ad loc) in this chapter may nod to the regime which Frontinus represents, but they are authorial plurals all the same; and they are framed by singular verbs, which stress Frontinus' agency. Note also 101.4, where Frontinus' refusal of the lictors which the senate traditionally granted to Rome's *curatores* spurns mere senatorial authority, asserting instead his own integrity and the authority which he derives from the emperor (which his syntax places on an equal footing with his own: *fides nostra et auctoritas a principe data pro lictoribus erit*).

<sup>60</sup> Evans (n. 52), 59-61; DeLaine (n. 33), 135; Peachin (n. 52), 75-7; Rodgers (n. 2), 17.

surpasses that of his sovereign.<sup>61</sup> A litany of first person singular verbs (in particular, a recurring *inveni* – ‘I discovered’) underlines this, and reveals that, however much he may claim to be acting under the auspices of the emperor, it is Frontinus above all who deserves the credit for the improvements which he attributes to Nerva (87-9).<sup>62</sup> His sedulous efforts, so carefully documented, thus threaten not simply to match but to outstrip the diligence and devotion that (he has been at pains to stress) characterises his emperor. And the emphasis which he places on the practical and symbolic significance of Rome’s aqueduct network – it is not only bound up with the health and very survival of the city (1), it is also a testament to Roman power and supremacy (16, 119.9)<sup>63</sup> – helps to transform him from a diligent public officer into a guardian of Rome, who holds the life of its citizens and the dignity of its empire in his hands.<sup>64</sup> While Nerva might also be able to make such a claim, one thing the *De Aquaeductu* underlines is that he now shares that burden with other men: the responsibility – and credit – for the smooth running of Rome do not reside with the emperor alone; what is more (and this is the real innovation), a senator can now say so (if not in so many words).

Frontinus’ self-promotion in the *De Aquaeductu*, then, not only elevates his own status, and by association that of the whole senatorial class, but also interrogates the

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<sup>61</sup> I discuss this more fully in A. König, ‘Knowledge and power in Frontinus’ *On Aqueducts*’, in J. König and T. Whitmarsh (edd.), *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), 177-205; on the authority which his specialist knowledge confers, see also DeLaine (n. 33), 127-8, 139; Peachin (n. 52), 64.

<sup>62</sup> Frontinus’ repetition of phrases like *ad caput inveni/invenerim* becomes almost formulaic at 64-72; see also, e.g., 94-6, where *invenio/inveni* repeatedly introduce more research; and 73-74, where his first person singulars help him to stand out from everyone else in having discovered such discrepancies that will amaze the reader. The repeated authorial plurals (*diximus*, *posuimus*, *deprehendimus* and variations) at 65-72 have a similar effect, testifying again to his command of his subject.

<sup>63</sup> Bruun (n. 54), 15, 18; DeLaine (n. 33), 124-5; Rodgers (n. 2), 23-4.

<sup>64</sup> DeLaine (n. 33), 129: ‘By presenting the aqueducts as one of the wonders of the world, Frontinus shows that the post of *curator aquarum* is one of paramount importance... Some of the glory goes, of course, to the emperor, but the overall effect of the *de aquis* is to show that most of it goes to the *curator*... In his role as *curator aquarum*, Frontinus is, then, in a way, acting for, if not as, the emperor himself.’

power and position of the emperor himself. He sets himself up from the beginning as one of Rome's 'leading men' (at *Aq.* 1, where he notes that the office of *curator aquarum* has always been held by 'the foremost men of our state' – *administratum per principes semper civitatis nostrae viros*).<sup>65</sup> Over the course of the text his conscientious approach helps to re-define the role – and extend the authority – of such *principes*, in accordance with the ethos of the new political age. And that has implications for Rome's reigning *princeps*.

They need not be subversive, however, or even incompatible with the picture Frontinus paints of himself from beginning to end as one of the emperor's 'loyal lieutenants'.<sup>66</sup> Rather, his enterprising engagement with Nerva forms part of a wider exposition and exploration of the (new?) relationship between the emperor and his senators in the post-Domitianic age. Nerva and Trajan both made a show of restoring some dignity and power to Rome's beleaguered elite in the years immediately following Domitian's assassination. In reality, little changed, particularly for the senate as a body; but in the *De Aquaeductu* we see one senator capitalising on his own new position to lay claim to even greater levels of power and consequence, and thereby to recalibrate the distance – or proximity – between Rome's head of state and the rest of the (ruling?) elite.<sup>67</sup> Written in what was supposed to be a time of great change, the *De Aquaeductu* (like the *Agricola*) champions some official reforms in a way which helps to enshrine them as both successful and permanent. And what emerges, among other things, is a new (or refreshingly old) mould of statesman: one who is able to serve his emperor without compromising his own authority or dignity.

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<sup>65</sup> Rodgers (n. 2), 125 does not see anything suggestive in Frontinus' use of the term *principes* here; but DeLaine (n. 33) is more open to the possibility, noting (136) that throughout the text Frontinus seems to cast himself in the role of *princeps senatus*, 'under an emperor who was no longer *dominus* but *princeps*'.

<sup>66</sup> Evans (n. 52), 61.

<sup>67</sup> On the *De Aquaeductu* as an expression of Frontinus' (and perhaps wider) senatorial aspirations, see also DeLaine (n. 33), 131-3, 136; Cuomo (n. 55), 195; and Rodgers (n. 2), 14-18.

Indeed, one who (one might say) combines *obsequium* and (the appearance of) *modestia* with industry, vigour and service to the state; and who becomes great.<sup>68</sup>

#### V. FRONTINUS AS A ROLE-MODEL FOR THE READERS OF THE *AGRICOLA*

Now it is unlikely that Tacitus had read much, if any, of the *De Aquaeductu* before he completed the *Agricola*.<sup>69</sup> However, he and his readers would have been aware of the approach that Frontinus was taking in his new appointment, and of the example he was thus setting. Indeed, evidence from contemporary authors suggests that Frontinus' attitude to public office turned him into something of a benchmark against which other men – and models of behaviour – could be weighed up. In *Epigrams* 10.58, for example, Martial trades not only on his shared leisure time with Frontinus but also (I think) on Frontinus' industrious reputation and importance as a representative of the new age to dramatise his own growing detachment from Trajanic Rome.<sup>70</sup> And for Pliny the Younger, too, Frontinus serves as a useful touchstone. Pliny exploits Frontinus' public stature to boost his own: for example, in *Epistles* 4.8.3, where he congratulates himself not only on having succeeded this *princeps vir*

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<sup>68</sup> In this respect, the *De Aquaeductu* has something in common with Plin. *Ep.* 10, which also presents an idealising (and perhaps even protreptic) image of a model senator-cum-administrator working in close partnership with a model emperor (on this aspect of *Ep.* 10, see esp. G. Woolf, 'Pliny's Province', in T. Bekker-Nielsen (ed.) *Rome and the Black Sea Region: domination, romanisation, resistance* (Aarhus, 2006), 93-108; Stadter (n. 26); C.F. Noreña, 'The social economy of Pliny's correspondence with Trajan', *AJPh* 128 (2007), 239-77).

<sup>69</sup> Although it is possible that sections of it may have been circulated prior to publication (perhaps at the kinds of literary gatherings we encounter in, e.g., Plin. *Ep.* 1.13; 7.17; 8.21). DeLaine (n. 33), 137 suggests that Frontinus' political prominence would have made the *De Aquaeductu* 'a must for the senatorial bookshelf...'. Peachin (n. 52) also assumes a large (elite) readership.

<sup>70</sup> On Martial's distancing of himself from Trajanic Rome throughout *Epigrams* 10, see H. Fearnley, 'Reading the Imperial Revolution: Martial, *Epigrams* 10', in *Flavian Rome* (n. 3), 613-35, esp. 626-35. B. Baldwin, 'Notes on the *de aquis* of Frontinus', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, vol. 7 (Brussels, 1994), 484-506, at 485, suggests that Martial 'missed a golden opportunity' in 10.58 to allude more directly to Frontinus' role as *curator aquarum*, or to any of his other public appointments. Nonetheless, though they are not mentioned explicitly, Frontinus' industrious reputation and diligent approach to public office must add an extra piquancy to Martial's rejection here of Roman public life.

in the post of Augur but also on having been (repeatedly) nominated by him to do so (*mihi vero illud etiam gratulatione dignum videtur, quod successi Iulio Frontino principi viro, qui me nominationis die per hos continuos annos inter sacerdotes nominabat, tanquam in locum suum cooptaret*).<sup>71</sup> And he draws Frontinus into revealing comparisons with other men too: for example, in 9.19, where Frontinus' (not so) self-deprecating refusal of a physical monument is contrasted with the approach of another eminent statesman (Verginius Rufus, who did want an epitaph inscribed on his tomb).<sup>72</sup> Frontinus and Verginius Rufus come under scrutiny here as much for the wider lessons that can be drawn from their differing attitudes, of course, as for their own sakes; and Frontinus figures as a representative of a wider phenomenon, not just an individual, in the *Panegyricus* too. Indeed, there he is paraded as a shining example of the age, whose third consulship testifies to the renewed status of the senate in Trajan's 'new' Rome – and, of course, to Trajan's enlightened government.<sup>73</sup> Frontinus was not simply a useful yardstick against which the choices and merits of various personalities could be measured, in other words; he was deployed as a paradigm (along with other great role models of the age) in broader contemporary debates about (shifting) approaches, standards and conditions in Roman public life.

And that is why I think it is possible that Frontinus takes on a role in the *Agricola* similar to that of Agricola himself. Indeed, in one respect (as I have indicated) he may be even more significant. For, although Agricola has much to teach

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<sup>71</sup> See also *Ep.* 5.1.6, where Pliny leans on Frontinus' reputation (as one of the 'two most respected men of his era' – *duos quos tunc civitas nostra spectatissimos habuit*) to guarantee his own integrity and authority in a law suit concerning a legacy.

<sup>72</sup> On this letter, see Baldwin (n. 70), 486; DeLaine (n. 33), 137; Peachin (n. 52), 87-91; Rogers (n. 2), 5; Del Chicca (n. 58), viii-ix. However disingenuous his sentiments may have been, the words attributed to Frontinus here show him emphasising duty and public service over personal ambition, which tallies with his (self-promoting) self-presentation in the *De Aquaeductu*.

<sup>73</sup> *Pan.* 61-2: 'Indeed, I thought I was gazing on the great Senate of old when I saw a consul for the third time seated beside you...'



a readership which is still grappling with the differences between Domitianic and Trajanic, and with the task of reinventing (or re-presenting) themselves for the ‘new age’, the paradigm he embodies is no longer (so) relevant: for Rome, in theory at any rate, is no longer suffering under *malis principibus*. Tacitus himself may serve as a more up-to-date role model, for while he identifies closely with those who (barely) ‘survived’ Domitian, he also takes a lead in embracing the changes that have come with Nerva and Trajan. As we saw, however, his persona in the *Agricola* remains conflicted, for his new identity as a re-empowered author and senator is overshadowed by lingering uncertainty and anxiety; so while he may endorse the need for change, he does not constitute an entirely successful example of it.<sup>74</sup> Frontinus, on the other hand, does: for when the *Agricola* was published, he was busy parading himself as a new generation senator (and outlining exactly what that might mean in the process); but Tacitus also reminds us of his Flavian past. He is thus able to serve as a bridging figure in a way which *Agricola* (and Tacitus) cannot: he experienced life under the previous dynasty (and, while he conducted himself creditably under Vespasian, he must also be implicated along with Tacitus and the rest of the elite in the degeneration of the senate described at *Agricola* 45), but he is not stuck there; indeed, he has been an important figure in helping Rome to move on. Tacitus’ brief mention of Frontinus at *Agricola* 17, and the verbal and ideological connections established between him and *Agricola* as the text progresses, thus nudge readers in the direction of a living example not just of what *Agricola* once was, but also of what *Agricola* might have been, had he lived on; and (more significantly) what Tacitus and his readers must themselves become: a senator who has navigated his way (heroically) through difficult times to reinvent (or perhaps merely reassert) himself in the new age.

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<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Whitmarsh (n. 5), 310 distinguishes between Tacitus himself and the persona he adopts in the text, and wonders whether ‘Tacitus the “hidden author” subvert[s] the surface-level position of Tacitus the narrator’.

Tacitus does not hammer the point home; indeed, he may not even make it intentionally. Frontinus' presence in the *Agricola* does not furnish his readers with a straightforward solution (any more than Agricola himself does), nor does it make the biography a (more) optimistic text (although this flattering nod to a man so close to the emperor could be taken as a flattering nod to the regime itself<sup>75</sup>). But his brief appearance, and the wider associations that it triggers, do add an extra dimension to Tacitus' reflections on the process of transition and transformation and the questions of conduct, status and identity facing Rome's elite. Far from being a passing reference in another man's story, in other words, Frontinus features as a significant reference point in a story that concerns all Tacitus' readers. And for that reason he should become a more significant reference point for us, too; he and his *De Aquaeductu* deserve a more central place in discussions of Tacitus, and other contemporary authors, and the political period they belonged to.

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<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, if the policy of quietism is presented as ambiguously in the *Agricola* as Whitmarsh (n. 5), suggests, Tacitus' characterisation of Frontinus at 17.2 may not be quite so flattering after all.