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Review on Sailor

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2012

Halla-aho , H 2012 , ' Review on Sailor ' , Arctos : Acta Philologica Fennica , vol. 2011 , no. XLV , pp. 184-185 .

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/231568>

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Seneca and the Self. Edited by SHADI BARTSCH – DAVID WRAY. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2009. ISBN 978-0-521-88838-7. IX, 304 pp. GBP 55, USD 99.

Assembling the papers of a 2003 University of Chicago conference with the same title, *Seneca and the Self* is an inspired and important book that bears witness to the current cultural resonance of the Senecan corpus. As A. A. Long puts it in his essay: "... the Seneca revival is also an important part of a widespread and most welcome reappraisal of the Roman intellectual culture of which he was a most prominent member" (p. 21). This may be best seen in context with the vigorous activity in Hellenistic studies, an important domain for many of the present volume's contributors. Some of these conference articles (Gill, Inwood, Long) have already been published elsewhere.

After an introductory section by the editors and Long, the book's essays are grouped into three parts titled "Philosophical Perspectives" (Inwood, Gill, Nussbaum), "Seneca and Roman Culture" (Asmis, Edwards, Ker, Bartsch) and "Reading the Tragedies" (Schiesaro, Wray, Busch). That said, the essays by and large seem to unify rather than segregate the different roles in which Seneca made his impact. Literary-rhetorical, philosophical and cultural interpretation of both prose and poetry go smoothly together and the inclusion of Senecan humour in Nussbaum's article on the *Apocolocyntosis* completes the book's holistic scope.

The modern notion of *selfhood*, which receives historically conscious critical attention above all in Long's, Inwood's and Gill's essays and plays a somewhat minor role in the rest, seems a very successful choice in bringing about just enough unity to this diversity of articles to contribute to something larger than their sum. This also makes the book a worthy read for even those who would not choose to look for any themes of selfhood at all. The bold plurality of methods and ideas that the collection boasts with goes a good deal beyond any positivistic classicist standards but may well be something in the direction that the full appreciation of the unified, holistic nature of Seneca indeed deserves and calls for.

Teemu Huttunen

DYLAN SAILOR: *Writing and Empire in Tacitus*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-89747-1 (hb). XII, 359 pp. GBP 55, USD 99.

Sailor's book is about the relationship between Tacitus the author and the Empire in which he lived and worked (p. 2): "This book is the result to take seriously the reminder this inscription [CIL VI 1574] offers, that Tacitus' writing was part of a life." The discussion concentrates on the *Agricola*, and certain key passages in the *Histories* and the *Annals*. The central claim of the author is that there is an inherent (though in scholarly discussion not often pronounced) tension between Tacitus the statesman with a respectable *cursus honorum*, and Tacitus the historiographer who relentlessly accounts the deeds of *principes*, even bad ones, without falling into disfavour. The central claim is advanced in Chapters 1, 3 and 5 whereas Chapters 2 (on the *Agricola*) and 4 (on the city of Rome) appear less essential for the course of argument.

Sailor's thesis is that Tacitus, in various ways, tries to balance himself between these two, in many ways opposite, roles. His substantial career, although providing him with ac-

cess to the essential administrative and other resources, also restricted his independence and impartiality as a historian. Sailor argues that in many places Tacitus' text is written in order to give the impression that his books had the potential to be dangerous, and that only by choosing his words carefully he was able to record all that he did in the way that he did without facing threat from the ruler; his exceptional capacity as a writer enabled him to write uncompromising history and not only to survive, but also to flourish under several emperors, even the infamous Domitian. For example, in Sailor's reading, Tacitus employs the story of Cremutius Cordus (who was forced to commit suicide under Tiberius for praising Brutus and Cassius), to paint a picture of himself as an author who could have faced a similar fate, and suggesting an identification between the two historians. Sailor's point is that Tacitus had to struggle to achieve the appearance of an "outsider" (in the eyes of his readership) to the events he describes (p. 257): "Under those circumstances, it was a burden of this work — as of the previous ones — to show that Tacitus was not the *princeps'* man and his work not in the *princeps'* service. That scholars do not regularly note this and talk instead about the ways in which he successfully negotiates the regime's potential *hostility* testifies to how well he has done his job."

While this is a legitimate approach, the argument could have been formulated in a more compact form (the book has 321 pages). The interpretation of a particular passage of Tacitus is sometimes forced, and relying on ideas that depart too far from what Tacitus actually wrote (e.g. p. 266 on the usefulness of the *Annals*; or on p. 167 the analysis of the language of fidelity and betrayal).

In spite of the lengthy exposition, the author fails to explain how his approach is compatible with *hist.* 1,1,4 where Tacitus explicitly mentions the *rara temporum felicitas*, a circumstance that makes possible the fair treatment of present events, and presumably past events even more so. His discussion of *hist.* 1,1,4 (pp. 153-160) is concerned with explaining how Tacitus here excuses himself from writing a history of Trajan but ignores the difficulties that the last words cast on his central claim.

It is true that (especially in the *Histories* and the *Annals*) Tacitus depicts the whole idea of the Principate (the institution itself, independent of the qualities of a particular emperor) as the main cause that ruined Roman society, and this may have been a potential source of annoyance for his dealings with Trajan. However, this aspect, too, is included in *hist.* 1,1: whatever a historian thinks about the Principate generally, one can speak freely.

Furthermore, another problem is evident in the discussion of this key passage (p. 151 on *hist.* 1,1,3–4). In discussing Tacitus' account of his relationship to the various *principes*, Sailor notes that "The Flavians pose a different problem, in that each of them in succession advanced Tacitus' standing, especially Domitian. [...] This declaration [*neque amore quisquam dicendus et sine odio*] seems designed to persuade readers not to suspect him of favoritism toward the Flavians, which is puzzling, since probably no one would have. [...] In short, the last thing we should expect from Tacitus is an overly favorable treatment of the *domus Flavia*." Here Sailor apparently ignores the words *sine odio* in the passage. Even if lacking a clear reference in the preceding text (whereas *neque amore* has its counterpart in the reference to Tacitus' public career), the implications of these words should have been clear to Tacitus' audience, namely Domitian's reign of terror, recorded even in Tacitus own previous work, *Agricola*.