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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 6 (1916), pp. 196-201

Published by: [Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/296272>

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TACITUS DURING THE LATE ROMAN PERIOD AND THE MIDDLE AGES.

By PROF. F. HAVERFIELD.

While lately engaged with an edition of the 'Agricola,' it occurred to me to enquire how far Tacitus was read, and his works copied, during the period between his lifetime and the introduction of printing. Such an enquiry is more necessary than is always realised, if one is to appreciate properly the character and importance of the manuscripts of an ancient author. One needs not only to know their dates, relationships and general merits or demerits, but also to understand what may be called their 'background,' that is to know how far the author in question was seriously studied and his works copied during the centuries between his own day and the Renaissance. I therefore tried to work out some account of the history of Tacitus in this respect. I have been able to do

this only very briefly, but the sketch, though short, may interest some readers of our *Journal*, and, being more or less historical, is not alien to its proper scope. Moreover, no quite similar sketch seems to exist, either in English or, so far as I am aware, in any language.

I owe to my Oxford colleague, Professor A. C. Clark, some valuable hints on a matter which he has made largely his own. Further, I am indebted for effective aid in the collection of the facts to Miss L. Lister of Somerville College (St. Mary Hall), who has helped me to make a much better sketch than I could otherwise have done. Some writers to whom I am particularly indebted are cited in the footnotes: see especially p. 197, note 3.

It has been observed that, with the exception of Catullus, no great classical author has come down to the modern world by so slender a thread of transmission as Tacitus.¹ The slenderness varies with the historian's works. The first six books of the 'Annals' depend on one manuscript, the 'First Medicean,' which is the sole source of these books. For the other six books (II-16) and for the 'Histories,' manuscripts are more numerous; besides the eleventh-century 'Second Medicean,' some twenty are known to exist. None of these twenty, however, are earlier than the fifteenth century; all are probably derived from the 'Medicean,' and are not independent authorities.

The three 'opera minora' of Tacitus—'Agricola,' 'Germania,' 'Dialogus de oratoribus'—have mostly come down to us conjoined in the same manuscripts, which from early times have generally been distinct from those containing the 'Annals' and 'Histories.'² These manuscripts of the 'Lesser works' are few in number and mostly late in date. Before the Renaissance, readers were (it may be) deterred by the difficulties of the Tacitean style, particularly, perhaps, by those of the 'Agricola.' For whatever reason, the 'Lesser works' were copied somewhat seldom till the fifteenth century, though the 'Germania' was popular in one part of ninth-century Germany. Of the 'Agricola,' five manuscripts are known, of which four are derived from the fifth. None of the five are in England; neither Oxford, nor Cambridge, nor the British Museum has any.

¹ See Peterson, *Dialogus* (Oxford, 1893), p. lxii.

² There are exceptions. A Naples manuscript contains the 'Dialogus' (C), 'Germania,' also

'Annals' II-16, 'Histories,' and in addition some Suetonius.

Clearly, the biography, perhaps because of its peculiar difficulty, perhaps also because of the great vagueness of its geographical references, was little read in the island which it most concerns. The 'Dialogus,' couched in an easier style, survives in more numerous manuscripts; the latest editor (1914) lists 14, all of the later fifteenth century.¹

Still, Tacitus was not so little read during the Roman empire as is sometimes asserted. The evidence which can be adduced to determine the extent to which a classical author was read by the ancient world after his own day is, indeed, seldom quite satisfactory or easy to use. As a rule it consists of either (a) references to him by name in later (Roman or mediaeval) writers, or (b) 'quotations,' that is, either more or less direct verbal quotations, or passages and phrases which seem to be quoted or imitated, from him. Either kind of evidence may easily mislead:—

(a) A writer who names a predecessor need not have known or have even seen his works; he may have lifted name and reference from some intermediate writer.²

(b) Quotations and imitations are no less hard to judge.³ It must often remain doubtful whether a writer who seems to quote or imitate is actually copying, and is not by chance independently inventing anew some phrase already used by the earlier author. When, for instance, Apollinaris Sidonius, recording in the fifth century the death of a lady, Philomathia (Filimatia), speaks (*ep.* 2, 8, 1) of her *infortunata fecunditas*, he may, as some think, be echoing words of Tacitus about Agrippina, *infelici fecunditate fortunae obnoxia* (*Ann.* 2, 75). Or he may have hit on his words himself, although he was certainly acquainted with the writings of Tacitus, and we might rather think that he was here echoing them by memory. Different men will always judge differently respecting such literary parallels or reminiscences. It has long been, and still is, disputed whether Tacitus's contemporary, Plutarch, used the 'Histories' for his 'Galba' and 'Otho,' or whether he and Tacitus used a common source. In short, it is seldom easy, on the evidence of references which may be second-hand, and of 'quotations' which may be mere coincidences in phrase, to decide decisively how far the writings of ancient authors were actually known and read by those who came after them. We have also to allow, as Dr. Reid points out to me, the possibility that phrases of Tacitus may have passed into common use like many phrases current in modern

¹ Gudeman (ed. 2), p. 115.

² If the predecessor be a poet, any mention or even quotation may be derived from an anthology, or 'florilegium.' Anthologies of prose writers are naturally rarer than of poets, but it is rather strange that Tacitus's epigrams—'solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant,' and the like—seem never to have been gathered into any 'florilegium.'

³ For the supposed references to Tacitus cited below, I am partly indebted to the indices of the Vienna *Corpus Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum* and of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, partly to articles by M. Manitius, and a dissertation by E. Cornelius, 'Quo modo Tacitus in hominum memoria versatus sit, usque ad renascentes litteras' (Wetzlar, 1887-8).

literature, and may have been employed by persons who had never read Tacitus and who did not even know whence the expressions were derived. We have to do the best we can with unsatisfactory material.

In his own lifetime, at any rate, the works of Tacitus were much esteemed, if we may trust the very complimentary allusions to them in his friend Pliny's letters. For the second century generally the evidence is somewhat disputable. As has been remarked, many have held that Plutarch, in his Lives of Galba and Otho, had before him the 'Histories' (of which, however, books i and ii were probably issued about A.D. 104-105, that is, not till after Plutarch had completed the two Lives).¹ It has further been suggested that Lucian, in his essay, 'How to write History' (ch. 60) imitated a sentence in the *Germania* (ch. 3, end). This, again, seems doubtful. The two passages agree in thought, but it is an obvious thought, and might have occurred to any two men independently. Probably, however Tacitus was used by Florus, and perhaps, too, by Suetonius. More significant is an odd bit of evidence that the geographer Ptolemy knew the 'Annals.' He mentions (2, 11, 2) a place in north-west Germany called Σιατουράνδα. This appears to be an almost incredible misreading of words in *Annals*, 4, 73, 1, *ad sua tutanda digressi*. One or two scholars, it is true, have taken 'Siatoutanda' to be a real Teutonic name, in which case the proof that Ptolemy knew Tacitus would fail, but Teutonic experts assure me that this is highly improbable, and most men prefer to think that Ptolemy got the very odd name from Tacitus.

Late in the second, or early in the third century, two writers may have known Tacitus. The Christian Tertullian (A.D. 160-240) mentions him by name, and seems to have been acquainted with the 'Histories.' On the other hand, it is not clear whether Cassius Dio (consul A.D. 211) used Tacitus for his elaborate History of the Empire. Probably he did not, but it is difficult to see from what other source he learnt the name Agricola (39, 50; 66, 20); since the famous name does not occur in any ancient author between Tacitus and Dio, nor does it occur elsewhere in Tacitus than in the 'Agricola.' It is to be observed also that, in 66, 20, Dio seems to quote the 'Agricola' (ch. 28), and dogmatism is not here in place.

It is, however, hardly doubtful that, after Dio, Tacitus was forgotten during most of the third century. Flavius Vopiscus records²

¹The question was raised by Mommsen in *Hermes*, 1870, see *Gesammelte Schriften*, vii, 224-252; cp. also E. G. Hardy, *Studies in Roman Hist.* i, 295-334 (1906). Both think that Plut. and Tac. followed one common authority very closely. Mommsen finds this authority in Cluvius Rufus, Hardy in the 'Histories' of the elder Pliny, which began 'where Aufidius Bassus left off,' probably about A.D. 54. Nipperdey (Introd. to

his ed. of the 'Annals') vehemently combats the view that Tac. followed any authority very closely.

²Writing about A.D. 305 in the *Historia Augusta* (27, 10, 3). The *Historia Augusta* is of course a poor authority, but this item may pass. On the date of Vopiscus's writings see Mommsen, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vii, 331. Manuscripts of Tacitus, must, then, have been rare about A.D. 275.

that the brief emperor, Claudius Tacitus (A.D. 275-6), recalled attention to and multiplied copies of his then neglected namesake, whom he claimed as his *parens*. Perhaps it is due to this revival that Vopiscus, in three separate works, refers to Tacitus; once he avers that he felt no wish to imitate him.

Another man of the same age, the Constantinian panegyrist Eumenius, has been thought to quote a phrase from the *Dialogus*.¹ The same Eumenius, or a contemporary (*Paneg. Constantino Aug.* 9) seems to imitate the 'Agricola,' ch. 12, 14, *scilicet extrema*, etc. unless, as is not likely, he had before him the original passage in Livy from which Tacitus drew. Later in the fourth century, Tacitus and especially the 'Histories' are mentioned or imitated several times, especially in Gaul, which now witnessed, as it were, a little sunset glow of care for classical literature. The Gaulish Ausonius, whose poems belong to this age, seems in some of his epigrams on the Caesars to have had the 'Histories' in mind.² The Gaulish historian, Sulpicius Severus (365-425 A.D.) has also been thought to have known both 'Annals' and 'Histories.' St. Jerome, too (A.D. 334-420) (*ad Zachar.* 3, 14), mentions Tacitus as author of a history in thirty volumes, from Augustus to Domitian. This history is clearly the 'Annals' and 'Histories.'

In the fifth century, a Spaniard, Paulus Orosius, mentions Tacitus by name fairly often, and quotes the 'Histories' recognisably about a dozen times. Rather later, the Gaulish noble, Apollinaris Sidonius (c. 430-480), was plainly acquainted with the 'Histories'; indeed, his various references to Tacitus suggest that the historian's name was then familiar in Gaul. He makes believe that one of his friends was descended from Tacitus, and refers to another as deliberately imitating the Tacitean style (*ep.* 4, 14).

Still later, Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus (Senator), writing in Italy about A.D. 520, cites Tacitus (*Germ.*) clearly once, repeating (*Variae* 5, 2) a well-known allusion (*Germ.* 45) to Baltic amber. Lastly, a sixth-century historian, the Goth (or Alan) Jordanes, in his *de rebus Geticis* (2, 10-13) paraphrases several passages in the 'Agricola' (ch. 10, etc.). He seems also to quote or echo the 'Histories' (2, 32, 5, 11) but not the 'Annals,' though he refers to Tacitus as *annalium scriptor* (*Get.* 2, 10), and has been thought to quote *Ann.* 14, 61. He paraphrases too freely to throw light on the readings of special sentences.

After his time the Gaulish interest in classical literature, like an abortive Renaissance, died down; no quotation of Tacitus can be traced for three centuries or so. The darkness lifts only about

¹ Gudeman (*Dial.* ed. 2, p. 12) compares *Dial.* 34, 7 with Eumenius, 'pro instaur. scholis,' 3, 2, 'velut sudibus ac saxis dimicatur.' The resemblance, if not quite convincing, is not altogether negligible.

² Compare, for instance, the quatrain on Galba (Auson. ed. Peiper, p. 189) with *Hist.* 1, 49.

A.D. 850 in the Carolingian age. Then, a knowledge of the historian, and possibly of other Latin historians too, can be detected in a corner of Germany which was a centre of Carolingian learning. In the district of Cassel, fifty miles north-west of Frankfurt-am-Main, at the Benedictine abbey of Fulda, and at neighbouring Benedictine abbeys, Hersfeld and Corvey, and perhaps in a connected monastery at Mainz (about A.D. 880), the writings of Tacitus seem to have been known, and manuscripts of Tacitus must then and there have been in existence. Rudolf, monk of Fulda (died 865); Meginhard of Fulda, his pupil and collaborator; and the famous biographer of Charlemagne, Einhard or Eginhard (770–840), who was educated at Fulda, had access to various works of Tacitus. Einhard, as Ritter long ago pointed out, must have known the ‘Annals’ (1 and 2), and the ‘Germania,’ and there was apparently a ‘codex Fuldensis,’ which may be a lost ancestor of our extant manuscripts of at least the ‘opera minora.’¹ From these (mostly Benedictine) abbeys a knowledge of Tacitus may perhaps have reached the Benedictine abbey on Monte Cassino in middle Italy, where, in rather later times, manuscripts of Tacitus existed, and where about now German abbots ruled.² At any rate, manuscripts of Tacitus were known in the part of Germany above-mentioned in the ninth century, though they have long since disappeared. Indeed, in 1864 a German novelist spun a pleasant romance—‘die verlorene Handschrift’—about the rediscovery of such lost classical manuscripts in Germany; but the history of Germany, down to 1813, hardly encourages one to expect such finds.

However, like the Gaulish, the Carolingian revival presently died out. Later in the Middle Ages, readers of Tacitus were few; ancient historians had little attention in those times.

No knowledge of Tacitus’s writings, ‘Agricola’ or other, can be traced in Britain. William of Malmesbury (died c. 1143) has been thought to have quoted the ‘Histories,’ but Sir John Sandys is probably right in suggesting that the quotation is from Sallust, not from Tacitus.³ Again, John of Salisbury (*Pol.* 8, 18, ed. C. C. J. Webb) mentions and has been thought to have known Tacitus, but apparently he took his reference to Tacitus from Orosius, just as a rather later mediaeval writer, Peter of Blois, who also mentions Tacitus, seems to have borrowed the mention from John. One might have expected that some of the account which Tacitus gives of Britain in the ‘Agricola’ would have passed into the conventional account of the island with which Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* opens, and which many English

¹ See Ritter, introd. p. iv; Furneaux’s *Annals*, vol. i (ed. 2), introd. p. 6; Gudeman, *Dial.* p. 1. That Rudolf had seen the ‘Germania’ and ‘Annals’ (1 and 2) seems unquestionable. Later (about A.D. 950) Widukind of Corbei shows acquaint-

ance with the ‘Annals’ (Manitius, *Gesch. der lat. Literatur*, i).

² Loew, *Beneventan Script*, 1914, p. 11.

³ Sandys, *Hist. of Classical Scholarship* (Cambridge, 1906) vol. i, p. 662, note 6.

chroniclers repeat; but the name of our 'Agricola' seems to have been unknown to Bede, and indeed, to the writers on whom he chiefly depends. In the form 'Aircol,'¹ it occurs in certain early Celtic genealogies, and it must somehow have survived in the popular consciousness of the Britons. But the silence of Gildas and the *Historia Brittonum* show that it had fallen out of the tradition in Britain before the sixth century A.D., and one may connect this with the general absence of references to Tacitus after Jordanes. It is therefore not likely that, as has been conjectured, the monasteries of Fulda and Hersfeld derived their manuscripts of Tacitus from any source in the British Isles.²

On the Continent, Tacitus was equally little known or noticed in the later Middle Ages.³ As the Italian Renaissance approached, a change came. Petrarch (1304-74), indeed, knew nothing of him. Boccaccio, almost exactly contemporary with Petrarch (1313-75), did know him, but had to transcribe the 'Annals' with his own hand for his own use. Yet, till the fifteenth century, manuscripts seem to have been rare. Then Tacitus began to be read more widely. His works were more often copied, and were soon diffused in print.

¹ Rhys, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 1895, p. 311; see also Anscombe, *Y Cymmrodor*, xxiv, 1913, pp. 75, 78, table ii. Aircol is in the genealogy given as father of Guortepyr or Vortiporius, whom Gildas (*de excidio* 31) mentions as prince of the Demetae and as *boni regis filius nequam*, and who is also (as it seems) known from an inscription (*Epbemeris epigraphica*, ix, 1030). This would put Aircol somewhere in the sixth century A.D.

² Dr. Montagu James, Provost of Eton, has suggested to me that, in the time of Alcuin (A.D. 735-804), a manuscript of Tacitus may have existed in the Cathedral library at York. There, according to Alcuin's enthusiastic lines, were:

Historici veteres, Pompeius, Plinius; ipse
Acer Aristoteles; rhetor quoque Tullius ingens
and also copies of Orosius and Cassiodorus (cited by J. B. Mullinger, *Schools of Charles the*

Great (London, 1877), p. 60; see also Migne, 101, 843); if Tacitus was among the 'historici veteres,' Alcuin's pupil, Hrabanus Maurus (died 856), might have taken a copy to Fulda or its neighbourhood, in time for Eginhard or others to use it. But a copy of the 'Agricola' at York must have surely become known to Bede, and would have been cited by him in the opening of his *Hist. Eccl.* i, 1-3, in which Pliny, Orosius and Solinus are freely quoted; Bede wrote the *H.E.* about A.D. 731.

³ There are occasional traces. Guibert of Nogent (North France), who died 1124, must have been quoting the *Germania*, ch. 19, when he wrote *modernum hoc saeculum corrumpitur et corruptum* (Migne, 156, 858). *Corrumperet ei corrumpi* recurs in *Annals* (4, 14, 20), but the use of *saeculum* by Guibert leaves no room for doubt that he used the *Germania* here.