A. J. WOODMAN (ED) with contributions from C. S. KRAUS, *TACITUS AGRICOLA* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xi + 358, illus., maps. ISBN 9780521700290 (pbk.); 9780521876872 (hbk.). £66.00/£24.99.

Almost half a century separates the publication of Ogilvie and Richmond's Oxford commentary on the *Agricola* and the new Cambridge commentary by Tony Woodman with contributions from Christina Kraus and much has changed in the meantime in terms of scholarly preoccupations more generally and approaches to the works of ancient historians more specifically. Not least, one of running themes of Ogilvie and Richmond's commentary, namely the attempt to map the narrative to the reality of 'Roman Britain' on the ground, has yielded to a stronger textual focus with considerable attention paid to unravelling the meaning of Tacitus' sometimes difficult Latin. The two commentaries are thus not in direct competition, but offer complementary support for reading and interpreting this short but complex text.

W. offers a compact but excellent introduction, which starts by tackling head-on the vexed generic affiliations of the *Agricola*, poised as it is between biography, ethnography, historiography and encomium, before locating the work within the landscape of Tacitus' own writings. W.'s stress here on the highly impractical and incomplete nature of Tacitus' representation of Roman Britain seems entirely justified and indeed makes one wonder at the amount of ink spilled in the past on aspects of the text which were almost inevitably bound to disappoint. Instead, centre stage of the introduction is occupied by a sizeable discussion of 'Imperialism, freedom and servitude', themes which resonate loud and clear for a modern readership. W. offers a fascinating set of insights into how *Agricola*, a figure whose leading role in triumphalist imperial behaviour which Tacitus himself problematizes and which we too might naturally find troubling, nevertheless is presented in this text as embodying the fulfilment of the Roman imperial mission as prophesied by Anchises in Vergil's *Aeneid*, simultaneously conquering and civilizing.

Similar freshness is brought to the twinned themes of *libertas* and *servitium*, with a sensitive approach to the problem of 'double standards' in the *Agricola*, and some helpful ways forward on how to reconcile the inclusion of such a beguiling appeal to *libertas* as that afforded by the Scottish chieftain Calgacus alongside the promotion of *Agricola*'s imperial bid. Furthermore, seeing the verbal and conceptual similarities between *servitium* at Rome's hands and *servitium* in Rome itself as complicated by disjunctions which may be owed to 'two value-systems... operating in parallel', helps to make sense of a text in which the different locations constantly tease the reader with deceptive impressions of uniformity. W.'s strongly literary approach naturally underpins his inclination to view the *Agricola* as a complex medium through which to seek the 'history' of this period of Romano-British interaction. But, while scepticism about whether literary works of history

can ever tell us ‘what really happened’ may be rife nowadays, W. provides more solid ammunition for this view in precise parallels between the language of Tacitus’ account of the Caledonian night attack on the Ninth Legion and that used by Livy and Sallust to describe similar episodes, illustrating very convincingly the representational and literary nature of Tacitus’ text.

Given that the strength of this introduction lies primarily in its new interpretative insights into the literary nature of the *Agricola*, it is no surprise to find the same virtues in the commentary itself, where many of the themes outlined in the introduction are played out in greater detail. W.’s note on the much cited phrase at 39.2 *ducis boni imperatoriam virtutem* will suffice as an illustrative example. Here W. moves beyond Ogilvie and Richmond’s well-made observations on the much-attested imperial monopoly over military excellence. Firstly, he raises the question over whether ‘the excellence of a good leader was an imperial excellence’ is actually the most compelling reading, suggesting that ‘a commander’s prowess belonged to the Good Leader’. While I am not fully convinced by this interpretation and furthermore find the capitalization awkward, nevertheless the suggestion is amply supported by citations from other authors and typically thought-provoking. It will shake readers from their long-held certainty that they knew what the phrase meant. But W. goes beyond explicating the key phrase linguistically. His alternative reading opens up an analysis of the notion of the *dux bonus*, which is attested in Augustan literature (Hor. *Odes* 4.5.5 in relation to Augustus’ triumphal return) and underwent a revival under Domitian and Trajan. Thus, the linguistic and literary focus also yields important historical observations in the self-presentation of Domitian as a new Augustus, with the critical contemporary twist that here the returning *dux* will be *Agricola* and not Domitian himself.

This is an extremely welcome commentary on a text which is notoriously enigmatic. If I had one suggestion it would be that even more help on translation and how to grapple with this difficult Latin would have been a good thing, especially in the open-ended and non-dogmatic form adopted in this commentary. The volume will appeal to undergraduates, colleagues and all who are interested in Tacitus, Roman attitudes to Britain, or the Domitianic period in general, regardless of their engagement with this particular text. This is a commentary which genuinely throws the spotlight on new literary and historical interpretations and brings fresh energy to an important and difficult text.

KATHERINE CLARKE

St Hilda’s College, University of Oxford

katherine.clarke@classics.ox.ac.uk