

The ‘Grey’ Tacitus of Jesuits: The Case of Famiano Strada (1572-1649)

The *Prolusiones academicae* of Roman Jesuit Famiano Strada (1572-1649), first published in Rome in 1617, collects the text of lectures the scholar gave at the Roman College. In particular, the first four *prolusiones* constitute a kind of *ars historica*, in which the Jesuit, starting from the Ciceronian categories of *res* and *verba* (*De oratore* II, 62-64), shows what the constitutive elements of a historiographical work should be (CLAIRE 2015, 119). Moreover, within this group of orations, the second prolusion is expressly dedicated to Tacitus, as is also evident from the title: *An congruenter Honestatis, et Historiae legibus faciant ii, qui in rerum narrationibus ad callida et politica, ut ipsi vocant, praecepta divertunt. Quo loco de Corn. Taciti scribendi ratione multa disceptantur.*

According to Toffanin (1921, 153-154), Famiano Strada’s work and, in particular, the *prolusio* dedicated specifically to Tacitus, contains an effective description of the so-called Black Tacitism and constitutes an accurate and objective examination of the process of disguising Machiavelli’s thought through the use (or abuse) of Tacitus’ work, with the aim of justifying the Reason of State and adapting it to the religious precepts. Furthermore, in the three types of Tacitism identified by Toffanin - Black, Critical and Red - the Jesuit was placed in both the Black and Critical categories (CROCE - CARAMELLA 1930, 289 and BARCIA 2003, 54-55). This double attribution, however, would deserve to be reviewed through a deeper analysis of Strada’s work.

The *prolusiones* appear as a “tentative de démolition de Tacite” (CLAIRE 2015, 128): in fact, the Roman historian is described as a bad citizen, a flatterer and, above all, an unreliable writer (*scriptor opiniosissimus*. GENTILE 1887, 557). Compared to Cicero, taken by Strada as a theoretical model, and Livy, taken as a practical model, Tacitus appears as a kind of anti-model. The same judgment on Tacitus was expressed by Strada in another of his famous writings, entitled *De bello Belgico decades duo*, a historiographical work that is clearly inspired by Livy’s and focuses on the Wars of Flanders (1555-1578).

The Tacitus described by Famiano Strada is, therefore, a ‘grey’ Tacitus, neither black nor red, an author who does not deserve to rise as a model, and of whom the Jesuit operates a constant *deminutio*. The paper aims to illustrate how Strada, using Aristotelian and Ciceronian categories, denies that Tacitus can represent an *exemplum*: according to Strada, in fact, contrary to the rules of the historiographical genre, Tacitus prefers the verisimilar to the true. In addition, the paper will also focus on the satirical attitude, typical of Jesuits (MALAVASI 2019), with which Strada argues against the idea of many scholars to consider Tacitus a ‘philosopher’ (BUONGIOVANNI 2005) from whom to learn how to found a tyranny or how to live under a tyrant.

Selected bibliography

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