

Tacitus Aulicus

When Giuseppe Toffanin resurrected the Tacitist movement in 1921 his focus was substantially on its political aspects, whence his designations of the historian as politically either 'red' or 'black'. This political focus was further promoted by Arnaldo Momigliano's often reprinted paper on Carlo Pascale. Now there is nothing misleading in foregrounding the political slant of those who contributed to the movement. But I would urge that their target audience was not so much the 'tyrant' or prince as the courtier, and that they presented Tacitus as an instructor in courtly skills.

Pascale for instance was himself a courtier in Savoy and France. On the very title page of his book he says that he proposes to explain difficulties in the text and to provide matter worthy of knowledge (*scitu digna*) to be taken to heart by those who undertake public functions (*quae in ima praecordia demitti ab iis, qui publica munia capessunt, debent*). They are not tyrants or princes but their courtiers, like Pascale himself, who serve as advisers or ambassadors. A good number of his observations are clearly directed at those who aspire to serve in a prince's court.

Likewise his successor, Annibal Scoto, served in the court of the duke of Parma, and in his opening address to the reader he compared his experience with what he read in Tacitus, whose *praecepta* he reckoned could clearly be applied to the contemporary princely court (*ad usum et consuetudinem nostrae aetatis*).

The figure I want to draw out of the shadows is Eberhard von Weyhe (1553-?1633), who moved in the court circles of Saxony and northern Germany in the capacity of what we might call a 'privy counsellor'. Adopting a Latinization of his German name, Durus de Pascolo, in 1596 he published in Rostock *Aulicus politicus, diversis regulis, praeceptis, sive, ut iurisconsultus Iavolenus loquitur, definitionibus selectis, videlicet CCCLXII antiquorum et neotericorum prudentiae civilis doctorum instructus*. This is a fascinating, but so far as I know largely neglected work, which does exactly what the title proposes. Von Weyhe goes serially through the text of the *Annales*, in search of precepts or historical events which can be turned into brief disquisitions, advantageous to the courtier. His method is remarkable, since he doesn't always name Tacitus as a source, but the reader who knows the Latin text well will easily pick up borrowed expressions which lead directly to the source passage. Von Weyhe is my chief representative of one who read Tacitus as a guide to the courtier.

I turn now to some advertised aims of the conference which I should be in a position to address. The period of the Tacitist movement is rightly regarded as one in which the historian was 'radically popular and widely read'. My hunch is that it was the Tacitists themselves who helped generate that popularity. A glance at F. R. D. Goodyear's account of 'Editions of the Annals' shows that there wasn't much scholarly work done on Tacitus until the last quarter of the sixteenth century (*The Annals of Tacitus, Books 1-6, Volume I, 1972, p. 10*). He doesn't stop to ask why this should be so, but it is just at that time that the Tacitist movement gets under way. I seem (to myself at any rate) to see a connection. The widespread influence of the movement is undeniable, and it may well have goaded the professional scholar into a closer engagement with the textual tradition. Even as late as 1686 the scholarly Theodore Ryckius in his *Animadversiones* engaged occasionally with Traiano Boccalini's *Ragguagli dal Parnasso* (Boccalini too was a courtier). But by 1752 when Johann August Ernesti produced his edition of Tacitus, he claimed that the movement was moribund (and in his view good riddance). So there are indeed echoes of Tacitist readings into the eighteenth century, but they were growing ever more faint, and Ernesti was happy to perform the movement's exequies. What I regard as significant in this is that Ernesti was a professional scholar, who held two professorships in Leipzig. The Tacitists of the previous century, on the other hand, were not academics, but men in public life, whose appropriation of Tacitus Ernesti deplored. He therefore rejoiced at a change of climate which saw the Tacitist movement in decline and the scholar's approach in the ascendant. The Academy is beginning to ring-fence its territory, excluding the *profani*. Not a progressive moment, it may be felt.