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ANNALS
BOOK IV

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More information

CONTENTS

Preface vii

Introduction 1

1 *Latin historiography to Tacitus* 1

2 *Tacitus' career* 10

3 *The* Annals 12

4 Annals *Book 4* 14

Structure and narrative 15

Language and expression 19

Sources 26

Tacitus and Tiberius 27

Text 33

CORNELII TACITI AB EXCESSV DIVI AVGVSTI LIBER QVARTVS 35

Commentary 77

References and Abbreviations 264

Indexes 268

General 268

Latin words 274

Names 278

Stemma 282

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PREFACE

'Book iv of the *Annales*, it may be asserted, is the best that Tacitus ever wrote.' Such is the judgement of this century's leading Tacitean scholar, Sir Ronald Syme (*Roman papers* (1984) III 1031); yet no commentary on the Latin text has been published in English since the time of the First World War. In the seventy-five years which have elapsed between then and now, our knowledge of classical literature has greatly increased, there have been several revolutions in the way literary texts may be read, and readers have become accustomed to expect more from classical commentaries than the elucidation of points of grammar and syntax.

We have devoted our Introduction to explaining both the nature of Latin historical writing and Tacitus' place within the historiographical tradition. By analysing the structure and various other aspects of the composition and style of Book 4, we have tried to show how Tacitus capitalised on that tradition to produce a dramatic work of literature which would be found compelling by his readers in the second century A.D.

In the Commentary we have had two principal aims: first, to help the modern reader understand Tacitus' Latin and, second, to illustrate the intrinsic fascination of his writing. On the relatively few occasions when we have been unable to put forward an agreed interpretation, our separate views are identified by our initials – a practice which we hope may stimulate further discussion amongst readers. We have not attempted to give an account of the broader historical background, which is available in two reliable and relatively recent biographies of Tiberius by R. Seager and B. Levick. Though we hope that the Commentary will make a contribution to Tacitean scholarship and be useful to professional classicists, we also hope that it will be found 'user-friendly' by the sixth-formers and university students for whom it is primarily intended. We have tried to avoid much of the conventional panoply of scholarship, preferring instead to refer to such works as E. C. Woodcock's *New Latin syntax* or the *Oxford Latin dictionary*, to which our readers may reasonably be expected to have access.

We are jointly indebted to the generosity of Dr D. C. Braund and Mr K. Wellesley, who supplied us with valuable information on buffer

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states and Tacitean emendations respectively, and of Professor W. S. Watt, who volunteered a series of textual notes on Book 4. In addition AJW is grateful to a number of friends and colleagues in the North East, who have cheerfully tried to answer the questions with which they have been pestered and amongst whom Dr E. D. Hunt deserves a special mention. He also wishes to express his appreciation to the University of Durham for allowing him an extended period of research leave, during which the bulk of the book was written, and for a research grant to help with the purchase of a book by the Durham University Library.

September 1988 R.H.M.
A.J.W.

NOTE TO THE THIRD REPRINT

In the decade since this book was completed, a very great deal has been published on Latin historical writing: note esp. J. Marincola, *Authority and tradition in ancient historiography* (1997) and, for a convenient introduction, C. S. Kraus & A. J. Woodman, *Latin historians* (*Greece & Rome* New Surveys in the Classics 27, 1997). For comparative purposes the current state of modern historiography is well discussed by R. J. Evans, *In defence of history* (1997).

On Tacitus in particular, R. Mellor has produced both a vigorous general book, *Tacitus* (1993), and a survey of the author's reception from the early fifteenth century to Sir Ronald Syme: *Tacitus: the classical heritage* (1995). Individual subjects and themes are discussed in T. J. Luce & A. J. Woodman (edd.), *Tacitus and the Tacitean tradition* (1993); for the Tiberian *Annals* note P. Sinclair, *Tacitus the sententious historian* (1995), while there is much of relevance to Tacitus in S. Bartsch, *Actors in the audience* (1994). Bibliographical surveys and other studies may be found in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.33.2 (1990): note esp. those by M. M. Sage (851–1030), W. Suerbaum (1032–1476) and R. H. Martin (1500–81: 'Structure and interpretation in the "Annals" of Tacitus'). The latest bibliography on Tacitus is by H. W. Benario, *C.W.* 89 (1995) 91–162, and AJW's various papers on Tacitus have now been collected as *Tacitus reviewed* (1998).

October 1998

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