

## Tacitus' Greek

It has been observed and argued that Tacitus was resistant to Greek culture (Syme 1958: 504-19) and language (Janaccone 1950: 90). In many instances this seems to be true. Yet, he operated during a period in which Latin-writing contemporaries such as Quintilian, Pliny the Younger and Suetonius eagerly obtained and displayed an education in Greek culture (*paideia*). Was Tacitus utterly detached from this environment?

This paper will aim to illustrate that while operating within generic boundaries, Tacitus employed methods and stylistics in a manner that were sometimes parallel to and analogous with even those of Greek atticizers of the Second Sophistic. Such parallels will suggest how prevalent literary Greek was among the Roman elite and how useful it could be in terms of establishing authority; and they will certainly illustrate shared literary and cultural ideals, intentional or not.

The paper will begin by addressing Tacitus' biography, including familial roots in Massilia and service in Greek-speaking Asia (Birley 2000), and the evidence—limited though it may be—of his acquisitions in Greek language and culture. It will proceed next to Tacitus' employment of Greek grammatical constructions, demonstrating that the historiographer employed a number of them—from the Greek accusative and the epexegetic infinitive to present participles acting in the aorist—with greater frequency than most Latin authors. Tacitus' habits of usage, such as a preference for the dative of agent, and of idiom, such as his frequent use of *specie...ceterum ut*, will further reveal a writer exposed to Greek stylistics and thought. Such examples will also reveal the intrinsic value of reading ancient languages in their original form. Finally, the paper will examine Tacitus' use of "mild archaism" (Martin and Woodman 1989: 20) in comparison with that of Greek contemporaries whose archaism has been considered "a major component of Hellenism" (Saïd 2001: 291). The study ends with a lingering question: if

even Tacitus can be shown to have engaged in Greek *paideia*, how do we approach the role of cultural identity in studies of the so-called Second Sophistic?

### Bibliography

Birley, A.R. 2000. "The Life and Death of Cornelius Tacitus." *Historia* 49: 230-47.

Janaccone, S. 1950. *Recherches sur les éléments grecs du vocabulaire latin de l'Empire*, I. Paris.

Martin, R.H. and A.J. Woodman. 1989. *Tacitus: Annals IV*. Cambridge.

Saïd, S. 2001. "The Discourse of Identity in Greek Rhetoric from Isocrates to Aristides." In

Malkin, I., ed. 2001. *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*. Cambridge, MA and London, 275-99.

Syme, R. 1958. *Tacitus*. 2 vols. Oxford.