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*A cinquant'anni dal Tacito di Francesco
Arnaldi: riflessioni, bilanci e prospettive
di studio*

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Victoria Emma Pagán

From *Tacito* to the *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, via *Tacitus*

In 2023 after more than a decade of recruitment, research, compilation, and editing, the *Tacitus Encyclopedia* was finally completed and published exactly fifty years after the publication of Francesco Arnaldi's *Tacito*, and our papers in this volume respond to the three chapters, the first on the historical Tacitus, the third on the artist Tacitus, and an intervening chapter on *Tacitus* by Ronald Syme. In this middle chapter, Professor Arnaldi takes stock of Syme's *Tacitus* on the fifteenth anniversary of its publication, and his observations on Syme's two volumes motivate this inquiry into the place of the *Tacitus Encyclopedia* in the history of Tacitean scholarship. Thus, there are really three works of scholarship under consideration here, each from unique historical and geographical perspectives.

Professor Arnaldi's observations are fascinating because for him *Tacitus* was still something relatively new. Its arguments were still matters of debate, its pronouncements entirely fresh. It represented a deliberate and significant departure from European, continental, and especially German attitudes and ushered a "provincial" approach that afforded Syme the "splendid autonomy" that typified, according to Professor Arnaldi, the best English classical scholars (even the notorious A. E. Housman, "who would seem so pathologically 'continental'").¹ We now take for granted

¹ F. Arnaldi, *Tacito*, Napoli, Gaetano Macchiaroli, 1973, p. 81.

the degree to which Syme's status as an outsider influenced his interpretation of Tacitus.² Syme could find affinities between the "greatest ruling class in history" and the English ruling class, with its "friendships born in the public schools and colleges of Oxford and Cambridge." Britain could even produce a good scandal, and Professor Arnaldi unobtrusively drops three names: "dei Profumo, degli Stephen Ward e delle Keeler."³ The reference is to the so-called Profumo affair of the early 1960s. John Profumo, Britain's war secretary, was discovered to have had an extramarital affair with Christine Keeler, who may have been involved with a Soviet naval attaché. Both Profumo and Keeler were friends of Stephen Ward, a socialite charged with prostitution. Profumo resigned; rumors of sex scandals proliferated; Ward was prosecuted. Closing arguments were so damning that Ward took an overdose and was hospitalized. The next day he was found guilty *in absentia* and died before sentencing.⁴ In short, headlines ripped from the *Annals* of Tacitus,⁵ even if a bit anachronistic, as the Profumo affair transpired well after *Tacitus* was published.

Professor Arnaldi identifies in Syme's *Tacitus* two dominant motifs, and he enhances his observations with personal anecdotes.⁶ The first is Tacitus' attention to the provinces and people from the provinces. In a glimpse of his place within Italian academic circles, Professor Arnaldi recalls a statement made by Federico Chabod who had heard Arnaldo Momigliano say that *Tacitus* was "above all the book of a provincial,"⁷ an assessment that cuts two ways. Syme's *Tacitus* is a book *about* a provincial Roman historian, but it is also a book *by* a provincial New

² See M. Toher, *Tacitus' Syme*, in A. J. Woodman, editor, *Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009; F. Santangelo, *Syme, Ronald*, in V. E. Pagán, editor, *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2023, pp. 1046-1049.

³ Arnaldi, *Tacito* cit., p. 82.

⁴ See V. Holburn, *The Profumo Affair*, Yorkshire and Philadelphia, Pen and Sword History, 2024 for a recent study.

⁵ For adultery as treason, cfr. Appuleia Varilla, *Ann.* 2.50; Aemilia Lepida, *Ann.* 3.22-23; Claudia Pulchra, *Ann.* 3.38.2, 4.52.1-3; Albucilla, *Ann.* 6.47.2; A. Corbeill, *Adultery*, in V. E. Pagán, editor, *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2023, pp. 9-10. For suicide before trials' end, cfr. *Ann.* 3.16.2, 6.26.1, 6.29.1-2, 12.8; A. Corbeill, *Suicide*, in V. E. Pagán, editor, *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2023, pp. 1036-1037. For an affair with a naval officer, cfr. Epicharis, *Ann.* 15.51.

⁶ Arnaldi, *Tacito* cit., p. 82; cfr. the recollection of a conversation with Ronald Syme, p. 97.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Zealander. The second dominant theme uniting Syme's two volumes is prosopography. Professor Arnaldi recollects an occasion in the museum at Praeneste when Syme identified characters and relatives from the late Republic on tombstones with an ease and admiration that can only derive from a profound command of Roman prosopography. He reminds us that in fact Syme's earliest scholarly efforts were devoted to a monograph entitled *The Provincial at Rome*, drafted in 1934 but set aside in favor of *The Roman Revolution*, and not published until 1999, posthumously edited by Anthony Birley.⁸ Also published in 1958, concomitant with the two volumes of *Tacitus*, was the slender volume of the Whidden Lectures, entitled, *Colonial Elites: Rome, Spain and the Americas*.⁹

In addition to provinces and prosopography, Professor Arnaldi notes that unlike earlier studies of Tacitus that treated his five works in discrete chapters, *Tacitus* continuously alternates between the content of the works and their contexts of production. The history of the years from 14 to 96 CE also tells the history of the years from 96 to 117 and beyond, years in "which Tacitus lived, but did not narrate, and of which there is no adequate account left, especially for Trajan." So in the preface, Syme delivers the "gist of the two volumes"¹⁰:

Oligarchy is the supreme, central, and enduring theme in Roman history. Across the revolutionary age it links the aristocratic Republic to the monarchy of the Caesars; and the process of change in the governing order has its sequel in the century between Caesar Augustus and Trajan. In the design of the present work, Cornelius Tacitus emerges as an exponent of that process—but he is also an item in it, a personal document. It is suitable to confess in this place that the concluding section, 'The New Romans' (Chapters XLIII-V), owes something to a book begun many years ago, soon interrupted, and not yet terminated—*The Provincial at Rome*.¹¹

⁸ A. Birley, editor, *The Provincial at Rome and Rome and the Balkans, 80 B.C.-A.D. 14 by Ronald Syme*. Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1999.

⁹ R. Syme, *Colonial Elites: Rome, Spain and the Americas*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

¹⁰ Arnaldi, *Tacito* cit., p. 83.

¹¹ R. Syme, *Tacitus*, 2 vols., Oxford, Clarendon, 1958, v. In the design of Arnaldi's chapter, Syme himself emerges as an exponent of the process of scholarship as well as an item in it, as both subject and object of Roman history and historiography.

The *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, on the other hand, has a far different purpose. It “provides a point of entry for further research for every person or place named in Tacitus, or for topics related to the study of Tacitus.”¹² Unlike the sole-authored *Tacitus* of Oxford and *Tacito* of Naples, the *Encyclopedia* is an international collaborative effort of 179 contributors from six continents and twenty-nine countries. Perhaps its only dominant motif is democracy. Alphabetical order levels social status, neutralizes Roman oligarchy, and materializes non-elite lives. The roster of contributors from across a broad range of professional experience, from advanced undergraduate students to emeriti faculty, democratizes scholarship and admits a plurality of viewpoints and voices. Despite these differences, the *Tacitus Encyclopedia* provides quantitative evidence to substantiate Professor Arnaldi’s two dominant motifs and to prove that the form and content of the two-volume *Tacitus* are the product neither of Syme’s invention nor of his individual social circumstances but of the raw material from which Tacitus composed his works.

Let us first consider the *Germania*. According to Arnaldi, Syme’s pages dedicated to the monograph make no particularly important contribution. In Arnaldi’s opinion, Syme shortchanged the *Germania*, because of “an excess of empiricism.” Arnaldi proposes that a better understanding of the monograph is achieved if we recognize that, “The greatness of *Germania* lies precisely in its generic nature, in its representation of a country and inhabitants like a great nebula, with all the cosmic implications that may exist in the word.”¹³

The *Tacitus Encyclopedia* suffers the same excess of empiricism. Tacitus names more than sixty tribes of *Germania*, but some only once, and many are hapax legomena. If the *Encyclopedia* were to include individual entries for each tribe, the reader would only be referred to the one passage of the *Germania* with little to no further information due to the lack of literary or archaeological documentation. So instead of individual entries, the *Encyclopedia* treats tribes in broad categories. “Germanic Peoples of the Northeast” by Eduard Droberjar; “Mannus Tribes” by Katie Low; “Nerthus Tribes” and “Suebi” by James McNamara gather

¹² V. Pagán, *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell, 2023, p. ix.

¹³ Arnaldi, *Tacito* cit., p. 86.

individual tribes according to geography and customs—the very rubrics that Tacitus uses in the *Germania*.

Limited by evidence for the peoples of Germania, nevertheless the *Tacitus Encyclopedia* may begin to approximate Arnaldi's "cosmic implications." For Ellen O'Gorman the *Germania* is a treatise in which the representation of the place known as Germania in the Latin language is an act of possession. As she says, naming "makes comprehensible alien places and peoples."¹⁴ To the extent that the *Tacitus Encyclopedia* makes comprehensible alien places and peoples, it reinscribes the hegemony that O'Gorman identified. To compensate for this inevitable re-inscription of Roman imperialism, the *Encyclopedia* contains entries on "empire" by Emma Dench, "ethnography" by Richard Thomas, "geography" and "provinces" by Carlos Noreña, that provide background and context for the ancient historiographical practices of describing non-Roman peoples.

"Armed with the technique of prosopography,"¹⁵ says Arnaldi, Syme can demonstrate the "history of the ruling class" in progressive decline and deterioration, from *nobiles* to *noui homines* of the civil wars of the 1st century BCE and first decades of the Principate, leaving an ever-greater place for the *noui homines* of the western provinces. If, as Arnaldi notes, "one has the impression that Syme ends up transforming the *Annals* into a secret history, on which only he and Tacitus agree," this is due to the difficulty that the *Annals* presents to both author and reader: the "forest of details, of praenomina, nomina, and cognomina," that make it difficult to keep things straight.¹⁶ If Syme was able to compose such a secret history, it is only because Tacitus provided him the raw material. Examples from the *Tacitus Encyclopedia* that begin with letters A and Z are instructive.

The *gens Aemilia* is an easy and useful case study. There are seventeen entries for the *gens* in the *Encyclopedia*. The first two are the homonymous Aemiliae Lepidae, also paired in the second edition of the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, A 420 and 421. The first Aemilia Lepida was charged with adultery, poisoning, and consulting astrolo-

¹⁴ E. O'Gorman, *No Place Like Rome: Identity and Difference in the Germania of Tacitus* («Ramus» 22, 1993, p. 142.

¹⁵ Arnaldi, *Tacito* cit., p. 89.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

gers, for which she was found guilty and exiled (*Ann.* 3.22-23). She was defended by her brother Manius Aemilius Lepidus. The second Aemilia Lepida was the daughter of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, consul in 6 CE. After the death of her powerful father, she was denounced for adultery with a slave, and rather than face charges she died by suicide (*Ann.* 6.40). When read together, we see two women who appear in the *Annals* as defendants on charges of adultery. Both women appear only once in our extant *Annals*. Aemelia (1) is first mentioned in *Annals* 3, but we do not know whether she would have been mentioned in the lost books. As for Aemilia (2), it is likely that she was mentioned in the lost books, since Tacitus says of her, *quam iuveni Druso nuptam rettuli*, “whom I have already mentioned was married to young Drusus (son of Germanicus)” (*Ann.* 6.40.3).

The third woman is Aemilia Musa, known only from Tacitus, who describes her as rich and intestate, whose property Tiberius bestowed on Marcus Aemilius Lepidus; we can only assume they were related (*Ann.* 2.48.1).

Next in the *Encyclopedia*, the entry “Aemilii” by Christopher Dart sets forth the history of the family from its storied origins under King Numa to the end of the family line under Tiberius. The overview provides a general introduction to the individuals who follow. And yet the next entry is not a member of the noble family of Aemilii Lepidi, but the simply named Aemilius, a soldier who fought under Germanicus against the Batavi in 16 CE. For the next entry, Manius Aemilius Lepidus, the reader is referred to the entry for his sister.

This brings us to the five homonymous Aemilii Lepidi, presented chronologically, with numbers unique to the encyclopedia: (1) the consul of 187 BCE, of interest to Tacitus because he served as a tutor for the children of a Ptolemaic king; (2) the consul of 78 BCE, whose discontent with the settlements of Sulla Tacitus mentions in his digression on Republican laws; (3) the triumvir; (4) *capax imperii* and perhaps one of the most mentioned persons in the Tiberian hexad; and (5) the consort of Caligula and/or his sister(s).

Aemilius Longus was a deserter and the murderer of Dillius Vocula (*Hist.* 4.59 and 4.62) and Aemilius Pacensis was a military tribune who fought first for Otho then for Vitellius only to be killed in the sack of the

Capitol (*Hist.* 1.20, 1.87, 2.12-13, 3.73). For both non-elites, the *Histories*, supplies our only information.

Three Aemilii belong to the Republican era: Aemilius Mamercus appears in a digression on the history of the quaestorship (*Ann.* 11.22.4); the triumph of Aemilius Macedonicus is compared to the celebration of the capture of Caratacus (*Ann.* 12.38.1); and a case involving Marcus Aemilius Scaurus is mentioned in the *Dialogus* (*Dial.* 39). The seventeenth entry for the *gens* is Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus, a notorious informant under Tiberius.

Compare the seventeen Aemilii in the *Encyclopedia* to the only ten Aemilii indexed in Syme's *Tacitus*. Quickly we see Syme's focus of attention on elites of the *Annals*, as enumerated by Arnaldi: "Of the 624 pages of the text of *Tacitus*, only 216 are dedicated to the minor works and *Histories*."¹⁷

In 1986, Syme published *The Augustan Aristocracy*, which in many ways serves as an annotated appendix to *Tacitus* and a precursor to the *Encyclopedia*. In explaining the organization of the book, Syme reminds the reader that "material determines treatment," "a proper inquiry ... cannot be confined within narrow limits," and "a subject of this kind defies continuous exposition." He apologizes that "an original plan ... expanded to a portentous total," and that "repetition could not be avoided." He suggests that there will be additions to the work, but "the execution may well turn out to baffle zeal for economy." In the end, he admits that *Augustan Aristocracy* is "a kind of incomplete work of reference" that nonetheless "may be of use to students of literature as well as history."¹⁸

The Augustan Aristocracy indexes thirty-seven Aemilii. This is not surprising, given the scope and intent of the work; Syme discusses ten more Aemilii beyond the ones that appear in the two volumes of *Tacitus*. However, five Aemilii appear in neither *Tacitus* nor *Augustan Aristocracy*. Aemilia Musa, Aemilius, Aemilius Longinus, Aemilius Mamercus, and Aemilius Pacensis. These are not *nobiles* and obviously not of importance to Syme whose intent is to trace aristocracy. The *Encyclopedia* has a dif-

¹⁷ Arnaldi, *Tacito* cit., p. 88.

¹⁸ R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, preface.

ferent remit, a different purpose, but also a different result, as non-elite lives are registered and given equal status alongside the elite Aemilii.

As for the letter Z, there only three entries in the *Encyclopedia*. All are figures from the provinces, and none are indexed by Syme. Zeno, Zenobia, and Zorsines were elites within their own societies, whose stories end well because they collaborated with the Romans. The first is Zeno (*Ann.* 2.56), a native Armenian who, once crowned by the Romans, took the regnal name Artaxias III of Armenia (hence he is *PIR*² A 1168). The last entry in the encyclopedia is Zorsines, known only from Tacitus. He was king of the Siraces, a Sarmatian tribe who dwelled on the shores of the Sea of Azov. During the reign of Claudius, Zorsines was an ally of Mithridates Bosphorus, however, when the Roman troops prevailed, Zorsines abandoned Mithridates, gave up his hostages, and paid public homage to a statue of Claudius, who allowed him to retain his power (*Ann.* 12.17, 19).

The penultimate entry is “Zenobia,” queen of Armenia with her husband Radamistus, who killed his uncle to obtain the throne:

Radamistus then purged the royal family, including putting to death Zenobia’s two brothers for weeping over the deaths of their parents (*Ann.* 12.47). Radamistus was soon driven out by the Parthian king Vologaeses, who designed to place his own kinsman Tiridates on the throne. After a failed attempt to recover Armenia, in the face of an uprising of the Armenian people, Radamistus was forced to flee on horse, taking Zenobia with him (*Ann.* 12.51). Zenobia, pregnant at the time, was unable to endure the hardship of the flight. To avoid the shame of being taken captive, or out of love for her husband, she begged Radamistus to kill her. After stabbing her with his sword, Radamistus dumped her body in the Araxes River so that even her body would not fall into the hands of the enemy and then continued to Iberia where he was ultimately put to death by his father. Zenobia, however, survived and was rescued by shepherds, who treated her wounds with “rustic remedies” (*agrestia medicamina*, *Ann.* 12.51.4). They then conveyed her to Artaxata where Tiridates received her kindly and treated her as royalty. Nothing else is known of Zenobia after this, although the [early twentieth century] Armenian historian Leo claims she lived out her days at Tiridates’ court.

The story of Zenobia and Radamistus, known only from Tacitus (both figures are absent from medieval Armenian histories and the *Georgian Chronicles*), beca-

me a popular artistic subject for Baroque authors and composers beginning in the seventeenth century.¹⁹

In the eighteenth century twenty different composers set the libretto of her story to music. Zenobia continued to be a popular figure in the Romantic period with numerous operas composed throughout the nineteenth century. In the visual arts, the scene of Zenobia being rescued by the shepherds was a popular subject for artists from Poussin (1634) to Bouguereau (1850). This entry, like so many others, highlights the need for a concentrated study of the reception of Tacitus. Together with Zeno and Zorsines, this entry also widens the scope of the two dominant motifs. Prosopography expands beyond elite circles to include non-Roman royalty. And the European provinces that shaped Tacitus' life and works are complemented by attention to his representations of the internal politics of eastern kingdoms.

The *Tacitus Encyclopedia* thus materializes and validates non-elite and non-Roman lives. Even so, due to constraints on space and time, and in the interest of finishing the project, 846 entries (44% of the whole) redirect readers to one of the other 1046 full entries. A revised edition would not only update and correct the current 1046 entries but also provide complete entries for the other 846. Only then can the *Encyclopedia* truly adhere to its aspirational "principle of general inclusion."²⁰ For now, I hope to have shown that Professor Arnaldi's two dominant motifs, prosopography and provinces, people and places, are the building blocks of any study of Tacitus that can allow us to gage quantitatively how far we have come in scholarship, and how far we have yet to go.²¹

Abstract

The fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Francesco Arnaldi's *Tacito* coincides with the publication of the *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, and the occasion is

¹⁹ A. Nichols, *Zenobia*, in V. E. Pagán, editor, *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2023, pp. 1189-1190.

²⁰ Pagán, *Tacitus Encyclopedia*, cit., p. ix.

²¹ I would like to thank Claudio Buongiovanni and Chiara Renda for the invitation to participate in the conference and to contribute to this volume.

an opportunity to assess the impact of Syme's *Tacitus*. Examination of selected examples from the *Encyclopedia* illustrates the reasons for certain continuities in Tacitean scholarship as well as the deficiencies still to be addressed in Tacitean studies.

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