

Murray, J. and Wardle, D. (edd.) 2021. *Reading by Example: Valerius Maximus and the Historiography of Exempla*. Leiden: Brill. Pp. 316. ISBN 978-90-04-49940-9. €114.00, US\$137.00.

It is cheering that a dozen researchers have found in Valerius Maximus' *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* rich reflection on crucial Roman social, historical, and political ideas (friendship, piety, virtue and vice, lessons from the great actors in Roman and foreign history). This Tiberian author had been mined for points of detail. The revenant of the footnotes of Roman historians is here further on his way to being evaluated as a thinker about his society and not simply as a minor witness.

The studies range from close readings of a chapter to examination of Valerius' periodization of Roman history (D. Wardle, "Not putting Roman History in order?" – Regal, Republican and Imperial boundaries', pp. 14-46, with important conclusions about the regal period and the civil conflicts to which the imperial enthusiast thinks the emperors have put an end). The chapters often have a tight focus: J. Atkinson's chapter on Coriolanus ('Coriolanus as an exemplar in Valerius Maximus', pp. 75–93) has only five exempla to consider; S. Lentzsch considers spoils of war ("Others took money from that victory, but he took the glory": spoils of war in the *Facta et dicta memorabilia*', pp. 123-48). And yet the scholars are intent on seeing Valerius as his own witness to his society. In a study of friendship, for instance, G. Baroud ('*Amicitia* and the politics of friendship in Valerius Maximus', pp. 197–233) reads Valerius not as a reality check on what Cicero has to say (as of old), but treats Valerius like Cicero as a literary reflection on, and cultural revision of, a (changing) social practice. This is a welcome far cry from the old-fashioned idea of key cultural ideas that exist in some Platonic form (the changeless Roman truths of piety, dignity, et sim.), which the present text manifests in part. These revised papers of a 2017 conference move toward a deeper literary history which is thought of as the making of a culture springing from canonical texts, imperial developments, and social practices (the penultimate study of D. Burgersdijk, 'Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia* and the Roman biographical tradition', pp. 287–315, calls for a new understanding of Valerius' literary character and achievement; some chapters point the way). Several studies bring the material into connection with Tiberian political developments and with the contemporary enthusiast for the regime, Velleius Paterculus.

Noteworthy progress comes in several chapters. R. Langlands ('Valerius Maximus' engagement with Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* on virtue and the endurance of pain in 3.3 *De patientia*', pp. 167-96), compares Cicero's *Tusculan*

Disputations (certainly a recognized source) to clarify Valerius' divergence from, even disagreement with, Cicero's philosophical positions. She presents at some length R. Woolf's recent conclusions about the *Tusculans* (especially the necessity of social context) and demonstrates well that the *Tusculans* have prompted, but not rigidly directed, Valerius' thinking. Her strongest claim is that Valerius 'intends his reader to see allusion to contemporary philosophical debates and ideas.' Participating in an intellectual culture and literary intertextuality seem to me far different things. I wonder if Valerius' practice should not be considered intertextuality in the sense so well known to students of Latin literature (certainly Seneca the Elder thought the audiences of declamation did not know the prior treatments). Further, the 'situational ethics' which is a pillar of Langlands' work could be contextualized, for after a fashion that is what declamation was doing: not examining 'Should one marry?' but 'Should Cato marry?' and 'What should a son do when his father accuses him of sleeping with his stepmother and wanting the old man dead?' There are philosophical ideas here, but perhaps we should distinguish what Cicero had done, and what soon, from Valerius' perspective, Seneca and Musonius Rufus were to do from the literary play of how the present writer or speaker can surprise an audience with a representation of an old situation. As elsewhere in this volume I miss a sense of moralizing discourse's connections to literary ambition. Moralization may 'intend' to affect its listeners' mores; it is also of course a communicative performance (not least of status, tradition, identity).

E. Brobeck (*Efficacior pictura: morality and the arts in Valerius Maximus*, pp. 261–86) adds to our appreciation of the rich visuality of Valerius, and to his hierarchy of the arts. She argues well that for our author 'art is most compelling when it imitates writing' (p. 268). Valerius' insistent habit of comparison is here well explicated in the pairing of the Greek painting of Pero, paragon of piety, breastfeeding her imprisoned father and a painting of an anonymous Roman daughter doing the same for her mother. Valerius has his reader not distracted by the visual (unlike the guard overseeing the Roman suckling her parent or those aroused to lust by a statue of Venus).

In an excellent chapter D. Burgersdijk (see above) brings welcome new material to situate Valerius in the long history of Roman biography, adding Nepos to Valerius' important influences, calling attention to Valerius' literary ambition and to the lack of scholarly assessment of his literary achievement, and then turning to Valerius' reception in later antiquity, though with short shrift given to the epitomists and no attention to Plutarch. Far more importantly, after a possible connection to Ammianus Marcellinus comes a demonstration of the dependence of the *Historia Augusta* on Valerius, with a table and an appendix of the texts of

corresponding idioms from programmatic statements of the *HA* and Valerius.

In a valuable reassessment of Valerius in the hands of medieval students and scholars K. Conrau-Lewis ('Preaching Ancient History: Valerius Maximus and his manuscript reception', pp. 316–42) graciously begins by saluting D. Schullian's studies of the medieval Valerius and noting the interest of scholars in the humanist Valerius (with appropriate reference to the work of M. Crab and R. Black, *inter alios*). He demonstrates succinctly and convincingly Valerius' appeal for preachers, and indeed elucidates a medieval intellectual and devotional practice with the pagan author.

S. Lawrence ('And now for something completely different ...', pp. 47–74) takes up the issue of Valerius' attitude toward foreign history and foreignness by considering closely chapter 2.6, which has only foreign examples. While not discounting Valerius' repeated ranking of Roman as better (placed first in his chapters and often directly described as superior), Lawrence considers Valerius looking at 'a chain of customs across the Mediterranean,' foreigners voluntarily taking on death for their homeland and then, with an old woman of Cea, whose suicide was witnessed by Valerius and Sextus Pompeius, a movement to private virtues in keeping with but not always directed by Greek philosophy (see also Indian widows). Here are acute treatments of the exempla and fine insights on the state controlling what its citizens see, another aspect of exemplarity. I have doubts about Valerius' anthropological openness. In its absence in these foreign examples Rome remains the marked term, the foreigners appropriated by measuring them by a Roman idea of the value of exemplary personal ethics for the state or praised as a version of old Rome, with no need of Greek precepts.

Like Lawrence's chapter, R. Roth's discussion of Rome's Italian allies ('Boundary issues: Valerius Maximus on Rome's Italian allies', pp. 94–122) contributes to a more nuanced understanding of ethnicity, and not simply in Valerius. He clarifies the differing treatment of Campanians from that of the Italians and argues that the latter had stronger resonances for the readers, the new elite drawn from the municipalities (and notes the *municipia* extended by Tiberius and the interest of regional elites in laying claim to a Roman past). Campanians are outrageous (they cannot escape their perfidy with Hannibal); pre-Social War Italians, occasionally virtuous, are always almost as good as the Romans that their descendants will become. Valerius' criteria are well explained: an Etruscan is included among the *externa* since the event antedates the extension of citizenship.

J. Atkinson (see above) encourages a thorough reading of Valerius and demonstrates clearly the differences in treatment from Livy (Coriolanus the arrogant patrician rehabilitated – as I have argued, Valerius has little interest in factional politics). The connections to Tiberian Rome are in my judg-

ment only suggestions, but Atkinson thinks the war hero, shown ingratitude and thrust into exile, ‘would surely have brought to mind’ Tiberius, and the ‘muting of Veturia’s role’ reflects Tiberius’ efforts to limit Livia’s influence. Two other exempla ‘may for the Tiberian reader have clear echoes of Livia.’ ‘May’ and ‘clear’ seem in some tension. A. Gowing (‘Forgetting Germanicus: reading Valerius Maximus through Tacitus’ Tiberian books’, pp. 149–66), in something of a thought experience, considers Valerius forgetting Germanicus (not mentioned in the text) against the common set of values (e.g. military discipline) held by Valerius and Tacitus. No grand conclusions emerge but the unusual rapprochement of the two authors so easily set at odds brings both into better focus. In investigating vice J. Murray (‘Valerius Maximus on vice’, pp. 233–60) brings out well the visuality of Valerius’ presentation and suggests that like a *delator* Valerius may be doing the good public service of prosecuting the criminal.

Caveats: all chapters engage with recent scholarship; a few, however, in polemical and schematic mode, verge on the facile or intemperate. Here, as several times with the slow beginning of some chapters and also rehearsal of the contents of the text, I wanted the editors to wield a red pencil. A number of pieces do not stray far from English language scholarship. In particular the work of French scholars appears infrequently (J. M. David’s 1998 edition is appreciated only by a few).¹ Several pieces have very short conclusions. The proof may be in the pudding, but the studies have a tendency not to reach out. To fulfil the call for a deep understanding of Valerius’ literary achievement, more attention to his style, his similarities to Roman declamation, and to rhetoric as a communicative system is needed.²

A word about irony and deconstruction: Valerius’ text is read here on occasion as slightly or possibly dissident. This interpretative direction develops from Langlands’ argument that an exemplum or sequence of exempla is a prompt to ethical reflection. In practice, the authors discovering irony or indirection offer close critical readings to argue that the material can undercut his categories and moralizing, Romanocentric conclusions. Readers have long debated whether the ending of the *Aeneid* underscores or undercuts a pro-imperial message. I would not join Valerius with Virgil. Like Velleius, or indeed panegyric, the *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* are propagandistic literature. Such a literature will of course show the fissures that deconstruction so productively exploits. But let us not talk about the intentions of a text celebrating empire and imperialism as other than pro-

¹ David, J.-M. (ed.) 1998. *Valeurs et mémoire à Rome: Valère Maxime, ou la vertu recomposée*. Paris / Strasbourg.

² See now Lendon, J.E. 2022. *That Tyrant, Persuasion: How Rhetoric Shaped the Roman World*. Princeton, NJ.

pagandistic. The screeds of the last president of the USA or the present potentate of Russia have gaping holes of fact and logic that hardly need a deconstructionist. Still this does not mean they cannot be swallowed whole. By all means let us cast a gimlet eye on the claims of imperial literature, but we should not discount that some (most?) in the audience took it straight. Ovid might have rolled his eyes and Asinius Pollio probably, and certainly Tacitus later, had a critical counter-narrative. There are ways to read against the grain, but discovering irony in the propagandist is too good to believe.

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