The main body of Aelian’s Τακτικὴ θεωρία (Tactical Theory) looks back to a bygone age in Greek military history; it draws on texts that date back to Polybius and beyond, and sets out prescriptions for the organisation and formation of troops which derive from the Classical and Hellenistic periods.1 Its preface, however, plunges us into the literary culture and imperial politics of Nervan and Trajanic Rome and offers us some fascinating insights into a number of themes that are central to the ‘Literary Interactions’ research project.

Like many an author, Aelian veers between (seeming) modesty and self-promotion as he introduces his text and his reasons for writing it. He kicks off by pointing out to his dedicatee – the emperor Trajan2 – that Greek theory on tactics goes back a long way: to the time of Homer, no less. This stakes a claim for Greek pre-eminence in the field; and one might expect Aelian then to exploit his ancestors’ collective authority by aligning himself with them. He does so implicitly, of course; but he also changes tack. For no sooner does he alert us to their reputation than he partially undermines it, by stating that many of his predecessors were thought to have less grasp of military science than he does (πολλοὶ τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν συνέγραψαν οὕκ ἔχοντες, ἢν ἡμεῖς ἐν τοῖς μαθήμασι ἐπιστεῦθημεν ἔξιν ἔχειν). Hence his decision to write a new Tactical Theory: ‘so that those who come after us might attend to my writings rather than those of earlier authors.’ (Tact. pr. 1)

Aelian’s opening sentence thus establishes his credentials in forthright fashion: he derives some reflected glory from being part of a long-established tradition (and sets a somewhat combative tone by asserting the dominance of Greek military thinking at the start of his dedication to one of Rome’s most militarily ambitious emperors); but he underlines the (even greater) superiority of his own learning as the main reason why this text should eclipse all earlier such works.

Doubt and hesitation suddenly step in, however. For in the next sentence (in an adaptation of a standard prefatory manoeuvre – one that seems to have become particularly common under the principate) Aelian is assailed by his ignorance: specifically, by his ignorance of the nature of Rome’s military capability (δύναμις) and practice (ἐμπειρία), which – he claims – have cast Greek theory into oblivion:

Τῆς δὲ παρὰ Ῥωμαίους περὶ τὸ μέρος τούτῳ δυνάμεως καὶ ἐμπειρίας οὐκ ἔχουν γνῶσιν (δεὶ γὰρ ὠμολογεῖν τάληθη) δικνὸς κατεξήμον περὶ τὸ συγγράφειν καὶ παραδίδοναι τὸ μάθημα τούτο, ὡς ἀπημαυρωμένον καὶ τάχα μηδὲν ἐτι χρήσιμον τῷ βιῶ μετὰ τὴν ἐφευρεθεῖσαν ύφ᾽ ὑμῶν διδασκαλίαν.

1 ‘But in view of my own ignorance – the truth of which must be admitted – of that form of theory and practice current among the Romans, I was prevented by

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2 The manuscripts have Hadrian; but, as H. Köchly argued (De libris tacticis, qui Arriani et Aeliani feruntur, dissertatio; Turin 1851: 21-2), the dates do not add up, and Trajan must be Aelian’s addressee.
diffidence from handing down a science forgotten and moreover long out of use
since the introduction of the other system by your predecessors. 3 (Tact. pr. 2) 3
The language of conquest (underlined by the passive ἄπημαφομένον – ‘cast into
shadow’ – and the speed of Greek learning’s displacement) evokes the power of
imperial Rome, so that a mention of Aelian’s qualms about publishing all of a sudden
becomes a story about the overthrow of Greek tradition. Rome does not entirely win
out, however; for the vocabulary which Aelian uses to characterise Roman military
activity (not just δύναμις and ἐπιμερία but also διδασκαλία – ‘training’) underlines its
essentially practical, un-theorised nature, and sets up an implicit comparison with
Greek military science (described alternately as μόθημα and θεωρία). 4 (The participle
ἐφευρεθέντων also helps to convey the impression that Roman military ‘training’ has
been almost ‘chanced upon’, ‘discovered’ rather than systematically worked out.) The
Greeks still hold sway in terms of the intellectual discipline, in other words, despite
Rome’s victories in the field.

In telling the story of his text’s composition, then, Aelian invites his readers to
indulge in some cultural and political reflections; and these are given an added
impetus by the entry into the preface of Sextus Julius Frontinus (Tact. pr. 3). Aelian
met Frontinus, we are told, after visiting the now deified Nerva – a fact which is
slipped in with the utmost verbal economy, but which alerts us to another of Aelian’s
influential connections and tightens the bond that links him to Trajan (as well, perhaps,
as conjuring up an image of a dutiful (Greek) subject paying his respects to the
(Roman) emperor). The structure of the sentence, however, shifts our gaze swiftly
away from the world of politics to a centre of more leisured, literary activity –
Formiae – a place, perhaps not incidentally, where Rome and Greece meet on rather
more equal terms. 5 And here we are allowed to eavesdrop on an encounter in which
Frontinus assuages Aelian’s (supposed) doubts.

Aelian’s description of Frontinus is brief but significant. He evokes Frontinus’
enormous social and political influence, not only by describing him as ‘a
distinguished former consul’ (rather an understatement, as it happens, for a man who –
by the time the Tactica Theoria was published – had enjoyed the signal honour of a
triple-consulship and helped to secure Trajan’s accession to the throne) but also by
segueing straight to him from Nerva – for the juxtaposition reminds readers of

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3 All translations are from Devine [n. 1], unless otherwise stated.
the tactical manuals of Asclepiodotus, Aelian and Arrian?’, The Ancient History
Bulletin 9: 40 points out that, while Arrian and Asclepiodotus adopted the title of the
source which all three appear to have had in common (Posidonius’ Τέχνη τακτική),
Aelian innovated with the title Τακτικὴ θεωρία.
5 The Hellenization of Roman culture was perhaps nowhere more evident than in the
country/seaside villas of wealthy Romans. The imagined conjured up here of Aelian’s
literary conversation with Frontinus at Formiae reminds me a little of the picture that
Martial paints (Ep. 10.58) of himself and Frontinus indulging in a spot of poetry near
Baiae. In that epigram, Baiae’s distance/difference from Rome (geographic, cultural
and political) is significant – it helps Martial to articulate his own (growing)
detachment from Rome and all that it stands for – and the presence (and leisured
activity) of Frontinus, one of Rome’s most senior statesmen, helps to draw attention
to that difference/distance.
Frontinus’ close connections with both Nerva and Trajan. But it is his description of Frontinus’ military credentials that is most revealing. Frontinus was himself the author of at least two military treatises, of course (the *Strategemata* and the now lost *De Re Militari*, which appears to have been a more technical/theoretical work), so one might expect Aelian to take advantage of – or at least make reference to – his clout in that sphere. He opts instead, however, to foreground Frontinus’ active service, describing him as a man ‘who has gained a reputation for experience in military matters’:

...parā Frontiīōn τοῦ ἐπισήμου ὑπατικοῦ ἐν Φορμίας ἡμέρας τινάς διήτησαι δόξαν ἀπενεγκαμένον περὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ἐμπειρίαν, συμβαλὼν τ’ ἀνδρὶ εὐρόν οὐκ ἐλάττωνα σπουδήν ἔχοντα εἰς τὴν παρὰ τοῖς Ἐλλησί τεθεωρημένην μάθησιν, ἡρξάμην οὐκέτι πειροφυνεῖν τῆς τῶν τακτικῶν συγγραφῆς, οὐκ ἀν ἐσπουδάσατε παρὰ Φροντίνῳ δόκων αὐτήν, εἴπερ τι χεύρον ἔδοξει τῆς Ὀμοιάκης διατάξεως περιέχειν.

‘...I was able to spend some days at Formiae with the distinguished consular Frontinus, a man of great reputation by virtue of his experience in war. Discovering in conversation with him that he had no lesser regard for Greek tactical science, I began not to despise their tactical writing, thinking that Frontinus would not pay so much attention to it if he indeed considered Roman tactical usage superior.’ (Tact. pr. 3)

Frontinus’ literary activities are implicit in the background, but the ‘hands-on’ connotation of the word ἐμπειρία identifies his campaigns (in Britain and elsewhere) as the foundation of his authority and expertise, the main reason why Frontinus’ views on military matters carry some weight. And ἐμπειρία also picks up on the cultural contrast that Aelian has already drawn (a contrast which explains why he is keen to

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6 On Frontinus’ career, see esp. W. Eck, ‘Die Gestalt Frontins in ihrer politischen und sozialen Umwelt’, in Wasserversorgung im Antiken Rom, vol. 1 (ed. Frontinus-Gesellschaft, Munich, 1982), 47-62; R.H. Rodgers, Frontinus. De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae (Cambridge, 2004): 1-5. On his role in Nerva’s adoption of Trajan as his heir, see, e.g., R. Syme, Tacitus (Oxford, 1958): 16-7; W. Eck, ‘An emperor is made: senatorial politics and Trajan’s adoption by Nerva in 97’, in G. Clark and T. Rajak (edd.), Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World (Oxford, 2002), 219-26. J.D. Grainger, Nerva and the Succession Crisis of AD 96-99 (London, 2003), 14 and 100, wonders if Frontinus had also been involved in choosing Nerva as the new emperor to take over from Domitian. His influence did not end there: for when Trajan stayed away from Rome for more than a year after Nerva’s death, Frontinus must also have been a prominent member of the small group of senators who temporarily took control of the day-to-day running of the state (Rodgers, op. cit.: 2; Grainger, op. cit.: 118). By the time he died, in other words, Frontinus was one of Trajanic Rome’s most successful, conspicuous and influential statesmen.

7 The *Strategemata* is a collection of examples of successful military stratagems compiled, so Frontinus claims, to inspire and support future generals; so it is a text which focuses on deeds, rather than theory or the philosophy of war. We know little about the *De re militari*, but Frontinus claims (*Strat* 1. Pref. 1) to have ‘drawn up a science of warfare’ and indeed to be somewhat original in this (*cum ad instruendum rei militaris unus ex numero studiosorum eius accesserim…*: ‘Since I, one [or alone?] of those interested in military matters, have succeeded in drawing up a science of warfare…’), which suggests that the *De Re Militari* may have been a more theoretical work.
present Frontinus as a doer more than a writer): for it reminds us (if reminder were needed) that Frontinus is Roman. As well as maintaining the notion that military theory is primarily the preserve of the Greeks, this makes Frontinus’ endorsement of Aelian’s text particularly powerful. If a fellow author were to evince interest in Greek tactical science, it would raise no eyebrows. But that a bastion of the Roman establishment (for all his practical experience/Romanness) shares Aelian’s ‘enthusiasm’ for Greek ‘theorised learning’ (and note the added emphasis, here, on its theorised nature: τεθεωρημένη μάθησιν) and does not rate it inferior to Roman military ‘arrangements’ (the word διάταξις once more underlines the un-theorised nature of the Roman approach); that is quite some affirmation.

Aelian goes on to exploit Frontinus’ reputation as an author more explicitly at Tactica 1.2, where he cites him in a list of notable military writers (again going back to Homer) whose works he has read. But though Frontinus’ inclusion as the only Roman in this list of Greeks might look flattering,² it also serves to point up (again) the overwhelming dominance of Greek learning on the subject. And it is significant, too, that Frontinus is characterised here as a commentator on other writers, not a theorist in his own right (despite the probability that his own De Re Militari was a theoretical work, whose composition – and originality? – Frontinus flags in the Strategemata as a way of underlining/enhancing his authority³). Moreover, Aelian goes on to make it clear, again (Tact. 1.3-6), that he has found all of his predecessors’ works inadequate, and that his own text will be an improvement on (and clarification of) their efforts.⁴ Frontinus’ reputation as an author, in other words, is sacrificed to promote Aelian’s own literary/scientific credentials.

Aelian also benefits socially and politically from association with an intimate of Trajan’s, of course – both because acquaintance with (and/or patronage from?) such an eminent statesman might enhance Aelian’s own standing in the eyes of his readers, and because Frontinus may serve directly or indirectly to broker a closer relationship between Aelian and the emperor. But Aelian’s self-positioning is not limited to purely personal agenda, and that is one of the things that makes his preface so rich: he uses his dialogue with Frontinus (as he uses his interaction with Trajan) to stage a competitive encounter between Greece and Rome (and between the past and the present).

The rest of the preface continues to oscillate between audacious assurance and staged hesitation. Aelian contrasts the burst of confidence that followed his conversation with Frontinus, for example, with the insecurity he had previously felt in the face of Trajan’s ‘unsurpassed’ strategic ‘courage’ (ἀνδρεία) and ‘experience’ (ἐμπειρία):

Πεποιηκός οὖν πώποτε συγγράμματος διατύπωσιν, μήπω δὲ πρός ἐκδόσιν ἐτοίμην ἔχων, διὰ τήν σήν ἀνυπέρβλητον, αὐτοκρατορ, ἄνδρειαν τε καὶ

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² Cf Arrian, Ars Tactica 1.2, where Frontinus’ name does not appear. Aelian and Arrian appear to have shared a common source (Dain [n. 1]: 26-40), and the first half of Arrian’s text presents very similar material to Aelian’s, in a very similar style (on parallels and differences between the two texts, see esp. P. Stadter (1978), ‘The Ars Tactica of Arrian: Tradition and Originality’, Class. Phil. 73.2: 117-128). Even their opening sections which review earlier writers of tactical manuals contain the same names (Stadter, op. cit.: 121) with the exception of Frontinus, whom only Aelian cites.

³ See above, n. 7.

⁴ Cf Arrian, Ars Tact. 1.2, who makes a similar claim.
...Having therefore projected this work some time ago, but not yet being prepared to publish it then on account of your unsurpassed valour and experience, Imperator, through which you excel all the other generals, without exception, who have ever been… (Tact. pr. 4)

This paean of praise is not entirely unmerited, for Trajan had probably recently completed his Dacian campaigns and was in the process of extending Rome’s frontiers further than ever. But as well as ingratiating himself with his dedicatee, and acknowledging the growing sway of the Roman empire, this flattery brings his two most important patrons/acquaintances, Frontinus and Trajan, into dialogue with each other. Indeed, it establishes a stand-off between what they each represent – one that Frontinus wins: for his interest in Aelian’s theoretical project ultimately overcomes (Aelian’s inferiority about) the emperor’s military know-how. Trajan may be unsurpassable in battle (note that his military credentials – ἀνδρεία and ἐμπειρία – belong, like those of other Romans, to the practical sphere) and the march of the empire may seem unstoppable, but that need not prevent Aelian from stamping his authority over the world of military science.

Indeed, Aelian ends up sounding rather like his description of the all-conquering Trajan as he embarks upon his literary campaign. Once inspired to press ahead, he employs strong, even combative verbs (in particular παραγκωνίζωμαι – ‘to elbow aside’) to characterise his endeavours, and depicts himself triumphing over all other/previous writers, just as Trajan surpasses all generals, past and present:

...παραρμήθην τελείωσι τῆς πραγματείας καλήν σφόδρα καὶ τοῦ ἐσποουκόσι περὶ ταύτην τὴν θεωρίαν παραγκωνίσασθαι δυναμένην τῇ τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων συντάξει. σαφήνειας τὲ γὰρ ἑκάστη διαπερατισθείσης λέγει τοῦ ἑντευκέμονον τῇ συγγραφῆ ἐνθέν μᾶλλον ἢ παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων στοιχειωθέσθαι καὶ τῷ κατὰ ταξίν ἐκαστα δεδηλώθησι.

‘…I have taken up again and completed this exceedingly worthwhile study, which is capable of elbowing aside, as far as serious students of tactical theory are concerned, the writings of the ancient Greeks. For on account of the clarity that I boldly dare to affirm, the reader will gain more from this work than from all the writings of earlier authors, such is the order and method I have followed.’ (Tact. pr. 4-5)

This renders his sudden return to doubt and hesitation at Tact. pr. 6 and the stock-in-trade contrast that he draws between the greatness of his dedicatee (τηλικοῦτων πολέμων στρατηγῶς – ‘a general with such great wars behind him’) and the potential paltriness of his treatise (ἐυτελέστερα) less than convincing. Moreover, his language in this closing section underlines common ground as well as distance between author and addressee, and even effects a subtle transformation on Trajan.

Using his ‘lack of courage’ as an excuse to place his own ‘instructions’ (ὑσήγογυμενα, from a verb, significantly, which means ‘to show the way’) alongside Trajan’s military ‘ideas’ (ἐπίνοιαι: ‘notions’, ‘thoughts’, ‘inventions’ – a word with ad hoc, rather than systematic, connotations), Aelian encourages the emperor to approach his treatise as ‘a Greek theory and a polished account’ (Ἐλληνικὴν θεωρίαν καὶ γλαύφουραν ἱστορίαν) – a suggestion which effectively ‘disarms’ the text, by aligning it with a philosophical/historical and (according to Aelian’s earlier remarks) now

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11 On the date of the Tactica’s composition and publication (probably some time between 106 and 113), see Dain [n. 1]: 18-19; Devine [n. 1]: 31.
bygone tradition, and downplaying any sense of contemporary relevance/utility. The noun ψυχαγωγία (‘evocation of the dead’, and – in a literary sense – ‘gratification’, ‘amusement’) also reinforces the impression both that it looks to the past and that it should be viewed as a piece of edifying but essentially abstract literature/philosophy. But no sooner has Aelian implied a retrospective and abstract focus (and reinforced the link between Greece and theory) than he tells Trajan that he might use the treatise to ‘observe’ (θεωρήσεις) the principles employed by Alexander the Great in marshalling his troops. The image that is suddenly conjured up of Alexander in the field reminds us that the Greeks were not just good at theory; indeed, their deeds might teach the Romans (even so notable a Roman as Trajan himself) a thing or two. And Aelian’s choice of a verb from which the noun θεωρία takes its meaning toys with another role-reversal, for it invites/challenges his addressee to be more ‘Greek’ in his approach to military strategy – not simply to ‘observe’ but perhaps even to ‘theorise’. Aelian’s insistence that he has prefaced his treatise with handy headings, meanwhile – so that his addressee might glean the gist without reading the whole thing and be able to look up specific topics that he wants to find out about (Tact. pr. 7: διὰ μὲντοι τὰς ἀναγλύσιας προέγραμα τὰ κεφάλαια τῶν ἀποδεικνυμένων, ἵνα πρὸ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως τοῦ βιβλίου τὸ ἐπάγγελμα τοῦ συγγράμματος δι᾽ ὀλίγων κατανόησις καὶ οὔς ἀν ἐπιξητήσῃς ἀναγνωσθῇν τόπους ραδίως εὐρίσκον τοὺς χρόνους μὴ τρίβης; ‘On account of the pressures of your business, I have prefaced the work with subject headings, so that you can, without reading the book as a whole, determine its contents from a few words and without spending much time easily find the places you want to look up’) – does not simply defer to Trajan’s imperial workload. It underscores the potential utility of Aelian’s text and, by imagining Trajan leafing through it, completes his progression from almighty general to (potential) pupil. The balance of power between author and addressee is thus interrogated (and even shifted), just as it is between the two cultures that they represent, as we discover that Aelian’s Tactica Theoria may not be a purely retrospective/abstract work after all; or, rather, that in so being, it may yet have relevance for Aelian’s (Roman and Greek) contemporaries – and for Trajan specifically.12

A brief comparison with Arrian’s Ars Tactica – written some twenty-five to thirty years later – is instructive here. As I noted above, Aelian and Arrian probably worked from a common source, and the first half of the Ars Tactica, like Aelian’s Tactica Theoria, reviews Macedonian military tactics in some strikingly similar ways.13 But the two texts also diverge significantly – not least, perhaps, because of the different circumstances of their respective authors. For while Aelian appears to have

12 Alexander the Great’s value as a model was debated, of course. Emperors may have emulated him (in their imagery, if not in their deeds), but Greek and Roman authors had long drawn attention to his failings as well as his achievements. See, e.g., Dio Chrysostom Or. 2, and T. Whitmarsh (2001), Greek Literature and the Roman Empire, Oxford: 201-4, on the implications of Dio’s ambivalent characterization of Alexander there for Trajan’s imitatio of him; also P. Stadter (1980), Arrian of Nicomedia, Chapel Hill: 140 on the ‘melancholy’ parallels that Cassius Dio draws between Alexander and Trajan. In this light, Aelian’s recommendation that Trajan emulate Alexander might be (even) more complex than it appears.

had no hands-on military experience (and casts himself in the role of scholar rather than practitioner, as we have seen), Arrian enjoyed a successful senatorial career which involved some military service among other posts. Indeed, for a provincial from Bithynia, he rose exceptionally high, becoming consul in AD 129/130 and then governor of Cappadocia in 131. In that capacity, he took command of two Roman legions and a number of auxiliary and native troops, and was called upon at one point to repel an invasion by the Alani in 135.

That campaign inspired one of his texts – the *Acies contra Alanos*, or *Ectaxis*; and he also wrote a lost work on Roman infantry exercises, dedicated to Hadrian (*Ars Tact. 32.3*). The *Ars Tactica* seems to have been intended as a sequel to that; for the section on Macedonian tactics is followed by a section on contemporary Roman cavalry exercises that complements his earlier treatise on infantry manoeuvres. Arrian’s discussion of Greek tactical science is embedded, in other words, in a wider project that is concerned as much, if not more, with contemporary Roman military practice. Indeed, contemporary Roman military activity even invades the Greek half of the *Ars Tactica*, for (in contrast to Aelian, who does not offer any illustrations in the *Tactica Theoria*) Arrian introduces examples both from history and from his own day to clarify the principles that he is setting out.

Furthermore, in so doing, Arrian appears to engage (and identify) with specifically Hadrianic (not just Roman) military practice. As Philip Stadter has pointed out, the second half of the *Ars Tactica* resembles a speech of Hadrian’s, partially preserved in an inscription (*CIL* VIII, 2532), in which Hadrian ‘commends various companies of cavalry and their commanders after a performance at the legionary camp of Lambaesis in Africa in AD 128’. There is already a possible overlap, in other words, between what Arrian is up to (in reviewing Roman cavalry manoeuvres on paper) and some of Hadrian’s military inspections/reforms. But Arrian also makes it clear that his combination of non-Roman and Roman illustrations mirrors (and perhaps even draws upon) existing Roman and specifically Hadrianic

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14 On Arrian’s career, see esp. R. Syme (1982), ‘The Career of Arrian’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 86: 181-211; also Stadter [n. 12]: 1-18. As Stadter (op. cit.: 1) points out, Arrian ‘was only the second known Greek to be made a Roman provincial governor’; moreover (6) the governorship of a vital frontier province like Cappadocia ‘marked the end of a special kind of career, carefully differentiated by Trajan and Hadrian from the normal administrative posts in interior provinces entrusted to senators with a minimal experience in military affairs’; on this, see also Wheeler [n. 13]: 351.

15 Stadter [n. 8]: 119.

16 Stadter [n. 12]: 42. The use of illustrative examples in military treatises goes back to Aeneas Tacticus, if not before; but it is perhaps noteworthy that Frontinus’ *Strategemata* is unusual in bringing Greek and Roman exempla together; and tempting to wonder whether Frontinus’ combination of Greek and Roman military history influenced or inspired Arrian (despite the fact that Arrian does not cite Frontinus as one of his sources).

17 On Arrian’s engagement with Hadrian and Hadrianic policies/practice, see esp. Wheeler [n. 13].

18 Stadter [n. 12]: 43.

19 Cf. Wheeler [n. 13]: 358.
practice: for he praises the Roman system generally for its readiness to incorporate foreign ideas, and also Hadrian himself for doing the same.20

The relationship that Arrian establishes between himself and his emperor is rather different, in other words, from Aelian’s engagement with Trajan. For, though Aelian and Trajan share interests (and acquaintances) in common, Aelian’s preface exposes differences and gaps; Arrian, on the other hand, emphasises parallels between Hadrian and himself. Moreover, they both posit different relationships between their respective emperors and the Greek/non-Roman past that result in different conceptualisations of the wider relationship between Greece and Rome. Aelian’s Trajan is advised to look back at a past that is incompatible with the Roman present and become more Greek; Arrian’s Hadrian, on the other hand, is being (commendably) Roman in his incorporation of the Greek/non-Roman past into current policy. Thus while Aelian works hard to establish/maintain a significant divide between the Greek theoretical tradition and contemporary Roman practice (which Trajan might overcome, if he would but emulate/study Alexander – though that is a more complicated/controversial course than Aelian suggests21), Arrian brings the two into a different kind of dialogue with each other. For his juxtaposition of the two traditions exposes the potential for conflation, not simply contrast, and may even (with the help of his mixed exempla) engender a sense of cross-cultural continuity.22

The irony is that, despite Aelian’s distance (real and paraded) from contemporary Roman military practice, there may be more continuity between his writing and some recent Latin texts than there is between Arrian’s treatises and the Latin literary/intellectual tradition. Aelian’s emphasis on the accessibility of his text and his use of headings, for example, further strengthens his connections with Frontinus – this time on a literary level. For Frontinus introduces his Stratagemeta (written ten or twenty years before the Tactica Theoria) with a preface in which he promises (among others things) to spare his busy readers the task of trawling through all history to find instructive exempla themselves. Indeed, not only has he selected his material with his readers’ time constraints in mind; he has set it out so that his treatise provides illustrations on whatever topic they want to find out about, ‘as if in response to questions’:

Nostra sedulitas impendet operam, ut, quemadmodum res poscet, ipsum quod exiguitur quasi ad interrogatum exhibeat…

20 Ars Tact. 33 and 44. On this, see esp. Stadter [n. 12]: 44-5, who argues: ‘Although not written for Hadrian, as was the book on infantry maneuvers, the Tactics was written with him very much in mind. Hadrian had taken a personal interest in the army and especially in the cavalry, as his addresses to the troops at Lambaesis attest. In the Tactics we see how warmly Arrian supported this care of the emperor’s and how he shared his interest in the improvement of the army…’; also Wheeler [n. 13]: 363: ‘Thus Arrian’s Tactica is best interpreted as an encomium on the occasion of Hadrian’s vicennalia. He has interlaced the work with repeated references to the emperor’s reforms, personal preferences and the atmosphere of the reign…’.

21 See above, n. 12.

22 Stadter [n. 12]: 45 and 48-9 suggests that Arrian’s Ectaxis incorporates/promotes a similar blend of Greek and Roman/past and present experience and knowledge: ‘Arrian neither retreats into his Greek heritage nor flees from it; proudly and consciously he incorporates it into his active life as a Roman imperial official. In Hadrian, moreover, he found a kindred spirit…’.
‘My energies will be devoted to the task of setting out precisely what is needed, in any given situation, as if in response to questions…’ (Strat. I, Pref. 2)

Moreover, as well as dividing his material into carefully themed books, Frontinus supplies readers with sub-headings at the start of each one. Aelian was not the only military author, in other words, to make his text (conspicuously) user-friendly; indeed, he may even have got the idea of section headings in part from Frontinus (despite the fact that he downplays Frontinus’ contributions to the genre).23

Another Latin text that begins with a contents page – though on a rather different scale, of course – is the Natural History of Pliny the Elder. In fact, the reasons that Pliny gives for including a table of contents sound remarkably similar to those set out by Aelian a generation later – though Pliny arguably has his tongue more firmly in his cheek.24 Dedicating his work to Titus (another imperial figure, incidentally, with an impressive military profile), Pliny explains that out of deference to Titus’ public responsibilities he has included a list of contents, so that his addressee need not spend time reading the text itself:

\[ quia \text{occupationibus tuis publico bono parcendum erat, quid singulis contineretur libris huic epistulae subiunxi, summaque cura ne legendos eos haberes operam dedi. } \]

‘Since, in the midst of your business, I must consult the public interest, I have attached to this letter a list of the contents of each individual book, and have taken great pains with this so that you are not obliged to read them yourself.’ (NH, Pref. 33)

This – and Pliny’s comments about the benefits that will accrue to his wider readership as well (like Titus, they too will not need to trawl through the whole text but will be able to look up the particular things they want to find out about) – may have been in Aelian’s mind when he wrote his dedication to Trajan.25 But it is not the only correspondence between the two prefaces; for Aelian’s staged concern about the ‘paltriness’ of his treatise, followed by his description of it as a ‘smoothed’/‘polished’ account, recall both Catullus’ dedicatory poem (in which he characterises his ‘little book’, his ‘trifling’ poetry, as ‘smoothed by pumice-stone’ and hence ‘polished’ in a more metaphorical sense) and the games that Pliny plays with that Catullan poem in the preface to the Natural History (NH, Pref. 1). Whether consciously or not, in other

23 Commentators often see Aelian’s use of headings as his own innovation and do not consider the possibility that he may have been copying Frontinus in this (e.g., Devine [n. 1]: 32; Stadter [n. 8]: 118).
24 Dain [n. 1]: 52 notes the echo of Pliny’s preface in Aelian’s comments at Tact. pr. 7.
25 As Y.L. Too (2010), The Idea of the Library in the Ancient World, Oxford: 60 points out, Pliny’s (assumed) anxiety about taking up too much of his imperial addressee’s time is a trope that he has borrowed from earlier author: Horace, Ep. 2.1.1. Pliny himself cites Valerius Soranus (the late-Republican author and statesmen, executed under Sulla) as the inspiration behind his own table of contents. On other examples of ancient contents pages and Pliny’s own contribution, see esp. A. Riggsby (2007), ‘Guides to the wor(l)d’, in J. König & T. Whitmarsh (eds) Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire, Cambridge: 88-107 (though Riggsby overlooks both Aelian’s and Frontinus’ contents pages in his discussion).
26 They may have been in Frontinus’ mind too, when he wrote the introduction to his Strategemata; and Frontinus’ language (especially his use of the comparative leviora) at De Aquis 77, where he suggests that readers need not trawl through all of his facts and figures, also recalls Pliny’s prefatory remarks.
words, Aelian seems to have drawn not just on Frontinus’ military treatises but on other Latin texts in his dedication to the emperor Trajan. He thus parades the distinctive Greekness (and consequent superiority) of his military theory (while also bettering his Greek forebears), but also draws on and engages with Latin literary topoi.27

Aelian’s *Tactica Theoria* has received only scant scholarly attention; and even one of its most enthusiastic readers (Alphonse Dain) cannot disguise a sense of disappointment with what the treatise ultimately offers, in comparison with what its preface appears to promise.28 But he points out that some of the text’s perceived limitations are more the product of modern misapprehensions (about Aelian’s intentions, and about the purpose and conventions of ancient tactical writing more generally) than a genuine flaw in Aelian’s work; and I hope that this short paper has also served to remind us that even apparently unpromising (‘derivative’/‘recondite’/‘peripheral’) texts have hidden depths. As we saw, Aelian goes out of his way to suggest that his *Tactica* reprises a lost Greek past/science that has little connection with the Roman present/practice. But in so doing – and in addressing such a work to Trajan, and involving Frontinus in its composition and dedication – he refutes that very position, and prompts reflection on the relationship between past and present, Greece and Rome, science/theory and practice, and between writing and doing – in ways that echo but also enhance our understanding of what other contemporary and near-contemporary texts are doing. Indeed, when his text is read in dialogue with other near-contemporary works, it offers some fascinating insights into the variety of ways in which different authors explored those relationships. It is all too tempting, for example – especially with an overtly military text – to read conflict, aggression, or subversion into a Greek author’s musings on imperial Rome; but the comparison with Arrian’s *Ars Tactica* points up the greater complexity of both – and other – authors’ divergent approaches.

Aelian’s engagement with Frontinus, Pliny the Elder and even Catullus, meanwhile, exposes some interesting cross-pollination between Greek and Latin authors, which might prompt further investigations: into connections between Arrian and Frontinus, for example (after all, their careers as well as their military interests present some suggestive overlaps); or between Arrian, Frontinus and Pliny the Younger, for that matter (whose different literary responses to the practicalities and rhetoric of Roman imperial government – in Pliny, *Epistles* 10, Frontinus’ *De Aquis*, and Arrian’s *Periplus*, for example – warrant comparison29); or Frontinus and Plutarch (aside from a shared interest in setting Greek and Roman history/exempla alongside each other – albeit in very different ways – let us not forget that Plutarch’s great friend and addressee, Quintus Sosius Senecio, was Frontinus’ son-in-law); or Aelian and Tacitus (building, perhaps, on some of the parallels that Simon Hornblower has pointed to between Arrian and Tacitus, and their use of the past to

[27] I have already noted that Aelian’s literary meeting with Frontinus at Formiae brings Martial, *Ep.* 10.58 to (my) mind. It may be unwise to press this too far, but there is a possibility, at least, that Aelian may be engaging with/recalling the Martial epigram (and the ideas that it evokes) in his brief description of that conversation with Frontinus. (Dain [n. 1]: 22-3 notes that Martial mentions an Aelian (or two) in his *Epigrams* (12.24; 11.40), but we do not know if this is ‘our’ Aelian.)


[29] Tacitus’ *Agricola* and *Germania* might even be thrown if for good measure.
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negotiate their respective relationships with the Trajanic/Hadrianic present – which could itself be further explored\(^{30}\).

The connections and interactions between these various authors might raise some interesting questions about genre – or at least challenge some misconceived assumptions (perhaps Aelian’s engagement with Catullan motifs should not surprise us, for example, and might help to remind us that what we often categorise as ‘technical’ writing did not function and was not approached so very differently from, e.g., works of history or philosophy). The dialogue that Aelian enters into with Trajan (and Nerva, and Frontinus), meanwhile, underlines the power of even ‘technical’ texts to shape images of and attitudes to the emperor, other important statesmen, and Roman imperial rule more broadly. For Aelian does not simply borrow and adapt imperial imagery and authority to carve out his own literary/intellectual persona (just as others borrowed imperial iconography, for example, to parade their own identity/aspirations on libraries or tombs); his text invites us to look at his dedicatee, the Roman army, and the Roman empire from new angles and to ‘read’ them afresh (Aelian’s Trajan, for example, may be all-conquering, but he is also – crucially – not yet an Alexander: he is an imperator who wants a bit of Greek theory/science to elevate him to that kind of status – if that is, indeed, desirable).

Finally, Aelian’s preface also reminds us that one author’s engagement with another did not always (ever?) restrict itself to purely literary issues. Aelian engages as much, if not more, with Frontinus’ social and political personae as with his literary activities; and that helps draw attention to the overlaps between literary, social and political life. Thus a text that is determinedly focused on Greek battle techniques that have long since fallen out of use has much to teach (even more, perhaps, than I have suggested here): not just about the literary and intellectual climate of Nervan and Trajanic Rome, but about the interface between literary, cultural, social and political life in the period.

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St Andrews, 27\(^{th}\) November 2012