Frontinus’ Authorial Persona under Domitian and Nerva/Trajan

The difference between Domitianic and post-Domitianic is significant – or so the likes of Tacitus, Pliny and Martial have taught us to think.\(^1\) We are all familiar with Tacitus’ damming portrait of Domitian’s principate in the *Agricola* – as a period of corruption, persecution and tyranny, when writing and speech were heavily censored – and his celebration of Nerva and Trajan’s succession as the start of a new age of (greater) freedom, integrity and security (*Agr*. 1-3). His famous claim at the start of his *Histories*, that the reigns of Nerva and Trajan represent a ‘happy’ age in which one is allowed ‘to feel what one wants, and to say what one feels’ (*Hist*. 1.1: …*rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet*), pursues the same theme. And if neither his *Histories* nor his *Agricola* endorse Nerva and Trajan quite as whole-heartedly as they initially appear to,\(^2\) they have both contributed to a process of ‘political periodisation’ that has established a strong sense of contrast between late-Flavian and post-Flavian Rome – and the literature that was written in the two eras.

Martial has played his part too, not least in the book that he edited and reissued after Domitian’s death, where he distinguishes between the kind of poetry that he wrote previously and what is called for under Nerva and Trajan: ‘Flatteries, you come to me in vain, you poor creatures with your shameless lips. I am not about to speak of ‘Lord and God’. There is no place for you any more in this city. Go far

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\(^1\) On the lengths some Trajanic authors went to to distinguish the Domitianic past from the Nervan/Trajanic present, see, esp., E.S. Ramage, ‘Juvenal and the Establishment: Denigration of Predecessor in the *Satires*’, *ANRW* II 33.1 (1989), 640-707; C. Whitton, *The Rhetoric of Accession: Tacitus’ early historical works as Trajanic legitimation* (Diss., Cambridge University, 2008), 19-28; and cf. M. Wilson, ‘After the Silence: Tacitus, Suetonius and Juvenal’, in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, 2003), 523-42. Of course, the literature of the period exaggerates the extent of the discontinuity between Domitian and his successors, but (as R. Saller, ‘Domitian and his Successors: Methodological Traps in Assessing Emperors’, *AJAH* 15 (2000), 4-18, underlines) the limited extent of other evidence makes it difficult to know by how much.

\(^2\) See, e.g., Tacitus’ striking concessive clause at *Agr*. 3.1-2, which stresses the slow and fragile nature of the post-Domitianic ‘recovery’ that Nerva and Trajan are supposed to be ushering in; and on this passage, esp. W. Liebeschuetz, ‘The theme of liberty in the *Agricola* of Tacitus’, *CQ* 16 (1966), 126-39, at 133; J.P. Bews, ‘Language and Style in Tacitus’ *Agricola*’, *G&R* 34 (1987), 201-11, at 204; D. Sailor, ‘Becoming Tacitus: Significance and Inconsequentiality in the Prologue of *Agricola*’, *ClAnt* 23 (2004), 139-77, at 153-4; T. Whitmarsh, ‘“This in-between book”: language, politics and genre in the *Agricola*’, in B. McGing and J. Mossman (edd.), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea, 2006), 305-33, at 311-12; and A. König (2013), ‘Frontinus’ Cameo Role in Tacitus’ *Agricola*’, *CQ* (forthcoming). Tacitus’ claim (*Agr*. 1.4) that he has to seek permission ‘now’ (*nunc*) to write his biography, ‘so savage is the age and so inhospitable to virtue’, has also been read as a sign that he is not entirely persuaded by the rhetoric of change: e.g., Liebeschuetz (op.cit.), 133; Whitmarsh (op.cit.), 312. Cf. R.M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond (edd.), *Cornelii Taciti de vita Agricolae* (Oxford, 1967), ad loc.; also C. Kraus and A. Woodman, *A commentary on Tacitus’ *Agricola* (Cambridge, forthcoming), who will argue that the ‘now’ at 1.4 can only refer to the Domitianic past, not the Trajanic present.
away to turbaned Parthians and kiss the soles of gaudy monarchs – base, abject suppliants. There is no lord here, but a commander-in-chief and the most just of all senators, through whom rustic, dry-haired Truth has been brought back from the house of Styx. Under this ruler, Rome, beware, if you are wise, of talking the language of earlier days.1 And Pliny the Younger followed suit, in particular at the start of his Panegyricus where he too calls for a new rhetoric to suit the new age: ‘Away, then, with expressions formerly prompted by fear: I will have none of them. The sufferings of the past are over: let us then have done with the words which belong to them. An open tribute to our Emperor demands a new form, now that the wording of our private talk has changed… Nowhere should we flatter him as a divinity and a god; we are talking of a fellow-citizen, not a tyrant, one who is our father not our over-lord.’ Of course Pliny, like Martial, went on to employ some of the very hyperbole that they both claim to shun; but they, like Tacitus, have helped to crystalize some ideas about Nervan and Trajanic literary production that make it seem very different from the kind of writing that took place in the dark days of Domitian.

This article is about an author – Sextus Julius Frontinus – who wrote under both Domitian and Nerva/Trajan (a point often overlooked in discussions of him), and it will examine the authorial persona that he adopts in two different texts – the Strategemata, which was probably composed in the late eighties AD, and the De Aquis which was written in 97/98 – as a way of further exploring this supposed literary (and political) discontinuity. It will argue that some of the differences between the voices that he adopts in each text reflect – and reinforce – the kinds of distinctions articulated by Tacitus, Martial and Pliny. But it will also suggest that what we see in Frontinus’ treatises nuances and complicates the picture painted by his literary peers.

Frontinus’ career spanned the reigns of six Roman emperors. We know nothing of how he fared under Nero, but under Vespasian, Titus and Domitian he held several important appointments – including the governorship of Britain and the proconsulship of Asia – and he also served as consul for the first time.2 The most impressive part of his career, however, was under the reigns of Nerva and Trajan. For in addition to being made curator aquarum (Superintendent of Rome’s aqueduct network, of which more later), Frontinus was made consul for a second and then for an extremely rare third time (in 98 and 100 AD). On both occasions, his consular partner was no less person than Trajan himself; and it is generally agreed that he came by these honours because Trajan owed him a debt of gratitude for the work he had done in securing his accession to the throne.3 But his influence did not end there. For

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1 Mart. 10.72 (trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (1993), Martial: Epigrams, Cambridge, Mass.); see also, e.g., 12.5, and cf. e.g. 9.91, where Domitian is Martial’s earthly Jupiter.
when Trajan stayed away from Rome for more than a year after Nerva’s death, Frontinus was almost certainly a member of the small circle of senators who temporarily took control of the day-to-day running of the state. By the time of his death in 103/4, in other words, Frontinus stood out as one of Rome’s most successful, conspicuous and influential statesmen.

That will be significant for our reading of his self-presentation in the *De Aquis* – a text which he wrote in conjunction with his appointment as *curator aquarum* – but I want to turn first of all to his *Strategemata*, which was almost certainly written and published while Domitian was emperor and before Frontinus had risen to such prominence.

**Frontinus’ Authorial Persona in the *Strategemata***

As Frontinus explains in his opening sentence, this is not the first military treatise he has written: he has already ‘drawn up’ a ‘science of warfare’. Moreover (and depending upon how one translates *unus ex numero studiosorum*, whether as ‘one…’ or ‘the only one…’), he may claim some originality in this. Frontinus is already a (leading?) authority on military matters, in other words. But he clearly felt that his earlier text was still lacking something, so he embarked on a supplementary volume – the *Strategemata* – which aims to bring together lots of illustrations of ‘the cunning deeds of generals’:

> Cum ad instruendam rei militaris scientiam unus ex numero studiosorum eius accesserim eique destinato, quantum cura nostra valuit, satisfecisse visus sim, deberi adhuc institutae arbitror operae, ut sollertia ducum facta, quae a Graecis una στρατηγηµάτων appellacione comprehensa sunt, expeditis amplectar commentariis. (Strat. 1. Pref. 1)

Since I alone of those interested in military science have undertaken to reduce its rules to system, and since I seem to have fulfilled that purpose, so far as pains on my part could accomplish it, I still feel under obligation, in order to complete the task I have begun, to summarize in convenient sketches the adroit operations of generals, which the Greeks embrace under the one name *strategemata*.

We know nothing about his earlier treatise except what Frontinus tells us here, but his talk of *scientia* aligns it with (Greek-style?) theoretical works, which systematize knowledge and prescribe best practice, and suggests that Frontinus...
may have figured in it as an expert, expounding military theory to his readers. The *Strategemata*, by contrast, belongs to the *exempla* tradition (as Frontinus’ linguistic echoes of Valerius Maximus’ preface stress\(^\text{10}\)). And in this ‘handy little handbook’ (that is the implication of the phrase *expeditis... commentariis*), Frontinus features less as a know-it-all and more as a middleman or a facilitator.

Take, for example the second sentence of this preface. Here Frontinus puns with some military-sounding vocabulary (as he has done from the very start; his literary style is not half so dry as many suppose!\(^\text{11}\)), claiming that his text will ‘equip (or gird) generals’ with examples of good planning and foresight. Moreover, the language of assistance or support becomes even more pointed as he explains that this will ‘nourish’ their own ability to ‘think up and set in motion’ similar deeds, and stave off anxiety about the outcome of their actions:

> Ita enim consilii quoque et providentiae exemplis succincti duces erunt, unde illis excogitandi generandique similia facultas nutriatur; praeterea continget, ne de eventu trepidet inventionis suae, qui probatis eam experimentis comparabit.

*For in this way commanders will be furnished with specimens of wisdom and foresight, which will serve to foster their own power of conceiving and executing like deeds. There will result the added advantage that a general will not fear the issue of his own stratagem, if he compares it with experiments already successfully made.*

Frontinus establishes a helpful and constructive relationship between his treatise and his readers, then. But perhaps most interesting of all is the fact that he ends up writing himself out of the equation: for his syntax in the sentence quoted above makes the ‘examples of good planning and foresight’ the agents of the verb, suggesting that it is the material – not the author himself – that will be the instructive force in the text. Though he asserts his authority on military matters in his opening sentence, in other words, Frontinus takes himself out of the driving seat in the second, giving the impression that his *Strategemata* will work by bringing its readers into direct contact with other authorities (the ‘authors’ of the *exempla* he is about to set out) who will provide the didactic substance.

Frontinus is not without a(n important) role, however; for we learn as the preface goes on that his input has been the careful selection and organisation of

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\(^{10}\) There is no space to discuss this here, but Frontinus’ language throughout this preface recalls aspects of Val. Max. I, Pref.

\(^{11}\) The phrase *expedites... commentariis* (*expeditus* meaning ‘lightly armed’ but also ‘ready to hand’, and *commentarius* meaning ‘notebook’ or ‘guide’) is a case in point, for it underlines both the military and the practical nature of the text. In fact, Frontinus’ punning use of *expeditus* here suggests to me that he may also be punning slightly with *commentarius* – or at least enjoying its multivalence; in other words, he may have chosen this word precisely because, as well as meaning ‘handbook’ or ‘guide’, it can also allude to military memoirs (as we are about to discover) consists of a collection of ‘memoirs’ of various military figures which may serve as instructive *memoranda* for his readers. Another military-sounding phrase/pun is *instruendam... accesserim* in the opening sentence; Frontinus is describing his marshalling of knowledge and writing, but both verbs are commonly found also in military contexts.
material. And when describing this, he again emphasises his concern with aiding and supporting his readers:

Illud neque ignoro neque infitior, et rerum gestarum scriptores indagine operis sui hanc quoque partem esse complexos et ab auctoribus exemplorum, quidquid insigne aliquo modo fuit, traditum. Sed, ut opinor, occupatis velocitate consuli debet. Longum est enim singula et sparsa per immensus corpus historiarum persequi, et hi, qui notabilia excerpserunt, ipso velut acervo rerum confuderunt legentem. Nostra sedultias impendet operam, ut, quemadmodum res poscet, ipsum quod exiguitur quasi ad interrogatum exhibeat. Circumspectis enim generibus, praeeparavi opportuna exemplorum veluti consilia. Quo magis autem discreta ad rerum varietatem apte conlocarentur, in tres libros ea diduximus. In primo erunt exempla, quae competant proelio nondum commisso; in secundo, quae ad proelium et confection pacationem pertineant; tertius inferendi solvendi et στρατηγήµατα; quibus deinceps generibus suas species attribui. 

I neither ignore nor deny the fact that historians have included in the compass of their works this feature also, nor that authors have already recorded in some fashion all famous examples. But I ought, I think, out of consideration for busy men, to have regard to brevity. For it is a tedious business to hunt out separate examples scattered over the vast body of history; and those who have made selections of notable deeds have overwhelmed the reader by the very mass of material. My effort will be devoted to the task of setting forth, as if in response to questions, and as occasion shall demand, the illustration applicable to the case in point. For having examined the categories, I have in advance mapped out my campaign, so to speak, for the presentation of illustrative examples. Moreover, in order that these may be sifted and properly classified according to the variety of subject-matter, I have divided them into three books. In the first are illustrations of stratagems for use before the battle begins; in the second, those that relate to the battle itself and tend to effect the complete subjugation of the enemy; the third contains stratagems connected with sieges and the raising of sieges. Under these successive classes I have grouped the illustrations appropriate to each.

There is much to unpick in this passage which I do no have space to discuss here, not least – again – Frontinus’ competitive engagement with Valerius Maximus. His use of military imagery to characterise his authorial activity (the phrase circumspectis enim generibus, praeeparavi opportuna exemplorum veluti consilia casts him once more in the role of a general, for it shows him reconnoitering and marshaling his material in military fashion) is particularly significant – and a theme we will return to. But the main point, as far as his self-presentation goes, is that Frontinus continues to adopt a facilitating and industrious persona, making material available for his readers to learn from.

Frontinus stresses his superiority over earlier excerptors (who have amassed too much material for their readers to cope with) with language that closely recalls the way Valerius Maximus discusses his own selection and organisation of material; the irony being that the Strategemata vastly expands on one small section of the Memorable Deeds and Sayings, presenting his readers with far more material on this one topic than Valerius Maximus does.
And this facilitating, constructive relationship between author and reader is taken a step further in the third paragraph of this preface. For here Frontinus embarks on a rather conventional apology, craving the indulgence of his audience for any omissions he may have made; but he takes an unconventional step in suggesting that, should they find some exempla which he has overlooked, they should feel free to add them into his collection – for it will be ‘easy’ to append them to the appropriate section:

Huic labori non iniuste veniam paciscar, ne me pro incurioso reprehendat, qui praeteritum aliquid a nobis reppererit exemplum. Quis enim ad percensenda omnia monumenta, quae utraque linguæ tradita sunt, sufficiat? at multa et transire mihi ipse permisi. Quod me non sine causa fecisse scient, qui aliorum libris eadem promittentium legerint. Verum facile erit sub quaque specie suggere re. Nam cum hoc opus, sicut cetera, usus potius aliorum quam meae commendationis causa adgressus sim, adiuvari me ab his, qui aliq uid illi austruent, non argui credam. (Strat. 1. Pref. 3)

*It is not without justice that I shall claim indulgence for this work, and I beg that no one will charge me with negligence, if he finds that I have passed over some illustration. For who could prove equal to the task of examining all the records which have come down to us in both languages! And so I have purposely allowed myself to skip many things. That I have not done this without reason, those will realize who read the books of others treating of the same subjects; but it will be easy for the reader to supply those examples under each category. For since this work, like my preceding ones, has been undertaken for the benefit of others, rather than for the sake of my own renown, I shall feel that I am being aided, rather than criticized, by those who will make additions to it.*

We should be wary of taking this suggestion at face value; indeed, as we shall see, it may be a challenge to his readers (on more than one level). But on first reading, at least, it enhances the impression of a supportive and even collaborative relationship between Frontinus and his readers.

He reminds us of his careful selection and organisation of material in the prefaces to books 2, 3 and 4. Moreover, not only has he divided his material into specifically themed books, he has also arranged the exempla in each book under different categories and supplied a list of sub-headings at the start of each, which appear to support his claim that he has worked hard to set out whatever illustrations are required in any given situation ‘as if in response to questions’ (Strat 1 Pref. 2: *nostra sedulitas impendet operam, ut, quemadmodum res poscet, ipsum quod exigitur quasi ad interrogatum exhibeat…*). These headings may be quite an innovation within the genre, and they reinforce the impression that his treatise will be easy to use and learn from. And, while most of the headings employ impersonal gerunds (*de*...
occultandis consiliis – on concealing one’s plans; de explorandis consiliis hostium – on discovering the enemy’s plans, and so on), Frontinus slips a first-person plural verb into one heading in each of the first three books:

Strat 1, Heading 7:
Quemadmodum ea, quibus deficiemur, videantur non deesse aut usus eorum expleatur.
How to conceal the absence of the things we lack, or to supply substitutes for them.

Strat 2, Heading 12:
Quae facienda sint pro castris, si satis fiduciae in praesentibus copiis non habemus.
What must be done in camps where we do not have confidence in the present forces.

Strat 3, Heading 9:
De irruptione ex diversa parte, quam exspectabimur.
On attacks from a different place from where we were expecting.

The effect is to suggest that Frontinus is on the same level, or in the same position, as his readers. Despite the authoritative start to his text, in other words, Frontinus does not go on to style himself as a great military authority: his syntax in the books’ contents pages fleetingly but conspicuously joins him up with his (imagined) readers in the role of would-be/trainee generals who are looking for guidance on what to do in tricky situations.

And those very few moments, where he discusses his organisation of material or intrudes as a potential reader and learner, are – almost – the only times when Frontinus puts himself forward: for the vast majority of the treatise, he absents himself entirely. Though he remains the behind-the-scenes planner of it all (not unlike a great military strategist), once the prefaces and contents pages are complete, he lets the actions of his ‘army’ of generals take over and speak for themselves. As it turns out, however, his authorial absence is not quite so straightforward – nor indeed so supportive of his readers – as it may first appear; in fact, it turns out to be a rather destabilising device, which teaches us just how challenging generalship can be.

An inevitable hazard (or deliberate technique) of many compilatory texts is that the process of excerpting anecdotes and organising them into a new collection of material necessarily strips them (partially, at least – we mustn’t overlook the role of memory in reading) of their original historical and/or literary contexts. In other words, authors of such texts remove (some of) the co-ordinates which readers have used to interpret these episodes in the past; but they replace them with new interpretative prompts, by weaving new relations between formerly unconnected stories and allowing them to join forces to tell different tales. Now, when Valerius Maximus does this, he weighs in on a regular basis to express his own opinions; and though they may divides his exempla into themed sections, but does not supply a list at the start of each book. Pliny the Elder’s list of contents at the start of the Natural History is on quite a different scale, of course, and Pliny claims that it has a slightly different purpose from that later envisaged by Frontinus in the Strategemata: to help its dedicatee avoid having to read the whole work (NH, Pref. 33). 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).
not be as straightforward as they perhaps seem (Rebecca Langlands, for example, has argued that Valerius’ strident moralising may be provocative, and intended to prompt reflection on moral complexities and contradictions, rather simply promoting clear-cut ideas15), they nudge readers towards particular interpretations and subtexts – even if only to be discounted or revised. Frontinus, by contrast, almost never comments on the stories that he narrates; and, for all his emphasis on the careful organisation of his material, once he has separated his exempla into their specific military categories (before battle, during a siege and so on), he piles them up in comparative chaos, which leaves readers struggling to find coherent messages or meanings.

For example, if we compare his arrangement of individual chapters with that of Valerius Maximus, we notice that Frontinus avoids national divisions: he does not narrate Roman anecdotes separately from non-Roman ones, but mixes Romans, Carthaginians, Egyptians, Greeks and so on all together. Thus a reader looking for some kind of pro-Roman subtext will be disappointed; indeed, we see many examples of Romans being outwitted by cunning foreign generals. The exempla also jump about chronologically, so we do not get any clear narrative of decline or progress – or any association of particular stratagems with particular periods of history (there is no weighting of success stories from the early Roman Republic, for example; nor, indeed, from any part of the imperial period – a point we will return to).16 While Valerius Maximus constantly talks ethics, Frontinus refuses to associate successful manoeuvres with particular moral values. And he does not single out any particular models of leadership for special prominence; indeed, the hero of one stratagem may find themselves overthrown a few chapters or even a couple of examples later. In other words, it is hard to find any cultural, political or ideological sub-texts in all of this material: in the process of imposing strict military order on his exempla, Frontinus has robbed us of many of our familiar – and reassuring – interpretative strategies; and, as I have noted, he does not replace them with any guiding commentary of his own.

If we accept Frontinus’ claims about the Strategemata and view it merely as a handy repository of successful stratagems that we might deploy should we find ourselves on the field of battle, we may not be too troubled by the absence of such subtexts. But few ancient ‘technical’ treatises are as simple either as their prefaces or our assumptions often suggest, and there is much in this text that indicates that Frontinus’ real readers would have been the leisured elite – men with varying levels of interest in generalship, who may indeed pick up one or two interesting tips but who would also have approached the treatise much as they might Valerius Maximus’ work or, indeed, Livy’s history of Rome.17 Besides, Frontinus authorial absence and the disorganisation of his exempla within their own sections still have the power to baffle, or at least daunt, even the purely military reader. For one thing that the Strategemata’s

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16 As Turner [n. 13]: 436 notes, Polyainos groups his exempla according to chronology and ethnicity.

17 Frontinus’ claim that you can ‘question’ his text does not bear up to close scrutiny; despite the existence of contents pages, it was no easy matter to turn to particular sections. This was a text that readers were much more likely to read through.
The exempla collectively teach us is how chaotic battle itself is: in jumping us backwards and forwards in time, across geographical boundaries, between different generals, and from one strategic approach to another (and sometimes back again) – and in failing to let us identify particular patterns or links between certain types of stratagem and consistent outcomes or models of generalship – Frontinus’ text plays out the constantly shifting, hard-to-prepare-for, unpredictable nature of war.

Moreover, there is one thing that links many of the generals we see storming successfully through the text, and that is sollertia (cunning) – or consilium (wisdom), prudentia (sagacity), providentia (foresight), and other variations on the same theme. One could be forgiven for thinking that in furnishing readers with examples of other people’s cunning, Frontinus’ text aims to instil that quality in us. But he is careful not to promise this: rather, he argues that his exempla will ‘nourish’ readers’ ability to ‘think up’, ‘generate’ and ‘invent’ similar deeds:

...unde illis excogitandi generandique similia facultas nutriatur; praeterea continget, ne de eventu trepidet inventionis suae, qui probatis eam experimentis comparabit. (Strat. 1 Pref. 1) ... which will serve to foster their own power of conceiving and executing like deeds. There will result the added advantage that a general will not fear the issue of his own stratagem, if he compares it with experiments already successfully made.

The anti-climax of similia after excogitandi generandique underlines the paradox here. For sollertia ducum facta, by definition, do not come from books: unlike a techne or an ars or a set of military precepts, sollertia is an innate quality that cannot be taught. What Frontinus’ treatise offers us, then, is not cunning but the opportunity to ‘copy’ other men’s cunning; and at no point in the treatise do we see any generals doing any such thing. From the very start, in other words, there is a gap between the models of generalship that are held up to us to emulate and the kind of general that the text promises to turn its readers into.

In this light, the seemingly endless succession of success stories that makes up the Strategemata might start to feel like a slightly challenging barrage. Frontinus’ habit of beginning almost every exemplum with the name of the triumphant general reinforces the sense that we are watching a parade of victors. And as we do we are presented with example after example of the kind of generalship that is – in part thanks to our reading of the Strategemata – so tantalisingly out of our reach: for who could ever claim originality in battle after trawling through such a collection of stratagems! Frontinus’ suggestion (at Strat. 1. Pref. 3.2) that it will be ‘easy’ for readers to ‘to pile up’ additional stratagems should they find any gaps in the text is thus challenging on more than one level: not only does the volume of anecdotes that he has brought together make it very unlikely that we will find anything lacking, but we are also confronted with the possibility that, whatever ‘like deeds’ we may go on to perform after reading this text, we ourselves are unlikely to merit inclusion in it.

In that respect, Frontinus has already got the better of us. I mentioned above that Frontinus largely absents himself from the main body of the text, once the prefaces and contents pages are out of the way; but there is one particularly notable exception, where he himself pops up in an exemplum:

Auspiciis Imperatoris Caesaris Domitiani Augusti Germanici eo bello, quod Iulius Civilis in Gallia moverat, Lingonum opulentissima civitas,

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18 Frontinus flags these as the defining qualities of his generals in the preface to book 1.
In the war waged under the auspices of the Emperor Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus and begun by Julius Civilis in Gaul, the very wealthy city of the Lingones, which had revolted to Civilis, feared that it would be plundered by the approaching army of Caesar. But when, contrary to expectation, the inhabitants remained unharmed and lost none of their property, they returned to their loyalty, and handed over to me seventy thousand armed men.

As we saw, in his contents pages Frontinus aligns himself briefly with his readers as someone who might be in need of some strategic inspiration. This passage, by contrast, reminds us that he is already an experienced general; he has not only written about military matters, he has seen active service – and enjoyed some success. There is much more to it that I will unpick towards the end of this article (in particular, regarding Frontinus’ engagement with Domitian). For now, I simply want to note that Frontinus’ appearance in one of his exempla establishes a significant different between himself and his readers, which potentially/partially undermines the nourishing, supportive relationship that he has been constructing with them. He does not push himself forward; indeed, his self-promotion in the Strategemata is negligible compared to what we will see in his De Aquis. But this anecdote does set him apart from most of his contemporaries, albeit in a somewhat self-deprecating way.

**Frontinus’ Authorial Persona in the De Aquis**

As mentioned above, the De Aquis was written not under Domitian but during Nerva’s brief reign (and published at the start of Trajan’s). And, as Frontinus explains in the preface, it was inspired not by an existing literary project but by an event in his own life. For when Nerva made him curator aquarum in 97, he decided that he had to research his new field thoroughly and so prepared a kind of self-instruction manual:

Quapropter ea quae ad universam rem pertinentia contrahere potui, more iam per multa mihi officia servato in ordinem et velut corpus diducta in hunc commentarium contuli, quem pro formula administrationis respicere possem. In aliis autem libris, quos post experimenta et usum composui, succedentium res acta est; huius commentarii pertinebit fortassis et ad successorem utilitas, sed cum inter initia administrationis meae scriptus sit, in primis ad meam institutionem regulamque proficiet. (De Ag. 2.2-3)

... Therefore I have gathered into this booklet (into one systematised body of material, if you like) everything I could find that seemed relevant to the whole topic (as I have regularly done in previous appointments), so that I might consult it as a kind of administrative handbook. My earlier books, which I have written in the light of my own efforts and experience, have been composed for the benefit of my successors; it may be that this treatise too will be useful to my successor, but (written as it is at the start of my administration) it will particularly contribute to my instruction and guidance.\(^{19}\)

\(^{19}\) All translations of the De Aquis are my own.
Here, then, we see an immediate contrast with the *Strategemata*: while his earlier work set out to aid its readers, and kept its author very much in the background, it is clear from the start that the *De Aquis* is going to centre around Frontinus. Indeed, as we delve deeper, we discover that this text is not so much for Frontinus as about him: it is an exercise in self-promotion rather than simple self-instruction, and casts its author as the hero of the work not just as the intended (or pretend) audience. For though it does proceed to do what Frontinus promises it will, and sets out in mind-blowing detail all the ins and outs of Rome’s aqueduct network, from its early beginnings to its present-day administration, it also has agenda that go well beyond the collection of technical and administrative data. Precisely what they are remains a matter of debate, but many now agree that the *De Aquis* is a highly politicised work, which offers important insights into some of the rhetoric and ideals which circulated during Nerva’s reign (and also at the beginning of Trajan’s) and particularly into senator-emperor relations in this period.

From its opening sentence, the text marks itself out as clearly belonging to, and inspired by, Nerva’s rule, for Frontinus attributes his decision to research his new job thoroughly not only to his own conscientious character (the self-promotion is at work right away) but also to the model and standards set by his emperor:

> Cum omnis res ab imperatore delegata intentionem exigat curam, et me seu naturalis solicitududo seu fides sedula non ad diligentiam modo verum ad amorem quoque commissae rei instigent sitque nunc mihi ab Nerva Augusto, nescio diligenteri an amantiore rei publicae imperatore, aquarum iniunctum officium ad usum, tum ad salubritatem atque etiam securitatem urbis pertinens, administratum per principes semper civitatis nostrae viros, primum ac potissimum existimo, sicut in ceteris negotiis institueram, nosse quod suscepi. (*De Aq.* 1)

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Since every task delegated by the emperor demands particularly careful attention, and since either my inborn conscientiousness or my tireless loyalty compels me not only to diligence but also to devotion to the task that has been entrusted to me, and since the management of the aqueducts has been charged to me by Nerva Augustus (I cannot decide whether the emperor’s diligence or devotion to the state is the stronger) – an office which is bound up with the health and even the security of the city, and one which has always been held by the foremost men of our state – I believe that the first and most important thing I should do (a practice I have already established in other jobs) is to find out about what I have undertaken.

Indeed, the diligence which Frontinus then goes on to show may endorse a new imperial policy (that of reappointing senators to positions which had lately been filled by friends of the emperor or freedmen), for it underlines how very seriously Frontinus took his new responsibilities, and thus how right Nerva was to trust him (and the rest of his class). Moreover, though much of what follows does not mention Nerva specifically, the whole treatise ends up being (in part) a tribute to the dramatic change which he (with the help of Frontinus) has wrought in Rome.

Much of the De Aquis focuses on the past: as we read through the history of the aqueducts’ construction (De Aq. 4-16), the routes taken by all of Rome’s water channels (De Aq. 17-23), a minutely detailed discussion of measurement techniques and gauges (De Aq. 24-63), and two sets of figures detailing the supposed capacity (De Aq. 64-73) and distribution (De Aq. 77-86) of each aqueduct, we are immersed in pre-Nervan history. But there is a particular point to this, for it enables Frontinus to sketch a picture of prior chaos, incompetence and even corruption: indeed, we learn over the course of the treatise that virtually all the records Frontinus has inherited are wrong, largely because people have been illegally siphoning off water for private profit. But we also learn that Frontinus and his emperor have joined forces to tackle the problem. Indeed, as early as De Aq. 9, we see the emperor and his curator plugging quietly away to combat cheating aqueduct officials and ensure that the water reaches those it was meant for. The order which Frontinus systematically imposes

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23 For Grimal [n. 22] in fact, the propaganda levels are so high as to put the De Aquis on a par with Pliny the Younger’s *Panegyricus*, and to lead him to conclude (xv-xvi) that ‘Frontin n’est que le porte-paroles du Prince’.


25 *De Aq.* 9.4-7; significantly, this picture of Frontinus and the emperor together combating malpractice is Frontinus’ first appearance in the text after the preface. See also, e.g., *De Aq.* 64, where Frontinus recapitulates some of the themes of his preface.
on all of his data, meanwhile, supports the impression that there is a new level of order (and accountability) in the actual running of the water supply system. And not just order, but also abundance: for Frontinus closes his summary of the now out-of-date distribution figures with a celebration of the difference which Nerva’s intervention has made:

Haec copia aquarum ad Nervam imperatorem usque computata ad hunc modum disceperatur. Nunc providentia diligentissimi principis quicquid aut fraudibus aquariorum intercipiebatur aut inertia pervertebatur, quasi nova inventione fontium accrevit. Ac prope duplicata ubertas est… (De Aq. 87.1-3)

This volume of water, as calculated up to the time of Nerva’s reign, was distributed in this fashion. But now, thanks to the forethought of our most industrious emperor, all that used to be stolen by cheating water-men or lost through negligence has mounted up as if a whole new source had been discovered. Indeed, the flow of water has been almost doubled...

The result of this increase in the water supply, Frontinus claims, is that the whole city is healthier, its appearance cleaner, and the air purer (De Aq. 88); and Nerva (and Trajan) have also taken trouble to ensure that the very water itself is less muddy and polluted. Thus they (and Frontinus) are represented as cleaning up Rome both literally and metaphorically.

The remainder of the text (De Aq. 94-130) deals with the management and maintenance of the aqueduct network, focusing particularly on the duties and powers of the curator aquarum; but here too, we have references to the restorative impact of the new emperor. In particular, we learn at De Aq. 118 that Nerva has redirected income from water rentals away from the emperor’s private coffers (which is where it had ended up under Domitian) and back into public funds; his iustitia is thus seen combating Domitianic corruption head-on. And the text’s closing chapter further and reminds us that he was inspired to his efforts by the providentia optimi diligentissimique Nervae principis.

26 On this see esp. Cuomo [n. 24]: 193-4, who notes in particular his systematic descriptions of each aqueduct (in fact, Frontinus walks us through the aqueduct network four times – De Aq. 4-16, 18-22, 65-73, 78-86 – giving different statistics on each occasion, but always in an highly ordered and formulaic way), his emphasis on measurement and mathematics (which provides him with ‘a rhetoric of objectivity and accuracy’) and his imposition of a standard type of pipe (which will help him to guarantee future precision and control over the distribution of Rome’s water).

27 See De Aq. 89-93, where Frontinus details various improvements which resulted in cleaner water coming into the city. Nerva is responsible for much of this, but Trajan is mentioned at 93.4, probably because he took over the project after Nerva’s death (Rodgers 2004, 257). It is perhaps not insignificant that the aqueduct which these improvements revolve around (the New Anio) was begun by Caligula, in a manner befitting the general tenour of his reign (at De Aq. 13.1, Frontinus comments that Caligula commissioned two new aqueducts, because the seven in existence did not seem sufficient for ‘the public uses and private extravagances’ of the day), and completed by Claudius ‘with great show’ (13.2); Frontinus, Nerva and Trajan are thus resolving a problem which originated with two of Rome’s more autocratic emperors.

28 De Aq. 118.3: ‘This income, which amounted to nearly 250000 sesterces, had become diverted and lost, and in recent years had been transferred into Domitian’s private coffers; but the divine Nerva’s sense of justice restored it to the people, and
underlines the ethos of the new age, reminding us once more that order is now being imposed on the previously chaotic system, and that the irregularities and malpractice of the past will no longer be tolerated (though they are being dealt with as humanely as possible):

Utilissimae legis contemptores non negaverim dignos poena quae intenditur, sed neglegentia longi temporis deceptos leniter revocari opportuit. Itaque sedulo laboravimus ut quantum in nobis fuit, etiam ignorarentur qui erraverant. Eis vero qui admoniti ad indulgentiam imperatoris decucurrerunt, possumus videri causa impetrae beneficier fuisses. In reliquum vero opto ne executio legis necessaria sit, cum officii fidem etiam per offensas tueri praestiterit. (De Aq. 130)

…I agree that those who flout such a useful law deserve the punishment which is set, but those who have been led astray by such long-standing neglect ought to be corrected gently. And so I have worked hard, as hard as I could, to make sure that those who have done wrong remain anonymous. As for those who applied to the emperor for pardon, and got away with a warning, they may thank me for this imperial favour. For the future, I sincerely hope that the law will not have to be brought into play, since I will be obliged to protect the integrity of my office even if it means giving offence.

Here Frontinus is conciliatory and forceful in equal measure, emphasising his and the emperor’s generosity in overlooking past transgressions while also proclaiming strict adherence to the new policy for the future. Thus from beginning to end the De Aquis engages with ideals that were central to the promotion of the new principate, rejecting Domitianic corruption and injustice, and heralding a new era of health, happiness, order and accountability, with hints too of a return to Augustan-style government.

Indeed, it plays a significant role in the creation and propagation of that rhetoric; it is

my painstaking efforts subjected it to a fixed rule, so that it might be made clear which places this revenue came from.’ Note that Frontinus muscles in on the action here, too; it is not just Nerva who is putting an end to Domitianic problems. On this passage, see M. Griffin, ‘The Flavians’, in A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (edd.), The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 11 (2000), 1-83, at 74; Turner [n. 13]: 438-9; Gibson [n. 22]: 111.

39 On this chapter, see esp. Peachin [n. 20], who underlines (among other things) the importance the De Aquis seems to place on (re-)establishing ‘proper’ relations between the emperor and the elite (138, 140); cf Baldwin, B. (1994) ‘Notes on the de aquis of Frontinus’, in C. Deroux (ed.) Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History, Vol 7: 484-506, at 489, who identifies a ‘severe, almost sinister tone’ and notes that this ending ‘betrays the fact that abuses have not yet been curbed by the new administration…’.

30 Coins from Nerva’s reign reveal some of the political slogans he put out: pax, iustitia, salus publica, Fortuna, libertas publica, aequitas (Grainger [n. 6]: 47; see also Waters, K.H. (1969) ‘ Traianus Domitiani Continuato’, AJPh 90: 385-405, at 394). Peachin [n. 20]: 71-5 notes that De Aq. 94-102 evoke the good old days of Republican Rome; but Frontinus also holds up Agrippa (and therefore the Augustan age) as an important model in the management of Rome’s aqueducts, suggesting that his tenure of the post will see a return to the standards set by Rome’s first ever curator aquarum (see, e.g., De Aq. 9.4-9, 98, 99.3, 116.3; Evans [n. 20]: 59-61; DeLaine [n. 21]: 135; Peachin op. cit.: 75-7; Rodgers [n. 5]: 17.
taking an active part in the same process of ‘political periodisation’ asTacitus, Martial and Pliny the Younger, helping to establish the clear dividing-line between
Domitianic and post-Domitianic that was so crucial to the identity and legitimisation
of the reigns that followed.

However, it also promotes its author in interesting ways, and this must nuance
our understanding of its propagandistic features.\textsuperscript{31} For example, while it shows due
deerence to Nerva, the text also presents Frontinus as his colleague and on occasions
almost as his equal. We can see this happening from the start, for the matching
language of his opening sentence shows not merely how in tune with his emperor (and
imperial policy) the new \textit{curator aquarum} is but also how similar in character the two
men are: Frontinus’ diligence and devotion (\textit{… et me seu naturalis sollicitudo seu
fides sedula non ad diligentiam modo verum ad amorem quoque commissae rei
instigent…}) are conspicuously paralleled by Nerva’s just a few words later (\textit{…ab
Nerva Augusto, nescio diligentiore an amantiore rei publicae imperatore…}).\textsuperscript{32}

Straightaway, then, Frontinus and Nerva are made to seem (in one respect at least)
indistinguishable from each other; the emperor’s representative is a spitting image of
the emperor himself (or vice versa). But that is not all. For Frontinus goes on in the
same sentence to remind his readers just how significant his new post is: not only is it
bound up with the very health and safety of the city (\textit{…tum ad salubritatem atque
etiam securitatem urbis pertinens}), it has always been held (he stresses) by Rome’s
leading men: \textit{administratum per principes semper civitatis nostrae viros}.\textsuperscript{33} This
breaks down the distance between himself and his emperor further, for it suggests that
the roles (not just the characters) of \textit{curator aquarum} and \textit{princeps} resemble each
other closely.\textsuperscript{34} With his opening paragraph, in other words, Frontinus seizes on
the idea that he now enjoys a status not so very far below that of the emperor himself; and
the impression that his powers and consequence are somehow on a par with Nerva’s
continues throughout the text.

In that final chapter, for instance, Frontinus figures not merely as an
intermediary between the emperor and his subjects, helping to implement the new
imperial policy, but also as the active (real?) authority behind the changes which he is
announcing; it is Frontinus, after all, who may take the credit for the way past
misdemeanours have been handled/overlooked (he spells this out, \textit{De Aq. 130.3}), and
it will be Frontinus who descends with the full majesty of the law behind him on any

\textsuperscript{31} Evans [n. 20]: 57-64 and DeLaine [n. 21] both stress Frontinus’ self-promotion.
\textsuperscript{32} On this, see DeLaine [n. 21]: 129-30, though she points out that the comparatives
\textit{(diligentiore, amantiore)} place Nerva slightly above Frontinus. Even so, the sentence
works so that Frontinus’ diligence and devotion come first, and are then matched by
his emperor, almost as if Nerva is taking his lead from Frontinus. Thus the syntax,
which alternates between the two men, shows them bound up in a mutually
informative relationship.
\textsuperscript{33} Rodgers [n. 5]: 125 does not see any tension in Frontinus’ use of the term \textit{princeps}
here; but DeLaine [n. 21] is more open to the possibility, noting (136) that throughout
the text as a whole Frontinus seems to cast himself in the role of \textit{princeps senatus},
‘under an emperor who was no longer \textit{dominus} but \textit{princeps}’.
\textsuperscript{34} Frontinus’ suggestion that he is almost as important as the emperor contrasts
strongly with much Domitianic literature, which tends to emphasise distance between
emperor and author/subject; but it is more in line with, e.g., Pliny’s self-presentation
in \textit{Epistles} \textit{X} as an emperor-in-miniature.
miscreants in future (De Aq. 130.4).\footnote{Note also De Aq. 101.4, where Frontinus’ refusal of the lictors which the senate had granted to Rome’s curatores is no proof of modesty but an assertion of supreme confidence, both in himself and in the authority he derives direct from the emperor (…fides nostra et auctoritas a principe data pro lictoribus erit); the balance suggested here between his inner strength and the imperial authority neatly parallels Frontinus’ balanced combination of innate characteristics (seu naturalis sollicitudo seu fides sedula) and princely prompting at De Aq 1.} His praise of Nerva at De Aq. 86-90 is thus sandwiched by long sections of text which establish not only how indispensable he is to the emperor (in fact, as I noted above, he makes subtle connections between himself and Agrippa, Augustus’ right-hand man) but also how similar he is in terms of approach and importance.\footnote{DeLaine [n. 21]: 129 notes how close Frontinus comes to sounding/looking like the emperor, and also (133) the relatively small role the Nerva ultimately plays in the treatise. And as she puts it (132): ‘What wonder, in a period in which a senator has been elected emperor and the senate seemed to be regaining its lost powers, that Frontinus might just portray himself as the emperor’s equal?’ See also Rodgers [n. 5]: 14-17 on the close ‘partnership’ Frontinus establishes between himself and his emperor; and S. Hoffer (1999), The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger, Atlanta: 6 on the more general point that role-exchange between emperors and high-ranking senators was an important feature of a ‘Good’ emperor’s self-presentation.}

In fact the level of authority he lays claim to threatens at times to surpass that of Rome’s sovereign. As we saw, he suggests in the preface that his De Aquis was born out of a lack of knowledge, but by its end the orderly drip drip drip of facts and figures has proven Frontinus the undisputed master of all aqueduct-related lore. And, as he points out early on, knowledge is power, for it enables a man to carry out his duties without having to rely on subordinates:

…primum ac potissimum existimo, sicut in ceteris negotiis institueram, nosse quod suscepi.
Neque enim ullam omnis actus certius fundamentum crediderim, aut aliter quae facienda quaeque vitanda sint posse decerni, alidvve tam indecorum tolerabili viro, quam delegatum officium ex adiutorum agere praecipitis, quod fieri necesse est, quotiens imperitia praepositi ad illorum decurrit usum; quorum eti necessariae partes sunt ad ministerium, tamen ut manus quaedam et instrumentum agentis. (De Aq. 1-2.1)

…I believe that the first and most important thing I should do (a practice I have already established in other jobs) is to find out about what I have undertaken.

For I believe that there is no more reliable foundation for any undertaking, nor any other way of deciding what must be done and what must be avoided, nor is there anything so dishonourable for an able man than to carry out duties delegated to him on the basis of instructions from his assistants; but this necessarily happens whenever his own lack of skill leads him to fall back on their experience. These subordinates do indeed provide necessary aid; but they are like the hands and tools of the man in charge.\footnote{Frontinus makes a similar point at De Aq. 119.3.}
Here we see Frontinus taking an unusually professional approach to public office, and making expertise a crucial factor in that professionalism. And though this further proof of his outstanding diligence clearly reflects well on the emperor who appointed him, it also has more challenging implications; not so much because Nerva himself (inevitably) relies on subordinates (after all, one could hardly expect an emperor to do otherwise), but because of the exclusive nature of the power which Frontinus’ specialist knowledge enables him to accrue. For as it turns out, he does not share quite so much with his princeps – or his readers, for that matter – as first appears to be the case. He may give Nerva some of the credit, but the volume and deployment of technical minutiae in the treatise confirm that it was Frontinus and Frontinus alone who really unravelled the mess that the aqueduct network was in and thus restored it – and Rome – to its former glory.

His syntax stresses this: although he employs plenty of first person plurals (which sometimes gesture vaguely towards others who may have helped him), for the most part they are authorial plurals, referring just to Frontinus, and they are complemented by a litany of first person singular verbs (in particular, a recurring inveni – ‘I discovered’), which mount up to show the curator aquarum sourcing and supplying new water to Rome’s inhabitants almost single-handedly. In addition, he keeps some of his expert knowledge (and therefore future...

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38 As Cuomo [n. 24]: 190 notes, Frontinus’ ultra diligent approach has led some to identify him as ‘a quintessential Roman public officer… the embodiment of ‘typical’ Roman pragmatism’; but his conscientiousness in fact marked him out as rather unusual (Cuomo op. cit.: 196-7; Peachin [n. 20]: 53-7, 86 and 142).

39 Indeed, though he mentions imperial orders/guidance from time to time (e.g. De Aq. 9.7; 64.1), he sometimes (as Peachin n. 20]: 115-6, n.95 notes) leaves the decision-making process rather murky, not establishing ‘whether he simply received a command to do what he did, or whether his own initial investigations, or suspicions, served to impel the project.’ He may come across, therefore, not merely as the active agent of aqueduct reform but even as the driving force behind it.

40 This is true, for example, of the first person plurals at De Aq. 130 (which are themselves framed by first person singular verbs, negaverim and opto, underlining Frontinus’ agency all the way through); see also, e.g., repeated variations of diximus, posuimus, reprehendimus at De Aq. 65-72, where Frontinus details some of the discrepancies he has discovered between official records and his own measurements. Occasionally, Frontinus talks of aquarii nostri (9.6), civitas nostra (89.3) or principi nostro (93.1), which are genuine plurals; and once or twice he uses phrases like nostra cura (De Aq. 64.1) or nostra sedulitas (118.3) which, at a stretch, could just about include Nerva or even Frontinus’ workforce in their embrace; more often, however, his use of noster/nos is exclusively authorial (e.g. nostrae…sollicitudini [De Aq. 17.3], nostra…mensura [72.3], nobis, fides nostra [101.4]).

41 Frontinus’ repetition of phrases like ad caput inveni/invenierim becomes almost formulaic at De Aq. 64-72; see also, De Aq. 94-6, where invenio/inveni introduce more research; De Aq. 23, where Frontinus uses lots of first person singular verbs to stress his diligence and anticipate the fruits of it; and De Aq. 73-74, where his first person singulars help him to stand out from everyone else in having discovered such discrepancies that will amaze the reader. I noted above the way first person singular verbs frame his closing chapter; Baldwin [n. 25]: 499-50 points out that Frontinus’ use of them at De Aq. 9.7 (his first intrusion into the text after the preface) is also striking (though Rodgers [n. 5] has amended the text here and removed them from his edition).
control of the aqueducts) to himself: as others have noted, the complexity of some of his data seems almost deliberately baffling,42 and he even encourages readers to skip over some of his details at one point (De Aq. 77.5) – though on closer inspection they turn out to be the most significant material in that section.43 Moreover, though he bombards us with a wealth of out-of-date data, he never ends up supplying the corrected distribution figures which are the result of all his researches, and which would presumably be of most relevance to his readers.44 In other words, it remains Frontinus alone who holds the crucial information about how Rome’s aqueduct network should (be) run.

That may not seem terribly significant until one remembers how important Frontinus has claimed the aqueduct network is. For not only is it bound up with the health and very survival of the city,45 it is also presented as a symbol of Roman power and identity. At De Aquis 16, for example, Frontinus famously sums up the history of its construction by exclaiming:

Tot aquarum tam multis necessariis molibus pyramidas videlicet otiosas copmares aut cetera inertia sed fama celebrate opera Graecorum. Look at this huge volume of water and the many indispensable structures which transport it, and compare them, if you like, with the pointless pyramids or other useless though well renowned constructions of the Greeks.

And towards the end of his text he is even more explicit about the aqueducts’ symbolic value, explaining that their maintenance (which he is taking extremely seriously, of course) is especially important because they provide such impressive evidence of the might of the Roman empire (De Aq. 119.1).46 In asserting his expert authority on every aspect of Rome’s water supply system, in other words, Frontinus is stamping his absolute and on-going control over an institution which is all-important in both practical and ideological terms. The diligent public officer of the text’s preface

42 See esp. De Aq. 25-33 and 39-63, and DeLaine [n. 21]: 127-8 and 139 (‘…There seems to be no expectation that all the technical and numerical detail would be understood or absorbed… The lists and statistics serve a rather different end, that of generating wonder and confirming power.’); Peachin [n. 20]: 64 also notes that the technicalities of De Aq. 23-63 serve above all to underline Frontinus’ intimate knowledge, and exclusive control, of the aqueduct network.

43 ‘…I realise that taking all of this in could seem not only a dry but also a bewildering task, so I shall set everything out as briefly as possible… Those who are satisfied with knowing the sum totals (summa) should feel free to skip past the details (leviora).’ Though his choice of adjective suggests that the details will be unimportant here – or at least less important than the totals – the opposite is true, for the section that follows (De Aq. 78-86) breaks down the distribution figures for the network, showing how much water is delivered where. If one were to stop at the summa, in other words, one would simply find out the total capacity of each aqueduct; in this case, it is the minutiae (the seeming ‘trivia’) which really matter. For further discussion of this point, see König [n. 21]: 193-7.

44 He acknowledges this at De Aq. 88.4, and promises to append them when they are ready (DeLaine [n. 21]: 134-5). Whether he did so or not, we cannot say; but for the time being, at least, he withholds them from publication.

45 Rodgers [n. 5]: 23-4 notes the links Frontinus makes between a good water supply and the health of the city.

46 On both passages, see DeLaine [n. 21]: 124-5; also Bruun [n. 22]: 15 and 18.
thus figures, by the end, as a guardian of Rome, who holds the life of its citizens and the dignity of its empire in his hands. While Nerva might also be able to make such a claim, one thing the *De Aquis* underlines is that he now shares that burden with other men: the responsibility – and credit – for the smooth running of Rome do not reside with the emperor alone; what is more (and this is the real innovation), a senator can now say so (if not in so many words).

Frontinus’ self-promotion in the *De Aqueductu*, then, not only elevates his own status, and by association that of the whole senatorial class, but also interrogates the power and position of the emperor himself. He not only sets himself up from the beginning as one of Rome’s ‘leading men’; over the course of the text his conscientious approach helps to re-define the role – and extend the authority – of such *principes*, in accordance with the ethos of the new political age. And that has implications for Rome’s reigning *princeps*.

They need not be subversive, however, or even incompatible with the picture Frontinus paints of himself from beginning to end as one of the emperor’s ‘loyal lieutenants’. Rather, his enterprising engagement with Nerva forms part of a wider exposition and exploration of the (new?) relationship between the emperor and his senators in the post-Domitianic age. Nerva and Trajan both made a show of restoring some dignity and power to Rome’s beleaguered elite in the years immediately following Domitian’s assassination. In reality, little changed, particularly for the senate as a body; but in the *De Aquaeuctu* we see one senator capitalising on his own new position to lay claim to even greater levels of power and consequence, and thereby to recalibrate the distance – or proximity – between Rome’s head of state and the rest of the (ruling?) elite. Written in what was supposed to be a time of great change, the *De Aquaeuctu* champions some official reforms in a way which helps to enshrine them as both successful and permanent. And what emerges, among other things, is a new model of statesman: one who is able to serve his emperor without compromising his own authority or dignity.

**Authorial Voices Compared**

By contrast with the *De Aquis*, Frontinus’ *Strategemata* seems to be a strikingly apolitical work. But, as Andrew Turner has argued, some of its very (or apparent) apolitical-ness may in fact be rather political. Frontinus includes very few *exempla* from the imperial period (a point we will return to), but he does narrate five episodes in which Domitian figures as the successful general (*Strat*. 1.1.8, 1.3.10, 2.3.23, 2.11.7, and – as we saw above – 4.3.14). In two of these he departs from his usually detached narrative style and expresses his (positive) judgement of Domitian’s actions and character: at *Strat* 1.1.8, for example, he not only describes him as ‘such a

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47 Frontinus is, of course, also asserting the importance of his office, not just his person; the post of *curator aquarum* appears to have become something of a sinecure prior to Frontinus’ appointment, and he seems keen to reinstate its authority and significance. On this point, see, e.g., Bruun [n. 22]: 178-9, 186-7, n. 45.
48 Evans (n. 20), 61.
49 On the *De Aquaeuctu* as an expression of Frontinus’ (and perhaps wider) senatorial aspirations, see also DeLaine [n. 21]: 131-3, 136; Cuomo [n. 24]: 195; and Rodgers [n. 5]: 14-18.
50 Turner [n. 13].
great general’ (tanti ducis) but also notes, approvingly, that in overcoming a number of fierce German tribes Domitian ‘acted for the good of the provinces’ (provinciis consuluit); and at Strat. 2.11.7, he refers to Domitian’s acquisition of the title ‘Germanicus’ (…eo bello, quo victis hostibus cognomen Germanici meruit) and presents the emperor as a merciful victor, whose renowned justice won the loyalty of all (atque ita iustitiae fama omnium fidem adstrinxit). Frontinus breaks his habit of refraining from authorial comment, then, in order to praise Domitian. However, as Turner has noted, this is not the hyperbolic praise that Pliny and Martial talk of as characterising Domitian’s principate;\(^{51}\) indeed, it is a lot less flamboyant than Frontinus’ praise of Nerva and Trajan. There is no dedication to Domitian, and much less mention of his military campaigns than might be expected, given Domitian’s interest in figuring as a successful military commander. Frontinus praise of him is muted, in other words.

Nonetheless, as Turner points out, Frontinus’ treatment of Domitian does stand out, not only because it represents an unusual intrusion into the text of his own voice but also because it contrasts with the absence of any other contemporary or near-contemporary exempla.\(^{52}\) In fact, examples from the principate generally are rather thin on the ground: there are a number of anecdotes about Julius Caesar, but no mentions of Augustus, Claudius or Titus, and only a couple of references to Vespasian; and, while Domitian’s father-in-law, the general Corbulo, is the subject of five anecdotes, the general Agricola does not get a look-in.\(^{53}\) Turner suggests that Frontinus’ avoidance of contemporary exempla may show ‘his tact in the face of Domitian’s supposed jealousy of the military successes of others’;\(^{54}\) indeed, his ‘[s]ilence about these contemporary figures and even himself… may have been the only way in which a writer like Frontinus could convey the jealously and despotic nature of his princeps to a discerning audience of educated Romans’. Frontinus’ authorial absence (or very low-key presence) in the Strategemata, in other words, may – like his silence about other contemporary generals – not simply reflect but also prompt reflection on the climate in which writers (and generals) were operating under Domitian.

Frontinus’ engagement with Nerva and Trajan in the De Aquis and with Domitian in the Strategemata contrast strongly with each other, then: he weaves himself into a close partnership with the former, but maintains a discrete distance from the latter – perhaps partly because that reflected the true nature of his interactions with them, but perhaps also because it was the politically astute thing to do. His authorial persona is very different in both texts too – confident and assertive in one, restrained and retiring in the other. But there are interesting overlaps as well, which emerge particularly in that anecdote at Strategemata 4.3.14, where both Frontinus and Domitian make an appearance. By placing Domitian at the start of the exemplum, Frontinus appears to give him the credit for the success of the stratagem; but as Turner points out, his readers will know that the young Domitian was only the figurehead, not the real commander of the campaign.\(^{55}\) The phrase ‘under the auspices of…’ thus embraces Domitian as the campaign leader in such a way as to make him (partially?) responsible for the ‘fear’ that the Lingones felt on the approach of

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\(^{52}\) Op. cit.: 431.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Turner [n. 13]: 432.

‘Caesar’s army’;\(^{56}\) but it also makes room for Frontinus to step in and secure the actual surrender, with the final word *mihi* emphasising his decisive role. Turner notes that this delicate dance with Domitian is not so very different from the way in which Frontinus narrates his and Nerva’s restoration of an old water supply at Tusculum at *De Aquis* 9.7;\(^ {57}\) but I would go further and suggest that *Strategemata* 4.3.14 operates in a similar way to the whole of the *De Aquis*, which – after all – begins with Frontinus operating under the auspices of the emperor Nerva and ends with him in the driving seat (the subject of a series of verbs), asserting the authority of his office and laying down the law.

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\(^{56}\) Domitian was not emperor at the time of this anecdote.

\(^{57}\) Turner [n. 13]: 444.