This paper was delivered at the Edinburgh Celtic Classics Conference, 2014, as part of a panel entitled ‘After 69CE: Writing about Civil War in Flavian Rome’. As well as exploring the ways in which Frontinus’ Strategemata engages with the theme of civil war, it makes a broader argument: namely, that it is high time that this Flavian text was brought into regular and sustained dialogue with some of the better known works from the period.¹

There are obvious – though unsound – reasons why the Strategemata has been generally overlooked in Flavian studies to date. It is mostly because it has long (and wrongly) been categorised as a so-called ‘technical’ treatise (and so not ‘proper’ literature somehow). Frontinus himself tells us in the preface to Book 1 that he wrote it as a supplement to an earlier ‘science of warfare’, and that it is a collection of ‘the clever deeds’ of former generals designed to support future commanders by providing them with strategic examples that may inspire or reassure them. He has even organised the exempla according to the different stages of battle, he claims, so that readers may look up particular topics (like how to conceal one’s plans, or how to determine the time for battle, or how to conceal a lack of supplies when under siege). It comes across (at first glance, at least) as a practical, instructive work, in other words.

In fact, despite these prefatory claims, it is not simply instructive on a practical level.² It was designed in part at least to entertain its readers, by parading before them hundreds of famous and less well known incidents from mediterranean military history, in both familiar and unfamiliar ways. It was also designed to prompt reflection on that history and on themes that go far beyond military tactics. In fact it touches on some hugely important contemporary topics, including Roman identity, Roman imperium, military and political leadership, and Domitian himself. It does not simply configure itself as a vocational text, in other words; and we need to recognise that, and begin to read it in relation to the wide range of texts and literary traditions (historiography, the exempla tradition, philosophy and even epic) with which it explicitly engages.

¹ At the moment the Strategemata tends to languish in the footnotes of studies of Flavian literature and culture (Boyle and Dominik’s Flavian Rome is a case in point), marginalised from view, while other texts by authors who may well have shared sources or even drawn on it dominate the landscape. It is extraordinary, for instance, that studies of Josephus or Silius Italicus almost never engage with the Strategemata.

² Of course, many of Rome’s elite readers would have been faced with the prospect of military service themselves, and might have welcomed the opportunity the text provides to reflect on different strategic models with that practical end in view. But we know that they would also have read texts like the Strategemata (and Onasander’s Strategikos, and Cicero’s De Oratore, and Columella’s De Re Rustica, and Vitruvius’ De Architectura, and so on) in less practically focused, more contemplative, more leisured ways – as they might read a historical or a philosophical (or even a poetic) text.
I want to try and do a little of that in this paper, which will centre around three core themes. First, I will take a quick glance at some of the ways in which the Punic Wars are presented in Frontinus’ *Strategemata*. And I want to suggest that the parallels and differences between the ways in which Frontinus and Silius Italicus present these campaigns are worth investigating further. Secondly, I will home in on some exempla that plunge us specifically into Roman civil war, a phenomenon that the text returns to again and again. Finally, I will consider a couple of Flavian-period exempla, which explore ideas about leadership, autocracy and internal (even inter-familial) strife in wonderfully suggestive ways – and which I hope will prove once and for all that to read the *Strategemata* at face value, as a merely practical, strategic instruction manual, is to miss a wealth of meaning that makes this text a fascinating counterpart to other Flavian literature.

The *Strategemata* presents nearly five hundred exempla over the course of four books. I cannot cover even a fraction of them here, so to offer a flavour of the dynamics of the text I will centre the bulk of my discussion around one representative section of it: the third chapter of Book 2, ‘On the drawing up of troops for battle’.

**PUNIC WARS IN FRONTINUS’ *STRATEGEMATA***

The first point that I want to make about this section is that it contains lots of Punic exempla; in fact, they frame the chapter, and constitute one third of it (eight of the twenty-four anecdotes are from Punic wars). That is quite typical of the *Strategemata* as a whole. Punic exempla dominate the text; Carthaginian generals outnumber every other nation except the Romans; and Hannibal crops up more frequently than any other general. Silius’ *Punica* was not the only Flavian text to be drawn to Carthaginian conflicts, in other words.

As various studies of Silius note, he distorts chronology and emphasis in his retelling of Rome’s conflict with Carthage⁵ – but not on the same scale as Frontinus. For in the *Strategemata*, the Carthaginian narratives that we are familiar with are dismantled and scattered all over the place (because the text rearranges all of its material according to military time – what should happen when in a battle – not according to historical chronology…). We jump backwards and forwards from the 2nd Punic war, to the 1st, and sometimes to the 3rd; and to encounters around and about them.⁶ In fact, episodes

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³ Of course, Andrew Gallia (2012) has already drawn attention to a number of overlaps (and contrasts) between Frontinus and Silius; but, while I agree with much of what he says, my emphasis here is very different, and I hope it will significantly expand on the excellent work he has already done in encouraging people to read these texts alongside each other.

⁴ Valerius Maximus (3.3.2) claims to avoid the theme of civil war as much as possible, as a topic too upsetting for readers to contemplate. Frontinus, by contrast, peppers the *Strategemata* with exempla from all sorts of civil conflicts, often in conspicuous places (at the start of chapters, for instance).


⁶ We even get transported to the odd fourth-century skirmish between Carthage and Syracuse. The very start of the treatise is a case in point, for the first exemplum takes us to a campaign led by Cato the Elder in Hispania, in the aftermath of the 2nd Punic
from different Punic wars are both scattered AND conflated throughout the text – flung far and wide, but also made to blend into each other, in ways that unpick some of the ideological narratives readers are used to telling about them. So the *Strategemata* makes us look at these Punic conflicts afresh. And in coming back again and again to them, in no particular order, but with great regularity, the *Strategemata* also makes Rome’s conflicts with Carthage feel enduring, unending, almost – a constant in Mediterranean history, something that is never done, never finally dealt with.

It is significant, too, that Roman stratagems and triumphs are repeatedly matched by Carthaginian ones, and vice versa, in a seemingly endless to-and-fro (that presents a striking contrast with what we find in Valerius Maximus, for instance, where Roman superiority is emphasised). We begin with a couple of Roman successes at 2.3.1 and 4, for example; but they are followed by Carthaginian triumphs – not least at Cannae at 2.3.7, and then on different fronts at 2.3.9 and 10. And in these *exempla*, Roman and Carthaginian generals behave in very similar ways to each other, adopting variations of each others tactics: strategically, they are almost indistinguishable, it is just that sometimes one has the upper hand and sometimes the other. The on-going to-and-fro between these two nations (which the *Strategemata*’s a-chronological organisation is able to emphasise so powerfully), hammers home the repetitive, unpredictable nature of these Punic conflicts (and of many other military conflicts more generally). Victories are invariably followed by defeats, and successful strategists are always only one episode away from being outmanoeuvred themselves in turn.

It is also the case that Frontinus weaves lots of different nations into the picture that builds up of Punic conflicts. Scholars have noted Silius’ emphasis on the African-ness of the Carthaginians, and his use of different African toponymns and ethnonyms and their possible reference to Flavian connections with north Africa, among other things. We get a certain amount of that in Frontinus too; but also a repeated reference to the various other nationalities who are drawn into and fade out of these Punic campaigns. Take 2.3.1, for instance, where the Roman commander (Gnaeus Scipio) in is Spain, contending not only with *Afri* but also *Hispani*. At 2.3.10, the Carthaginian forces are led by a Spartan mercenary (at elsewhere in the text). And at 2.3.16, Hannibal masses Italians, Gauls, Ligurians, Balearians, Moors and Macedonians, among his Carthaginian troops, against the Romans.

In view of the fact that in many surrounding *exempla* these different nationalities fight on a host of different fronts against a variety of other enemies, this mix of

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War, and the second then transports us to a much earlier 4th-century Greco-Punic war, between Carthage and Syracuse. Neither are episodes from THE Punic wars (those between Rome and Carthage) that we are most familiar with, but together they do gesture towards them (preparing us for the fact that they will crop up themselves in due course). And they hint at the wider repercussions and even the pre-history of those Roman-Punic conflicts, extending our perspective on them and making it impossible to isolate them from the wider sweep of history.

7 See also e.g. *Strategemata* 2.2.11, where the general in question is again the Spartan mercenary Xanthippus, fighting on the side of the Carthaginians, and where Carthaginian troops are variously referred to as *Afri*, *Poeni* and *Numidae*.

8 Spartans against Lucanians and Persians at 2.3.12 and 13, for example.
nationalities in Punic exempla takes on an extra significance (beyond reminding us how many different peoples were sucked into Rome’s wars with Carthage): for it exposes the ephemeralility of shifting alliances between different peoples across history. In juxtaposing Punic and non-Punic exempla in which overlapping sets of peoples, allies and enemies, repeatedly engage with (and betray) each other in different variations, the Strategemata presents all history (not just Roman-Carthaginian history) as an endless succession of spats and alliances, conquests and desertions, between a revolving cast of characters, who team up with and confront each other ad infinitum.

Far from helping readers to distinguish between friends and foes, or offering us a story of imperial progress or enduring domination, the Strategemata breaks such romanticising narratives down and rearranges history into a much more disorienting, disconcerting miscellany of episodes, which en masse emphasise how short-lived victory can be, how unpredictable war is, and how difficult it has always been to know who is on who’s side – or who will be in the future.

That is not a very reassuring message, especially in the context of the on-going border rebellions and disputes that Domitian is wrestling with (against the backdrop of AD 68-9…). Shifting alliances (and the treachery or betrayal that sometimes comes with them) is another theme that crops up in Silius’ Punica of course, especially his retelling of the famous Saguntum episode.

**CIVIL WARS IN FRONTINUS’ STRATEGEMATA**

A further possible parallel with Silius is in Frontinus’ repeated juxtaposition of Punic exempla with episodes from different Roman civil wars. Strategemata 1.7, for instance, begins with a Roman commander finding a clever way of getting his elephants across a river during the first Punic war, and then offers us a parallel exemplum in which Hannibal (during the 2nd Punic War) similarly comes up with a cunning ruse to transport his elephants across a stream.

1.7.3 also showcases Carthaginian cunning; but these opening exempla are followed by a brief reference to Julius Caesar’s siege of Marseille, and then a visit (at 1.7.5) to Mutina (that civil war milestone, where Octavian emerged as a force to be reckoned with), where we see Mark Antony (in conflict with his own countrymen) deploying similar ingenuity when it comes to adapting available resources. And then we turn to an episode from the Third Servile War (another internal conflict) and have Spartacus held up as an

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9 There are no progressive narratives of imperial expansion or Roman (or Athenian, or any other nation’s) domination, in other words; Rome’s wars with Carthage are broken down and woven into a miscellany of other episodes that together present ancient mediterranean history as a series of unpredictable, even inexplicable back-and-forths between unpredictable peoples. Cf Dominik 2003 (Hannibal at the Gates): 494: ‘Silius seems to suggest that history never changes: it merely repeats itself in cyclical fashion. Cities (Troy, Alba Longa, Ardea, Saguntum, Carthage come and go; only the names change…’

10 The first two exempla of 1.7 reinforce the sense of on-going repetition and to-and-fro that I have mentioned. As so often, here we see an episode from the first Punic War being replayed as we revisit the same scenario in the 2nd Punic war, but with the commanders exchanged, so that a small Roman triumph is followed by a Carthaginian one (while the two Punic Wars themselves rather blend into each other).

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exemplum to emulate. Strategemata 1.7, in other words, does not simply draw parallels between Roman and Carthaginian (and other) commanders; it draws parallels or irons out distinctions between external and internal conflicts, as if they are on a par, or all the same phenomenon; and indeed as if the likes of Spartacus are as inspiring as the great Alexander himself.

Strategemata 1.8 then begins with Coriolanus and his attempts to sow internal discord and ‘destroy the harmony of the Romans’, and similarly goes on to juxtapose Punic exempla (in some of which we see allies deserting from Rome to Carthage, or trust being eroded by the Romans between Carthage and her allies, at 1.8.6-7 for instance) with exempla in which Italian states form alliances against Rome, or Rome ravages the land of other Italians.11 Again, parallels are exposed between Roman commanders and generals of other nationalities, in particular Carthaginian ones, and between heroes and rebels (whose various stratagems are all up for emulation); and external and internal conflicts are presented alongside each other, on an equal footing. There is no ethical or moralising commentary: just the same neutral presentation for all exempla.

Strategemata 1.9 pursues the recurring theme of desertion and rebellion by presenting four exempla in which generals devise ways of quelling mutinies among their own troops. All four exempla concern Roman generals, having to wage a campaign, almost, against their own Roman soldiers (internal sedition thus emerges as a particularly Roman problem). And the final example transports us to the heart of Julius Caesar’s camp during the civil war, so that we get a picture of internal sedition within the context of wider internal strife. Again, this civil war exemplum is presented in the same terms, as if on a par with non-civil war exempla. And the next section (1.10, on ‘how to check an unseasonable demand for battle’ – another theme that throws up conflict between generals and their own troops) continues in the same vein. 1.10.1, for example, depicts Sertorius dealing with dissent among his own men, who are all too eager to engage in battle with their fellow Romans and need restraining. Rome thus emerges as a state bristling with soldiers and generals intent on each other’s destruction.12

The first section in Book 2 opens with two Punic exempla (2.1.1, from the 1st Punic War, and 2.1.4, from the 2nd) that frame two more exempla from Roman civil wars (2.1.2-3). Again, they are all narrated with the same, neutral matter-of-factness, and all held up as equally valid strategic options for readers to choose between. And at Strategemata 3.14, overlaps between civil war exempla and Punic ones (and between Romans and Africans) are again drawn out. The list could go on, but the point is clear. The Strategemata juxtaposes exempla from all sorts of different conflicts, but particularly Punic and civil war ones; and the result is that Romans and non-Romans, national heroes and rebels, rulers and bandits, external conflicts and internal strife, are all made to look very like each other. In fact, in some cases (thanks to suggestive

11 Again, parallels are exposed between Roman commanders and generals of other nationalities, in particular Carthaginian ones, and between heroes and rebels (whose various stratagems are all up for emulation); and external and internal conflicts are presented alongside each other, on an equal footing.

12 Note that 2.8, on how to restore morale by firmness, again contains exclusively Roman exempla – as if this is primarily a Roman problem.
juxtapositions, and what we see of the shifting alliances of different peoples across time) is it not easy to tell if we are looking at a civil, foreign or more mixed kind of war – the kind of *permixtum bellum* that Tacitus talks of as being a particular feature of Flavian history at the start of his *Histories*.13

Take *Strategemata* 3.16, for instance, where all of the *exempla* concern desertion (mostly between Rome and Carthage), and in some cases double-deceit, and where who is on who’s side (and who is the real enemy) becomes very confused, especially in 3.16.3. Both Valerius Maximus and Livy identify treachery and deceit – ruses – as particularly Carthaginian methods, not very Roman.14 In the *Strategemata*, there is certainly a lot of Carthaginian trickery and treachery on display; but there is also plenty of Roman cunning to match it (e.g. at 1.4.11, where the trickery is based, perhaps significantly, on a pretense of Roman internal discord). As I have said, the two nations emerge as pretty indistinguishable. Indeed, it is significant, I think, that we are told in one *exemplum* (3.2.3) that ‘Hannibal captured many cities in Italy by sending ahead certain of his own men, dressed in the garb of Romans and speaking Latin, which they had acquired as a result of long experience in the war.’ Not for the first time, we are reminded how easy it is to confuse Romans and Carthaginians; we are even invited, perhaps, to reflect more deeply on their association and parallels. But even more importantly, this *exemplum* invites us to look at an act (or acts) of external aggression as if they were internal ones. As happens several times in the *Strategemata*, we have a Punic *exemplum* here in which men who look like Romans turn on their supposed countrymen and defeat them – repeatedly (Hannibal captured many cities this way). As ever, Frontinus offers no authorial commentary, or criticism, no explicit analysis that might prompt us towards a particular interpretation; but it is an unsettling reminder (among many others) of how indistinguishable foreign and civil wars (and enemies) can be; and also one of several moments in the text that sanctions us as readers (if we want to) to read in Punic *exempla* analogies with later conflicts much closer to home – to look at Carthage as a way of thinking about Rome, as Silius Italicus also invites us to.

If we return to chapter 2.3, we can see some of these trends at work here too. There is not as much treachery or desertion on display as in other sections, but episodes from Roman civil wars are juxtaposed with Punic and other *exempla* as if they are all on a continuum with each other. At 2.3.5, for instance, we move straight from an *exemplum* in which Scipio Africanus outwits Hasdrubal towards the end of the 2nd Punic war, to an *exemplum* in which Metellus Pius adopts a similar stratagem (and formation of troops) to defeat a fellow Roman, Hirtuleius, in the Sertorian War. And at 2.3.11 we are told that ‘Sertorius employed the same tactics in Spain [as Xanthippus in the 1st Punic War] in his campaign against Pompey.’ Pompey himself crops up in a non-civil campaign too, at 2.3.14; and again, that is something that is typical of the *Strategemata* more widely. *Exempla* from civil wars are often mixed in with *exempla* involving some of the same personnel from foreign campaigns. So Sulla, Mark Antony and Caesar also pop in in chapter 2.3, for instance, fighting Macedonians, Parthians and Gauls, alongside *exempla* which gesture towards their

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13 *Hist*. 1.2.1-2.
14 E.g. Val Max 7.4.4; 7.4.ext. 2.
involvement in episodes of civil strife. The text oscillates between images of Romans fighting foreign forces and images of them fighting each other, in other words, in ways that underline the frequent slippage between the two (in fact, the way in which foreign and civil wars in Roman history have tended to generate each other).

The second half of chapter 2.3 very unusually picks up a certain pro-Roman momentum. For the most part, as I have noted, the *Strategemata* frustrates any attempts the reader might make to identify subtexts about Roman superiority or imperial destiny; but here, we get a series of *exempla* in which a foreign stratagem is immediately answered by a successful Roman counter-stratagem, and Frontinus actually intrudes to offer some very rare approbation of Roman commanders. Hannibal’s formation of his (very mixed) troops at 2.3.16 is bettered by Scipio’s ‘shrewd’ (*prudens*) organisation of Roman forces, for instance, in what readers will identify as the Battle of Zama, the decisive final victory that brought the 2nd Punic war to an end. Sulla’s clever thinking at 2.3.17 outclasses Archelaus’ battle dispositions, and results in a Roman victory over the Macedonian forces. Romans triumph at 2.3.18 and 20; and Roman consuls counter Pyrrhus’ battle arrangements *aptissime* (‘very judiciously’) at 2.3.21 with a different arrangement of their own which – while not resulting in a Roman victory (as Frontinus’ readers would know) – limited Roman losses, while inflicting greater losses on the enemy.

At this point, however, as we draw towards the climax of the chapter, we are plunged suddenly into one of the most famous civil war battles of all, for 2.3.22 takes us to the decisive encounter between Caesar and Pompey at Pharsalus (which Lucan makes a climactic episode in all sorts of ways in his influential epic). Frontinus’ account agrees in very basic terms with what Caesar himself tells us about troop dispositions in the *De Bello Civili*, though of course it is heavily compressed and simplified. But the final phrase of the *exemplum* feels more Lucanesque. In the other *exempla* of 2.3 we see commanders and armies surrounding each other, routing each other, and only occasionally killing each other. At the end of 2.3.22, by contrast, the vocabulary and imagery step up a notch, for the *exemplum* ends both with a Roman victory (which offers a distorted parallel of the Roman victories celebrated at the ends of 2.3.16 and 17) and also with the ambush and slaughter of Roman cavalry units by their countrymen, who are handed over to be killed – *caedendumque tradiderunt* – in a macabre inversion of the celebration at the end of 2.3.21 of relatively light Roman losses. There is no explicit authorial approbation or condemnation here, but I think this *exemplum* is meant to be shocking, not least because of the contrast and anti-climax it offers after the unusual build-up we have had of images of Roman superiority. In chapter 2.3, Roman commanders triumph splendidly over a series of foreign enemies – but they also keeping turning on each other, in bursts of brutal self-destruction.

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15 Sulla is behind aspects of the Sertorian conflict, for example; and as well will see, we come to an *exemplum* in which Caesar and Pompey confront each other in the civil wars.

16 Caes. BC 3.88-89.

17 At 2.3.6, 7 and 14.

18 Cf. Caesar *de Bello Civili* 3.98, on Caesar’s *clementia* towards those who surrendered; also 3.99 on Pompey’s heavy losses compared to Caesar’s lighter ones.
DOMITIAN IN FRONTINUS’ STRATEGEMATA

It can be no coincidence, I think, that this exemplum – in which the man who established Rome’s first imperial dynasty triumphs over a fellow contender towards the end of a long period of chaotic and destructive civil war – is immediately followed by an exemplum in which Imperator Caesar Augustus Germanicus (ie Domitian) pops up.

There is a lot I could say about Frontinus’ engagement with Domitian in the Strategemata if I had more time – but, in brief: Domitian pops up surprisingly rarely (on only four occasions, and not in any preface); and when he does, Frontinus is sparing with his praise (especially in comparison with other contemporary texts, and in view of Domitian’s own keenness to figure as a great military commander like his father and brother). In fact – as this example shows – far from standing out from other commanders within the text, Domitian blends blandly in – or even loses out a bit by comparison. For the stratagem that he comes up with here (telling his men to dismount and fight on foot) feels rather feeble in comparison with the epic troop dispositions that other (especially Republican) commanders have been devising earlier in the chapter. And Domitian’s stratagem is immediately followed by an exemplum which takes us back to the 1st Punic War and showcases a very famous (and decisive) instance of Roman naval cunning: Gaius Duellius’ invention of the grappling hook. Sandwiched by the likes of Scipio, Hannibal, Sulla, Pyrrhus and Duellius, and coming immediately after Caesar’s (almost Pyrrhic!) victory at Pharsalus, Domitian’s appearance at 2.3.23 conspicuously fails to celebrate or promote him; instead, it prompts comparison with competing models, and raises questions about leadership, generalship, and imperatorship (emperorship) that the rest of the treatise also raises.

To conclude, I want to turn to another such moment – at 4.3.14 – where Domitian puts in another appearance, and where again readers are prompted to think about models of leadership and Rome’s (on-going) tendency to descend into civil war. This exemplum takes place during the Batavian revolt led by Julius Civilis – a ‘mixed’ conflict if there ever was one (as Tacitus himself pointed out), in which former Roman allies (the Batavians) rose up against the Roman empire, and involved themselves in the civil strife of AD69 and 70 (siding, vaguely, with Vitellius along the way). This episode obliquely invokes some of the recurring themes of the text, in other words: shifting loyalties, broken alliances, desertion and rebellion, and blurred distinctions between foreign and civil conflict. It also plunges us specifically into the period following Vitellius death, before Vespasian had consolidated his claims to power – so into the closing stages of the civil wars that brought the Flavians to power.

Tacitus spends a lot of time on the Batavian revolt, and at Histories 4.85-6 he suggests that Domitian became frustrated during the campaign by his lack of front-line involvement (and the consequent lack of opportunity for glory); and also that, as a result, he began to plot against either his father or his brother, and to give in to the

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19 As Joseph 2012: 35 notes, Josephus characterizes the Batavian revolt as a foreign war, a German attack on Rome; Tacitus, by contrast, emphasizes its civil aspects (Hist. 4-5) and states its ‘mixed’ nature (Hist. 4.22.2: mixta belli civilis externique facie).
autocratic tendencies that would mar his later reign. According to Tacitus, in other words, the Batavian revolt was a campaign which triggered seeds of sedition within the Flavian imperial family, and which set Domitian on his tyrannical course. In view of that, Frontinus’ treatment of Domitian within the episode is particularly interesting.

The anecdote starts ‘Under the auspices of the Emperor Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus’, and is the only exemplum in the Strategemata which begins that way (aupiciis…); almost every other example in the collection begins with the name (in the nominative) of the commander responsible for the stratagem – but as Frontinus narrates it, Domitian had nothing directly to do with this one. In fact, the subject of the main verbs is the ultimate object of the stratagem, the city of the Lingones, who had revolted to Julius Civilis and then become afraid that the approaching Romans would take the opportunity to plunder it. Of course, it is potentially to Domitian’s credit (as notional commander-in-chief) that this did not happen (just as the fear that it might – that the imperial army might not exercise restraint – perhaps reminds us, obliquely, of Domitian’s later reputation for abuses and excesses20). However, that line of thought is not pursued. Instead the exemplum takes an unexpected turn, as we learn that – in relief or gratitude at not being plundered by the approaching Roman forces – the Lingones returned their loyalty to Rome and ‘handed over seventy thousand of their soldiers to me’. Frontinus’ sudden appearance comes as a surprise, not least because it disturbs the pattern that the text’s stories usually take, whereby the ‘hero’ at the start remains the ‘hero’ to the end. Here mihi is slipped in as the exemplum’s very last word, so that Domitian and Frontinus frame the anecdote – with the details (and responsibility for it) floating somewhere in between. Its dative case distances the author somewhat from the initiative, presenting him as the representative recipient rather than the instigator of the Lingones’ surrender. On the other hand, Domitian features primarily as a figurehead (and a preposterous one at that, given what we know of his lack of involvement and authority during the wider campaign), not as an involved commander whose ingenuity secured the successful outcome. Readers are left to draw their own conclusions, but the anecdote perhaps reminds us both of Domitian’s overweening military and imperial ambitions and of his tendency to be savagely jealous of contemporary commanders who won too much glory for themselves (hence Frontinus’ telling self-deprecation in this, the only exemplum in which he himself appears).

Even more significant is the fact that Frontinus deferentially gives Domitian all of his imperial titles, despite the fact that he was not yet emperor (and had not yet acquired the title Germanicus); indeed, his father, Vespasian, had not yet become emperor at the time of this episode. To give an emperor his imperial titles, even when narrating a story from the time prior to his reign, can of course be construed simply as a matter of courtesy. It can also be construed as self-preservation – a cautionary act of deference by an author operating under a tyrannical ruler. Or it could, in this case, be construed as satire – a biting joke on the fact that even before the Flavian dynasty is on the throne, even before his father and brother have become emperors, Domitian can be seen jostling for power, setting himself up as emperor and dominating the narrative.

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20 Frontinus’ Strategemata is no less open to readings of ‘figured speech’ (Ahl 1984) or ‘doublespeak’ (Bartsch 1994) than other Flavian texts, especially where Domitian is concerned.
4.3.14 takes us to an episode that will remind readers of the civil war origins of the Flavian dynasty, then, and narrates it in such a way as to hint at divisions, competition and hostility within the Flavian gens even before they have come to power (as well as reminding readers of the emperor’s autocratic habit of overshadowing other contemporary commanders). It is a fitting place to end this whirlwind tour of the Strategemata, which I hope has underlined how rich and complex text this is. For in offering readers hundreds of examples of military stratagems that they might consider adapting or emulating themselves, it confronts us with a disorienting, disturbing vision of history that projects the perpetual, on-going to-and-fro of military conflict – foreign, civil, and the revolts and rebellions that lie somewhere between the two – well into the future – a prospect that was of great concern to Frontinus’ contemporary readers (not least Domitian himself). If civil war is a preoccupation in the likes of Statius and Valerius Flaccus, it is something more destabilising yet in Frontinus’ Strategemata: it is a repeated, perennial forecast – whose future realisation will be enacted by the very readers supposedly learning from this text.
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


