

Did Tacitus Finish the *Annales*?

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Since Tacitus completed and made public his *Historiae* before he finished, and presumably before he began, the *Ab excessu divi Augusti*, the two works must have circulated separately.¹ At some time in antiquity, however, probably when they were transferred from rolls to codices and perhaps in 275, when the Emperor Tacitus undertook to preserve and disseminate the work of the great historian whom he claimed as an ancestor,² the two

¹ In *Ann.* XI.11.1 he refers to the later books of the *Historiae* ("quibus res imperatoris Domitiani composui") as presumably well known to his readers. Tertullian in or after 197 referred to *Hist.* V by book-number (*Apol.* 16.2).—I need not remark that everyone who now studies the works of Tacitus will owe more to Ronald Syme's *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958) and Erich Koestermann's commentary on the *Annales* (Heidelberg, 1963–1968) than he can acknowledge in footnotes. For the rest, I limit myself to citing modern studies that seem to me fundamental and directly relevant to my inquiry, and I intend my references to include what they in turn cite; to mention and debate everything that touches, directly or indirectly, on my subject would be to convert this article into a long book, for which I see no need.

² Vopiscus, *Tac.* 10.3, which Syme (p. 687), with reference to an earlier article of mine, rejects as "a fable." One does not lightly disagree with Syme, but I remain unrepentant. The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* are patently the work of a vulgar mind or minds, and no one would claim for the author or authors a concern for veracity greater than that of a modern journalist or "publicist," but, as Syme has repeatedly said, they are our only source for much of the period they cover, and our task is to determine, on the basis of our pitifully scanty information from other sources and inherent plausibility, what statements are probably historical. Since no one, so far as I know, has yet gone so far as to deny the existence of an emperor named Claudius Tacitus, and since it is highly unlikely that the greatest of the Roman historians had been utterly forgotten in the Third Century, nothing is more likely than that the emperor, whether or not he was a "military man," would have had the wit to profit from the coincidence of cognomina and bestow on himself the lustre of a probably supposititious (though not impossible) descent from the historian, thus acquiring a dignity and prestige that might increase his slight chance of dying a natural death. There could have been no better way of advertising the protective eminence he thus acquired than by promulgating official commands for the dissemination of the works of his adopted ancestor. The story is therefore inherently plausible.

histories were combined to form a single sequence of thirty (or more) books in chronological order,³ possibly under the collective title, *Historia Augusta*.⁴

It appears that only portions of one ancient codex, sadly mutilated and dismembered, survived the Dark Ages to become the ancestor of the manuscript that preserves for us (with lacunae) *Annales* I–VI and of the manuscripts that preserve (with lacunae) *Annales* XI–XVI and *Historiae* I–V, presenting them as a single and untitled work with books numbered from XI to XXI.⁵ Our problem arises from the fact that the preserved portion of Book XVI takes us only to about the middle of the year 66 and it is inconceivable that the lost part of that book could have continued the narrative to January 69, where Book XVII (= *Hist.* I) begins.

It has been seriously argued that Tacitus, presumably after completing the sentence that is incomplete in our text, was suddenly smitten with fatigue and consequently decided just to “hit the high spots” thereafter to dispose of Nero in the rest of Book XVI, and not even to mention the events of the last six months of 68 because they had been adequately described by another historian, perhaps Fabius Rusticus!⁶ *Haec igitur*

The passion for disbelieving as much as possible of what the Scriptorum say may lead to excess; for a salutary lesson, see the article by James H. Oliver, *A.J.P.*, LXXXIX (1968), pp. 345–347.

³ Hieron. *Com. ad Zach.* 3.14: “Cornelius Tacitus, qui post Augustum usque ad mortem Domitiani vitas Caesarum triginta voluminibus exaravit.” The use of *volumen* as a synonym of *liber* is common in Cicero and later writers, so Jerome’s statement cannot be taken to imply that the thirty books were still in the form of rolls rather than codices. To this may be added, for what it is worth, Vopiscus’s reference to the historical works of Tacitus as a *liber*, i.e., a single *opus*, almost certainly in the form of a codex or codices, as was first pointed out by Cicero Poghirc, *Studia Classica*, VI (1964), 149–154.

⁴ Vopiscus, *loc. cit.*: “Cornelium Tacitum, scriptorem Historiae Augustae.” Such a title would also explain Jerome’s description (“vitas Caesarum”) of a work that he may not have read, although he probably glanced through it for propaganda purposes.

⁵ In *T.A.P.A.*, LXXXII (1951), pp. 232–261, I assembled evidence to show that the First Medicean MS. was derived from a very ancient codex of the combined edition. There is nothing to indicate that the Second Medicean and its congeners did not stem from another part of the same dismembered codex. The fundamental work of Rudolf Hanslik and his pupils indicates that there was a line of descent from that MS. that was independent of the Second Medicean, although there are difficulties, which I discussed briefly in *Illinois Classical Studies*, I (1976), pp. 216–225. The source of the preposterous title that appears, with slight variations, in subscriptions of the Geneva family of manuscripts, “Actorum diurnalium Augustae historiae libri,” must remain mysterious; it is hard to believe that any part of it came from the archetype.

⁶ Frank Gardiner Moore, *T.A.P.A.*, LIV (1923), pp. 5–20.

*addent qui volent collectaneis de incredibilibus philologorum.*⁷ Not only is it inconceivable that the historian exhibited such shameless levity, but it is obvious that, as Bretschneider pointed out years ago, Tacitus “*producere voluit Annales usque ad Nymphidii exitum, id est ad initium Historiarum, et iam, ut ipsius utar verbis, narrationem disposuit intra se ipsum et ordinavit, cum XV 72 scriberet.*”⁸ Bretschneider believed that one more book might have sufficed, but we cannot disregard the calculations of Philippe Fabia in an article confidently entitled “*Sur une page perdue et sur les livres XVI, XVII, XVIII des Annales de Tacite*”:⁹ Tacitus could scarcely have reached the death of Nero before the end of a Book XVIII, and if he continued to the beginning of the *Historiae*, at least one more book would have been necessary.¹⁰ We need not, however, review these calculations: whatever the requisite number of books, we must conclude that either (a) Tacitus did not write them, or (b) they have been lost at some stage in the transmission of his text.

We must mention here two considerations that are relevant, though inconclusive.

(a) We are virtually certain that Tacitus did not complete the historical study that he had undertaken. We must believe that he intended to keep the promise that he made in *Ann.* III.24.3 to treat the Age of Augustus, “*si effectis in quae tetendi plures ad curas vitam produxero.*” When he resolved to begin his study with the end of the Republic, we do not know: that could have been part of his original plan, announced in *Agr.* 3.3: “*non . . . pigebit . . . memoriam prioris servitutis . . . composuisse.*” But whether he had planned an *Ab exitu liberae reipublicae* from the first or only later came to see that the crux of his problem was the institution and nature of the principate, he never wrote the projected work—unless it was lost before his histories were consolidated in a series that began, as Jerome says, *post Augustum*.

(b) It would help, if we knew how many books the *Historiae* comprised, and much ingenuity has been expended to determine whether there were twelve, as required by the mystic doctrine of hexads, or fourteen, to make with I–XVI the total of thirty mentioned by Jerome. We shall not ponder that question, first, because the reading *triginta* in Jerome is not

⁷ The phrase is Mommsen’s, in his edition of the palimpsest of Livy, III–IV, Berolini, 1868, p. 208.

⁸ Carolus Bretschneider, *Quo ordine ediderit Tacitus singulas Annalium partes*, Argentorati, 1905, p. 74.

⁹ *R.É.A.*, XXXIV (1932), pp. 139–158.

¹⁰ Fabia believes that such a book was not written, because he is sure that Tacitus would have preferred to stay within the sacred limits of hexads.

certain,¹¹ and second, because any attempt at accurate computation would quickly lose itself in tenuous speculations. Tacitus was not writing one of our comprehensive textbooks, which seek to "cover" all of a given period and to allot to each event space proportional to its "over-all" importance, as so many moderns believe. A first reading should make it obvious that his subject is the principate, and that he writes with a full awareness that all the events he mentions were within the compass of other and well-known histories.¹² If Tacitus and Mommsen met in the shadowy realm of Dis, the "most unmilitary of historians" laughed at the solemn critic and told him to assuage his curiosity about the exact position and movements of the armies at Bedriacum by reading Pompeius Planta,¹³ and to learn the military geography of Armenia from the *Commentarii* of Corbulo. Tacitus' concern is to correct and explain, and he allots space accordingly. Even so acute a scholar as Goodyear complains that disproportionate attention is given to the mutinies on the German frontier in the year 14, and imagines that the reason is rhetorical, a desire to present "vivid and exciting scenes" with stylistic elaboration.¹⁴

¹¹ No variant is shown in the apparatus of the new critical edition of Jerome's *In Zachariam* by M. Adriaen ("Corpus Christianorum," Series Latina LXXVI-A, Turnholti, 1970), but the apparatus is obviously very selective, and even if the manuscripts collated all have *triginta* or *XXX*, it would remain possible that Jerome wrote *XXXV* or *XXXX*, the former being particularly exposed to corruption before *voluminibus*, or *tres et triginta*, etc.

¹² Including the last years of Domitian, if Tacitus did not "publish" the relevant books until 107 or later, as is universally believed and seems quite probable. He was certainly not the only man who felt an urge to write on that subject as soon as the tension and periclitation of Nerva's rule had been resolved by the adoption of Trajan; there must have been many contemporaries who were eager to explain what they had done or failed to do during the Terror, and others who wanted to exhibit their opinions. One such historian is mentioned as *quidam* by Pliny, *Ep.* IX.27.1, a letter which will suggest one possible reason for the long interval between Tacitus's decision to write and the publication of his work: he deemed it kind or prudent to await the death of certain persons whose actions he would have to explain, especially, perhaps, in connection with the conspiracy that procured the assassination of Domitian. We could also imagine that he waited to see what facts would be disclosed by other writers.

¹³ Of whom we know only from a scholium on Juvenal, II.99, for which see Wessner's edition. It is unfortunate that Peter in his *Historicorum Romanorum fragmenta* quoted the scholium in the form given it by Georgius Valla, who probably merely inferred that Planta wrote after Tacitus from the earlier form of the scholium, in which the authors are probably named in order of dignity. There is a good chance that this Planta is the man whose death Pliny announces in *Ep.* IX.1, c. 107 or earlier.

¹⁴ F. D. R. Goodyear in the first (and thus far only) volume of his truly excellent edition of the *Annales*, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 29-31, discussing the "vast elaboration" of *Ann.* I.16-52.

Those mutinies were the first occasion on which Roman armies in the field tried to influence succession to the principate, and while it is true that the mutinies had no great "historical effect" at the time, a little more ineptitude in dealing with them or sheer bad luck might have resulted in a premature divulgence of the *arcanum imperii*. Tacitus's interest is in studying the *first* manifestation of a tendency that was to have such dire manifestations in later history to his own time and such calamitous consequences thereafter, of which he may have in part apprehended the danger. To calculate how long the *Historiae* were, we should first have to know to what incidents Tacitus would see fit to devote two-fifths of a book. The task is hopeless.

Although the numbering of the books in our manuscripts has been imputed to that handy scape-goat, the Mediaeval scribe,¹⁵ the extreme improbability that anyone in the Middle Ages would think to combine two distinct works or to alter the book-numbers shown in the colophons of an exemplar, and the attested existence of a consolidated edition in antiquity, make it only reasonable to suppose that our book-numbers come from the surviving portion of a dismembered ancient codex. It is on this basis that Walter Allen, Jr., believes that very substantial parts of Tacitus's work, including the end of the *Annales*, were lost "when the text was in the form of a volumen for each book and when each volumen confronted its own destiny".¹⁶ Only one tattered and incomplete set of rolls remained when the works of Tacitus were first transcribed into a codex around the middle of the Fifth Century. That this is possible, we cannot deny. Tacitus was never a popular author: he demands in his readers concentrated attention, a very high degree of intellectual power, and, what is even rarer, the fortitude to face a world of unpleasant realities instead of comforting oneself with hallucinogenic fairy tales or drugs. Symmachus, who did so much to preserve civilization, never mentions him. In his darkling day, Tacitus might have given cold shivers of foreboding to anyone who understood him, so we cannot argue that Tacitus would have been preserved together with Livy. If we are not to rest content with ignorance, we must try to weigh the relative probability of the alternative explanation, that Tacitus completed no more than sixteen books of *Annales*.

¹⁵ Fabia (*op. cit.*, p. 151) thinks that the last books of the *Annales* were lost before the two works were combined, and that the first book of the *Historiae* was numbered XVII because "le copiste de notre manuscrit [the Second Medicean!] ou d'un archétype . . . a considéré le seizième livre incomplet des *Annales* comme le dernier."

¹⁶ *T.A.P.A.*, CI (1970), p. 9. Jerome's reference (see note 3 *supra*) could, of course, have been to a collection of rolls rather than a codex.

We are first of all handicapped because we know nothing about his methods of working. We do not know when he first resolved to write history,¹⁷ nor do we know the compass of the work he then planned. We do not know how many administrative positions he held besides a proconsulship,¹⁸ how much of his time and energy was in various years absorbed by official duties, political activities, social responsibilities, and domestic cares, or what facilities or obstacles aided or hindered research and composition when he was away from home—or, for that matter, when he was at home. And worst of all, we do not know whether he assembled and digested material for one segment of his work at a time and remained with it until he produced a final draft of his text before starting on the next segment, or whether he prepared his material for an entire work, organized his treatment of it, and decided what he would say on each subject before he began to write a literarily polished and final text of any part.

When Tacitus wrote the *Agricola*, in or near January, 98, he had planned at least the *Historiae*. If modern scholars are correct in refusing to believe the younger Pliny's assertion that his letters were not arranged in chronological order, Tacitus in 106 or 107 asked Pliny for some information about the death of his uncle in 79. If eight years of labor had brought him only to that year, he was certainly a slow worker, but, so far as we know, his energies may have been engrossed by official duties in the provinces or other activities until 105 or 106; or, on the other hand, his request may have been an afterthought while revising a final draft of books otherwise completed—or it may have been a mere courtesy to a colleague eager to "help." About a year later, Pliny supplies information about his own conduct in 93, thus providing proof that the *Historiae* or the part of them that dealt with that year had not yet been made public.¹⁹

We do not know how Tacitus "published." Historians recited in his

¹⁷ Gaston Bossier, in his *Tacite*, Paris, s.a. [1903], pp. 50 f., thinks it likely that Tacitus prepared to write history as early as 93.

¹⁸ Of which we know only through the chance discovery of an inscription in Caria; for the date of Tacitus's term as Proconsul of Asia, see A. I. Suskin, *A.J.A.*, XL (1936), pp. 71 f., and Syme's Appendix 23.

¹⁹ The proof, however, is subject to two obvious questions: (a) Pliny's letter is supposed to be more or less contemporary with datable letters in the same book, but would Pliny have "published" his letter before the part of the *Historiae* in which he hoped to be commended was available to his readers? (b) Since it is unlikely that Tacitus devoted the equivalent of a full Teubner page to Pliny's daring remark in the senate, could not Pliny have put his letter into circulation to give his readers a fuller account of the incident than they had found in Tacitus's already published work?

day, but Pliny's silence may indicate that Tacitus was above such vanity.²⁰ Ingenuity has been lavished on efforts to prove that he "published" in triads or hexads; one is reminded of Sherwin-White's comment anent similar efforts with Pliny's letters: "The triad is a fantasy born of scholarly hankering after system where system is improbable."²¹ There are fairly numerous allusions to contemporary events in almost every book of the letters, but very few in the whole of Tacitus. There is no reason to suppose that he would have followed the example of Vergil or of Propertius or of Ovid,²² and while we certainly cannot deny that he may have "published" in triads or hexads or decades or dodecades, the internal evidence that can be elicited by a microscopic search for discrepancies is both so exiguous and so tenuous that we may be excused from affirming that he followed any system.²³

²⁰ Pliny had the good sense to be especially proud of his acquaintance with Tacitus. What better way of advertising that relationship and paying his greater contemporary fulsome compliments than a letter, perhaps to a third person, commenting on a recitation by Tacitus, if such there had been?

²¹ *The Letters of Pliny*, Oxford, 1966, p. 53.

²² As is well known, Ovid composed his long and intricate *Metamorphoses* and completed them (except for a few finishing touches) without "publishing" a single hexad, pentad, triad, or book, and was able to pretend that he believed his own personal copy, which he burned before going into exile, was the only copy in existence (*Trist.* I.7.15-25). For that procedure there can have been only one motive: he wanted his readers to have the completed work in its entirety at one time. He doubtless felt that piecemeal "publication" would gravely detract from the effect of the whole, which attains a quasi-epic sweep in the last book, and his artistic sense was certainly correct. If Ovid could master what appears to have been a common Roman urge to rush before the public as soon as a book or two was ready, Tacitus could have had equal self-control. Too much has been made of the obvious fact that the peripeties of history are by their very nature dramatic and often tragic, but Tacitus, who combined a profound historical sense with the highest literary art, could well have thought of the *Historiae* as what they probably were, a continuous narrative rising from somber beginnings to a terrible climax and a catastrophe in which blood-stained daggers, like a *deus ex machina*, suddenly resolved what had appeared to be both unalterable and intolerable. If he did, he may have refused to destroy that unity and blunt the emotional effect by giving out his work in pieces.

²³ If there were hexads, then, obviously, the only place where a division would occur in our extant text is after Book XII, where, to be sure, some indications have been found, of which the most significant is the mention of Locusta in XIII.15.3 as though she had not already been identified in XII.62.3. In his commentary on I.54.1, however, Good-year points out a discrepancy between that passage and II.95.1 that is fully as noteworthy as any that "has been cited as evidence for lack of revision in the later books," and justly remarks that the comparison "encourages scepticism about the value of such evidence." In fact, a common interpretation of the passage mentioned in note 29 *infra* could be used to prove either that II.60 was published before II.61 or that Tacitus never revised Book II.

When it was believed that the *Dialogus de oratoribus* was a youthful work, it was imagined that the author's style grew more "Tacitean" as steadily as a tree grows year by year, until it reached full growth in the last book of the *Annales*, so that intervals of time could be measured by a process analogous to counting the rings in a tree's trunk. Fortunately, we now need do no more than refer to two statistically precise and trenchant articles, the one by Goodyear, who has shown that "stylistic change is part of Tacitus' nature" and is neither uniform nor chronologically measurable, and the other, which is virtually a corroborative sequel, by J. N. Adams, who shows how many factors, conscious and subconscious, may have contributed to the observed variations.²⁴

If Tacitus finished the *Historiae* in 109, as Syme suggests,²⁵—and there certainly is no reason to suggest a later date—he had about six years in which to work on the *Ab excessu divi Augusti* before he completed the final draft of Book II, and although he spent one of those years as Proconsul of Asia²⁶ (a position of high dignity but not necessarily one of onerous duties), there is no known reason why that space of time should not have sufficed him for the composition of all sixteen (or more) books of that work, particularly if, as is possible and even likely, he had assembled material for it even earlier. Livy wrote at the rate of *at least* three to four books every year; Cicero produced something like thirty books in a year, aided, to be sure, by Greek treatises and his own recollections of the studies of his youth,²⁷ but apparently without materials previously collected and digested in preparation for those writings. We do not know how laborious was the brilliance and concision of Tacitus's Latin, but even if his style required the most careful elaboration and reworking, composition of a final version from fully prepared materials would certainly have been possible within a year, and the same space of time would be more than ample for all variations of stylistic habits found between Book I and Book XVI. Let us accordingly consider the internal evidence without fitting it to a Procrustean bed of preconceptions about how Tacitus "must" have "published" or how his style "must" have "evolved."

There is one secure and certain indication of a fairly precise date: the

²⁴ F. D. R. Goodyear, *J.R.S.*, LVIII (1968), pp. 22–31; J. N. Adams, *C.Q.*, XXII (1972), pp. 350–373.

²⁵ *Tacitus*, pp. 118–120; cf. Appendix 21 on the chronology of Pliny's letters.

²⁶ 112–113; see note 18 *supra*.

²⁷ This makes the speed of composition somewhat less amazing. Cicero drew on his early studies and subsequent thinking about philosophical questions as much as on the Greek treatises, as was shown by Martin van den Bruwaene (*La théologie de Cicéron*, Louvain, 1937), who, however, ventures too far in trying to identify "early" passages in our texts.

reference in II.61.2 to the *Romanum imperium*, "quod nunc Rubrum ad Mare patescit".²⁸ Despite a phenomenal expenditure of perverse ingenuity in numerous attempts to explain away that passage, which in turn fixes the scope of the more general reference to expansion of empire in IV.4.3, the *Rubrum Mare* here is necessarily the *Rubrum Mare* of XIV.25.2, and Tacitus patently refers to an epochal enlargement of the empire, not a trivial rectification of frontiers. And since *nunc* means "now," Tacitus wrote that passage after hearing the first news of Trajan's conquest of Mesopotamia in 115 and before that territory was abandoned by Hadrian soon after the death of Trajan in August, 117. If we knew whether or not the passage was a late addition to a substantially complete book,²⁹ and if we knew what method Tacitus followed in composing, we could venture further deductions, but as matters stand, we must be content with the limits 115-117, or, if Hadrian successfully dissembled his intention for a time, 118.³⁰

²⁸ All that needs to be said on this subject is said by Koestermann, *ad loc.*, and by Syme, Appendix 71, with a postscript in his *Ten Studies in Tacitus*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 129, 144 f.

²⁹ As Syme points out, the passage is the effective conclusion of a digression on Oriental empires; he could have added that it seems to have a close rhetorical relationship to II.60.4, which has been the favorite datum of those who argue against the obvious meaning of *Mare Rubrum*, and has also been taken to show that the reference to Trajan's conquests was a kind of "stop-press" addition to a completed text. I think the passage may be fairly paraphrased in its essentials as follows: In 772/19 the senior Egyptian priest at Thebes translated for Germanicus hieroglyphic inscriptions which, he said, proved that Rhamses had (1) conquered (a) Libya, now a Roman province, (b) the large territory south of Egypt known as Aethiopia, which the Romans never seriously attempted to occupy, and (c) the vast territories east of Asia Minor, Media, Persia, Bactria, and Scythia, which even Alexander the Great had never completely subdued and into which no Roman had ever led an army; (2) ruled all of Asia Minor, including the territories that Trajan added to the Empire in 113-115; and (3) exacted from the lands subjected to him a revenue equal to that which those lands now, in the year 869/116, pay to their present masters, who are either the Parthians or the Romans. There is nothing in that passage that need conflict with what is said a little later about the *Rubrum Mare*, for while Trajan captured the capital, Ctesiphon, and annexed the western fringe of Parthian territory, he never claimed to have taken Susa or Ecbatana, or to have penetrated into the Parthian heartland, Persis and Media, which therefore was still subject to Parthian rule, i.e., to Osroës, who, we may be sure, did not forget to collect taxes. It seems to me, therefore, that *nunc* in the two passages may refer to the same date and without the slightest inconsistency. The extension of Roman rule to the Persian Gulf by occupation of Mesopotamia did not at all imply that the whole of Parthia had been annihilated or subjugated, and, despite some odd assumptions by modern scholars, no one in Tacitus's day would have supposed that it did.

³⁰ So Syme believes, but Hadrian's intentions would doubtless have become known to well-informed Romans before they were carried into effect, and the date of the formal abolition of the new provinces is conjectural, as is the guess that Hadrian may have entered into some sort of "face-saving" treaty with the Parthians.

In what is preserved of the remaining books of the *Annales*, there is no definite allusion to a later event,³¹ and therefore nothing to invalidate Mendell's conclusion that the whole of that work was made public by Tacitus in 116. We can a little simplify our inquiry by strictly limiting it to the date at which the extant text was written, since we really know nothing about the circumstances of its publication.³² Lacking positive information, we are reduced to the ever parlous expedient of seeking negative evidence.

With no author are arguments *ex silentio* more precarious than with Tacitus; and that is not merely because so much of his history has been lost. He wrote with such restraint and subtlety that he thoroughly confused Von Pöhlmann,³³ and he always disconcerts readers who have not reached the intellectual maturity that Renan attained when he wrote, "je me résignai à un état de la création où beaucoup de mal sert de condition à un peu de bien."³⁴ We are often tempted to assume that so powerful a mind must have foreseen—and foreseen *as inevitable*—the disintegration of the empire and the barbarian invasions; it requires constant vigilance to keep our understanding of him untainted by the endemic superstitions and epidemic delusions of our darkling age. There is, even now, incessant argument about his opinions on every subject. *Il nous faut trancher les discussions*. I can address only those who will agree that his primary concern was preservation of the *Imperium Romanum*; that he believed that the empire, *urgentibus fatis*,³⁵ was under the neces-

³¹ Syme suggests (especially pp. 517–519) that experience of the early years of Hadrian's rule may have colored Tacitus's portraits of Nero and perhaps even Tiberius. Koestermann, *Athenaeum*, XLIII (1965), pp. 206 ff., believes that the description of the judicial murder of Thrasea Paetus was colored by Hadrian's assassinations. Such conjectures are insubstantial; history repeats itself, and thoughtful men disapprove in the past what they would resent in the present. One could argue that *Hist.* IV.41.1 reflects Hadrian's belated oath to the Senate that he would not have senators murdered informally!

³² Koestermann, in his commentary, Vol. IV, p. 10, says of the later books, "Dabei bliebe die Frage offen, wann diese Bücher überhaupt aus seinem Nachlaß ediert worden sind." For aught that we know to the contrary, that could have been true of the *Annales* as a whole. We have no evidence that they did not, like the historical work of Seneca's father (though perhaps for a different reason), remain 'unpublished' for years after the author's death.

³³ *Die Weltanschauung des Tacitus*, München, 1913, leaves one with the conclusion that Tacitus either had no settled opinions or did not see that some of his opinions were incompatible with others!

³⁴ In the preface to the publication in 1890 of his juvenile *L'Avenir de la science*.

³⁵ The controversy over the meaning of this phrase is simply phenomenal. If one has an irresistible urge to make Tacitus prophesy the coming of Alaric, Wölfflin's emenda-

sity—perhaps a fatal necessity—of expanding its dominion by subduing the barbarians on its borders, and that the worst princeps was one who was *incuriosus proferendi imperii*; and that, furthermore, as Iiro Kajanto has reminded us in an excellent article that he could have carried farther,³⁶ Tacitus believed that war was itself a moral purgative indispensable to the empire. When Rome was little more than a city, L. Quinctius (as reported by Livy, III.19.12), with the Roman capacity for facing facts, had observed, “Nescio quo fato magis bellantes quam pacati propitios habemus deos.” Under the empire, as experience had repeatedly proved, there was a further consideration: the standing armies that were necessary for defence of the frontiers were, under competent commanders, an irresistible offensive force, but when they, like the aristocracy, became *longa pace desides*, the result was sedition and civil war. The army, like fire, was an indispensable servant but a fearful master, and the way to keep it under control was to employ it on the tasks for which it had been created. However painful so horrid a thought may be to tender souls, Tacitus was certain that the *saeculum* inaugurated by Trajan would be *beatissimum* because, *inter alia*, the bungling defensive policies of the past would be replaced by the offensive operations which alone can succeed against a persistent enemy.

tion or Koestermann's will serve his purpose, and some such meaning could be extracted from Robinson's in spite of Robinson's own interpretation of his reading, but if there was ever an excuse for misunderstanding *urgentibus*, that excuse was based on ignorance of the parallel passages that are conveniently listed by Gudeman *ad loc.* (*Germ.* 33) in his second edition of the *Agricola* and *Germania* (Boston, 1928). Tacitus's meaning was ably demonstrated by Herbert W. Benario, *Historia*, XVII (1968), pp. 37–50; his conclusions are not in the least impaired by the subsequent article by Konrad Kraft, *Hermes*, XCVI (1969), pp. 591–608.

³⁶ *Latomus*, XXIX (1970), pp. 699–718. On the politically and socially demoralizing influence of peace, cf. Oswald Spengler, *Jahre der Entscheidung*, München, 1933, p. 10: “Einen langen Krieg ertragen wenige, ohne seelisch zu verderben; einen langen Frieden erträgt niemand.” Aristotle's theory (*Pol.* 1334a) that the deleterious effects of peace could be obviated by wise legislation (assuming that the nomothete had the power to impose his wisdom on the populace) was applicable only to city-states; in the Roman Empire, such legislation was no longer possible, and peace within the empire could be broken only by the far greater evil of civil war, but the vigor and virility of the ruling class could be maintained by the wars along the frontiers that were in any case necessary to preserve and augment the Empire and to maintain the discipline and efficiency of the standing armies. Tacitus, no doubt, thought primarily in terms of the historical imperative inherent in the very fact of empire, and we should not forget that his belief that *Agricola* should have been permitted to complete the conquest of Britain and then go on to annex Ireland was confirmed by subsequent history: after the futility of Hadrian's Chinese Wall had been repeatedly and expensively demonstrated, Septimus Severus had to make a belated effort to carry out *Agricola's* plan.

When he wrote II.61.2, Tacitus believed that Mesopotamia had become a province like Libya, and while the Parthians had not been subdued, he doubtless thought that their power had been permanently broken by the loss of their capital city, and that their kingdom would slowly disintegrate by internal convulsions aided by further Roman thrusts at opportune moments. He may even have hoped, as did Trajan in the full tide of victory, that the legions would one day march in India. Given his conception of imperial destiny, and his belief that the Parthians were a menace comparable to the Germans,³⁷ we can imagine the disappointment and distress that he would have felt at news of the reverses Trajan suffered before he started home in August, 117, and what would have been his anger—and perhaps despair—over a shameful and cowardly retreat and a contraction of the territory within which, ominously, it would thenceforth be *angustius imperitatum*. Now in Books XI to XV Tacitus has often to mention the affairs of Armenia and Parthia, and he devotes considerable space to them, especially to the career of Domitius Corbulo, and in all of this there is no allusion to the abandonment of Trajan's conquest, nor even a turn of phrase that would suggest such knowledge. Had he known of the failure, could he have refrained from at least some allusive phrase, such as *pervicaces Romanorum hostes* or *numquam diu domiti* or *sempiterno imperio nostro periculo nati*? I can discover nothing in those books inconsistent with an hypothesis that Tacitus regarded the Parthian problem as satisfactorily on its way to a definitive solution, and I note that the words he puts into the mouths of recreants in XV.13.2, “〈neque〉 eandem vim Samnitibus . . . ac Parthis, Romani imperii aemulis,” would be exquisitely ironical, if the rivals of the great empire were going the way of the rivals of the early city-state.

If a second and equally tenuous inference *ex silentio* is valid, we can lower the limit *ante quem*. The date of the simultaneous outbreak of the Jews in many parts of the empire is variously reported. Jerome says that it began in 115,³⁸ but it is inconceivable that Trajan, no matter how

³⁷ He admits, *Germ.* 37, “regno Arsacis acrior est Germanorum libertas,” but he lists the Parthians after the Samnites, the Carthaginians, the Celtiberians, and the Gauls—all problems that the Romans had successfully solved, with the implication that a solution of the Parthian problem was long overdue. If Tacitus perceived at all what later history makes so obvious to us, the danger of including in Roman territory an ever increasing number of unassimilable barbarians, he must have assumed either that they could be kept in permanent subjection or that the risk was less than that of permitting them to remain under arms and uncontrolled outside the frontiers. We may wish that we had the eloquent chapter that he must have devoted to Domitian's shameful peace with the Dacians.

³⁸ In Fotheringham's edition of the *Chronici canones*, Londinii, 1923, p. 278. The beginning of the outbreak is accordingly placed in 115 by R. P. Longden (*Cambridge*

intent on Oriental conquests he may have been, would have ignored for two years the devastation and effective loss to the empire of whole provinces, including Egypt with its indispensable granaries. Our best source, Cassius Dio, places the beginning of the great insurrection in the spring of 117.³⁹ That date for what amounted to a frenzied attempt to destroy the Roman Empire and forced Trajan to detach part of his army

Ancient History, Vol. XI, p. 250) and many others. On the discrepancy between this date and the dates in Eusebius's *Historia ecclesiastica*, see the article by Miss Motta, cited *infra*, n. 39. That the outbreak occurred simultaneously in several provinces is attested by all our sources, and is only reasonable, whether we suppose it to have spread by contagious enthusiasm or to have been prearranged and concerted according to an 'over-all' strategic plan. The eminent Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz, in his *Geschichte der Juden*, 4. Auflage bearbeitet von S. Horowitz, Leipzig, 1908, Vol. IV, p. 113, says that the Jews, after inciting and leading the revolts in Mesopotamia, "verbreiteten den Aufstand über einen großen Teil des römischen Reiches. . . . Eine solche Einmütigkeit setzt einen wohlberechneten Plan und kräftigen Führer voraus." Miss Motta (p. 487, n. 1) cites an article by A. Friedmann (to which I do not have access) in which it is concluded that the outbreaks in the Roman Empire were engineered from Palestine; I suppose that the chief of the race (*Nasi*, 'ethnarch') is meant. Offhand, one could conjecture that if there was a world-wide strategy, the direction came from the Prince (*Resch Golah*, 'exilarch'), who, according to Graetz (p. 112) had authority over all the Jews in the empire, and who normally resided in Babylon; no one seems to know whether he feigned submission to the Roman occupation of that city or fled into Parthian territory. Graetz points out that Roman control of Mesopotamia would have gravely impaired the commercial ascendancy of the Jews, and one can only say that if the coördination of the revolt in Mesopotamia with wide-spread insurrection within the empire to take Trajan *a tergo* was planned, it was masterly strategy and successful. Alexander Fuks (*infra*, n. 40) believes that the coördinated outbreaks in Cyprus, Cyrenaica, and Egypt, at least, had no "tangible, rational cause" and were merely "rooted in the messianic yearnings of the Jews." We are, of course, here interested only in the chronology (cf. *infra*, n. 40).

³⁹ Strictly speaking, what Dio implies (LXVIII.32.1) is that the news of the overthrow of Roman government in Cyrenaica, Egypt, and Cyprus reached Trajan while he was engaged in the siege of Hatra. (One could conjecture that his anger and alarm caused the tactical blunder of which Syme, p. 495, very plausibly accuses him.) On the chronology, see the study by Lelia Motta, *Aegyptus*, XXXII (1952), pp. 474-490, whose lucid and critical analysis of all the evidence (except certain papyri adduced by Fuks; see my next note) leads her to place the beginning of the sudden outbreak in the Roman provinces in the "prima metà del 117 d.C." We may add that although Trajan despatched Marcus Turbo with adequate forces to Egypt and doubtless sent other commanders and troops to other regions, the insurrection was not suppressed at the time of his death, which may, indeed, have contributed to the subsequent pacification. He left Mesopotamia after arranging a temporary cessation of hostilities, and intended to return (Dio, LXVIII. 33.1: *παρεσκευάζετο μὲν αὐθις ἐς Μεσοποταμίαν στρατεύσαι*), doubtless after he had restored Roman rule, begun reconstruction of the demolished cities, and taken precautions to avert similar outbreaks in the future. This supports Miss Motta's conclusion, for a much earlier date would mean either that Trajan simply ignored a vast and terrible insurrection for a year or more, or that it took legionary troops an improbably long time to break resistance in territory in which there were no mountain fastnesses to be stormed or starved.

in Mesopotamia, as distinct from relatively minor and local disturbances that may have occurred earlier, must be approximately correct.⁴⁰ The ferocity of the zealots, the atrocity of the tortures they inflicted on their victims, the gruesome mutilation of corpses, the extermination of Romans, Greeks, and even natives in prosperous and populous regions of the empire, the slaughter of Roman officials,⁴¹ and the levelling of great cities to the ground,⁴² made that outbreak surpass in horror any of Rome's civil wars, and the horror as well as the menace to the very existence

⁴⁰ Alexander Fuks, in his excellent article, *J.R.S.*, LI (1961), pp. 98-104, which complements his detailed study of the papyrological evidence in *Aegyptus*, XXXIII (1953), pp. 131-158, returns to the date of 115 on the basis of one crucial piece of evidence (since the other, the *Acta Pauli et Antonini*, is now securely dated to the reign of Hadrian: Musurillo, *Acts*, p. 181), a mutilated papyrus containing the proclamation of a nameless Prefect of Alexandria in the nineteenth year of somebody's reign. One could question Fuks' equation of that nineteenth year with 115, but if we accept it, I submit that a careful reading of the text (most recently edited by Fuks, *Corpus papyrorum Judaicarum*, Jerusalem, 1957, #435) will show that it cannot refer to the great outbreak that alone concerns us. Enough of the text remains to show clearly that, as Fuks himself says, the Prefect, writing on 13 October, regards the troubles as over and thinks only of reëstablishing domestic peace in the city, which he evidently hopes that a stern admonition to trouble-makers will suffice to produce. It is utterly unbelievable that any Roman prefect could have written in such complacent terms after the Jews in Cyrenaica had, according to Fuks, devoted themselves to "annihilation of the pagans" with such efficiency that they left only "scorched earth behind" when they invaded Egypt to join the insurrectionists there. If the date is 115, then the Prefect wrote after one of the usual *staseis* in Alexandria had been put down and *before* the great insurrection in Egypt and elsewhere, of which he knows nothing. The only objection is that such a local and separate outbreak does not fit the theory of a strategically planned and coördinated insurrection to support a revolt in Mesopotamia (*supra*, n. 38), but that obviously is not insuperable. If the Prefect's proclamation is evidence of an outbreak in Alexandria in the summer or early autumn of 115, which had to be suppressed by the available Roman troops in what he calls a *μάχη*, that explains the date in Jerome, for Eusebius could have regarded the event as a harbinger or preliminary of the great outbreak in Egypt and other provinces. Alexandria was a city in which riots approaching the fury of a civil war (Claudius calls one of them a *πόλεμος* in *P. Lond.* 1912, l. 74) occurred naturally and with monotonous regularity, and the *tumultus* mentioned in the papyrus would have been regarded as merely normal by Trajan (and Tacitus).

⁴¹ Appian, who was evidently a minor official in the bureaucracy in Egypt, escaped the Jews, as he tells us (frag. 19 Viereck & Roos), by extraordinary good luck, but many other officials in the Roman administration, perhaps including procurators, cannot have been so fortunate.

⁴² In Cyrene, for example, the destruction of the city was virtually total; see the inscriptions collected by S. Applebaum, *J.R.S.*, XL (1950), pp. 87-90, and the accompanying article. This substantiates reports of total devastation elsewhere. On the "scorched earth" policy, see the articles by Fuks cited above.

of the empire, of which a fatal weakness was thus disclosed,⁴³ must have made a profound impression on all contemporaries, and especially on Tacitus, who could scarcely have refrained from alluding to it, had it occurred before he wrote. Unfortunately for our purposes, however, his text has been lost at the points at which such an allusion would most naturally have occurred: the riots in Alexandria in 38, the violence and agitation of 41 that occasioned Claudius's letter and edict of warning, the sedition of Theudas, c. 46, and especially the outbreak in Rome *impulsore Chresto*.⁴⁴ We are left with the uncertain evidence of the famous passage in XV.44.3 concerning the *Chrestiani*, who, as Koestermann has shown,⁴⁵ must have been followers of the revolutionary agitator, Chrestus, and who formed a religious sect that Tacitus identifies with the sect that makes its first appearance in history in Pliny's famous letter of

⁴³ At the time that Hadrian seized power, according to Spartianus (5.2), in addition to yet unsubdued insurrections in the territories in which we know the Jews to have been active, "Mauri lacessebant [i.e., in Mauretania; cf. 5.8], Sarmatae bellum inferebant [in Dacia, thus providing Hadrian with a pretext for his reported wish to abandon that province also?], Britanni teneri sub Romana ditione non poterant." We may believe that there were serious troubles in the regions named, but we must allow for the possibility that the source is Hadrian's autobiography, in which he would certainly have exaggerated their gravity to the very limit of credibility. If we follow Graetz and others in thinking of a carefully planned and coördinated effort to shatter the Roman Empire, the uprisings in these (and probably other) regions could have been the work of the large Jewish colonies in cities throughout the empire, who would naturally have instigated and used the natives wherever possible; if, on the other hand, they were spontaneous native movements, their leaders must have been inspired, and emboldened by reports of the Jews' successes in Egypt, Cyrenaica, Cyprus, and perhaps elsewhere. What those successes proved was that Roman rule was not proof against a sudden and furious revolt by a segment of the population in a time of apparent tranquillity, and the example thus set may have influenced later revolts within the empire to an extent we cannot estimate.

⁴⁴ The date of the riots mentioned by Suetonius (*Claud.* 25.4) is uncertain. It seems unlikely that Tacitus would have ignored an outbreak in Rome of such magnitude that it called for rather drastic action by Claudius (no doubt accompanied by a pedantic discourse or other characteristic conduct), and he could have mentioned the riots without naming Chrestos or even have named the agitator without tracing the origin of the seditious sect to an earlier revolutionary of the same or similar name and thus anticipating what he says here. Our extant text begins near the middle of Book XI and after the early months of 47; there is no indication of a considerable lacuna in Book XII; and it is unlikely that Tacitus would have mentioned in the lost part of XI or a preceding book a noteworthy incident that occurred two or more years later. Given the possibility that Tacitus did mention the riots of which Chrestus was the instigator, the date 49, commonly assigned to them on very tenuous evidence, must be regarded as doubtful.

⁴⁵ *Historia*, XVI (1967), pp. 456-469; cf. his commentary *ad loc.*

c. 112.⁴⁶ Whatever the basis for the identification, Tacitus clearly thinks of the *exitiabilis superstitio* as a sect of Jewish nihilists, a pestilence that began in Judaea and spread to Jewish colonies throughout the western world, especially the numerous colony at Rome, and his "etiam per Urbem" sounds like an allusion to the outbreak instigated by Chrestus. Had he known of the enormously more deadly and devastating eruption of Messianic aspirations in 117, would he have contented himself with an allusion to a relatively minor outbreak at Rome that the government had quickly brought under control? I think it unlikely that he would. Without pretending to know what he said in the lost books,⁴⁷ I think the most probable of the several possible explanations of his silence at this point is that he wrote before the insurrection began. That would place the composition of Book XV, and presumably of XVI also, in 115-116.

Tacitus was sixty or past sixty in 116. He had reached the point in life at which every man, if not thoughtless, must say to himself, with Lucilius, "iam, qua tempestate vivo, chresin ad me recipio." All the ills that flesh is heir to begin to accumulate by a physiological necessity

⁴⁶ In *La Parola del Passato*, XXIII (1968), pp. 368-370, Robert Renehan (who had not seen Koestermann's article) argues that *Chrestiani* should be read not only in Tacitus but also in Pliny; he does not consider Suetonius, *Nero*, 16.2, or make clear his view of the quotation from Sulpicius Severus that is now printed as Frag. 2 of the *Historiae*, although the mention of *Christiani*, if not the entire passage, is more probably to be attributed to the Fifth-Century Christian writer than to Tacitus. Léon Herrmann, *Latomus*, XIII (1954), pp. 343-353, contends that Pliny's letter has been grossly, though very cleverly, interpolated; if he is right, then the sectaries whom Pliny found in Bithynia need not have been persons whom the Christians of later centuries would have been willing to accept as spiritual progenitors. It would be irrelevant to consider here questions that have been endlessly debated with much emotion and little objectivity, and it will suffice to remark that (1) it is psychologically improbable that the appalling malevolence manifest in the Apocalypse and innumerable similar compositions could have been satisfied by dreams of universal catastrophe and suffering that it made no attempt to realize, and (2) nothing is more preposterous than the notion that the eminently practical Romans, long accustomed to tolerate the most outlandish sects and the weirdest superstitions, attributed *odium generis humani* to an innocuous flock of innocent lambs that were uniquely engaged in loving one another.

⁴⁷ Or what he may have planned to say when he came to the Jewish revolt in 66, where, as Syme suggests (p. 469, n. 2), his probably numerous earlier mentions of Jewish seditions could have been brought to an artistically perfect climax, which, we may add, need not have involved much repetition of what he had said in *Hist.* V.2-8. I recognize that the possibility he might have deferred to that point the allusion that I desiderate in XV.⁴⁴ seriously weakens an argument *ex silentio* on which I should otherwise insist more strongly, but it is also possible that in the chapter now lost (if ever written) Tacitus maintained the attitude he took in the *Historiae*, where he speaks of the Jews of Judaea without reference to the Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, where their status was, of course, entirely different.

against which consolatory essays *de senectute* are powerless, and although a few men who are by heredity *μακρόβιοι* wither slowly, no one is astonished when men of that age cease to live. Tacitus may have died in the course of nature after he completed (or even before he completed) Book XVI; his great German expositor suggests, "Vielleicht hat ihm der Tod (wie Petrarca) den Griffel aus der Hand genommen."⁴⁸ Koestermann was thinking of a later date, but I see no reason why Tacitus may not have died before he heard of the Jewish outbreak or suspected that the empire had passed the noon of all its greatness—died with an unshaken faith in Rome, *felix opportunitate mortis*.

There are, however, two alternatives (aside from the obvious one, a physical collapse) that are worth mentioning. I shall do no more than sketch possibilities that no amount of argument could convert into certainties.

Tacitus was undoubtedly a man of considerable, and conceivably great, influence in the politics of Rome and the Roman Empire. From an inscription discovered by chance in 1889 we have learned that he held the proconsulship that was the highest honor to which a loyal senator could aspire,⁴⁹ but we do not know how prominent a part he took in the business of the senate nor to what extent he was an intimate friend of the princeps; we do not even know whether he was a member of the *consilium* that Trajan appears to have scrupulously consulted. He had some part in the rise of Trajan to the principate; how great a part is conjectural. In the *Agricola* (44.5) he says of his father-in-law: "ei <non licuit> durare in hanc beatissimi saeculi lucem ac principem Traianum videre, quod augurio votisque apud nostras aures ominabatur." Now this is generally taken to be merely a rhetorical device, a "happy artifice,"⁵⁰ and to mean no more than that Agricola hoped for better times. But an *augurium* should be more specific, and *ominari* means more than to wish or hope. When Agricola confided in his son-in-law (necessarily before 89, when Tacitus left Italy), Flavius Clemens was still alive and his sons were the officially designated heirs, and while anyone could have hoped that pupils of Quintilian would be imbued with *humanitas*, there was no assurance that Quintilian was a better teacher than Seneca. What is more, if we take Tacitus literally, Agricola predicted the accession of Trajan, who, to be sure, was a man of some distinction, son of a military man who had been transformed into a patrician; he had been a praetor,

⁴⁸ Vol. IV, p. 410.

⁴⁹ It is not *impossible* that we may someday learn from newly discovered fragments of the *Fasti* that he held a second consulship.

⁵⁰ Syme, p. 29.

had commanded a legion in Spain, and had given proof of military competence in handling troops, but it would have required practerhuman prescience to foresee that he would have a chance to become *princeps*. It is by no means impossible, however, that *Agricola*, one of the very few men of extraordinary ability whom Tacitus judged *capax imperii*, had, with a few of his peers, selected Trajan as Domitian's successor. Prudent men would not plan a futile revolt, such as that of Saturninus, nor yet an assassination when there were no special circumstances to make it feasible, but men capable of keeping their own counsel patiently could have made discreet preparations to take advantage of the opportunity that would present itself when the fortunately childless Domitian was removed from the scene. If that was what *Agricola* confided to the ears of his son-in-law and heir, *ominabatur* has a real meaning—and Tacitus was his successor in the conspiracy.⁵¹

It is generally agreed that Cocceius Nerva was probably a participant in the conspiracy that delivered Rome from Domitian, although he was in the end unable to protect the actual assassins from the Praetorians. At all events, the accession of so aged and feeble a man was merely a stop-gap; as Syme puts it, "it meant that the struggle for the succession could begin at once." If a small group of prudent men had already resolved that Trajan was to be the successor, they probably were not members of the conspiracy that disposed of Domitian, but they seized an opportunity that presented itself, perhaps unexpectedly, and it is quite likely that, as Syme suggests, the adoption of Trajan was forced on Nerva,⁵² which means that it was likewise forced on the senators and

⁵¹ As we all know, great political mutations, when not the result of war, are normally brought about by conspiracies, although it is customary to use euphemisms when speaking of successful conspiracies of which one approves, and prudence may require further circumlocution when the prevailing mythology attributes such changes to supernatural beings or "spontaneous" action by a populace or proletariat.

⁵² Dietmar Kienast, *Historia*, XVII (1968), pp. 51–71, has pointed out that Pliny in his *Panegyricus* speaks of Nerva in terms that are less than flattering, as surely Pliny would not and could not have done, had Trajan felt any real gratitude, much less *pietas*, toward his adoptive father. Pliny doubtless had good opportunities to learn after the event how the transfer of power was effected, and Kienast would have done well to explore the basis of Pliny's thrice-repeated certainty that Trajan was a man *quem constat imperaturum fuisse, etiamsi a Nerva non esset adoptatus*. Pliny, speaking in public, naturally speaks of the need to save the empire and implies that Trajan came to power *divinitus*, but Pliny had had some little experience of human affairs, and unless he was indulging in empty rhetoric or had the temerity to suggest that Trajan would have followed the example of Vitellius, he must have known that Trajan and his champions at Rome had made their preparations with such sagacity and thoroughness that they were in a position to impose their will on Nerva and the opposing factions.

other men of influence who favored other candidates. Now, whether or not there was a group already resolved and prepared to act for Trajan, as we have conjectured, Tacitus was undoubtedly a member of the group that procured Trajan's succession.⁵³ Trajan was therefore to *some* extent politically indebted to Tacitus, and Tacitus was *wholly* committed to Trajan, not only politically but from an inner conviction that must have been based on a knowledge of Trajan's character such as could have come only from a long acquaintance or friendship.⁵⁴

That Tacitus was disappointed in Trajan's rule goes without saying: every man who anticipates a *beatissimum saeculum* must necessarily discover that, no matter how hard he tried to be coolly rational, his imagination got the better of his judgement, leading him to expect from a political mutation impossible results. Even if he has kept his mind unclouded by the normal illusion that a change in régime will transform human nature, he will find that his conceptions of what is desirable and feasible conflict with the calculations of other influential men, that decisions must be made in terms of events and pressures that he did not foresee, and that, in short, "between the idea and the reality falls the Shadow." The only question will be how far he is willing to compromise.

We cannot catalogue Tacitus's disappointments. We may be sure that he disapproved strongly of Plotina's ingercence in political affairs, at least after she, like Messalina, presumed to sit in the *consilium principis*,⁵⁵ and he

⁵³ As Syme has pointed out, it is quite possible that Tacitus held the consulship when Nerva finally adopted Trajan. This has been denied by Harold B. Mattingly in a boldly prosopographical article (*Rivista storica dell'Antichità*, II (1972), pp. 169-185) that raises questions that I hope to discuss elsewhere. Whatever the date of the consulship, Ogilvie is surely right in saying (in his and Richmond's edition of the *Agricola*, p. 9) that Tacitus "must have participated, whether as consul or ex-consul, in the political crisis that resulted in the adoption of Trajan."

⁵⁴ The crowd is naturally eager to endow with imaginary virtues new rulers of whom it knows nothing, but Tacitus must early have acquired the unusual ability or fortitude to observe human nature objectively, and we cannot suppose that his confidence in Trajan's will and ability to inaugurate a new era was based on mere gossip or a nodding acquaintance. Whether he was well acquainted with Plotina (who was younger, and may have been very much younger, than her husband) is, of course, quite another question.

⁵⁵ Attested by P. Oxy. 1242 (= *Acta Hermasici* in the *Acta Alexandrinorum*), where her presence would have been specifically protested, had it not been usual and taken for granted. The unknown author doubtless colored his narrative to further his purposes, but he would have been at pains to avoid obvious blunders in describing the setting. The doubts about his accuracy expressed by H. A. Musurillo in his commentary (*The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, Oxford, 1954, p. 176) depend on the assumption that the author used *συγκλητικοί* in the special sense of "Roman senators" rather than in the general and normal meaning of the word, which simply designates the members of any group

may have been dismayed when she finally obtained from her indulgent husband the title and rank of Augusta, as Agrippina had done. He must have bitterly resented the presence and offices of her favorite, Aelius Hadrianus, a sleek young man of dubious antecedents and of morals that probably left no room for doubt, a *Graeculus*, master of all arts of which he had obtained a smattering, and actually a master of the art by which ambitious young men generally acquire influence over older men who have sexually unsatisfied wives.⁵⁶ Although Tacitus cannot have foreseen what would eventually happen, for there are limits to the powers of the *coniectura consequentium, non multum a divinatione differens*, he was doubtless worried when Plotina contrived a marriage between her favorite and Iulia Sabina, her husband's grand-niece. It is possible, though improbable, that he resented the influence of Jews in Trajan's court.⁵⁷ We cannot even guess whether Tacitus approved of the alimentary institutions as a means of preserving the native stock or regarded them and other expensive benefactions as a waste of money. Philostratus obviously catered to the credulity of his wonder-loving age when he described Trajan's affection and admiration for Dio Chrysostom,⁵⁸ but it seems that Trajan did show some favor to the house-broken Cynic, and he may have been really interested in Chrysostom's scheme for resettling urban proletariats in agrarian countrysides.⁵⁹ Tacitus may have been sceptical of the plan and almost certainly disapproved of its promoter.

that has been called together to deliberate or give advice, and is thus applicable to the *consilium principis*, which, as Musurillo says, probably included influential *equites* as well as senators.

⁵⁶ Victorians were sure that Plotina, to whom some nice sayings are attributed, was a lady, and that ladies are incapable of marital divagations. Our contemporaries, who take for granted Pope's dictum that "every woman is at heart a rake", will be especially moved by the report (Dio, LXVIII.7, says that Trajan *περί μεράκια ἐσπουδάκει*) that poor Plotina needed what is now called "an outlet."

⁵⁷ In *Ann.* XV.27.3 he identifies Tib. Iulius Alexander as an "illustis eques Romanus," obviously regarding him as a Roman by "assimilation," and it is likely that he took the same attitude toward many or all of the Jews in positions of prominence and power in Rome, who must necessarily have exhibited all the essentials of Graeco-Roman culture. Syme's note (p. 468, n. 2) is therefore misleading: it is Josephus, not Tacitus, who identifies as Jews several persons mentioned in the *Historiae* and *Annales*.

⁵⁸ *Vit. soph.* I.7.4; cf. G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1969, p. 47, and Donald R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism*, London, 1937, p. 154, who (following J. von Arnim) remarks that there were "good reasons why . . . Trajan should have found Dio highly useful."

⁵⁹ *Or.* VII (Εὐβοϊκός = 13 in von Arnim's edition) § 107; ἀναγκασθῆσόμεθα ἐκβαλεῖν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων τῷ λόγῳ τοὺς κομψοὺς πένητας, ἵνα παρέχωμεν τῷ ὄντι καθ' Ὁμηρον τὰς πόλεις εὐναιεταύσας, κ.τ.λ. Dudley (*op. cit.*, pp. 157 f.) takes this to be a serious proposal for social reform, and so do I, although it is hard to feel certain that any passage in the vast verbiage

We could multiply instances of policies that Tacitus is unlikely to have endorsed, and it would be possible to imagine that he was gradually alienated from Trajan,⁶⁰ but the real question is whether all of Trajan's shortcomings, multiply them as we will, would have outweighed in Tacitus's estimation Trajan's success in overawing the Germans, conquering Dacia, and extending Roman dominion to the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and the Persian Gulf—all this while preserving, at least in the part of society that Tacitus thought important, the *felicitas temporum* "ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet." Intelligent men understand that politics is the art of the possible, and Tacitus knew that nations that have won empire invariably find themselves riding a tiger from which it would be suicide to dismount. He need not have thought Trajan an *optimus princeps*, so long as he thought him *optimus principum*. And unless we imagine him as having gone into a disgruntled or despondent retirement, as he and Trajan grew old together, he must have been increasingly concerned with the problem of how power was again to be transmitted to worthy hands.⁶¹ And *if* he did survive Trajan,

of the "Second Sophistic" is not merely epideictic. Dio professes a practical political purpose (§ 127: εἰ δὲ πολλὰ τῶν εἰρημένων καθόλου χρήσιμά ἐστι πρὸς πολιτείαν κ.τ.λ.), but that, of course, could be part of the show. Dudley credits him with important additional proposals that have been lost in the transmission of the text.

⁶⁰ Alain Michel, in his *Tacite et le destin de l'Empire* (Paris, 1966), a discursive book addressed to readers ignorant of the Classics but well worth reading, depicts Tacitus as progressively alienated from Trajan's government and reaching a kind of spiritual and intellectual isolation in his later years. One could also base inferences on the modern view that Trajan in his last years became a "megalomaniac" who "overstrained the resources of the empire" in a "fantastic" scheme of conquest; the only evidence for this is the assumption that Hadrian consulted the interests of the nation rather than his personal convenience or advantage. To be sure, there was a limit to expansion eastward—our mind boggles at the idea of Rome with a boundary on the China Sea—but Tacitus evidently did not believe that the limit had been reached, nor, for that matter, did the authors of the tradition that came down to Eutropius, who is so certain that the retreat was unnecessary that he gives a naïve explanation of Hadrian's motive ("Traiani gloriae invidens").

⁶¹ It would be vain to discuss ancient rumors about whom Trajan would have nominated as his successor, or to speculate about why the nomination was deferred so long. It would have been expedient to defer the nomination until Trajan was ready to admit that he was old, and the announcement should, of course, have been made in Rome, where he could have delivered an appropriate oration and shown proper deference to the senate, where the few men who had shared his secret would lead the applause. For that matter, it is not *impossible* that Trajan, when he was partly paralyzed and knew that he was dying, did make a nomination that the precious three who surrounded him revised in the interests of Hadrian, who was at Antioch and doubtless preparing himself to be surprised by news of his "adoption."

he cannot have heard the news from Cilicia without horror and despair.

Gibbon's generalization about the period "during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous" has cast a glamor over Hadrian's reign. Our contemporaries, born into a catastrophic age of world wars and pathetically *μεθίεντες στρυγεροῦ πολέμοιο*, naturally venerate a man who contrived, by whatever means, to maintain for almost twenty-one years a peace, both foreign and domestic, that was broken only by the Jewish revolt of 132. And growing economic stringency makes it easy to see a nimbus about the head of a ruler whose propagandists could claim that he, by cancelling unpaid taxes, *non praesentes tantum cives suos sed et posteros eorum praestitit securos*.⁶² Our concern here, however, is neither to aver that peace is wonderful nor to criticize Trajan's budgets, but only to adumbrate, if we can, the sentiments of Tacitus, if he was still alive, when he heard the tidings that a dying or dead princeps had secretly, in the presence only of his intriguing wife, her lover's mother-in-law, that woman's paramour, and a young man who was cremated immediately thereafter, given an empire (that was not his to bestow) to a *Graeculus* who had married into the family against his will, whom he, despite pressure from his artful wife, had advanced only so far as the conventions of Roman society required to avoid scandal, and whom he had left in charge of an inactive Syrian army while the four great marshals on whose loyalty and generalship he was accustomed to rely were busy elsewhere.⁶³ Such was the story, and Tacitus was not a man who could say *credo quia absurdum est*. Had the tale been credible, Tacitus would not have been less offended by the private transfer of supreme power to a person whose character, however cunningly

⁶² C.I.L. VI, 967. No one seems to have remarked that the major beneficiaries were probably wealthy speculators and financiers who had access to "inside" information.

⁶³ To this must be added the fact that, while it is entirely possible that Trajan contracted typhoid fever at Hatra or succumbed to some other malady, he himself believed that he was poisoned, and his belief was certainly known in Rome, where Agrippina's pharmaceutical skill had not been forgotten. (Some wit may have remarked that Claudius and Trajan were both sixty-four when they ascended to Heaven.) Other suspicions or damning circumstances surrounding the demise of Trajan, unknown to us, probably flitted *per ora virum* in Roman society: the custom of transmitting news and rumors by correspondence did not end with Cicero. It is surely otiose to remark that we are here interested, not in establishing demonstrable historical truth, but in summarizing, on the basis of our available sources, what was probably said and believed in influential circles in Rome at the time, and that for our purposes it does not matter how much of the story is rejected by modern writers who have tender feelings toward Hadrian and Plotina. The basic work is still Wilhelm Weber's *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Kaisers Hadrianus*, Leipzig, 1907, which is much more detailed than the chapter he contributed to the Cambridge History and examines the sources systematically.

dissembled, must have been at least suspected, and whom no man, if not delirious, could have fancied another Trajan. Plotina's *coup de Jarnac* must have taken Rome by surprise, and we can only imagine the consternation of the eminent men (perhaps including Tacitus, if he was still alive) who must have had settled plans⁶⁴ (probably endorsed by Trajan) for determining the succession to the *imperium*, certainly with the concurrence and possibly with the ostensible primacy of the honest part of the senate. Neither Plotina's forged letter⁶⁵ nor Hadrian's hypocritical apology can have deceived any one of them.

As Weber seems to have been the first to see,⁶⁶ the astounding news must have been quickly followed by the arrival in Rome of P. Acilius Attianus, the Praetorian Praefect,⁶⁷ charged with the mission of converting the *coup de Jarnac*, in which he had been one of the three participants and may have been the prime mover, into a completed *coup d'état* by means for which so talented a dissembler as Hadrian could disavow responsibility. He arrested and ejected Baebius Macer,⁶⁸ whom Trajan had left in charge of the city; he handed out an extravagant double donative to the troops to inspire affection for Hadrian; and he must have proceeded to buy or intimidate the opposition.⁶⁹ We do not know

⁶⁴ They must surely have learned from the probably acute crisis that preceded the accession of Trajan, just as the men who engineered that succession had obviously profited from the lesson given by what happened after the assassination of Caligula.

⁶⁵ So described by Cassius Dio (LXIX.1) on the basis of the researches of his father, M^r. Cassius Apronianus, who had been governor of Cilicia and seems to have been twice consul. We may wonder what evidence of the forgery Apronianus could have found in Cilicia long after Trajan died there, but his son assures us that πάντα τὰ κατ' αὐτὸν [= 'Ἀδριανὸν] ἐμεμαθήκει σαφῶς, and that implies something much more than collecting gossip.

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 44. I try to exercise care to credit such perceptions, as one credits emendations, to the first authors, and I hope I have not been guilty of an oversight here.

⁶⁷ Hadrian's former tutor, reputed to have been the paramour of Matidia, had presumably been appointed to command of Trajan's guards at some time before Trajan's death. We do not know how many Praetorians had been left in Rome, presumably under the command of the other Praefect, who, so far as I can learn, may or may not have been Sulpicius Similis at that time. Like all men engaged in conspiratorial *coups d'état*, Attianus forgot the rule that tools are discarded when no longer useful.

⁶⁸ Not a man of strong character or loyalty, it seems, for it was deemed unnecessary to murder him (Spart. *Vit. Had.*, 5.5), and he became a prime example of the *clementia* of which Hadrian boasted in an autobiography in which he doubtless applied all the perfumes of Arabia to his spotted hands.

⁶⁹ Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 44: "Ohne ernstliche Bedenken für die Sicherheit des neuen Regiments sind Attians radikale Vorschläge nicht verständlich. In allen Teilen des Reichs haben sich die Großen gegen die Nachfolge Hadrians gestäubt"—and one would expect the greatest opposition to have come from the best members of the senatorial

the details; we do not even know to what extent he may have used the troops to demonstrate the legitimacy of Hadrian's succession. What is clear is that he in some way extorted from the senate decrees that gave some cover of legality to the murder of a number of eminent men⁷⁰ whom Hadrian feared or against whom he bore grudges. In some cases at least, the pretext was that they were conspiring against the new master, which may have been true in the sense that they remained loyal to what they believed or knew Trajan's intentions to have been, and may have pondered means of displacing the usurper; they appear to have been without troops when their official assassins overtook them, some of them *en route* homeward.

We need not ask whether at this date men knew or suspected that Hadrian intended to surrender all of Trajan's conquests: four Roman

aristocracy in Rome. That no effective opposition is recorded is in itself highly significant. As Weber, commenting on Attianus's *Wirksamkeit* in Rome, says, "Man kann dies nicht stark genug betonen." It is entirely possible that a strong conspiratorial organization had been formed during the last years of Trajan's life to put Hadrian in power, and that its Roman chapter was ready to strike, openly or secretly, as soon as the glad tidings came from Cilicia; if not, Attianus's achievement is so much more remarkable that one must credit him with a kind of genius. A vital question that we cannot answer is to what extent the various armies in the field were under the control of Hadrian's partisans. One notes that Trajan's trusted general, the polyonymous Q. Marcius Turbo etc. (on whom see Syme, *J.R.S.*, LII (1962), pp. 87 ff.), was, exceptionally, a commander on whom Hadrian felt that he could rely from the first (*Spart. Vit. Had.* 5,8). A. Iulius Quadratus, whom Hadrian sent to Dacia when Nigrinus was removed and destined for assassination, may have been of less certain allegiance; he died soon thereafter.

⁷⁰ The number of prominent victims is uncertain. Dio (LXIX.4), after naming A. Cornelius Palma, L. Publilius Celsus, C. Avidius Nigrinus, and Lusius Quietus, whom Hadrian killed on a pretext of conspiracy against him, adds, evidently among those killed at the very first, οἱ δὲ, ἐφ' ἑτέροις δὴ τισιν ἐγκλήμασιν, οἷα μεγάλα δυνάμενοι καὶ πλούτου καὶ δόξης εὖ ἤκοντες. We do not know who those wealthy and illustrious men were, nor can we be sure of the chronology of the purge. Dio says that it was carried out ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ, and Spartianus says (7.3) that the four consulars were killed *uno tempore*, and that Lusius Quietus was killed *in itinere*, presumably on his way home to Mauretania. For what it is worth, I note an indication that I do not remember having seen in the historians who have recently treated this period. Graetz, *op. cit.*, p. 126 (cf. pp. 406 ff.), reports a Jewish tradition that two insurgents in Judaea were on the point of being executed when their request for divine intervention was promptly answered by the arrival of the news that Hadrian had discharged Lusius Quietus: "Der Tag der Befreiung . . . am zwölften Addar (im Februar 118?), wurde als ein denkwürdig-freudiges Ereignis verewigt; das Synhedrion setzte ihn . . . in den Kalendar . . . unter dem Namen Trajanstag (*Yom Tirjanus*) ein." The name of the holiday, however, indicates rejoicing over the death of Trajan, and one cannot believe that the news of that happy event took six months to reach a people desperately interested in it.

provinces, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Armenia, and even Dacia.⁷¹ When Hadrian began to appease the Parthians,⁷² thus foreshadowing the craven policy of subsidizing, instead of defeating, the enemy,⁷³ is not important. It is unnecessary to conjecture to what extent contemporaries could have apprehended that the new master, *varius, multiplex, multiformis*,⁷⁴ would begin the process by which the Roman Empire would cease to be Roman in its culture, its mentality, and its ruling class, so that, as Eduard Fraenkel observed,⁷⁵ we see in Tacitus the last expositor of the indomitable spirit and lucid mind that created the Empire: he was the *ultimus Romanorum*.

We need only ask ourselves what the coming of Acilius Attianus would have meant to Tacitus, if he lived to witness it.

If Tacitus was a man whom Hadrian or his confederates had cause to remember as devoted to the policies of which Trajan had been the avatar, and if he had or was believed to have noteworthy influence, he may have been marked for an informal and unostentatious liquidation. That, of course, is an entirely gratuitous conjecture, possible only because we cannot name a source that would certainly preserve for us a notice of his death.

Let us consider the only alternative. Tacitus, a distinguished member of the senate, would almost necessarily attend the sessions at which that body performs under the direction of the newcomer ringmaster and authorizes the assassination of the men who had been great under Trajan. Even if he did not attend those sessions, Tacitus was a senator, and it is a moral certainty that he would have remembered one of the most eloquent passages in all literature: "Nostrae duxere Helvidium in carcerem manus . . . nos innocenti sanguine Senecio perfudit." Domitian had returned.

It was not merely that a man past sixty could scarcely hope to live to a future in which it might conceivably be possible to say again, "etiam nostri superstites sumus." The great effort that put Trajan in power, the high and audacious resolve to amalgamate "res olim dissociabiles, principatum ac libertatem," the last Titanic thrust of the Roman will-to-power—all had failed. *Nunc demum abit animus!* To my mind, it is

⁷¹ I see no reason to doubt the intention reported by Eutropius, VII.6. Dacia presented some administrative problems, as shown by the immediate reorganization of its government, and Hadrian would not have cared about the *multi cives Romani* whom Trajan had settled there. ⁷² Spart. 5.4.

⁷³ *Epit. de Caesaribus*, 14.10. With this goes the "Chinese wall" in England and a resort to purely defensive measures, which never succeed against a persistent enemy.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.6. ⁷⁵ *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft*, 1932, pp. 218-233.

inconceivable that if Tacitus lived to see that bitter day of dissolution, he would have had the heart to write another line.⁷⁶ He was, furthermore, a prudent man, not given to vainglorious displays of futile courage *ambitiosa morte*, and he may have had progeny or others dear to him whose inheritance and whose future, such as it might be in the new age, he would not willingly compromise; perceiving that the time *ubi quae sentias dicere licet* had passed away, he may well have consigned the pages of his unfinished *Ab excessu divi Augusti* to a *scrinium*, there to await, as had the histories of the elder Seneca almost a century before, a day when truth, grown obsolete, might be told without peril.

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⁷⁶ Or many lines, if, as Koestermann believes (*supra*, n. 31), the last twenty chapters of our extant text were written under emotion excited by Hadrian's bloody inaugural. That is possible, but the rather numerous points in the early books at which Syme sees oblique allusions to Hadrian, which may prove no more than that history repeats itself and that human crimes are sadly lacking in variety, are certainly parallels that delators or even Hadrian himself could have noticed; to have published them after the *coup d'état* would have been to take a risk gratuitously and with no possible hope that the books could serve either to reform or to displace the new boss.