

# The senator as historian

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V

RONALD SYME

The Senator as Historian



## THE SENATOR AS HISTORIAN

ELECTIONS of magistrates and the passing of laws, the allocation of *provinciae*, wars, triumphs and the building of temples, such is the annual register of the Roman State; and the « res populi Romani » continue thus to be narrated when the magnitude of the events threatened to burst the structure (as in the last epoch of the Republic), when the Republic gives way before the Monarchy, and when the Monarchy has endured for a century or more. Sallustius Crispus decided to begin, not with Sulla's resignation of the dictatorship, but with the consulate of M. Lepidus and Q. Catulus (78 B.C.), while Asinius Pollio chose for his exordium the year that saw the compact of the three « principes », heralding the armed conflict a decade later — « motum ex Metello consule civicum ». As for Cornelius Tacitus, his *Historiae* lead off precisely with the first day of January, A.D. 69, Ser. Galba and T. Vinius being consuls. His second work went further back into the past (in more senses than one). The books have for title (or perhaps sub-title) « ab excessu divi Augusti », according to the *Codex Medicus*. After short and prefatory remarks (« pauca de Augusto et extrema »), the story of Rome under the successors of Augustus is narrated year by year.

Posterity knows the work as the *Annales*. Why *Annales*? Or, let it be asked, why not? Commentators in antiquity, such as the scholiast Servius, draw a distinction: « annales » (they say) chronicle events in the past, whereas « historia » is the record of a person's own time and experience. The distinction is not helpful, and it may be fallacious. It has not always been noticed that Tacitus himself nowhere employs the word « historia » with the meaning of « history ». In his usage, a historian is an « auctor » or an « annalium scriptor ». If he evokes the « praecipuum munus

annalium » (III. 65), it is to enounce the principal function of all history; and when he refers to « *annales nostri* » (IV. 32), he simply means « the history I am writing ».

\* \* \*

In the beginning, history was written by senators (first a Fabius, and Cato was the first to use the Latin language); it remained for a long time the monopoly of the governing order; and it kept the firm imprint of its origins ever after. The senator came to his task in mature years, with a proper knowledge of men and government, a sharp and merciless insight. Taking up the pen, he fought again the old battles of Forum and Curia. Exacerbated by failure or not mollified by worldly success, he asserted a personal claim to glory and survival; and, if he wrote in retirement from affairs, it was not always with tranquillity of mind.

Sallustius had been a tribune of the plebs, active and turbulent in a year of anarchy, the third consulate of Pompeius Magnus; he was expelled from the Senate by the censors of 50 B.C.; he saw warfare and governed a province for Caesar. His career being terminated (and a fortune amassed), he proposed to put his leisure to good employ, cured, (so he professed) from the errors and ambition of his earlier life, a wiser man, and liberated from the spirit of party. To go in for hunting or practise agriculture was ignoble: he would write history. After the two monographs, Sallustius embarked on an ample narration. The subject of his *Historiae* might be described as the decline of that oligarchy which Sulla had brought back to power, with Pompeius Magnus at first and for a long time the enemy of the *Optimates*, then their false friend, and leading to catastrophe.

Sallustius had not got further than the year 67 when he died. Asinius Pollio took up the tale, a commander of

armies and a diplomat in high or secret negotiations, a partisan of Caesar and of Antonius but professing to be a Republican at heart. Soon after his consulship (40 B.C.), Pollio foreswore politics, turning to letters. He composed tragedies on mythological subjects (no trace survives), but soon found a more congenial occupation in recording the transactions of his own time, a theme which was also the fall of the Roman Republic, «*periculosae plenum opus aleae* ».

Tacitus came to history in the same season of life as Sallustius and Pollio. His experience was comparable. Not, it is true, the long agony of the civil wars, but the equivalent—«*saeva pax* » and a precarious equilibrium. He was *consul suffectus* under Nerva in 97, holding the *fascēs* for a term of two months somewhere in the second half of that year. A few months pass and he comes forward with a monograph on his wife's father, Julius Agricola, consul and governor of Britain. A first essay, for he intends to go on and narrate the reign of Domitian, the fifteen years of silence and humiliation, «*quindecim annos, grande mortalis aevi spatium* », to stand as testimony of past enslavement and present felicity.

The political events and arguments of 97 lie behind the *Agricola*. Tacitus pays due homage to the happy epoch now dawning: «*felicitas temporum* ». As would be expected, the treatise is an attack on the dead tyrant. It is also an attack on political extremists, namely the party of the opposition, the intractable men and the martyrs, who perished with no advantage to the «*res publica* ». Tacitus in a passionate outburst goes out of his way to assert that a man can do his duty to the Commonwealth even under bad emperors. That is a defence of the cautious and virtuous Agricola. Also a defence of Cornelius Tacitus, who had made a good career under Domitian. Also (it can be divined) a defence of somebody else, none other

than M. Ulpius Traianus, commander of the army of Germania Superior, who had been adopted by Nerva as his son and successor in October of 97.

That is not all. The year 97 (it can be argued) is also behind the *Historiae* of Tacitus. As the subject of his projected work, the eloquent consular announced the reign of Domitian. As it happened, he went back to 69. The reason is plain. The brief reign of Nerva had brought the past to life again, sharp and terrifying. The parallel between Galba and Nerva was inescapable—a weak emperor, the threat of civil war, the rôle of the Praetorian Guard, and an adoption in extremity. The one act failed, the other succeeded. Galba's choice was foolish and fatal, but Nerva elected a man who was « capax imperii ». Consul in 97, Tacitus witnessed the disintegration of a government, the menace from the army commanders and the veiled coup d'état that brought Trajan to power.

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The theme of the *Historiae* is the murderous story of civil war and despotism—the rapid events of 69 followed by the twenty seven years' rule of the Flavian emperors. Enough, perhaps, for one man's achievement. An interval elapsed. Tacitus went out to Asia as proconsul (112/3, summer to summer). At some time after his return he set himself to a second task.

It would be entertaining to speculate about his reasons (personal and political), and perhaps fruitless. We know very little about Cornelius Tacitus. Yet one supposition could be hazarded. In the late years of Trajan, a man could stand at a point of vantage, with a long perspective backwards. The time had come to ask when it was that the Principate took an evil turn, and why, to trace the decline of the dynasty from the Principate of Tiberius Caesar to

the despotism of Nero, to analyse a process which was at the same time the decline and fall of the Roman aristocracy.

Tacitus proposed to narrate the story of the Caesars according to the canons and manner of the Republic. Hence the traditional and annalistic structure. That method labours under sundry disadvantages. On the one hand, it breaks the unity of large subjects and disperses the interest. On the other, it produces a catalogue of heterogeneous items. Tacitus himself comes out with sporadic complaints, and modern scholars have not been slow to fasten upon the defects and constraints of the annalistic framework.

By contrast, it is the signal advantages that ought to be emphasized. First, and patently, chronology. How dispense with dates? Sallust tried in the *Bellum Jugurthinum*, and the result is not at all encouraging. Under the Empire, it might be urged, new and better types of dating offered. Reflection inspires a doubt. There were various complications in computing the regnal years of emperors, for example by the *tribunicia potestas*. Moreover, eras of that kind would be repulsive to a senator. It was the aim of Tacitus to write about Rome and the Senate, not merely the dynasty. He did not want his Roman annals to degenerate into a sequence of imperial biographies.

Let us be grateful for eponymous consuls. The schema came as a blessing to a compiler, a copyist, or a mere « exornator rerum »: it saved him from many of the errors, inherent in his ignorance or his lack of a living interest in the « res publica ». But it could not hamper a bold, vigorous and selective writer. Knowledge of government, artistic skill and architectonic power would prevail.

Tacitus had abundant information, and he operated with great freedom. About his sources in the *Annales*, there has been interminable debate, not all of it wise or profitable. To take the first hexad. Tacitus claims or plainly implies that he had read all the authors who dealt with Tiberius



Caesar, and he can be believed. The question arises, what value and *crédit* did he accord them? We have his condemnatory verdict on the writing of history under the Caesars—the living adulated, the dead defamed (I.1). One might therefore be tempted to refrain from conjuring with names and the unknown. Still less the phantom of the « Single Source ». Or rather (let it be postulated) there is a single source and a straight path—the archives of the Roman Senate.

Many scholars have doubted whether Tacitus had recourse to the *acta senatus* often, or at all; and peculiar argumentation has been adduced. Was not the answer before their eyes, in the matter and structure of the Tiberian books? Observe the sheer mass of senatorial transactions, debates reported at different stages, debates that lead to no conclusion—and the long strings of personal names attesting the diligence of documentary enquiry and the ever-vigilant interest of a Roman senator. The years 20, 21 and 22 (III. 20-76) are instructive and convincing. A full record, though nothing much happened. For the plan of his work Tacitus needed to fill up the interval between the prosecution of Cn. Piso, the governor of Syria (that is, the aftermath of Germanicus), and the death of Drusus Caesar, the son of Tiberius. Other historians might have passed quickly from the one event to the other.

Having command of material from the *acta*, Tacitus can expand or contract, select or omit. And he has free scope with supplementary devices.

First, the speeches. The pronouncements of Tiberius Caesar were of paramount value, not only for matters of state but as a clue to the secret nature of that enigmatic ruler. And the style was not uncongenial. Commenting on the oratorical performance of the Caesars, Tacitus pays an expert's tribute—« Tiberius artem quoque callebat qua verba expenderet, tum validus sensibus aut consulto ambi-

guus » (XIII. 3). It could be supposed that he followed the imperial orations fairly closely; and it might not be fanciful to look for traces of Tiberius' manner, and even of his diction. Tiberius is perhaps the most impressive orator in the *Annales*.

Tacitus can also invent. He produces a petition from the imperial minister Aelius Seianus, asking for the hand of a princess in marriage, and the Emperor's answer, cautious and temporizing, but with a note of encouragement towards the end and an amicable hint of plans for Seianus' benefit not yet quite ripe for disclosure (IV. 39 f.). No reward, (he said) was too high for the virtues and the loyalty of Seianus: which he would not hesitate to proclaim to Senate or People, when the time came.

Similarly, speeches from senators. A historian, Cremutius Cordus, threatened with prosecution, enters the Senate and delivers a noble oration on history and liberty (IV. 34 f.). Not, one suspects, to be discovered in the *acta senatus*...

Next, the digressions. The author was free to enlarge on all manner of topics that engaged his attention. For example, when a proposal is made in the Senate to modify one of the Augustan laws about marriage, the *Lex Papia Poppaea*, Tacitus subjoins an excursus on the history of legislation from the beginning down to the third consulate of Pompeius Magnus—which consulate he links to the laws enacted in 28 B.C. when Augustus in his sixth consulship established the Principate (III. 26-28). That was the beginning of more rigorous control—«*acriora ex eo vincula*». Again, when an attempt was made to saddle Tiberius with a programme of measures against luxury and extravagance, Tiberius in a dispatch to the Senate deprecates any action of the sort; he points out that the laws of Augustus were unsuccessful, and he implies that they were misconceived (III. 53 f.). The historian reinforces the speech with a digression. He affirms that luxury flourished unabated

all through, from the War of Actium to the fall of Nero; and he adds a diagnosis, explaining the more sober standards of life and conduct that prevailed in his own time (III. 55).

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Speech and digression, carefully selected incidents or unobtrusive comment, Tacitus compensates for one of the disadvantages of beginning a history with the year 14: he is able to introduce references to what preceded, with criticism of Augustus, insidiously. At the funeral of Augustus the men of understanding, the « prudentes », expatiate upon the life and works of the Princeps (I. 9 f.). Praise is the smaller portion. The comments of Tacitus later on in the hexad perhaps add up to something much more deadly and subversive.

As has been said, senatorial business in the *Annales*, by its selection and arrangement, indicates the senator. Also the frequent names, as witness the seven men of rank whose « sententiae » are registered by the historian after the suicide of an alleged conspirator, the silly Scribonius Libo — « quorum auctoritates adulationesque rettuli ut sciretur vetus id in re publica malum » (II. 32).

A sharp eye for personal and family history surveyed the record of Roman public life in the days of Tiberius Caesar. First, the *nobiles*, whose names evoked the old Republic: many still extant in the early Principate, having survived the wars of the Revolution, but destined to be destroyed by the dynasty of Julii and Claudii. Next, families that had come to recent prominence through the patronage of the Caesars, and were conspicuous in the historian's own time. He would be alert to discern their earliest emergence, which was not always honourable—avid careerists, ruthless prosecutors or adherents of Seianus. Many names, and the need for accuracy: he wrote for a subtle and malicious

audience. It is clear enough that a history of Tiberius' reign composed by somebody not a senator would be very different from the *Annales*.

Not merely a Roman senator is there revealed, but precisely Cornelius Tacitus, consul, *XV vir sacris faciundis* and proconsul of Asia. It might be worth looking for the trace of his predilections in odd items—and especially where the subject matter was not imposed but selected. That is to say, in speeches and digressions. The *Annales* disclose a keen interest in the religious antiquities of the Roman State. Tacitus by the time of his praetorship (in 88) was one of the *quindecimviri* who kept the Sibylline Oracles and had the supervision over cults of extraneous origin. A member of that college knew all about prophecies, numerical calculations and certain official ceremonies—and (let it be added) he acquired fresh reasons for a sceptical attitude towards the conduct of men and governments.

Again, the full documentation about the affairs of Asia. Debates about temples and the right of asylum or the vicissitudes of proconsuls (a prosecution or even a murder) help to certify the ex-consul who had held the twelve *fascēs* in that province.

Lastly (and perhaps most important) Roman oratory. Tacitus had been a great speaker, among the first, if not the first, in that age. After the prosecution of Marius Priscus in 100 he bade farewell to public eloquence. Oratory was finished. The *Dialogus* conveys his renunciation and furnishes a diagnosis, not without irony. Oratory flourished in periods of political freedom, and turbulence. In a well ordered state it is not needed any more. One man holds the power, and he is the wisest («*sapientissimus et unus* »); there is no need for long debates in the Senate, for men of good sense come quickly to the right decisions (*Dial.* 41). The *Annales* (it can be contended) supply an outline history of Roman eloquence under the Principate down to the

historian's own time or memory. It is rendered through significant names or through specimens of oratory. One can adduce, for example, the son of Messalla Corvinus whose ease, grace and tolerance is intended to convey the manner of his illustrious parent (III. 34); L. Vitellius, the crafty minister of state, blandly explaining to the Roman Senate that Claudius Caesar needs a wife to help him, has deserved a wife by his blameless conduct, and ought to be united in matrimony to his brother's daughter, Agrippina (XII. 5 f.); the prosecutors Suillius Rufus and Cossutianus Capito, in invented discourses that are savage and aggressive to the point of parody (XIII. 43; XVI. 22); and the venerable consulars Cassius Longinus and Thræsea Paetus, grave, dignified, and a little old-fashioned when they speak in defence of tradition and the honour of the governing order (XIV. 43 f.; XV. 20 f.).

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So far the structure and matter of the *Annales* (with especial reference to the first hexad). The style is in keeping. That the manner and words of Roman historians would tend to reproduce an earlier age is a natural assumption, even if history had not so often been written by politicians in retirement, acrid if not resentful, and prone to exalt the past to the detriment of the present. The Empire enhanced the appeal of antiquity.

With the first six books of the *Annales*, the style of Tacitus reaches its peak—less eloquent than in the *Historiae*, stronger and tighter, more archaic and more Sallustian. The advance on the *Historiae* can be easily documented. Likewise the different manner that becomes more and more perceptible in the course of the third hexad as extant (XIII-XVI). Various reasons could be assigned. Perhaps the author failed to revise, or was cut short by death. However

that may be, there is another reason that could be given some weight. To a contemporary of Trajan, Tiberius Caesar belonged to a past already far distant; born in the year of Philippi, he was an anachronism, and was proud to be such; under his principate there still subsisted « *quaedam imago rei publicae* ». Nero, however, was imperial and contemporary—alarmingly so, if one reflected on who was to succeed Trajan.

There is something else. With Sallustius, Roman history came to maturity in an age that was filled, if not nauseated, with political oratory. Sallustius felt an antipathy towards Cicero. That does not need to be contested, or anxiously played down. It finds its expression, and its best expression, in hostility to the voluminous periodic structure with its predictable conclusions, in the choice of a brief, harsh, abrupt style that subverts eloquence and asserts the truth, bare but discordant. Not, indeed, that the Sallustian style can or should be defined merely as anti-Ciceronian. It suited the man and the age. It became a fashion, quickly, as the discerning Seneca observes—« *Sallustio vigente amputatae sententiae et verba ante exspectatum cadentia et obscura brevitatis fuere pro cultu* » (*Epp.* 114.17). It also became classic, and a model for history ever after.

Asinius Pollio, archaic in his oratory, though not perhaps in his history writing, used with deadly effect the plain style of one who knew and distrusted the professions of men and governments, detesting any manifestations of the romantic and improving view of history. With Pollio and Sallustius for precedent, the writers of the revolutionary age, it is no surprise that Tacitus avoids the edifying phraseology which, exploited by politicians in the last epoch of the Republic, had been annexed by Caesar Augustus and degraded by governmental use ever after.

His vocabulary betrays his aversions. Instead of « *auctoritas* » he prefers the revealing « *potentia* », its pejorative

synonym. « Aeternitas » had come to be attached, not only to the Empire of Rome, but to the divinity of the emperors: the word is admitted once only in the *Annales*, in reported discourse (XI. 7). Tacitus has a proper dislike for « pius » and « felix »; and « felicitas » is found only twice, each time in reference to the resplendent success of the same *novus homo*, namely Seneca (XIII. 43; XIV. 53). « Providentia » occurs once, and that in derision—for nobody could help laughing when the funeral oration on dead Claudius passed on to an allusion to his « providentia » (XIII. 3). The senator furnishes a useful (and necessary) antidote to the legends advertised on coins.

\* \* \*

Matter and style reflect the senator, likewise tone and sentiments. The rule of one man was installed at Rome to abate strife, control the armies and hold the Empire together. That was clear, and conceded (*Hist.* I. 1; *Ann.* I.9). The non-political classes acclaimed the new order everywhere, with enthusiasm, but no senator could bring himself to confess a joyous acceptance: he was resigned, or bitter (and none the less bitter if he had recently come to high status). What the Princeps gained, the Senate lost—honour as well as power, and the imperial administration steadily encroached. Not despotism, to be sure, but the Principate, so it was proclaimed. The senator will be alert for the contrasts of name and fact, contemptuous of sporadic subservience or the manifestations of organised loyalty.

On the face of things, Tacitus might be claimed a Republican—if it were clear what substance could be given to that term under the Caesars. One layer deeper, and he is revealed, like so many others, as an opportunist, advocating the middle path in politics and hoping that chance or

destiny would bring forth some ruler who might be better than the worst. Men and character matter, not system or doctrine. Hence the preoccupation with « capax imperii ».

« Urbem Romam », with these words the *Annales* begin. The City appears to be at the centre of a senator's interest, as under the Republic. That is not, however, the anachronism it might seem. Rome is still seat of power, however much the Palace, the bureaucrats and the managers of secret influence may tend to supplant the Senate and the senatorial order. Tacitus is a political historian. Provinces and armies have their proper place—they will come into the narrative when they count (as they would in Book XVIII of the *Annales*.)

Otherwise, the subjects of Rome and foreign nations (like the lower classes) have a minor place. The inherited pride of an imperial people speaks through the mouth of Tacitus, with scorn and distaste for the foreigner, notably the Greek and the Jew (and for the Greek an aversion that exaggerates almost to parody the attitudes of old Romans). On the other hand, he knew and valued the northern barbarians; and, despising the conventional apologia for Rome's dominion over the nations, he insists on showing up the violence and oppression.

No senator could refuse to pay homage to the tradition of Rome and the Republic. The word « priscus » exercises an irresistible appeal. Praise of the past was normal and necessary. It did not always blind a man to the times he lived in, or influence his conduct overmuch. In a debate about the wives of proconsuls, Valerius Messallinus speaks for the modern and humane view, deprecating the rigour of traditionalists: the « duritia veterum » was out of place (III. 34). The author himself, in the digression on luxury, puts in a quiet plea at the end—« nec omnia apud priores meliora, et nostra quoque aetas multa laudis et artium imitanda posteris tulit » (III. 55).



The writings of Tacitus are fierce and gloomy. That also (it should seem) is in the tradition, Sallustius having set the tone, and no reason for dissent emerging subsequently in the history of Rome. Even without the fifteen years of the Domitianic tyranny, there was enough in the senatorial existence to predispose a man to a general suspicion of human behaviour and motives, a distrust of comforting beliefs, a propensity to the darker side. Yet it cannot with any confidence be assumed that Tacitus was not a robust, balanced and cheerful character. The writer and the man are not always the same person.

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For, it must be asked at the end, who is Tacitus? Not only a Republican, an imperialist, a conservative, a pessimist, but also a descendant of the ancient *nobilitas*, so some have fancied. On what grounds? The *Annales* show Tacitus preoccupied with the vicissitudes of aristocratic families. Further, he has sundry remarks in dispraisal of Roman knights and *novi homines*—for example, Aelius Seianus, paramour of a princess of the dynasty, is styled « municipalis adulter », and the lady is taken severely to task for bringing disgrace on herself, her ancestors and descendants (IV. 3).

All of that need indicate one thing only: the writer conforms to Roman tradition and assumes the manner and the pride of the Roman *nobilitas*. Not, therefore, one of the patrician Cornelii. The truth may be such as would have appealed to the irony of Cornelius Tacitus himself. He has fooled posterity.

The *patria* of the historian may be in the provinces of the West, and further even, his ultimate extraction not colonial but native. Perhaps from Forum Julii in Narbonensis, the home of Julius Agricola, his wife's father; possibly

from Vasio of the Vocontii, that elegant and prosperous city. The *novus homo* and senatorial historian stands in the line of succession that goes back to Asinius Pollio of the Marrucini, whose grandfather fought for Italy against Rome in the great rebellion, to Sallustius Crispus from Amiternum in the Sabine country, to Porcius Cato, the «inquilinus» from Tusculum, consul and censor.

## DISCUSSION

*M. Momigliano*: Le riunioni della Fondazione Hardt sono, come ci siamo accorti in questi giorni, la forma moderna del Decameron, e quando il professore Syme parla si può ben dire che il dolce novellare degli antichi ritorna a noi. La ragione è che Professore Syme affronta gli antichi, studia gli antichi con un presupposto non comune: col presupposto che essi siano esistiti. Abbiamo avuto questa mattina un saggio di questa capacità di Syme di vedere gli antichi, di sentirli vivere davanti di sé. A Tacito Syme ha attribuito perfino una *patria*; questa *patria* è la mia, e naturalmente non posso che ringraziare Syme per avermi dato un compatriota di questa distinzione. Ma forse questo è uno degli argomenti da discutere, ed io devo essere assolutamente imparziale. Perciò apro la discussione.

*M. Durry*: Une étude de M. Syme sur Tacite ne peut pas ne pas être importante. M. Syme sait s'attaquer aux grands sujets et y apporte du nouveau. Ici il a su nous prouver que Tacite n'a pas été le dénigreur du passé que l'on dit; on a beaucoup exagéré son pessimisme. Je voudrais poser à M. Syme deux questions. Il a dit un moment donné que sous un bon gouvernement il n'y avait plus besoin d'éloquence et que sous un mauvais gouvernement il ne peut pas y avoir d'éloquence. Il y a là quelque chose qui m'a un peu surpris. Je crois que sous un bon gouvernement l'éloquence peut encore avoir des causes à plaider, car la justice est toujours menacée. Quelle est votre impression, est-ce que je vous ai bien compris sur ce point?

*M. Syme*: Oui, sûrement. Je reproduisais ce que dit Maternus vers la fin du *Dialogue*. The late Republic is the age of great oratory, that is the argument in the *Dialogus*. You would be helpless if you could not speak in your own defence; and oratory brought fame and riches and great political power. I would not deny that the Empire could be quite good for judicial oratory. But the kind of eloquence that existed under a government like

that of Trajan would not, I think, have the freedom and vigour that prevailed in the late Republic.

*M. Durry:* Puisque nous en sommes au *Dialogue*, quelle est votre position actuelle sur la question du *Dialogue*? Cela nous importe énormément. Sur la question de l'auteur il n'y a pas de doute, nous sommes d'accord: c'est Tacite. Mais pour la question de la date, cela m'intéresse beaucoup de savoir quelle est la position d'un historien comme vous.

*M. Syme:* I would not put it, as some have, immediately at the beginning of the new era of felicity about the time of the *Agricola* and the *Germania*, but a little bit later. It would be attractive, although there can be no proof, to have it subsequent to the year which witnessed the end of the prosecution of Marius Priscus—and also the *Panegyricus* of the younger Pliny. But the *Dialogus* may fall later than this, about 105 or 106.

*M. Durry:* C'est une des transformations les plus extraordinaires de notre histoire de la littérature latine que le *Dialogue des Orateurs* ait été retardé par les recherches récentes de 25 à 30 ans.

*M. Syme:* Let us put it between 102 and 107. The dedication is interesting, to Fabius Justus. As I think Kappelmacher pointed out, this might be a kind of present to him for his consulate. He becomes suffect consul early in 102. Fabius was a man who had, I fancy, forsworn eloquence. He had taken up the career of provinces and armies, as one sees very clearly by his prominence in the consulate after the great Licinius Sura, and by the fact that in the year 109 he is governor of the province of Syria.

*M. Hanell:* In dem glänzenden Vortrag, den wir eben gehört haben, haben Sie eine Menge von Gesichtspunkten und Problemen berührt, die man gerne weiter diskutieren möchte. Von den Dingen, die mich besonders interessiert haben, möchte ich die kritische und skeptische Einstellung des Tacitus Trajan und Hadrian gegenüber hervorheben. Es dürfte wohl so sein, dass unsere traditionelle Auffassung von Trajan zum grossen Teil auf Plinius zurückzuführen ist, aber nicht nur auf ihn. Trajan selbst, der in der Nachwelt als Optimus Princeps lebt, hat es

tatsächlich sehr gut verstanden, sich als solchen darzustellen. Und bei aller Hochachtung vor dem Senat ist er ziemlich weit in der Richtung nach absoluter Monarchie gegangen. Die domitianische Epoche ist keineswegs spurlos verschwunden; auch die Tendenz zur Vergöttlichung lebt weiter. Die Tatsache, dass Trajan in Pergamon  $\sigma\upsilon\nu\nu\alpha\omicron\varsigma$  des Zeus war, steht nicht allein. Auch auf Monumenten der trajanischen Zeit, z.B. auf dem Bogen von Benevent, kommt eine deutliche Annäherung des Kaisers an Jupiter zum Ausdruck. Es ist dann nicht merkwürdig, dass es Leute gegeben hat, die gegen eine Herrscherauffassung, die sich solche Formen nehmen konnte, kritisch eingestellt waren. Und dass Tacitus zu denen gehörte, die mit der Gegenwart unzufrieden waren, zeigt, wie Sie es dargelegt haben, die ironische Einstellung am Ende des Dialoges. Und so die Andeutung auf einen Vergleich zwischen Hadrian und Nero! Sie sagten, Nero sei in der Darstellung des Tacitus «contemporary, alarming contemporary». Ja, gewiss haben Nero und Hadrian gemeinsame Züge, denn auch Hadrian war Philhellene in einer Art, die sich überschlug. Nero hat den Anfang gemacht und ist ein bisschen zu weit gegangen, aber im Prinzip ist doch Hadrian von einer ähnlichen Einstellung gewesen. Wenn nun die Welt merkwürdigerweise das bei Hadrian akzeptiert hat, was bei Nero kritisiert worden war, so ist ja dies ein Zeichen für eine Umwandlung der Maßstäbe, die Tacitus nicht mitgemacht hat. Es hat mich sehr interessiert, dass bei Tacitus ein Vergleich zwischen diesen beiden eigenartigen Gestalten der römischen Geschichte anzutreffen ist.

*M. Latte*: Ich möchte Herrn Hanell zustimmen. Der Hellenismus bei Nero ist doch ohne politische Konsequenzen, lediglich zur Befriedigung seiner Eitelkeit in Scene gesetzt. Ich verstehe, dass ein Senator von der politischen Haltung des Tacitus das bei Hadrian nicht anders ansah. Aber in Wirklichkeit geht es doch hier um eine klare politische Linie: Da nun einmal die senatorischen Kreise an Zahl und Qualität für die Regierung des Reichs versagten, muss die Basis erweitert werden, indem

man die einzige kultivierte Schicht, die es noch im Imperium gab, für die hohen Stellen heranzieht. Dann möchte ich noch einige Punkte hervorheben. Einmal die pessimistische Grundhaltung. Sie haben ganz richtig hervorgehoben, dass die vergangenen Zeiten gar nicht besser gewesen zu sein brauchen. Etwas davon ist von Anfang an in der senatorischen Geschichtsschreibung. Es gehört dazu. Die Herren schreiben alle am Ende ihres Lebens und sagen: «in meiner Jugend war es doch sehr viel besser, da herrschte noch Zucht und Ordnung u.s.w.» Ein weiterer Punkt ist die Stellung zur Rhetorik; Sie haben das mit Recht beiseite gelassen. Wenn Sie den Dialogus hinter Agricola und Germania setzen, so rückt er in das erste Jahrzehnt des 2. Jh. Rechnet man mit der Fähigkeit der Zeit, verschiedene Stile gleichzeitig schreiben zu können, so ist das durchaus möglich. Es wird zu gern vergessen, dass Tacitus noch in diesem Jahrzehnt Lehrer der Rhetorik gewesen ist. Aus dieser Zeit stammt ein Brief des jüngeren Plinius, in dem er Tacitus bittet, ihm unter seinen Schülern einen Lehrer der Redekunst für seine Heimatstadt zu besorgen. Zu Tacitus gingen also nicht junge Leute senatorischen Ranges, die ihn begleiteten, um in die Politik eingeführt zu werden, wie das etwa in der Republik ausgesehn hätte, sondern Rhetoren lernten bei ihm, um dann selber wieder Lehrer der Rhetorik zu werden. Die Datierung des Pliniusbriefes ist aufs Jahrzehnt sicher, — genauer lässt sich das ja nicht angeben. Damals hatte er also noch selbst als Rhetor Schule gehalten. Wahrscheinlich hat ihm das Treiben nicht sehr imponiert und er hat mit der gleichen Ironie, die Sie aufgezeigt haben, auch diesen Dingen gegenübergestanden, aber die Tatsache bleibt bestehn. Dann, — nur ganz am Rande, — sind die letzten Annalenbücher wirklich so unterschiedlich im Stil? Das geht auf sehr minutiöse Feststellungen von Löfstedt zurück, die ein Schüler von ihm ausgeführt hat. Die Einzelbeobachtungen sind sehr wertvoll, aber man müsste doch wohl die Gegenprobe machen. Das Meiden des üblichen, des *verbum proprium*, geht durch und man müsste wohl noch genauer zusehn. Ich bin etwas

misstrauisch gegen den Versuch, den Begriff der stilistischen Entwicklung, der bei Platon berechtigt ist, auf das 2. Jh. und einen Stilvirtuosen wie Tacitus zu übertragen. Er hat gelernt sich in seinem Stil zu bewegen und man könnte höchstens ein Nachlassen dieser Fähigkeit im Alter erwarten, etwas wie in den späten Reden des Isokrates. Davon kann keine Rede sein. In der Erzählung von Tiberius auf Capri und der vom Ende des Britannicus oder vom Tode der Agrippina ist die gleiche Meisterschaft.

*M. von Fritz:* Um noch einmal auf die Frage des Pessimismus des Tacitus zurückzukommen, so haben Sie, wie mir scheint, sehr mit Recht gesagt, dass Tacitus nicht ganz so pessimistisch gewesen sei, wie vielfach angenommen wird. Auf der andern Seite haben Sie doch auch, wenn ich Sie recht verstanden habe, von der *felicitas temporum* mit einiger Ironie gesprochen. Da Sie nun die Dinge so sehr viel genauer kennen, würde ich gerne an Sie die Frage stellen, ob man nicht sagen kann, dass zwar schon gleich am Anfang die *felicitas temporum* nicht absolut gewesen ist — das ist sie ja nie — aber doch das Aufatmen und die Erleichterung nach dem Regime Domitians ausserordentlich gross gewesen und gerade auch von Tacitus so gefühlt worden sein muss, dass aber dann im Verlauf der Zeit die *felicitas temporum* immer weniger *felix* wurde, gerade auch im Hinblick auf Trajan.

Mit dem, was Sie selbst und Herr Latte über Hadrian sagen, stimme ich ganz überein. Dass der junge Mann mit seinen persönlichen Neigungen der senatorischen Aristokratie sehr unheimlich vorkommen musste, versteht man ohne weiteres, auch dass dabei die Erinnerung an Nero eine gewisse Rolle spielte. Dass in Wirklichkeit doch etwas anderes und sehr viel Positiveres in ihm steckte, wurde erst langsam und wesentlich später offenbar. Aber dieser letztere Teil der Entwicklung liegt ja wohl über die Zeit, mit der wir uns hier beschäftigt haben, hinaus. Dagegen lässt sich wohl die Frage stellen, ob nicht die langsame Entwicklung einer pessimistischeren Auffassung auch des Prinzipats des senatsfreundlichen Trajan die düstere Atmosphäre der

Annalen gegenüber den Historien und vor allem das Bild, das Tacitus von Tiberius zeichnet, mitbestimmt hat.

*M. Syme*: Yes, I think we would all agree that there was a genuine, a very genuine, relief in «*felicitas temporum*» after what had happened in the last years of Domitian. How far there was disillusion with Trajan as the years go by, that would be very difficult (would it not?) to prove. Some have argued that Tacitus changed his political opinions: we see him in the *Agricola* and in the *Dialogus* (taken to belong about the same time) welcoming the Principate, but later Republican, or perhaps turning away from any purely political attitude.

*M. von Fritz*: Ich würde es vielleicht nicht ganz so formulieren. Ich glaube, es ist viel komplizierter, als dass man sagen könnte, er habe sich ganz von einer politischen Haltung abgewandt, oder sei ganz ein Republikaner geworden. Aber eine Desillusionierung ist, glaube ich, doch deutlich zu spüren. Diese Auffassung ist vielleicht doch nicht ganz unrichtig.

*M. Syme*: One gets tired of «*sapientissimus et unus*», perhaps, and also of firm control. And political life was not as exciting as it had been under the Flavians. It was not to offer the chances that people like Eprius Marcellus had, for example, or Vibius Crispus and others, about whom Tacitus would be writing in the *Historiae* perhaps just when he was composing the *Dialogus* round about 105. The matter is complicated. We must allow for the influence of what he is writing on the historian, whether some of the bitterness of Tacitus may not be due to this, that with the passage of time and experience in writing he realizes to the full the potentialities in his fierce and gloomy manner. When he was writing the *Agricola*, he did not mind «*felicitas temporum*». But more and more he came to see how ludicrous was a lot of the official business, how repulsive the praise of benevolent despotism.

*M. Gigon*: Vielleicht darf noch auf eine andere Komponente der taciteischen Geschichtsschreibung hingewiesen werden. Es ist die bekannte eigentümliche Atmosphäre der *ambiguitas*. Mit



einer selten wieder erreichten Meisterschaft führt uns Tacitus in ein Halbdunkel, in welchem nichts wirklich klar fassbar ist und augenscheinlich auch nichts klar gefasst werden soll. Neben dem persönlichen Können des Historikers steckt darin auch ein Stück literarischer Ueberlieferung. Man möchte sich fragen, wo etwa in älteren Texten eine derartige Stilisierung der Atmosphäre einer Monarchie, in der alles zweideutig und bodenlos wird, vorgekommen sein könnte. Ich wäre geneigt, zwei Perspektiven in Betracht zu ziehen.

Zunächst bin ich grundsätzlich durchaus der Meinung, dass man nur mit der äussersten Vorsicht über die Beziehungen zwischen der Geschichtsschreibung und der Tragödie sprechen soll. Was den griechischen Bereich angeht, so vermag ich überhaupt nicht daran zu glauben, dass es Historiker gegeben hätte, die sich zum Ziel gesetzt, Historie als Tragödie zu schreiben; dergleichen wird regelmässig nur von der Polemik behauptet, wie man das an Polybios schön verfolgen kann. Doch bei den Römern kann es etwas anders sein. An den Resten der Tragödie der römischen Republik (und noch in ihren Bearbeitungen durch Seneca) ist mir immer ein Zug aufgefallen: das dämonisch Böartige der Tyrannen- und Königsgestalten. Ich weiss nicht, ob es etwa zu dem Atreus, den Seneca nach Vorbildern der Republik in seinem «Thyestes» geschaffen hat, ein wirkliches griechisches Gegenstück gegeben hat. Jedenfalls kenne ich keines. Dass aber die Welt der römischen Tyrannen-Tragödien in ihrer Verruchtheit mit der Welt des taciteischen Caesarentums zu konvergieren scheint, ist ein bemerkenswertes Faktum, das vielleicht gewisse Folgerungen erlaubt.

Auf der andern Seite darf an die Geschichtsschreibung über die sizilischen Tyrannen erinnert werden. Schon die geographische Nähe und die politische Bedeutung Siziliens für das Imperium musste das Interesse an den Werken eines Philistos und Timaios immer wieder wachrufen. Was wir an Resten von Porträts der beiden Dionysios und ihrer Umgebung besitzen, könnte darauf schliessen lassen, dass mindestens zuweilen die

Atmosphäre in Syrakus ähnlich geschildert war wie die Atmosphäre im Rom des 1. Jhd.n.Chr.: dieselbe Verlogenheit, dasselbe Misstrauen aller gegen alle, dieselbe zynische Grausamkeit. Natürlich wissen wir von den sizilischen Historikern viel zu wenig. Aber die Möglichkeit, dass ihr Tyrannenbild auf Tacitus eingewirkt hat, ist vielleicht nicht völlig ausser Acht zu lassen.

*M. Latte:* Man müsste wohl in diesem Zusammenhang darauf hinweisen, dass die Schilderung der Einnahme von Cremona in den Historien genau zu den Vorwürfen passt, die Polybios gegen Phylarch erhebt. Da ist der Einfluss der hellenistischen Historiographie unmittelbar greifbar.

*M. Momigliano:* Questo problema dell'influenza di testi ellenistici su Tacito si presenta anche nel caso di uno storico come Demochares che attribuiva tanta importanza alla parrhesia. Se sapessimo di più di Demochares credo che si troverebbe qualche traccia di lui in Tacito, lo storico della libertas. Ma vorrei a questo punto domandare l'opinione di professore Syme sull'importanza che le provincie hanno nel pensiero di Tacito. Mi sembra che quando si parla di provincie in Tacito c'è da fare una distinzione rigorosa tra l'occidente e l'oriente. Per i Greci Tacito ha disprezzo, ma sente invece profondamente la forza delle provincie occidentali e questo è un atteggiamento non molto differente da quello che si trova in Giovenale. Certo l'interesse di Tacito è molto più rivolto a occidente che non a oriente. C'è poi un'ulteriore divisione nella sua mente, perchè da un lato egli ammira la capacità di resistenza dei provinciali a Roma e d'altra parte naturalmente apprezza la vittoria dei Romani sui barbari, che diventano provinciali.

*M. Durry:* Cela peut s'expliquer par son *cursus*; il a été proconsul d'Asie, oui, mais n'a-t-il pas eu aussi des fonctions dans les Germanies ou en Belgique ?

*M. Syme:* Probablement, nous ne le savons pas. One learns nothing about any provincial occupations in his early life, but a military tribunate (about 76) is possible. Then there is the four years of absence after his praetorship of 88.

*M. Durry*: Puisque nous en sommes aux questions géographiques, je voulais demander justement à M. Syme de nous départager. Je me rappelle une conférence qu'il nous a faite avec grand succès à la Sorbonne, où il a parlé en effet de Tacite originaire de la Narbonnaise et il semble me rappeler qu'il était encore plus précis (ou plus imprudent, comme vous voudrez!) en parlant de Vaison. Dans ce cas M<sup>me</sup> de Romilly et moi, nous sommes prêts à revendiquer Tacite comme un de nos compatriotes. Mais j'ai vu que notre président, M. Momigliano, l'a aussi revendiqué pour son compatriote comme Transpadan et alors je me demande à qui il appartient.

*M. Syme*: The indications, often vague but convergent, would give one either Italia Transpadana or Narbonensis. I think they are stronger for Narbonensis.

*M. Momigliano*: Lei, Professore Syme, ha mai controllato quell' iscrizione di Vaison per vedere di che età sia?

*M. Syme*: No, it is no longer extant. It is a dedication, a plain, simple dedication: « Marti / et Vasioni / Tacitus ». That is to say: to the god of war and to the city Vasio. Observe further the distribution of the *cognomen* « Tacitus » which looks Latin, just as « Vindex » and various other *cognomina* in the Gallic province look Latin. In Narbonensis the *cognomen* occurs only in the *territoria* of Nemausus and Vasio, which are not Roman *coloniae*, but old tribal capitals. No proof, of course. But one can reflect not without comfort on Corneli in Narbonensis. Recently I saw at Saint Remy a newly discovered inscription (of the late Republic) of a woman Cornelia: part of her name is Celtic, the inscription is written in Greek letters. That is to say, the triple nature of the civilisation of Narbonensis. Tacitus had the « duo corda » rather than the « tria ». I mean, not the Greek. That would fit your question, Professor Momigliano, would it not?

*M. Latte*: Solche lokalen Bindungen sind unstreitig für die persönlichen Beziehungen, meinethalb auch biologisch, wichtig, aber wie weit verschwinden sie vor der Einheitlichkeit der

Kultur im Reich? Wer Schriftsteller wird, gerät in eine Tradition hinein, die Originalität des einzelnen darf in dieser Zeit nicht überschätzt werden. Dafür ein Beispiel: Wir bewundern die geschliffenen Pointen bei Tacitus. Sieht man sich einmal an, was Seneca der Vater an solchen Formulierungen überliefert, — ich habe das einmal gemacht, — so entdeckt man, dass ein guter Teil «echt taciteischer Wendungen» rund ein Jahrhundert älter ist. Anderes steht bei Lucan oder dem jüngeren Seneca. Man sieht in die Kontinuität eines rhetorischen Betriebes hinein, in dem Generationen an der Zuspitzung eines solchen dictum gearbeitet haben, bevor es durch Tacitus seine endgültige Fassung erhielt. Das schmälert sein Verdienst gewiss nicht; aber sehr viel war schon vor ihm gegeben.

*M. Syme:* Tacitus' preoccupation with the western lands combines with his dispraisal of Greeks. Commemorating Arminius at the end of Book II of the *Annales*, he condemns the Romans for neglecting him — they pay too much attention to ancient history. As for the Greeks, «sua tantum mirantur». The «Graecorum annales» know not Arminius. A most peculiar outburst. Which Greek historian ought to have written about Arminius?

*M. Gigon:* Wenn gesagt wurde, Tacitus habe weniger Interesse für den Osten, so mag das vielleicht im Hinblick auf eine bestimmte Tradition erklärbar sein. Der Osten ist mindestens schon seit den mithridatischen Kriegen stilisiert als ein Sumpf üppigsten und verächtlichsten Wohllebens. Die römischen Feldherren, die ihre Heere in Asien einsetzen müssen, fürchten immer wieder, so heisst es, den demoralisierenden Einfluss des allzu reichen, allzu leichtlebigen Landes auf ihre Legionäre. Es scheint im letzten vorchristlichen Jahrhundert vor allem Poseidonios gewesen zu sein, der die abgründige Verkommenheit der Länder, aus denen er doch selbst stammte, boshaft und grellfarbig geschildert hat. Für ihn war das noch Folie zur römischen Virtus, und die Römer (für die er doch in erster Linie schreibt) haben an diesem Kontrast ihre Freude gehabt.

Tacitus jedoch will ja gerade die Verkommenheit des Okzidents und Roms selbst darstellen. Da konnte der Osten keine Folie mehr, höchstens noch Quelle der Verderbnis sein. Der Schriftsteller Tacitus hatte also guten Grund, den Westen so entschieden in den Mittelpunkt zu stellen und den Osten weitgehend beiseite zu lassen als eine Welt, die ihm neue, andere, kontrastierende Farben nicht mehr zu liefern vermochte. Ich forciere vielleicht ein wenig; aber gerade wenn man Poseidonios bedenkt und dessen Bild vom Treiben der letzten Seleukiden (das dem Treiben der Julier und Claudier bei Tacitus vielleicht gar nicht so unähnlich war), mag doch ein Stück Wahrheit an dieser Ueberlegung sein.

*M. Momigliano*: Questo è vero, ma anche è vero che era il tempo della ribellione di Vindex, il tempo in cui la Spagna prendeva per la prima volta la cittadinanza latina, e queste sono forze reali che Tacito sentiva dietro di sè.

*M. Syme*: Certainly. This is a writer who knows much more than he tells us, and he has a fine sense of structure. Cannot we divine that he was saving certain things up, the Greek East for the Book XVII, the risings in the West for Book XVIII: a tribal rebellion under Julius Vindex, but a rising of the educated classes in the cities of Spain supporting Sulpicius Galba? Various things would be brought out towards the end. Otherwise, if you look at the *Annales*, there is next to nothing about Spain, except the assassination of a governor called Piso in Book IV. That item was no doubt selected by Tacitus because it evoked a classic episode in the *Bellum Catilinae* of Sallust — and he enhances the resemblance by stylistic devices.

*M. Momigliano*: Mi sembra quasi impossibile che siamo arrivati alla fine. C'è ancora qualcuno che vuole parlare? Se no, chiudo la discussione esprimendo gratitudine al professore Syme maestro di noi tutti.