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Tacitus and C. Licinius Mucianus

William Henry Furness Altman

ABSTRACT

Building on Syme’s insights about Tacitus’ sympathy for Marcellus Epirus, and on Dylan Sailor’s work revealing the historian’s critical stance toward Helvidius Priscus, this article shows why the depiction of Mucianus is important for combining and confirming these two important interpretive strands. Presented as “kingmaker” to Vespasian, Mucianus —or rather Tacitus’ portrayal of him — proves to be a crucial but neglected guide to the methods and sympathies of the historian whose career depended on the Flavian Dynasty and who chose to tell its story in his *Histories*.

KEYWORDS

Tacitus; C. Licinius Mucianus; Vespasian.

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his paper emerges from the intersection of three elements: an otherwise unqualified admirer of Tacitus who found himself with unexpected leisure, the resulting first reading of his *Histories* which promptly disclosed itself—despite serious competition—as Tacitus’s masterpiece, and finally the comparative and amazing lack of scholarly attention to C. Licinius Mucianus. Although by no means a specialist in Roman history, I had taught the minor works of Tacitus, and to that extent had learned how to read “the quiet historian.” But nothing had prepared me for what I encountered in the *Histories*, the book I came to read last. Reading it, and realizing the central role that Mucianus plays in it, virtually compelled me to write this article, and for the sake of peer-review, it was written in general if not complete conformity with those scholarly canons that permit an author to examine without shame minor matters with considerable care. But when an anonymous reader suggested adding an introduction, I realized that I needed to make the following point: Mucianus may appear to be a minor character in the fragmentary remains of the *Histories* but it is through him that Tacitus discloses his masterpiece as such. In short, it was to honor Tacitus and his *Histories* that this paper was written, not simply to illuminate a comparatively minor player in the annals of Roman history.

So many have called C. Licinius Mucianus “king-maker” for so long that it proves difficult to determine who was the first to do so, but regardless of this merely secondary priority, the ultimate source can only be Tacitus.¹ Subject of its first character sketch,² and mentioned in its last fragmentary sentence,³ Mucianus dominates what remains of the *Histories*, and if Syme’s reconstruction of the entire work can be trusted,⁴ the great speech of the behind-the-scenes architect of Flavian dynasty was no less important to the whole literary edifice than to what remains of it.⁵ Tacitus gives Mucianus the opportunity to summarize the subject matter of the *Annals* in the great speech,⁶ and he is also mentioned

in both the *Dialogus de oratoribus* and *Agricola*.⁷ But he has received little independent attention,⁸ and this is particularly unfortunate since Tacitus tells us at the start of the *Histories* that his political career was inseparable from the Flavian dynasty.⁹ Moreover, any attention that Mucianus has received has used the testimony of Tacitus to elucidate and assess his actions, motives, and character.¹⁰ My purpose is different. By examining the role Tacitus assigns to Mucianus, the object of this investigation remains Tacitus himself, and my goal is to illuminate the extent to which the behind-the-scenes “kingmaker” of the Flavian dynasty was also responsible, as preceptor, for making Tacitus himself the king of Roman historians.

It is doubtless due to the merely partial preservation of the *Histories* that we do not know how or even when Mucianus died, and it is upon the verb *fuit* in Pliny the Elder that we are forced to depend for determining the likely year of his death.¹¹ But he is still alive at the time of the conversation described in the *Dialogus*, and thus Tacitus, who presents himself as having been present, finds a way to communicate that he was eagerly listening to the stories, disputations, and secrets of older and famous men, both in public and in private, at a time when Mucianus was not only still alive, but was gathering materials that would prove useful to the future historian.¹² Two other things are striking here: the same qualities that attracted the attention of Tacitus to Maternus and Aper would also be at least equally operative in the case of Mucianus,¹³ and Tacitus tells us that Mucianus himself was much attracted in his youth to famous and powerful men, and there is good reason to suppose that the word *ambitiose* applies equally well to both.¹⁴ By juxtaposing his own youthful passion for oratory with, for example, the Greek oration Mucianus delivered Antioch,¹⁵ and by comparing his own self-confessed interest in the secrets of famous and eloquent men with what he tells us that he knows about the young Mucianus, we are entitled to wonder about the chronological overlap he brings to our attention by having Messalla say in the presence of the young Tacitus that Mucianus is

even now (*iam*) at work gathering eleven books of *Acta* and three of *Epistulae*.

Tacitus is our only source for this particular literary activity, just as Pliny the Elder is our source for the books that Mucianus, “who was three times consul,” wrote about marvels,¹⁶ and it may be worthwhile to consider briefly what else Tacitus does not choose to tell us about him. Two such *lacunae* stand out, one filled by Dio Cassius, and the other by Suetonius. It is from the latter that we learn that Mucianus engaged in effeminate sexual behavior.¹⁷ While Tacitus confirms that he was devoted to private pleasures, and that his personal life was in ill repute,¹⁸ he says nothing of his sexual proclivities, either in youth or as an older man. He does, however, emphasize that his reconciliation with Vespasian originated in his friendship for Titus,¹⁹ and he is also depicted as working closely with the even younger Domitian.²⁰ As for Dio Cassius, he tells us that Mucianus was responsible for the expulsion of the Stoic philosophers,²¹ and here as well Tacitus’ testimony is best understood as discrete rather than as countervailing.

Thanks to his *Agricola*, Tacitus immortalized himself as a son-in-law, and it is particularly instructive to compare Tacitus and *Agricola* with another father/son-in-law pair that figures largely in his writings: Helvidius Priscus and Thrasea Paetus.²² It is with the death of the latter that our version of the *Annals* ends;²³ the former is prominent in *Histories* 4, its last complete book, and he clearly would have played an even larger role if so much of that work had not been lost in transmission. But the pair also appears prominently in *Agricola* itself: Tacitus uses them as examples of tyranny, and especially of tyranny exercised over the written word, those who were killed for praising both the son-in-law and the father.²⁴ This passage, prominent by position, invites the unwary reader to imagine that Tacitus identifies himself with “the Stoic opposition,”²⁵ and that the great merit of the post-Flavian era is that we can now openly praise men like Helvidius and Thrasea.²⁶ But just as Tacitus never got around to writing the book on Nerva and Trajan he promises at the beginning of the *Histories*,²⁷ he also

never seems to praise Helvidius in the glowing terms that others would.²⁸ My claim is that his ambiguous position toward Helvidius is best understood in relation to Mucianus.

In his illuminating discussion of *Agricola* 42.4, Dylan Sailor does not mention Mucianus, but he does bring out with great clarity how Tacitus complicates the martyrdom of Helvidius and Thræsea.²⁹ He shows that the criticism leveled at martyrs is supported by what Tacitus writes of this specific pair in the *Annals* and the *Histories*, particularly with respect to their pursuit of glory.³⁰ And it is this pursuit that allows him to contrast *Agricola*,³¹ and by extension himself, with those who incur martyrdom without bringing benefit to others:

Tacitus' treatment of the martyrs, then, pays them respect while also furnishing the material for a serious critique of them. His strategy does not aim to reverse public enthusiasm for them but rather to suggest that you could say they were motivated by interests of personal prestige rather than promotion of the common good, were mainly ineffective, were short of perfect with respect to their dignity and manly courage, and had even failed to secure the lasting glory to which they had aspired.³²

Sailor strikes just the right note here: while Tacitus is at some pains to suggest that he finds Thræsea and Helvidius admirable,³³ he also furnishes us with all the information needed for “a serious critique.” But what, if anything, does this have to do with Mucianus? Naturally the answer to this question can best be found in the *Histories*.

Having introduced Mucianus with the character-sketch of *Histories* 1, and then having justified this anomalous sketch's existence with the great speech of *Histories* 2, Tacitus next goes to work in depicting the conflict between Mucianus, the brains behind Vespasian's elevation, and Antonius Primus, the daring soldier who actually defeats the army of Vitellius at Bedriacum.³⁴ The crafty letters Mucianus sends to Antonius are not the only indication in the *Histories* of the former's interest in epistolary intrigue; he also gathers historically significant *epistulae*.³⁵ Once

Mucianus enters Rome and concentrates in his own hands the power won by his rival through force of arms, Tacitus provides evidence of his later interest in senatorial *acta*.³⁶ It is in the Senate that Tacitus creates a matched set of antagonists to balance Antonius and Mucianus: Helvidius and Eprius Marcellus,³⁷ the informant or *delator* responsible for Thrasea's death.³⁸ And before turning directly to Mucianus, it is worth considering this other pair, because in both sets of two, it would be easy to misidentify who has Tacitus' sympathy.

On the surface, of course, the opponent of Helvidius is, in Syme's words, "a wicked opportunist."³⁹ But not unlike his version of Tacitus, Syme is capable of finding good among the wicked,⁴⁰ and famously does so in the case of Marcellus, repeatedly quoting "his fine speech on the necessity for monarchy and tolerance."⁴¹ And it is not only Syme: Machiavelli was the first who seems to have suspected that the sentiments of Marcellus as expressed in *Histories* 4.8.2 are those of Tacitus himself,⁴² and naturally the view has been echoed.⁴³ Leaving the question of Tacitus' own sympathies for later, about Mucianus there can be no doubt: he is linked to Marcellus in a famous *bon mot*,⁴⁴ and more importantly Mucianus takes the side of Marcellus in a passage that marks the surrender of senatorial autonomy.⁴⁵ As others have suggested, then, Tacitus' own sympathies can be found in the duel between Marcellus and Helvidius, but only if we can divest ourselves of a natural inclination to attribute to him our own choice will we be able to discover them.

The critical figure here is naturally Helvidius, and Jürgen Malitz sounds exactly the right note near the beginning of his important 1985 article:

*Jede Rekonstruktion von Helvidius' Wirken ist zu einem erheblichen Teil auch eine Tacitus-Interpretation, die der Frage gilt, welche Position der Historiker innerhalb der widersprüchlichen Tradition eingenommen hat.*⁴⁶

With great tact and insight, especially in the notes,⁴⁷ Malitz creates a useful and structured summary of five distinct phases in the

ongoing quarrel between Helvidius and Marcellus.⁴⁸ Although this summary of events depends on Tacitus, it nevertheless offers no indication of how Malitz will eventually settle the interpretive question he raises at the start: instead, his strategy is to indicate the opposite poles “within the contradictory tradition,” locating the positive pole in Epictetus—who famously compared the death of Helvidius to that of Socrates⁴⁹—and in Senecio, his hapless and probable source,⁵⁰ and the negative pole, first embodied in the words and actions of Marcellus and Mucianus. Although Malitz does return to Tacitus’ own views at the end, he does so only after an attempt to reconstruct, as a historian, the truth about Helvidius’ death, an attempt that leads him to discuss the testimony and prejudices of Dio Cassius,⁵¹ Suetonius,⁵² Pliny the Younger,⁵³ and even Marcus Aurelius.⁵⁴

One can only be grateful to Malitz for doing so, but there is a problem. By the time he finally returns to the problem of Tacitus’ own sympathies, Malitz has jumped over Mucianus and Marcellus and has created, as it were, a post-Tacitus pole of opposition to Helvidius:

*sein [sc. Tacitus’] Bericht über Helvidius’ Kampf näher an die panegyrische durch Senecio repräsentiert Überlieferung herangerückt werden muß als an die flavische Geschichtsschreibung, deren Spuren bei Sueton und bei Cassius Dio zu finden sind.*⁵⁵

Leaving to one side the not entirely unproblematic basis for Malitz’s interpretations of specific texts in Suetonius and Dio Cassius,⁵⁶ his principal evidence for locating Tacitus “closer” to the Senecio pole is the character-sketch of Helvidius in *Histories* rather than his treatment of the events that follow it:

*In seinem biographischen Abriss über Helvidius hat Tacitus so viele Einzelheiten aus der »Martyrer«-Tradition übernommen, daß die Annahme, er habe im verlorenen Teil der Historien eine radikale Wandlung dieses Mannes zum skurrilen Eiferer im Sinne der flavischen Tradition beschrieben, nicht sehr plausibel ist.*⁵⁷

To say nothing of the difficulties in tracing what Tacitus says about Helvidius to what he had discovered in a lost book, it is unnecessary for Malitz to speculate about what is missing from Tacitus' own pen, as he indicates in the sentence that follows:

Die Grenzen von Tacitus' Anlehnung an die »Martyrer«-Tradition sind dabei nicht zu übersehen: sanctus wird er Helvidius vermütlich nicht genannt haben [note 97].⁵⁸

It is with this apt admission that things begin to get interesting. The attached note cites Suetonius, who records the fact that Domitian put Arulenus (or Julius) Rusticus to death for calling Thrasea and Helvidius *sanctissimi viri*, and in connection with the *crimen* that led to his death, “expelled all the philosophers from the city and from Italy” (*philosophos omnis urbe Italiaque summovit*).⁵⁹ By alluding to Rusticus immediately after mentioning Senecio, Malitz draws attention to the two matched passages in *Agricola*, one at the beginning, the other at the end. In the first, Tacitus distances himself from the burning of their books with the verb *legimus*: we've merely *read* about the destruction of the *monumenta* of *clarissimi ingenii*.⁶⁰ At the end, having completed his own *monumentum* of a *vir clarus* who took a very different path from that of Helvidius and Thrasea,⁶¹ Tacitus obliterates the distance between himself and those who silenced Rusticus and Senecio:

*mox nostrae duxere Helvidium in carcerem manus; nos Maurici Rusticique visus; nos innocenti sanguine Senecio perfudit.*⁶²

Even if we choose not to read this grammatically problematic *cri de coeur* as an anguished confession of personal complicity,⁶³ its remarkable intimacy is antithetical to the distancing *legimus* of *Agricola* 2.1. Most importantly, the juxtaposition of these texts indicates that the most serious error Malitz makes is taking Tacitus' first word about any subject as if it were his last one.

In the end, it is Malitz who needs the lost books of the *Histories* in order to situate Tacitus in the middle between the interpretive poles he has himself created:

Er selbst [sc. Tacitus] zog einen Mittelweg vor, ohne freilich die Würde von Helvidius' Kampf zu bestreiten—für Tacitus ein nachgeborener Cato, kein zweiter Favonius [note]. Und: konnte in Tacitus' Augen die Herrschaft Domitians Helvidius' Bestrebungen nicht wenigstens nachträglich einen Sinn geben?⁶⁴

Naturally the answer to this question could be “yes,” but since everything that Tacitus chooses to tell us about Helvidius is written with post-Domitian hindsight, it is remarkable that Malitz depends on so much speculation in order to place Tacitus on this *Mittelweg*. After all, Tacitus never compares Helvidius to Cato,⁶⁵ and in the *Dialogus*, where Cato is mentioned frequently, the claim is made by Aper—and never challenged—that Marcellus, *accinctus et minax*, made a mockery of Helvidius' *rudis sapientia*,⁶⁶ suggesting that the untutored wisdom of history's losers, no matter how principled they may appear, fares poorly in a contest with successful villains well-armed with eloquence. My claim is that for Tacitus, Mucianus embodies the skill and success of such men, and it is because he does so that the way Tacitus writes about Helvidius reveals how much he learned from Mucianus.

Malitz suggests that Tacitus may have allowed his readers to adjudicate the verdict Aper pronounces in the *Dialogus* about the contest in eloquence between Marcellus and Helvidius;⁶⁷ in any case, the matched speeches of *Historiae* 4.7.1-8.4 are found in a passage that is particularly relevant to this paper's concerns. First of all, Marcellus speaks second, always a strong position where matched speeches are concerned. And the most eloquent thing Marcellus says in his speech is the passage Syme so loved to quote.⁶⁸ But the contest between Helvidius and Marcellus will here be treated merely as a means to an end: my purpose is to show, on the basis of his own narrative, that Tacitus reveals himself through the role he assigns to Mucianus, not through any superficial show of sympathy for Helvidius. That sympathy, as demonstrated by Malitz, is to be found primarily in the character sketch of 4.5; it is in 4.6 that Tacitus modifies his praise along the lines described by Sailor by emphasizing the *cupido gloriae* among the *sapientes*.⁶⁹ Tacitus also uses this chapter to situate the quarrel between Helvidius and

Marcellus in relation to Thrasea.⁷⁰ In 4.7, we hear the speech of Helvidius, then Marcellus' in 4.8.

The important thing, then, is how 4.5-8 is framed, and more specifically, how Tacitus uses Mucianus to frame it. In 4.11, Mucianus arrives in the city in a physical sense; this matches the arrival of his letters in 4.4.⁷¹ But in both cases, Tacitus has contrived to introduce Mucianus into the narrative even before he is named, and the way he does this indicates how he teaches us to recognize the behind-the-scenes presence of Mucianus not only with respect to the Flavian dynasty but also and equally with respect to Tacitus' account of it. Book 4 begins with a description of Rome before Mucianus enters it,⁷² and chapter 4.1 is best understood as an attack on his rival Antonius.⁷³ Despite the presence of Domitian, Antonius remains the source of power in 4.2.⁷⁴ But in 4.3, the scene begins to shift with the apparently casual mention of the Third Legion.⁷⁵ We have met this legion before: it is counted among the four Syrian legions under the command of Mucianus at the beginning of his character-sketch in 1.10,⁷⁶ apparently erroneously,⁷⁷ and it will reappear in a variety of contexts, but always in a way that advances the cause of its (former) commander.⁷⁸

And then comes the letter from Vespasian, which allows Tacitus to shift the scene to the Senate in 4.3, where it will of course remain throughout the ensuing quarrel between Helvidius and Marcellus. But Tacitus does not allow us to forget the bigger picture:

*at Romae senatus cuncta principibus solita Vespasiano decernit, laetus et spei certus, quippe sumpta per Gallias Hispaniasque civilia arma, motis ad bellum Germanis, mox Illyrico, postquam Aegyptum Iudaeam Syriamque et omnis provincias exercitusque lustraverant, velut expiato terrarum orbe cepisse finem videbantur.*⁷⁹

The order of provinces after *postquam* is revealing: by placing Egypt first and Syria last, Tacitus challenges us to remember the details of Vespasian's elevation. It is true that the Egyptian legions had been the first to proclaim him Emperor on July 1,⁸⁰ but thanks to

Tacitus' account,⁸¹ we also know that the actual or rather secret progress of the coup proceeds in the opposite direction: the governor of Syria inspires Vespasian, the governor of Judea, to secure “the sinews of war”⁸² by occupying the *claustra Aegypti*,⁸³ and it is from Egypt that Vespasian will eventually arrive in Rome.⁸⁴ But first to arrive there are his *litterae*:

*addidere alacritatem Vespasiani litterae tamquam manente bello scriptae. ea prima specie forma; ceterum ut princeps loquebatur, civilia de se, et rei publicae egregia. nec senatus obsequium deerat: ipsi consulatus cum Tito filio, praetura Domitiano et consulare imperium decernuntur.*⁸⁵

The words of Vespasian—having been written as though the war was still going on—contributed to their promptitude; this, at first sight, was their form. For the rest, he was speaking as a prince, civil things of himself, extraordinary ones of the state. Nor was the Senate without its homage: upon himself with his son Titus were conferred the consulate, on Domitian the praetorship with consular authority.

The writer “was speaking as a prince” despite making some effort to appear to be only a general still engaged in civil war. “As if” (*tamquam*) the war were still going on: it was in this form (*ea forma*) that these *litterae* to the Senate appeared at first glance (*prima specie*). But consider the first words of book 4: *interfecto Vitellio, bellum magis desierat quam pax coeperat* (“With Vitellius having been killed, the war had rather finished than had peace begun”). The war is over, and thanks to Antonius, Vespasian has already won it. Tacitus' phrase *prima specie* is therefore curious and revealing: we always need to take a second look while reading the *Histories*. Tacitus provokes our curiosity by using that phrase here: he forces us to look behind the appearance, especially where Vespasian is concerned. Since *Histories* 2, there has been little doubt that Mucianus is the brains behind Vespasian, and the emphasis on Titus here provides another indication of his handiwork. Tacitus will also emphasize Mucianus' interest in *epistulae*,⁸⁶ and they are also his chosen instruments in his running quarrel with Antonius in book 3.⁸⁷

What makes these not quite epistolary *litterae* even more suspicious is that the very next thing that Tacitus tells us—in the opening sentence of 4.4—is that Mucianus too sent *letters* to the Senate: *miserat et Mucianus epistulas ad senatum, quae materiam sermonibus praebuere* (“Mucianus as well had sent letters to the Senate which offered material for discussion”).⁸⁸ If a healthy skepticism prevents us from believing that Mucianus wrote both these *epistulae* and the so-called *litterae Vespasiani*, it is surely impossible to doubt that Mucianus composed his own messages with those of the *princeps* already in mind: together they offered the Senate a good cop as well as a bad one. As for the *sermo* these letters generated, Tacitus’ first example is: *si privatus esset, cur publice loqueretur* (“If he [sc. Mucianus] were a private citizen, why was he speaking in a public way?”). This proves to be at once a good and a double-edged question if Mucianus was already speaking as *princeps* through the so-called *litterae Vespasiani*. Surely Mucianus had no great interest in speaking as a senator. Although Antonius wins the war, Mucianus contrives to receive the triumph, nor is he backwards in informing the Senate of what a second look at the *litterae Vespasiani* may have already told them: that he alone can be *superbus* with respect to the state and *contumeliosus* toward the prince, all simply because Vespasian holds *imperium* thanks to him: it had all been *in manu sua*.⁸⁹

How would the senators respond to this good cop/bad cop charade? Thanks to the entry of Helvidius into the narrative, we are about to learn. But of one thing we can already be sure: thanks to the information Tacitus has provided in the context of the great speech in book 2, the way *they* will respond is different from the way that we do. Unlike the senators Tacitus allows us to overhear, we know that the boasts of Mucianus the “king-maker” are fully merited. While listening to the senatorial mutterings, then, we occupy the privileged place that Tacitus has deliberately created for us: we may well wonder *why* Mucianus is telling the senators the truth, but *that* he is doing so we cannot doubt. Having already given some of his readers reason to suspect the hidden hand of Mucianus in 4.3, chapter 4.4 forces all of us to wonder about the

secret motives of his overt actions. In the process, we become at once the observers of Mucianus and his accomplices. And we are not the only ones.

*ceterum invidia in occulto, adulatio in aperto erant: multo cum honore verborum Muciano triumphalia de bello civium data, sed in Sarmatas expeditio fingebatur.*⁹⁰

When Tacitus describes the Senate's response to Mucianus by distinguishing *invidia in occulto* from *adulatio in aperto*, he does so in the context of a decision to award him *triumphalia*. Consider: if *adulatio* was responsible for the Senate's decision to award Mucianus *triumphalia*, the decision not to award them explicitly *de bello civium* was not, nor could it have been, the product of *invidia*. But this decision must nevertheless have been made *in occulto*—as the verb *fingebatur* indicates, it was a cleverly contrived policy—and constituted a timely and well-advised show of support for the man with power. It was therefore not thanks to the adulatory hypocrites but rather to his secret allies in the Senate that Mucianus achieves here an early victory over Antonius, whose claim to *triumphalia* would have been irresistible had they been given “concerning the civil war.” Apparently it was not only to the Senate in general that Mucianus addressed his *epistulae*, and beginning with his great speech to Vespasian, Tacitus has long since made it clear that the public utterances of Mucianus are not spontaneous, particularly when they are most meant to appear to be so; in fact, they have been carefully prepared in advance, and in secret.⁹¹ The interplay of *in occulto* and *in aperto*, of *invidia* and *adulatio* is therefore of utmost importance in the case of Mucianus. And while it might be more persuasive to keep their interplay in Mucianus separate from their interplay of *in occulto* and *in aperto* in the historian who immortalized him,⁹² my paper's purpose precludes this, for I am claiming that Tacitus reveals himself most openly in what he chooses to conceal about Mucianus.

It is therefore no accident that Helvidius enters the narrative in the same chapter that begins with the plain-spoken and deliberately provocative letters of Mucianus: the principled

senator falls victim to the good cop ploy, and therefore expects Vespasian to embody the tenor of the pose that has been so carefully contrived for him.

*ubi ad Helvidium Priscum praetorem designatum ventum, prompsit sententiam ut honorificam in bonum principem, falsa aberant, et studiis senatus attollebatur. isque praecipuus illi dies magnae offensae initium et magnae gloriae fuit.*⁹³

When the turn for speaking came to Helvidius Priscus, the praetor-elect, he offered his opinion as honorable to a good prince; falsities were absent, and by the approbations of the senate he was supported. This day in particular was to him the beginning of a great offense and of great glory.

Considered in its entirety,⁹⁴ the character sketch that follows is best understood as a gloss on the word *gloria*. As for the *magna offensa*, there has been no mention of Marcellus: he enters in 4.6, and only after the character-sketch of Helvidius. What then does Tacitus mean by the *magna offense*?

Tacitus conveys his meaning by structure. Helvidius rises to speak as to a good prince in 4.4 on the subject of rebuilding the Capitol, and the same subject then creates the bridge that leads back, after the dueling speeches of Helvidius and Marcellus, to the framing role of Mucianus in 4.9.⁹⁵ The question was simple: should the Senate take steps on its own authority to redress this calamity to the prestige and divine protection of Rome,⁹⁶ or should it await the arrival of the *princeps*?⁹⁷ The stance of Helvidius was predictable: it was the rational choice. But having just lost the opening round to Marcellus, it was not the prudent one. In what Mommsen would later show was the last tribunican veto⁹⁸—strange that Tacitus does not say anything to this effect—the matter never comes to a vote, and the measure is soon forgotten. But Tacitus does not allow us to forget what he regards as important, and ominously adds: *fuere qui et meminissent* (“there were also those who remembered it”).⁹⁹ Like the Third Legion and the *litterae Vespasiani* of 4.3, these words bring Mucianus back into the narrative long before he is actually named once again in 4.11: he is

the secret power, and Tacitus preserves him as such, replicating his real but secret position in the way he writes his *Histories*. As if to warn us that the battle between Helvidius and Marcellus will need to be played out once again, and this time in the presence of the one who will remember the *magna offensa*, Tacitus inserts the discussion of Neronian *accusatores* in 4.10 before bringing Mucianus back to Rome; in fact, he has already been there in spirit for some time.

*Tali rerum statu, cum discordia inter patres, ira apud victos, nulla in victoribus auctoritas, non leges, non princeps in civitate essent, Mucianus urbem ingressus cuncta simul in se traxit.*¹⁰⁰

In such a state of things, with discord among the senators, rage amongst the beaten, no authority among the victorious, with neither laws nor prince in the state, Mucianus, having entered the city, at once drew all things into himself.

This sentence brings the story of Helvidius' short-lived glory to a fitting conclusion: in the narrative's scheme of things, he is nothing more than the cause of *discordia inter patres*, and Mucianus will eventually put a stop to that. One might be inclined to find the sympathies of Tacitus with the revival of senatorial debate, and to find in Helvidius a democratic hero.¹⁰¹ Without in any way denying that it is Tacitus himself who makes this kind of reading possible *prima specie*, I want to suggest that the way he uses Mucianus to frame the introduction of Thrasea's son-in-law tells another story in which the erstwhile kingmaker emerges as the consummate string-puller. Precisely by his show of independence, Helvidius becomes a puppet, and by following the deceptive lead offered by the *litterae Vespasiani*, he falls into a carefully contrived trap, and places the target on his own back. He need have no other fault than the one Tacitus emphasizes: deluded by the love of glory, he will allow Mucianus to tame the Senate because the beginning of his *magna gloria* was also the *initium* of his destruction.

But not all at once: the ultimate reward for the unforgotten *magna offensa* will be delayed. Tacitus leaves us in no doubt that

Mucianus has the skills required, and immediately after describing his entrance into Rome, Tacitus writes:

*fracta Primi Antonii Varique Arrii potentia, male dissimulata in eos Muciani iracundia, quamvis vultu tegetur.*¹⁰²

Broken was the power of Primus Antonius and Varus Arrius with Mucianus' anger towards them badly disguised even though it was concealed on his face.

As described by Tacitus, this is a neat trick, and the notion of “badly disguised” merits discussion. Are we to believe that Mucianus attempted to conceal his *iracundia* but that he did so poorly? Or did he *deliberately* allow it to become visible by consciously concealing it ineptly? This proves to be a good question when considering the interplay of *adulatio* and *invidia* in Tacitus' own treatment of Mucianus: he will end chapter 4.11 with the murder, at the instigation of Mucianus, of an innocent youth.¹⁰³ Here then is an example of Tacitus' own *invidia in aperto*; his *adulatio*, while by no means *in aperto*, is concealed but only poorly so. In fact, the power of Antonius has not yet been broken, although Tacitus warns us that it will be. And in between this use of prolepsis and the *terror* engendered by the unjust murder of Caius Piso, come two sentences that reveal Tacitus' own poorly concealed support for Mucianus:

*sed civitas rimandis offensis sagax verterat se transtuleratque: ille unus ambiri, coli. nec deerat ipse, stipatus armatis domos hortosque permutans, apparatu incessu excubiis vim principis amplecti, nomen remittere.*¹⁰⁴

But the state, sagacious with respect to glaring offenses, had turned and transferred itself: this one man was accompanied and cultivated. Nor was he himself backward: accompanied by armed men, moving from one house to the next, by his entourage, his gait, his personal guards, he embraced the power of a prince while remitting the name.

This use of *offensae* is revealing: we are being reminded of the *magna offensa*. By cultivating Mucianus, by turning itself over to him, the state proves itself to be *sagax*. This is, of course, a very different thing from the *rudis sapientia* of a Stoic sage; it is a rather more polished virtue considerably more appropriate to Tacitus, the skilled survivor. If we read his *Historiae* carefully, we need not be surprised at Tacitus' praise for *moderatio* in *Agricola* 42.3: it may well be the principal lesson he has to teach us,¹⁰⁵ one that closes any alleged gap between his public service to the Flavian dynasty and his written work. In neither Tacitus nor his father-in-law was there anything like the *inani iactatio libertatis* that insures the fame of Helvidius while sealing his fate;¹⁰⁶ we find it in his texts only because we bring it along with us. It was with well-trained powers of observation that sagacious Romans recognized the gaping offenses that provoked the hidden rage of Mucianus, and it was with *obsequium* and *modestia* that they sought out Mucianus in his better homes and gardens. Appointed by Mucianus to command a legion of doubtful loyalty, *Agricola* was one of those men,¹⁰⁷ and so too was his ambitious young son-in-law. His preference for the substance of power over the merely glorious name conventionally associated with wielding it is sufficient reason to admire Mucianus: he cared nothing for the *prima specie* except when he was creating it for the purpose of deceiving others. The young Tacitus learned this lesson, and this is why it is his *adulatio*, not his *invidia*, that remains *in occulto*, in deliberate cross-purpose to his own written formula.

Three more passages deserve attention, but for reasons of space, the first—which is lengthy—cannot be given the same degree of attention as 4.3-11. Beginning abruptly at 4.12, Tacitus turns his gaze northward, to Gaul, Germany, and Civilis the Batavian; he will return to Rome and Mucianus in 4.38-39. There is something to be said for viewing Civilis as the non-Roman Helvidius, and if so, then the victory of Roman arms is a victory for the master of Rome. In any case, Tacitus reminds us that Mucianus is that master in 4.39 and that Vespasian himself has not yet arrived in Rome in 4.38. Having informed us prematurely that

the power of Varus Arrius and Primus Antonius had been broken in 4.11, Tacitus allows us to make the amazing discovery that it has not yet been broken in 4.39. But we know that it will be, and Tacitus allows us to see how Mucianus will set about to accomplish this result: the Third Legion, shorn of its troublesome commander—one imagines that Varus Arrius knew altogether too much—is now sent back to Syria; Domitian is allowed to indulge in some harmless mischief, and Antonius is flattered and ensnared.¹⁰⁸ But it is the first sentence of 4.11, where Tacitus refers to the *discordia* of the senators and the rage of the beaten before Mucianus reaches Rome, that prepares for the first passage I need to discuss: the parallel taming of both the Senate and the army of Vitellius by Mucianus in 4.43-46.

Since Tacitus tells us who stood behind “Caesar Domitian,”¹⁰⁹ the drama he begins in 4.40 is best understood as orchestrated by Mucianus. The key phrase in the chapter is: *signo ultionis in accusatores dato* (“with the signal for revenge against the informers having been given”);¹¹⁰ the reappearance of *accusatores*, prepared by 4.7 and 4.10, will provoke the reentry of Helvidius in 4.43. Chapter 4.42 deserves more attention than it can receive here:¹¹¹ Tacitus begins by praising a speech he does not allow us to hear for both its eloquence and filial affection; curiously, he then writes out the speech of Curtius Montanus that rebutted it. But in terms of structure, this choice makes perfect sense: the speech of Montanus stands in the same relation to the earlier debate between Helvidius and Marcellus that the *litterae Vespasiani* did: Helvidius is led to believe that the time is ripe to overthrow Marcellus, the *accusator* of Thræsea, because Montanus reminds the senators that Vespasian is a good cop: *non timemus Vespasianum; ea principis aetas, ea moderatio* (“we do not fear Vespasian, the age of the prince, his moderation”),¹¹² and once again Helvidius takes the dangled bait,¹¹³ as the opening sentence of 4.43 shows: *tanto cum adsensu senatus auditus est Montanus ut spem caperet Helvidius posse etiam Marcellum prosterni* (“Montanus was heard with so much assent from the Senate that Helvidius took hope that even Marcellus might be overthrown”).¹¹⁴

This time Tacitus does not allow us to hear the two antagonists debate; it is sufficient for his purpose to preserve the frame that surrounds the place where it would be. Instead, he chooses to build suspense: before telling us that the contest was between the many good men who supported Helvidius and the few strong ones who backed Marcellus,¹¹⁵ the author of the *Historiae* adjourns the Senate with the *altercatio* unresolved. He allows only the *bon mot* that accompanies the feigned departure of Marcellus to become audible and thus to ring in our ears: *imus, inquit, Prisce, et relinquimus tibi senatum tuum: regna praesente Caesare* (“We are going, Priscus,” he said, “and we leave to you your Senate: play the king in Caesar’s presence”).¹¹⁶ These words are remarkable and deserve comment. To begin with, by no stretch of the imagination do the words *senatus tuus* apply to Helvidius; he has been unsuccessful at every turn,¹¹⁷ and the very next day, Mucianus will appear in the chamber to settle the issue with a lengthy speech *pro accusatoribus*.¹¹⁸ The next thing to note is that he will do so *praesente Caesare*, as Tacitus makes clear in the opening words of 4.44. Prolix though the speech may have been, Tacitus does not allow us to hear a single word of it: it is not the words and actions of Mucianus *in aperto* that interest him. In only seven words Tacitus pronounces the speech’s effect, doubtless intended, with his epitaph on the post-Nero attempt to reinstate the *senatus iudicium* championed by outmatched Helvidius: *patres coeptatam libertatem, postquam obviam itum, omisere*.¹¹⁹ The words of Marcellus, the derisive *senatus tuus*, undoubtedly apply, but not to Helvidius: it is Mucianus who rules as king in the presence of Caesar.¹²⁰

In fact, the contest between Marcellus and Helvidius is a sham: Marcellus is merely tempting bait for Thrasea’s son-in-law, and soon enough his services will no longer be required.¹²¹ It is worthy of notice that the fall of Marcellus Epirius creates a serious problem for Syme: since he finds Tacitus behind Marcellus and not Mucianus, he is hard-pressed by the subsequent death of the man he quotes so frequently:

Eprius met a paradoxical fate in the last year of Vespasian's reign, being suppressed on an allegation of conspiracy—paradoxical, because the essential virtue of these men was loyalty or 'pietas.' They were friends of Caesar and cherished by him.¹²²

And evidently the paradox rankles; hence its return, first as “a sharper paradox” a few pages later (emphasis mine):

the great Eprius brought to ruin, with no help now from rank and wealth and influence; hitherto Caesar's friend, on the attack and truculent (and it had been easy *for him* to baffle and crush Helvidius in altercation), but betrayed at the end, and perhaps abandoned in extremity by his own eloquence.¹²³

No longer presenting him as “a wicked opportunist” or “a bad man,” Syme is even more seriously mistaken in taking “the great Eprius” as the agent of Hevidius' *fatum*, and it is this mistake with respect to agency that explains the paradox with which he continues to struggle:

Above all, Tacitus would be drawn to the astute survivors, the advocates he had heard, and the great names for senatorial eloquence [the attached note begins: ‘notably Eprius Marcellus’]. As a dramatic and paradoxical finale there offered that conspiracy in the last year of Vespasian (unexplained and surely never proved) which joined in calamity Eprius Marcellus, the loyal agent of despotism, and Caecina Alienus, who had betrayed Vitellius.¹²⁴

Disguising his own discomfiture with the elimination of this murdered “survivor” with his own striking paradox (“the loyal agent of despotism”), the subtle Syme's parenthesis is therefore (*mirabile dictu*) naïve: if the steps that Mucianus takes to preserve the fiction of the *senatus iudicium* after having destroyed it are any indication,¹²⁵ the elimination of Marcellus was intended to restore a master showman's sense of balance after the elimination of Helvidius.

In any case, the unheard speech of Mucianus is all the more striking in the context of the lovingly quoted speech of Montanus, and even if one is not inclined to hear Mucianus himself speaking here *in occulto*, this question nevertheless applies quite perfectly: *invenit aemulos etiam infelix nequitia: quid si floreat vigeatque?* (“Even unsuccessful wrongdoing finds imitators: what if it should flourish and wax strong?”).¹²⁶ By the time that *invidia* toward Mucianus reappears in 4.44,¹²⁷ we can be surer than ever that his notably *felix nequitia*¹²⁸ had no shortage of *adulatores* and ready *aemuli*, especially among the *pauci validi* who had learned about *moderatio* from its real master—not from a merely expendable tool like “the great Eprius”—and thereby had discovered, as Tacitus had, that just as *vis* is best exercised behind the scenes, so too the man one praises in public will not always be the man one admires.¹²⁹ As a result there will be *invidia in aperto* for Domitian, *adulatio in occulto* for the one who made him possible.

But sometimes adulation becomes difficult to conceal, and the description of Mucianus taming the hostile soldiers still loyal to Vitellius in 4.46 should probably be regarded as Tacitus’ version of a Homeric ἀριστεία.¹³⁰ Naturally Tacitus does not praise Mucianus *propalam*, but the story is told with great skill, and Tacitus awards him the eloquent punch line after a moment of high drama.¹³¹ The scene entertains as it instructs: Mucianus entered the camp as he entered Rome, he divides his opponents before overcoming them, terrorizes them before playing the good cop, and only gradually and surreptitiously uses the mailed fist to weed out the dangerously recalcitrant among them. In allowing us to see the naked, squalid, quivering horde of terrorized and pleading Germans,¹³² Tacitus had long since “set the murderous Machiavel to school,” and passed along to us what he had learned as an impressionable youth from Mucianus. By a judicious use of divide and conquer, terrorism followed by the rhetorical removal of what is anything but “a false fear” (*falsus timor*),¹³³ the redemptive anaphora of deceit, and perhaps most importantly “the safest remedy against the consensus of a multitude,”¹³⁴ Mucianus has taught us the

secrets of a *felix nequitia*, and Tacitus has immortalized him for having done so.

Although the mention of secrets in the foregoing paragraph must be considered incomplete without noting that Mucianus was also the probable source of that greatest of the *domitionis arcana* that caused Vespasian to occupy Egypt before proceeding to Rome,¹³⁵ and despite the fact that the mention of rhetoric calls out for further discussion of the great speech of *Histories* 2,¹³⁶ the next to last passage I will consider begins by repeating *ingressus*,¹³⁷ the word that joins Mucianus' entry into the camp (*ingressus castra Mucianus*) with his entry into Rome (*Mucianus urbem ingressus*):

*tum Antiochensium theatrum ingressus, ubi illis consultare mos est, concurrentis et in adulationem effusus adloquitur, satis decorus etiam Graeca facundia, omniumque quae diceret atque ageret arte quadam ostentator.*¹³⁸

The word *ostentator* is interesting and revealing: is not our historian also “one who shows”? In this paper I have tried to give some indication of what his characterization of Mucianus shows us about Tacitus, who here shows him to be “in all the things which he would say and do” an eloquent, copious, and highly manipulative master of the art of showing.¹³⁹ Throughout his writings, Tacitus shows us that the same is true of him. The business of the historian is to show us things with words: we enter into a theater of his construction, watch the scenes he wants us to see, and hear only the speeches he wants us to hear. Many and indeed most of us will depart from that theater with any number of misconceptions, and I have tried to show that a surprising number of them, particularly those involving his apparent admiration for Helvidius Priscus, revolve around Mucianus, and this suggests the presence or rather the transmission of the mysterious *ars quaedam* that he has challenged us to discover for ourselves.

And finally there is the necessary return to the beginning: the crucial sentence from the character-sketch of 1.10.

*luxuria industria, comitate adrogantia, malis bonisque artibus mixtus: nimiae voluptates, cum vacaret; quotiens expedierat, magnae virtutes: palam laudares, secreta male audiebant: sed apud subiectos, apud proximos, apud collegas variis inlecebris potens, et cui expeditius fuerit tradere imperium quam obtinere.*¹⁴⁰

First the verb *tradere*: just as Mucianus transmits the *imperium* to Vespasian, Tacitus transmits the story of that *imperium* to us, and it is not for nothing that *tradere* appears in the first sentence of the *Agricola* just as *traditus* appears in its last.¹⁴¹ Then there are his *magnae virtutes*: the moment he sets out on a military expedition¹⁴²—or enters into a scene requiring virtue—they are plain to see. But Tacitus finds no reason to make himself the *ostentator* of whatever it was that Mucianus did when he was not doing something worthy of the historical record; his outrageous *voluptates*, which would be just cause for *invidia*, thus forever remain *in occulto*. What will remain is the *ars quaedam* of 2.80, here introduced with a preliminary clue: his *ars* is oxymoronic to the core, a mixture of good arts and bad ones, of lies and of letters,¹⁴³ of public speeches following private conferences, and of playing the king *Caesare praesente*.

Malitz makes the valid point that “every reconstruction of Helvidius’ deeds is to a considerable extent also an interpretation of Tacitus,” but the claim is even truer in the case of C. Licinius Mucianus. Recall that Malitz deduced the existence of Tacitus’ “middle way” on the basis of the information contained in his character-sketch of Helvidius, information Malitz traced back to the burnt book of Senecio. This ignores the fact that Tacitus’ only reference to any direct contact with Senecio depicts himself as splattered with his blood. But even if we agree with Malitz that Tacitus did derive information about Helvidius from his hapless admirer, we must wonder even more where he learned what he knows about Mucianus,¹⁴⁴ he who was *potens* by means of *variae illecebrae*. It is therefore natural to ask: What were the allurements and enticements that made Mucianus so powerful among all those who knew him? Of one thing we can be sure: Tacitus applies the adjective *variae* to them because they too were oxymoronic,¹⁴⁵ and

thus at apparent cross-purposes to each other, as a good cop is to a bad one. But there is more: Tacitus must be speaking from personal familiarity with these *illecebrae*, and the evidence for that claim are the passages that reveal that the historian remained under his spell. Whether sketching his character or recording his great speech, whether describing him entering the theater in Antioch armed with Greek eloquence, Rome in a successful general's *triumphalia*, or the camp of the Vitellianists with his versatile arsenal of secret arts, Tacitus has repeatedly demonstrated the superiority of Mucianus, above all to Helvidius, the one man in the *Histories* whom "you would praise openly."

The author of the *Histories* makes it easy for us to see him as something other than what Tacitus tells us that he really was:¹⁴⁶ the skilled political survivor who achieved his greatest success in service to the most odious member of the Flavian dynasty.¹⁴⁷ As a result, he will not openly praise its architect, and of course neither would you. The use of the second-person *laudares* is therefore as false as it is striking.¹⁴⁸ For who would praise Mucianus openly? Tacitus will assure us in *Histories* 4 that those who did so while he was alive were lying: their *adulatio* was merely a show. Yet here, at the beginning of his book, he presumably means that everyone, including you, would praise the *magnae virtutes* that Mucianus displayed in *public* enterprises, but that we—even though it is really "they"—"were hearing badly" the *nimiae voluptates* that stained his private life. But of these scandalous pleasures, Tacitus will say nothing, and he will go on to qualify if not contradict *laudares palam*. In the light of such *ambages*, we must reconsider whose character is really being sketched here.

Personified neither by the amorphous "you" of *laudares* nor the impersonal "they" of *audiebant*, Tacitus is instead best understood as the *ostentator* of Mucianus, himself the master showman,¹⁴⁹ and he will therefore need to use the master's oxymoronic art to show the amazing man—who found it more advantageous (*expeditius*) to pass along (*tradere*) an empire than to obtain one—for what he was.¹⁵⁰ Most of his readers will be *prima specie* enchanted by Helvidius because Tacitus knows we need someone we can praise

openly; he can therefore count on most of us to confine the classic formula that combines *adulatio in aperto* with *invidia in occulto* to Mucianus. By examining the arts that Tacitus used to show how Mucianus was able to lure, expose, and defeat Helvidius — and thus to defend the rather more compromising choices made by another famous Roman's son-in-law — I have not only echoed others who have showed that this application gets things wrong, but also have argued that we can only understand why it is wrong if we have exposed ourselves, as I am claiming that the youthful Tacitus did, to the *variae illecebrae* of C. Licinius Mucianus. Only then will we begin to understand the *ars quaedam* that both caused and allowed Tacitus to make Mucianus immortal,¹⁵¹ not least of all because the story of his death has not, for whatever reason, been passed down to us.

RESUMO

Baseando-se no entendimento de Syme sobre a simpatia de Tácito por Marcelo Éprio como também na obra de Dylan Sailor que revela a atitude crítica do historiador em relação a Helvídio Prisco, este artigo mostra por que a exibição de Muciano é importante para que esses dois importantes fios interpretativos possam ser combinados e confirmados. Apresentado a Vespasiano como “*kingmaker*”, Muciano – ou melhor: o seu retrato em Tácito – prova ser um guia crucial mas negligenciado para conhecer os métodos e simpatias do historiador cuja carreira dependeu da dinastia flaviana e que escolheu contar a história dela em sua obra *Histórias*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Tácito; C. Licínio Muciano; Vespasiano.

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- ¹ In *Agricola* 7.2 Tacitus claims that Mucianus was himself ruling as a king: *initia principatus ac statum urbis Mucianus regebat*.
- ² *Histories* 1.10.
- ³ *Histories* 5.26.3.
- ⁴ SYME, Ronald, 1958, p. 211-216.
- ⁵ See *Histories* 2.76-78.
- ⁶ *Histories* 2.76.2: *non adversus divi Augusti acerrimam mentem nec adversus cautissimam Tiberii senectutem, ne contra Gai quidem aut Claudii vel Neronis fundatam longo imperio domum exurgimus*.
- ⁷ *Dialogus* 37.2 (quoted below).
- ⁸ The literature on Mucianus is so strangely thin that one must still cite Leopold Brunn, *De C. Licinio Muciano* (Leipzig: Pöschel, 1870). Most recently, see KLEIJN, (2009), p. 311: “Mucianus, on the other hand [sc. in contrast with Vespasian], who played an important role in Vespasian’s assumption of power, and was in charge of Rome and the northern provinces of the empire for ten months after the Vitellian defeat, ultimately more or less passed into oblivion.”
- ⁹ *Histories* 1.1.3 (quoted below).
- ¹⁰ Representative is LEVICK, 1999, p. 46: “Now early in 69 on the initiative of the returning Titus a more active collaboration was planned. Tacitus presents Mucianus as openly exhorting Vespasian to make his move and so demonstrating their solidarity. Second only to Mucianus was Ti. Julius Alexander in Egypt, with two legions and control of grain shipments.” By treating Titus as doing the initiating, and by treating the equestrian governor of Egypt as if he were almost as important, Tacitus allows Mucianus to go missing; the passive “was planned” lacks the appropriate ablative of agent. While “kingmaker” on 53, he is also “a notorious homosexual with a theatrical manner.”
- ¹¹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 32.66; on this see BECK, 2001, p. 169.
- ¹² *Dialogus* 37.2: *Nescio an venerint in manus vestras haec vetera, quae et in antiquariorum bibliothecis adhuc manent et cum maxime a Muciano contrahuntur, ac iam undecim, ut opinor, Actorum libris et tribus Epistularum composita et edita sunt*.
- ¹³ Mucianus is “silver-tongued” in Rhiannon Ash (ed.), Cornelius Tacitus, *Historiae. Liber 2* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 284 and 351.
- ¹⁴ *Histories* 1.10.1: *insignis amicitias iuvenis ambitiose coluerat*.
- ¹⁵ *Histories* 2.80.2 (quoted below).
- ¹⁶ See WILLIAMSON, 2005, p. 219-252. For “three times consul,” see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 2.231, 8.6, 12.9, 13.88, 14.54, 16.213, and 34.36.
- ¹⁷ Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 13: *Licinium Mucianum notae impudicitiae, sed meritorum fiducia minus sui reverentem, numquam nisi clam et hactenus retaxare sustinuit, ut apud communem aliquem amicum querens adderet clausulam: Ego tamen vir sum*.
- ¹⁸ *Histories* 4.10.2 (quoted below).
- ¹⁹ *Histories* 2.74.1 (quoted below); cf. 2.79: *consiliorum inter Mucianum ac patrem nuntius*.
- ²⁰ *Histories* 4.39.1: *Caesar Domitianus praeturam cepit. eius nomen epistulis edictisque praeponebatur, vis penes Mucianum erat*.
- ²¹ Dio Cassius 65.13.
- ²² For the kind reassessment that guides my approach, OWEN; GILDENHARD, 2013, on “Thrasea Paetus and the so-called ‘Stoic opposition,’” paragraph 10.
- ²³ *Annals* 16.35.
- ²⁴ *Agricola* 2.2.1.
- ²⁵ See BRUNT, 1975, p. 7-35.
- ²⁶ *Agricola* 2.3.
- ²⁷ *Histories* 1.1.4.
- ²⁸ For this insight, see especially SAILOR, 2008.
- ²⁹ Sailor, 2008, p. 11-20.
- ³⁰ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 18-20.
- ³¹ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 18: “Far from standing in a class of its own, the martyrs’ path is fundamentally comparable to the one that Agricola takes: they are both, above all, competing means to the end of glory.”
- ³² Idem, *ibidem*, p. 23.

- ³³ Cf. GOWING, 2009, p. 28: “Helvidius Priscus, one of the few characters Tacitus openly admires”.
- ³⁴ See TREU, 1948, p. 241-262.
- ³⁵ See *Histories* 3.8, 3.53, and 3.78.
- ³⁶ *Histories* 4.9.2; he speaks in the Senate in 4.44.1. Cf. *Annals* 15.74.3.
- ³⁷ See in particular PIGOÑ, 1992, p. 235-246.
- ³⁸ *Histories* 4.6.1.
- ³⁹ SYME, 1939, p. 515
- ⁴⁰ Syme, *Tacitus*, 2.547: “The argument [sc. for ‘the acceptance of monarchy’] is set forth with eloquence and power, and (as is typical of Tacitus) by a bad man trying to pass for plain and honest, none other than the orator Eprius Marcellus: he knew about the Republic, and he also knew the times he lived in; he rendered proper homage to the past while keeping in step with the present; one prays for a good emperor, and puts up with what comes along.”
- ⁴¹ Ronald Syme, “Review of Marcel Durry, *Pline le jeune: Panégyrique de Trajan.*” *Journal of Roman Studies* 28, pt. 2 (1938), 217-224 on 223.
- ⁴² Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 3.6.
- ⁴³ HADAS, 1942, p. xix-xx.
- ⁴⁴ *Histories* 2.95.3.
- ⁴⁵ *Histories* 4.44.1 (quoted below).
- ⁴⁶ MALITZ, 1985, p. 232. Although arguably made out-of-date by Sailor, the careful scholarship in this article nevertheless deserves a response.
- ⁴⁷ Idem, *ibidem*. 235n29, 236n35, 237n37, 237n41, and 237n42.
- ⁴⁸ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 235-238.
- ⁴⁹ Epictetus 4.1.123.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. MALITZ, 1985, p. 245.
- ⁵¹ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 241.
- ⁵² Idem, *ibidem*. 238n47.
- ⁵³ Cf. Idem, *ibidem*. 245n95 and 246n99.
- ⁵⁴ Idem, *ibidem*. 246n100.
- ⁵⁵ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 245-46.
- ⁵⁶ The documentation provided in MALITZ, 1985, 241n66 is insufficient to sustain the claims in the text; although this is not the place to prove it, Dio Cassius is substantially subtler than he is generally considered to be.
- ⁵⁷ MALITZ, 1985, p. 246.
- ⁵⁸ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 246.
- ⁵⁹ Suetonius, *Domitian*, 10.3; note the death of Helvidius’ son in 10.4.
- ⁶⁰ See SAILOR, 2004, p. 150-51.
- ⁶¹ Following Sailor, *Writing and Empire*.
- ⁶² *Agricola* 45.1
- ⁶³ Cf. OAKLEY, 2009, p. 194: “Tacitus’ readers have found it hard not to see passages like *Agr.* 45.1–2 [parenthesis deleted] as reflecting his own guilt at not having taken a nobler course.” Better is Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.25; after calling it “a passionate confession of collective guilt” in then adds: “Tacitus puts himself among the majority that witnessed and condoned the worst acts of tyranny. It does not follow [what follows is really quite perfect:] that Tacitus would have quietly concurred when anybody else arraigned Agricola’s conduct, or his own, for cowardice or subservience.”
- ⁶⁴ MALITZ, 1985, p. 246.
- ⁶⁵ It is Marcellus who does this, mockingly, in *Histories* 4.8; but note the disappearance of any gap between Tacitus and Marcellus in Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.25-26: “Attacking those who admired the martyrs unduly, Tacitus defends his father-in-law—and shields his own conduct under the tyranny of Domitian. Tacitus may have spoken in the Senate, deprecating the excesses of faction and fanatics. When the time came, he was to show how well he could demonstrate that theme—it was all very well to emulate Brutus and Cato in fortitude: one was only a senator, and they had all been slaves together’ [the attached note reads: ‘*Histories* 4.8.3 (the oration of Eprius Marcellus)’]. Tacitus speaks not only for Agricola or for himself.” Syme repeats the suggestion about the speech of Eprius Marcellus on 1.209: “using words which Tacitus had heard—or had used himself.”

- ⁶⁶ *Agricola* 5.7: *Quid aliud infestis patribus nuper Eprinus Marcellus quam eloquentiam suam opposuit? Qua accinctus et minax disertam quidem, sed inexercitatum et eius modi certaminum rudem Helvidii sapientiam elusit.*
- ⁶⁷ MALITZ, 1985. 235n29.
- ⁶⁸ *Histories* 4.8.2.
- ⁶⁹ *Histories* 4.6.1; cf. Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 19.
- ⁷⁰ *Histories* 4.6.1.
- ⁷¹ Cf. *Histories* 4.4.1 and 4.11.1.
- ⁷² *Histories* 4.1.1: *Interfecto Vitellio bellum magis desierat quam pax coeperat. armati per urbem victores implacabili odio victos consecrabantur: plenae caedibus viae, cruenta fora templaque, passim trucidatis, ut quemque fors obtulerat.*
- ⁷³ *Histories* 4.1.3: *duces partium accendendo civili bello acres* [these words apply primarily to Antonius Primus], *temperandae victoriae impares, quippe inter turbas et discordias pessimo cuique plurima vis, pax et quies bonis artibus indigent.* For the earlier association of Mucianus with *artes bonae*, see 1.10.2.
- ⁷⁴ *Histories* 4.2.1: *Nomen sedemque Caesaris Domitianus acceperat, nondum ad curas intentus, sed stupris et adulteriis filium principis agebat. praefectura praetorii penes Arrium Varum, summa potentiae in Primo Antonio.*
- ⁷⁵ *Histories* 4.3.1: *Capuae legio tertia hiemandi causa locatur*, a plum posting as reward for services rendered (see below).
- ⁷⁶ *Histories* 1.10.1: *Oriens adhuc immotus* [Mucianus will put a stop to that]. *Syriam et quattuor legiones obtinebat Licinius Mucianus* (see following note).
- ⁷⁷ Cf. SYME, 1977, p. 85 (emphasis mine): “The new generals Mucianus and Vespasian divided six legions. The seventh, III Gallica, was dispatched to Moesia [for its political activities there, see following note], either in 67 or in 68: a fact ignored or forgotten by Tacitus when he allotted four legions to the legate of Syria [sc. Mucianus] in 69 [the attached note reads: ‘Hist. 1.10.1; 2.4.4; 6.2; 76.5’]. Pace Syme, Tacitus has not forgotten that the Third Legion still belongs to “the legate of Syria,” and that is why, despite appearances, the *suam* of *Histories* 2.74.1 refers not to Vespasian, but to Mucianus: *Muciani animus nec Vespasiano alienus* [this association prepares the reader for the coming ambiguity] *et in Titum pronior* [although Tacitus doesn’t allow us to forget that there was still distance, at least on the part of Mucianus]; *praefectus Aegypti Alexander consilia sociaverat* [at the very least Alexander has associated himself with both Mucianus and Vespasian]; *tertiam legionem, quod e Syria in Moesiam transisset* [only Mucianus would have had the power to make this transfer, hence the switch that follows:], *suam numerabat.*
- ⁷⁸ *Histories* 2.85.1: *adcelerata interim Vespasiani coepta Illyrici exercitus studio transgressi in partem: tertia legio exemplum ceteris Moesiae legionibus praebeuit.* Cf. Suetonius *Vespasian* 6.3.
- ⁷⁹ *Histories* 4.3.3.
- ⁸⁰ *Histories* 2.79.
- ⁸¹ Cf. Suetonius *Vespasian* 6.3: *Ceterum divulgato facto* [i.e., only after the actions of the Moesian army described above became known], *Tiberius Alexander praefectus Aegypti primus in verba Vespasiani legiones adegit Kal. Iul., qui principatus dies in posterum observatus est.* For Tacitus’ account, see previous note; bear in mind the *consilia sociaverat* applied to T. Alexander in *Histories* 2.74.1. Note also that the description of Egypt immediately follows the character-sketch of Mucianus in 1.11, where Tacitus reminds us of its special status as described in *Annals* 2.57.
- ⁸² *Histories* 2.84; cf. Dio Cassius 65.2.5.
- ⁸³ *Histories* 2.82; cf. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7.1.
- ⁸⁴ *Histories* 3.8.2.
- ⁸⁵ *Histories* 4.3.4.
- ⁸⁶ Cf. the *epistulae* of *Histories* 2.82 and 4.80.
- ⁸⁷ *Histories* 3.8 and 3.78: *Mucianus ambiguis epistulis victores morabatur.* Consider also 3.53, especially the interchangeability of *litterae*, *nuntia*, and *epistulae*. In this revealing chapter, Antonius taunts Mucianus has fighting the war with the latter alone: *non se nuntiis neque epistulis, sed manu et armis imperatori suo militare.*
- ⁸⁸ *Histories* 4.4.1.
- ⁸⁹ *Histories* 4.4.1: *id vero erga rem publicam superbum, erga principem contumeliosum, quod in manu sua fuisse imperium donatumque Vespasiano iactabat.*
- ⁹⁰ *Histories* 4.4.2.

- ⁹¹ Cf. *Histories* 2.76.1: *et Mucianus, post multos secretosque sermones iam et coram ita locutus.*
- ⁹² I am grateful to an anonymous referee for recommending this separation, and for much else.
- ⁹³ *Histories* 4.4.3.
- ⁹⁴ That is, as including *Histories* 4.6.1.
- ⁹⁵ That is, as the most important of those who remembered.
- ⁹⁶ Cf. *Histories* 4.52.2.
- ⁹⁷ *Histories* 4.9.2.
- ⁹⁸ See MALITZ, 1985. 236n35.
- ⁹⁹ *Histories* 4.9.2.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Histories* 4.11.1.
- ¹⁰¹ Cf. Dio Cassius 65.12.1.
- ¹⁰² *Histories* 4.11.1.
- ¹⁰³ *Histories* 4.11.2-3.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Histories* 4.11.1.
- ¹⁰⁵ As emphasized by Syme; hence his repeated citation of *Histories* 4.8.2, on which see Pigoñ, “Helvidius Priscus, Eprius Marcellus, and *Iudicium Senatus*,” 235n2.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cf. Sailor, *Writing and Empire*, 16-19.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Agricola* 7.1-2.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Histories* 4.39.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Histories* 4.39.
- ¹¹⁰ *Histories* 4.40.3.
- ¹¹¹ See MARTIN, 1967, p. 109-114. Martin emphasizes the Ciceronian aspects of this speech, and it deserves notice that it was *Philippics* 5.5. that Mucianus was mischievously paraphrasing when he harped upon the (*civilis*) *belli nervi* in *Histories* 2.84.
- ¹¹² *Histories* 4.42.6.
- ¹¹³ Cf. Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.209: “Liberty dawned for a brief moment after the fall of Vitellius. It was slight and fallacious.” Syme does not identify the man who made it so.
- ¹¹⁴ *Histories* 4.43.1.
- ¹¹⁵ *Histories* 4.43.2: *cum glisceret certamen, hinc multi bonique, inde pauci et validi pertinacibus odiis tenderent, consumptus per discordiam dies.* With this *discordia*, cf. 4.1.3.
- ¹¹⁶ *Histories* 4.43.2; for “feigned,” consider *velut discedens*.
- ¹¹⁷ See Malitz,
- ¹¹⁸ *Histories* 4.44.1: *proximo senatu, inchoante Caesare de abolendo dolore iraque et priorum temporum necessitatibus, censuit Mucianus prolixè pro accusatoribus.*
- ¹¹⁹ *Histories* 4.44.1.
- ¹²⁰ Cf. *regnabat* in *Agricola* 2.7.
- ¹²¹ See Suetonius, *Titus*, 6.2.
- ¹²² Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.101.
- ¹²³ Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.111.
- ¹²⁴ Syme, *Tacitus*, 1. 212-13.
- ¹²⁵ Consider *Histories* 4.44.2-45 beginning with: *Mucianus, ne sperni senatus iudicium et cunctis sub Nerone admissis data impunitas videretur.*
- ¹²⁶ *Histories* 4.42.5.
- ¹²⁷ *Histories* 4.44.3: *nec ideo lenita erga Mucianum invidia.*
- ¹²⁸ Consider *Histories* 2.84.3: *propriis quoque opibus Mucianus bellum iuvat, largus privatim, quod avidius de re publica sumeret. ceteri conferendarum pecuniarum exemplum secuti, rarissimus quisque eandem in recipiendo licentiam habuerunt.*
- ¹²⁹ Cf. *Histories* 4.39: *Mucianus, quia propalam opprimi Antonius nequibat, multis in senatu laudibus cumulatum secretis promissis onerat.*
- ¹³⁰ Cf. JOSEPH, 2012. 3n4.
- ¹³¹ *Histories* 4.36.3 (quoted below).
- ¹³² *Histories* 4.36.3: *illos primus statim aspectus obstupescerat, cum ex diverso velut aciem telis et armis trucem, semet clausos nudosque et inlucie deformis aspicerent: ut vero huc illuc distrabi coepere, metus per omnis et praecipua Germanici militis formido, tamquam ea separatione ad caedem destinaretur. prensare commanipularium pectora, cervicibus innecti,*

suprema oscula petere, ne desererentur soli neu pari causa disparem fortunam paterentur; modo Mucianum, modo absentem principem, postremum caelum ac deos obtestari.

¹³³ *Histories* 4.46.3 (immediately follows previous note): *donec Mucianus cunctos eiusdem sacramenti, eiusdem imperatoris milites appellans, falso timori obviam iret.*

¹³⁴ *Histories* 4.46.4: *dein quibus aetas et iusta stipendia, dimissi cum honore, alii ob culpam, sed carptim ac singuli, quo tutissimo remedio consensus multitudinis extenuatur.*

¹³⁵ Cf. *Annals* 2.59 with *Histories* 2.84.1 and 3.8.2.

¹³⁶ For comment on this speech, see ASH, 2007, p. 283-301 and LEVENE, 2009, p. 219-220.

¹³⁷ Cf. JOSEPH, 2012. 175.

¹³⁸ *Histories* 2.80.2.

¹³⁹ Despite *Histories* 2, there is no evidence that Vitellius planned to transfer the German army to Syria and the Syrian army to Germany; cf. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 6.4 (quoted below) where this will be styled *rumor*.

¹⁴⁰ *Histories* 1.10.2.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Agricola* 1.1 and 46.4.

¹⁴² OLD *expedio* 5b.

¹⁴³ Suetonius *Vespasian*, 6.4: *Plurimum coeptis [sc. the elevation of Vespasian] contulerunt iactatum exemplar epistulae verae sive falsae defuncti Othonis ad Vespasianum, extrema obtestatione ultionem mandatus et ut rei p. subveniret optantis; simul rumor dissipatus, destinasse victorem Vitellium permutate hiberna legionum et Germanicas transferre in Orientem ad securiorem mollioremque militiam, praeterea ex praesidibus provinciarum Licinius Mucianus.* The fact that this rumor was certainly promulgated by Mucianus according to *Histories* 2.80 contributes to the suspicion that the letter of Otho, if forged, was likewise his handiwork.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.177-78: “For the events (or intrigues) before the proclamation of Vespasian in the East, the testimony of Licinius Mucianus could have been highly instructive [Syme is writing on Tacitus’ sources].” Note “the great Mucianus” in the next sentence; although he quotes *Agricola* 37.2 there, Syme does not, aside from the sentence quoted in this note, emphasize the possibilities suggested by the chronological overlap.

¹⁴⁵ OLD 3b; cf. *varietas* 5b.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Syme, *Tacitus*, 2.547: “At first sight and on the surface he [sc. Tacitus] is against monarchy.”

¹⁴⁷ *Histories* 1.1.3: *dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius provecam non abnuerim.* Cf. Syme, *Tacitus*, 1.210: “Tacitus owed his advancement to the Flavian House—and especially to the Emperor Domitian.

¹⁴⁸ See GILMARTIN, 1975, p. 114.

¹⁴⁹ Note the use of *ostenta* at Suetonius, *Vespasian* 5.1; that Mucianus was the *ostentator* who promulgated these *ostenta* is suggested not only by his recorded interest in *admirabilia*—cf. Ash, *Historiae* 2, 313—but by the placement of *Histories* 2.78 directly after the great speech.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Treu, “M. Antonius Primus,” 241: “Man ist freilich bei Tacitus solche ‘doppelgesichtige’ Kunst der Menschendarstellung nachgerade gewohnt: mag er auch mitunter eine solche Art der Charakterzeichnung, die ursprünglich ein Merkmal der Objektivität des Historikers war, aus seiner Quelle übernommen haben, so scheint sie doch wie kaum ein anderes Mittel geeignet, die Zweifelhaftigkeit menschlicher Wesensart zu verdeutlichen, wie er sie als bittere Erkenntnis erlebt hat.” I have offered an alternative explanation of how Tacitus learned all of this.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 7.33.1 (to Tacitus): *auguror nec me fallit augurium, historias tuas immortales futuras.* If the claims advanced in this paper are valid, the desire Pliny expresses in this letter to be included in the *Histories* for what the divine Nerva had called an *exemplum simile antiquis* went unfulfilled and, in any case, the fact that he had to ask for it is evidence that it would have defeated Tacitus’ purpose to praise Pliny for his courageous defense of Senecio. For the juxtaposition of Senecio and Tacitus, see Sailor, “Becoming Tacitus,” 147.