

THE ROMAN CITY-STATE UNDER THE EMPERORS
29 BC-AD 69

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This paper must begin with a confession. I have always felt unsure as to how we should approach the central narrative of events in Rome in the first century and a half of Imperial rule. Whose history should we be attempting to write? That of the successive Emperors? Of the Senate in its new situation? Of the population of Rome? Of the wider body of Roman citizens? Or of all the peoples whom Rome ruled or had contact with? In particular, I find Tacitus' *Annales* profoundly unsatisfying. For a start, we must ask why he made the deliberate choice to call the work *Annales*, as he does: 'But let no-one compare our *Annales* with the writing of those who recounted the ancient deeds of the *populus Romanus*'.¹ We will come back to this comparison later, for the frame of reference which is implied is fundamental to the historical writing of the early Empire. But it was also a deliberate choice, as is implied by the title *Annales*, to structure the work by years, and to introduce at the beginning of each year the names of the annual pair of *consules ordinarii*. As regards the history of what

I am very grateful to the University of Sydney for the honour of being invited to give the Todd Memorial Lecture, delivered on November 17, 1997, and Princeton University, where it was given as the Magie Lecture on March 24, 1998. This paper represents the text of the lecture as given, with the addition of a few footnotes containing essential references. There is a mass of further evidence, old and new, relating to the *res publica* of the first century AD, and I hope to return to the topic in more detail elsewhere.

¹ *Ann.* IV, 32, 1: 'sed nemo annales nostros cum scriptura eorum contenderit, qui veteres populi Romani res composuere'.

we call the Republic, there had been a good reason for this: for it was the two consuls, during their year of office, who commanded the two main Roman armies; in other words it was they who expanded, or failed to expand, the *imperium* of the *populus Romanus*. But in spite of this, even in the Republic itself, the idea of writing 'annalistic', year-by-year history could seem inadequate, mere chronicling without proper analysis of intentions and reasons. Precisely this view had been expressed by Sempronius Asellio in the preface to the *res gestae* which he wrote in the second half of the second century BC. But we can encounter his words now only because they were quoted by Aulus Gellius, writing in the middle of the second century AD²—and thus only a few decades after Tacitus had finished his *Annales*. In short, a highly educated senatorial orator, like Tacitus, writing in the earlier second century, must have known that it might seem oddly old-fashioned to write 'annalistic' history.

So, to call the work *Annales* was a deliberate choice, and a very paradoxical one. For the consuls of the Imperial period did not lead armies, but held office in Rome, and usually not even for the whole year. One thing they did do was to preside in the Senate. As to what else they did, the evidence now available shows, for instance, that they gave jurisdiction and dealt with contracts for public revenues and expenditures. But if they were ever, like Domitius Corbulo or Iulius Agricola, to get the chance to command armies, it was after their consulship, sometimes long after, and only when appointed by an Emperor. Their campaigns when in their provinces could extend over several years.

So choosing to write *Annales* was a controversial decision for a senator of the early second century, and one which, as Tacitus himself found, caused various difficulties: in some years, as he complains, nothing much happened in Rome;³ in other periods

² Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att. V*, 18.

campaigns on the frontiers did not really make sense if divided up year-by-year.⁴ These are some of the reasons why I have always found it hard to discern what the purpose and subject of Tacitus' *Annales* really is. But one aspect of how the work is constructed is clear, and has become incomparably clearer as a result of dramatic recent discoveries of new evidence. That is that, to a quite extraordinary extent, the narrative of events in Rome which Tacitus presents is built up from a chain of scenes in the Senate. This was argued in a splendid paper by the late Sir Ronald Syme, published when its author was a mere 79.⁵ It is clear throughout the *Annales* how Tacitus has followed in detail the sequence of exchanges and speeches in the Senate; what is more, as has long been known, he has edited and re-written the original speeches for insertion in his own narrative. I hardly need to refer to the two classic cases where we have both at least some of the original text and also its representation, or re-presentation, by Tacitus: I mean of course Claudius' speech about the right of prominent Roman citizens from Gaul to seek senatorial rank, of which we have the original text on the famous inscription from Lyons;⁶ and the debate on the conferment of honours on Pallas, from which Pliny the Younger quotes verbatim.⁷ In the former case, both the text of Claudius' actual speech and Tacitus' version of it represent something very characteristic both of the ideology of first-century

³ See e.g. *Ann.* XIII, 31, 1: 'Nerone iterum L. Pisone consulibus pauca memoria digna evenere, nisi cui libeat laudandis fundamentis et trabibus, quis molem amphitheatri apud Campum Martis Caesar extruxerat, volumina implere, cum ex dignitate populi Romani repertum sit res inlustis annalibus, talia diurnis actis urbis mandare'.

⁴ See e.g. *Ann.* XIV, 29, 1.

⁵ R. Syme, 'Tacitus: Some Sources of his Information', *JRS* 72 (1982), 68 = *Roman Papers IV* (1988), 199.

⁶ The Tabula Lugdunensis, *ILS*, 212; *Ann.* XI, 23-5. See esp. M.T. Griffin, 'The Lyons Tablet and Tacitean Hindsight', *CQ* 32 (1982), 404.

⁷ Pliny, *Epp.* VII, 29 and VIII, 6 (verbatim quotations found in paras. 6-7 and 13); *Ann.* XII, 53.

Rome and of our means of access to it. That is, the use of the Republican past, its history, its institutions and its values, as a frame of reference for debates about the present. When we encounter these debates as represented by Tacitus, of course, we are ourselves engaging in a sort of multi-level dialogue: there is our engagement with Tacitus' text; his engagement with the oratory of the Emperor and the Senate in the Julio-Claudian period; and their engagement with the institutions and values of the Republic as they understood them. I will mention only two further examples: the speech by Cremutius Cordus in *Annales* IV on the tradition of free speech in Roman historiography;⁸ and the debates in *Annales* III on the rules relating to the Flamen Dialis.⁹

The Senate is therefore the main stage on which the action recorded in the *Annales* of Tacitus takes place, and the question which Tacitus poses is above all the following. How did the senators conduct themselves in the shadow of autocracy? Some responded to the new political structure by adulation, or by self-interested accusations directed against other senators; but others did so by self-conscious adherence to traditional standards, or by an unyielding attachment to *libertas*, meaning both dignity of conduct and freedom of speech. The best analysis of this theme is still, in my view, Chaim Wirszubski's book *Libertas*, published in 1950.¹⁰

As we will see later, recent evidence gives us very clear and specific reasons for thinking that Tacitus' concentration on the Senate is excessive. For we can now see, much more clearly than before, how the Senate was only one element in a much wider context, even if we think only of Rome and its inhabitants. Firstly, there are the very complex institutions of the *res publica*

⁸ *Ann.* IV, 34.

⁹ *Ann.* III, 58-9; 71.

¹⁰ Ch. Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome during the late Republic and early Principate* (1950).

itself, or what I have called in the title 'the Roman City-State'. It is a strange paradox, but I think a real one, that as a result of both new and not-so-new discoveries, we now know more about the working of the *res publica* under the Emperors than we do for the Republic proper.

Then, because Roman public life really was public, and took place almost entirely in the open air, we have to think of the topography of the city of Rome itself, and above all of its public buildings and public spaces, of the functions performed by them, and of the meanings and associations attached to them. Some of these buildings and designated spaces were centuries old, like the Circus Maximus, the temple of Iuppiter on the Capitol, or the Campus Martius, in its role as a meeting-place for the assembly, or of course the Forum Romanum itself. But the huge building-programmes which had been undertaken from the late Republic onwards, from wholly new building to re-structuring or renovation, had transformed the centre of the city, and with that the very contexts in which the business and communal life of the *res publica* was conducted. We have only to think of the theatres of Pompey and Marcellus, the temple of Divus Julius in the Forum Romanum, the Forum of Caesar with the temple of Venus Genetrix, or the Forum of Augustus with the temple of Mars Ultor.

The monumental centre of Rome does of course play a significant part in Tacitus' narratives, for instance in the *Historiae*, in his powerful accounts of the last hours of both Galba and Vitellius, or of the burning of the Capitol in December 69, and its subsequent restoration.¹¹ But we also find the major buildings of Rome forming the subject of debates and exchanges in the Senate, as represented in Tacitus' narrative, for instance under AD 22, when Lepidus asked permission to restore at his own expense what Tacitus calls 'the Basilica Pauli, Aemilia monumenta'. The reference is to the massive basilica on the north side of the Forum

¹¹ *Hist.* I, 39-42 (Galba); III, 67-8; 84-6 (Vitellius); III, 70-2; IV, 53 (Capitol).

Romanum which is normally known as the 'Basilica Aemilia'. What it should properly be called is the subject of heated debate among moderns, not worth entering into now.¹² As Tacitus says, Lepidus was setting out deliberately to live up to the tradition of his family's munificence; by contrast, since there was no member of the family to do it, it was Tiberius who promised to restore the theatre of Pompey. He took the occasion, when speaking in the Senate, to praise the services and vigilance of Sejanus, and the Senate duly voted that a statue of Sejanus should be set up in the theatre.¹³

That vote reflected another new feature of senatorial business, and one which had only entered the standard repertoire of senatorial debates in the very late Republic, and then the Caesarian and Triumviral period. This was the emphasis on formal, public marks of honour, usually in both visual and written form (for we can be quite certain that the base for Sejanus' statue will have borne an inscription in his honour). The elaboration of visible forms of honour for Emperors themselves, and their families, hardly needs emphasis here. Equally, the forms of self-representation—or of representation by others—which were now open to senators were the subject of a brilliant chapter by Werner Eck published in 1984.¹⁴ But what needs stressing is the self-conscious awareness in early Imperial culture of the potential ideological significance of forms of publicly-inscribed writing. *Annales* III offers a perfect example. When Tiberius wrote to the

Senate to ask for a vote of the *tribunicia potestas* for Drusus, adulatory votes of statues, altars, temples and arches were merely a routine response. But one senator went further, and proposed that monuments should from now on bear the names not of the consuls but of the holders of the *tribunicia potestas*; and another went too far, in suggesting that the texts of the *senatus consulta* passed that day should be put up in golden letters in the Curia.¹⁵ We shall see below that a self-conscious attention to memorialisation in the form of carefully displayed public writing was not in itself an aberration, but was precisely an innovation which was entirely characteristic of the Imperial age.¹⁶ So too was the placing of honorific statues. Thus under AD 23 a brief sentence in the *Annales* records that the Senate voted that Lucilius Longus should receive a *ensorium funus* and a statue in the Forum of Augustus, both at public expense.¹⁷ That was one sign of the reshaping of the topography of public space in the centre of Rome. We see this much more clearly, however, at the death of L. Volusius Saturninus in 56. Tacitus, in recording this, notes only the good reputation which Volusius had preserved through his 93 years. But the damaged inscription recording his posthumous honours, found at the family villa at Lucus Feroniae, reveals a whole new, or almost new, topography of public honour.¹⁸ The Senate had voted a public funeral, with the provision that *vadimonia* for that day should be postponed; then there were to be three triumphal statues, a bronze one in the Forum of Augustus, and two marble ones in the 'new' temple of Divus Augustus; also

¹² See E.M. Steinby, 'Il lato orientale del Foro Romano', *Arctos* 21 (1987), 139; E. Carnabucci, *L'angolo sud-orientale del Foro Romano nel manoscritto inedito di Giacomo Boni* (1991); T. P. Wiseman, 'Rome and the resplendent Aemilii', in H.D. Jocelyn (ed.), *Tria Lustra* (1993), 181; *LTUR* I (1993), s.vv. 'Basilica Aemilia'; 'Basilica Fulvia'.

¹³ *Ann.* III, 72.

¹⁴ W. Eck, 'Senatorial Self-representation: Developments in the Augustan Period', in F. Millar and E. Segal (eds.), *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects* (1984), 129 = W. Eck, *Tra epigrafia, prosopografia e archeologia* (1996), 271.

¹⁵ *Ann.* III, 57.

¹⁶ See esp. G. Alföldy, 'Augustus und die Inschriften: Tradition und Innovation. Die Geburt der imperialen Epigraphik', *Gymnasium* 98 (1991), 289; *idem*, *Studi sull'epigrafia augustea e tiberiana di Roma* (1992).

¹⁷ *Ann.* IV, 15, 1–3.

¹⁸ *Ann.* XIII, 30, 4. For the inscription see esp. W. Eck, 'Die Familie der Volusii Saturnini in neuen Inschriften aus Lucus Feroniae', *Hermes* 100 (1972), 461, and S. Panciera in M.T. Boatwright *et al.*, *I Volusii Saturnini: una famiglia romana della prima età imperiale* (1982), 83f.

three 'consular' statues, one in the temple of Divus Julius, one in the Palatium and a third in the *area* of (the temple of) Apollo, within view from the Curia (meaning where the Senate now often met, at the temple of Apollo on the Palatine); next, there was to be a statue of him in augural dress at the Regia; then a mounted statue near the Rostra; and finally one of him seated on his *sella curulis*, to be placed in the Portico of the Lentuli, beside the theatre of Pompey.

Almost all the architectural features mentioned had come into existence in the previous hundred years. Nor is it the case that, as we might expect, these new monumental elements were just that, with no significance for the operations of society or government. The opposite is shown by unexpected evidence, namely the wax tablets from Murecine recording business affairs at Puteoli in the middle of the first century AD. Now properly edited by G. Camodeca, these documents record a whole series of *vadimonia* given by parties to legal proceedings who are due to go to Rome to appear before the praetor.¹⁹ As usual, old and new elements combine. Another text which Camodeca has re-edited in the same volume shows that the Praetor Urbanus would still put up his *edictum* in the old Forum, 'under the Porticus Iulia, in front of his tribunal'.²⁰ But all of the actual *vadimonia* are for appearances at different sections of the Forum of Augustus, each identified by its most prominent monumental element: 'at Rome in the Forum Augustum before the triumphal statue of Cn. Sentius Saturninus, at the fifth hour'; 'in front of the altar of Mars Ultor'; 'before the statue of Gracchus at the column nearest to the steps'; 'before the statue of Diana Lucifera, at column X'. Here we go beyond the monuments themselves, to catch a glimpse of the open-air functioning of the administration of justice as it affected the man in the street, and indeed (potentially) in the streets of all the small towns of Italy. The public space in question was a new one,

¹⁹ G. Camodeca, *L'archivio puteolano dei Sulpicii I* (1992).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

opened only a few decades earlier, and the different parts of it were distinguished by the honorific statues which stood there.

This routine jurisdiction by annual office-holders, which was essential to the working of society, only surfaces occasionally in literary sources, and usually when an Emperor is in some way involved. Thus, early in his reign, so Tacitus says, Tiberius would take his seat on the praetor's tribunal, but at the far end of it, so as not to displace the magistrate from his *sella curulis*; as a result, the verdicts issued gave less weight to influence and the pleas of the powerful.²¹ But Emperors too followed the model of the roles fulfilled by the annual Republican magistrates, and made a point of taking their seats in public to give jurisdiction. It was while he was giving justice in the Forum in 51 that Claudius was assailed by a crowd complaining of the price of corn, and only just escaped via the nearest door to the Palatine.²² This was of course the old Forum, the Forum Romanum. But he might do the same in the new Forum Augustum. It is Suetonius who tells the splendid anecdote of how, when Claudius was giving justice there, he was powerfully attracted by the smell of a banquet which was being set out for the Salian priests in the nearby temple of Mars (Ultor); so he quitted the tribunal, mounted to the temple and reclined along with the priests for the meal.²³

The custom of the Salii dining together was presumably ancient—but we have to be careful, for another feature of the history of the Roman *res publica* is that a very large proportion of what we are told of its early history and institutions in fact comes from sources written under the Emperors (think of the *Fasti* of Ovid for a start). I cannot pursue this topic here, nor go into the complex and varied forms in which civil and criminal jurisdiction actually operated in Rome in the early Empire. It is in fact only

²¹ *Ann.* I, 75, 1, see Suetonius, *Tib.* 33.

²² *Ann.* XII, 43, 2; Suetonius, *Div. Claud.* 18.

²³ Suetonius, *Div. Claud.* 33.

now, with the publication of the tablets from Puteoli, and also from reading the Flavian municipal law, of which a large new section was published in 1986, that we can begin to see what we call 'Roman law' actually functioning in the Classical period itself. It is of some significance that the Flavian municipal law, known from inscribed bronze tablets of Domitian's reign, found in Spain, repeatedly refers back to the procedures for jurisdiction in Rome.²⁴

I must leave that topic, not least because I am still too confused myself as to how the various elements of jurisdiction in Rome in the first century really functioned. But in thinking of the routine of jurisdiction we are extending our attention to the citizens of the *res publica*: 'citizens' in one sense means the population of the city itself; in another, it includes all the adult males in Italy; and in another not only them, but all those outside Italy who enjoyed the Roman citizenship. Citizens from the provinces were still relatively few. But there were now Roman *coloniae* in the provinces, and one of the really important revelations provided by new documents comes from the Tabula Siarensis, a bronze tablet from Baetica recording the public commemoration of Germanicus after his death in 19. For in this document the Senate advises the consuls to put up a text of its decree, and instructs the ambassadors of the *municipia* and *coloniae* to copy it and to send it 'to the *municipia* and *coloniae* of Italy, and to those *coloniae* which are situated in the provinces'.²⁵ Italy was now in some respects something like a nation state, with citizen off-shoots in the provinces. In other respects, what still mattered most, and what in a real sense constituted the active citizenry of the *res publica*,

²⁴ J. González, 'The Lex Irnitana: A New Copy of the Flavian Municipal Law', *JRS* 76 (1986), 147. The three main texts are printed separately in J. González, *Bronces jurídicos romanos de Andalucía* (1990): 51f. (Irnitana); 101f. (Salpensana); 111f. (Malacitana).

²⁵ For the Tabula Siarensis, see nn. 41–2 below. The section quoted is Frag. (b), Col. II, ll. 23f.

was the population of Rome. All Roman citizens, wherever they lived, belonged in principle to one or other of the ancient 35 tribes. But inscriptions put up in Rome in honour of Germanicus and Drusus in AD 23 could represent the source of these honours as being 'the *plebs urbana* of the 35 *tribus*', as if the two categories were essentially identical.²⁶ Tacitus himself was of course to begin his *Annales* with the words 'Urbem Romam', and there was a real sense in which the essential subject of Roman history could still be seen as the city, its institutions and its people: in short as the history of a strange and anomalous sort of city-state, which on the one hand had extended its citizenship to all of Italy and beyond, and on the other ruled a great Empire. But the most marked anomaly was of course that this city-state was now itself ruled by an Emperor, and all of its complex institutions were transformed by that fact. But yet it is absolutely clear from contemporary documents, including the Tabula Siarensis, that in formal terms the Roman Empire was still seen 'as the *imperium* of the *populus Romanus*'.²⁷ Augustus himself embodied this conception in his *Res Gestae*: 'I added Egypt to the *imperium* of the *populus Romanus*'.²⁸ It is also the case, as we shall see soon, that new evidence brings out, in a way which had not been clear before, to what extent popular participation, and popular voting, was still essential to the way that the *res publica* worked. To call it a 'city-state' is certainly to beg many questions. But it does serve to do two things: to direct attention to public institutions other than the Senate itself; and to stress the power and importance of popular reactions to events in Rome. The 'history' of Rome in the Empire, as under the Republic, is, or should be, the history of a whole community.

²⁶ *ILS*, 168 (Drusus); 176 (Germanicus). See esp. C. Nicolet, 'Plèbe et tribus: les statues de Lucius Antonius et le testament d'Auguste', *MEFR(A)* 97 (1985), 799.

²⁷ F. Millar, 'Imperial Ideology in the Tabula Siarensis', in J. González (ed.), *Estudios sobre la Tabula Siarensis* (1988), 11.

²⁸ *RG* 27.

This element, the population of the city of Rome, is of course vividly present from time to time in Tacitus' narrative. In one particular respect, however, both in Tacitus' narrative and in other accounts, there is a new feature which was missing from the Republic: the presence of soldiers stationed in the city, and with that is the capacity of the state to control or repress popular reactions by force. The role of military forces in Rome is heavily marked in the first few pages of the *Annales*: for instance the watchword given to the praetorian cohorts; a guard stationed at the Palatine; soldiers escorting Tiberius to the Forum and the Curia. Then, after an *edictum* from Tiberius warning the people not to demand that Augustus, like Divus Julius, should be cremated in the Forum rather than the Campus Martius, came the day of Augustus' funeral itself, with soldiers acting, as Tacitus says, like a garrison. After the long years of the first reign, Tacitus alleges, some people commented that military protection was hardly needed to ensure that his funeral would be peaceful.²⁹

None the less, as the narrative progresses, Tacitus comes to a number of different occasions where crowd reactions, even violent ones, are significant. Even here, however, he is selective. If I may digress for a moment, it is odd how little use we make, in analysing the Julio-Claudian period, of a vast range of evidence in the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder, who was born in the 20's, and finished his work in the 70's, long before Tacitus. Out of a vast store of material I pick out a couple of stories, both from around the time of Pliny's birth. First, there is the anecdote of the raven which was hatched on the roof of the temple of Castor and Pollux on the Forum, and which then attached itself to a cobbler's shop in the vicinity, and which learned to talk; each morning it would fly down to the Rostra and salute by name Tiberius, Germanicus and Drusus, and then the *populus Romanus* on its way past. When it was killed, as a result of a dispute between its owner and a neighbour, its killer was driven out, and the bird's funeral was celebrated by a vast crowd, with two Ethiopians

²⁹ *Ann.* I, 7-8.

carrying the coffin, and a trumpeter going in front. The body was burned on a pyre on the Via Appia.³⁰ Then, from a few years later, AD 28, comes the story of the loyal dog which belonged to a man who was executed because he was a friend of Nero, the son of Germanicus. The dog followed his master to the prison (*carcer*), and still persisted when he was cast down the Gemonian Steps; finally, when the body was thrown into the Tiber, the dog swam after it, 'while a *multitudo* poured out to witness the *fides* of the animal'.³¹ These stories give a much deeper impression of popular feeling, and of popular attachment to members of the Imperial family, than anything in Tacitus. So they serve to prepare us for Tacitus' report from AD 29 of how, when a letter from Tiberius attacking Agrippina the elder and her son Nero was read in the Senate, a crowd carrying images of these two surrounded the Senate, praising the Emperor, and shouting that the letter was a forgery, and that the attack on the house of Germanicus was being made without his knowledge.³² The crowd reappears, as a passive witness or an active participant, at quite a number of points in Tacitus' narrative. In 62, for instance, popular protests seemed momentarily to have prevented Nero's divorce of Octavia and his marriage to Poppaea. The people rejoiced, went up to the Capitol and offered worship to the gods. They threw down images of Poppaea, bore statuettes of Octavia on their shoulders, decked them with flowers, and placed them in the temple. Crowds had even filled the Palatium, when units of soldiers were sent out to disperse them, and Poppaea was restored to her position.³³

But of all the scenes in which Tacitus reflects the force of popular feeling, the most powerful is the account of the news of the death of Germanicus in Syria in AD 19, the subsequent arrival

³⁰ Pliny, *NH* X, 60/121-2.

³¹ Pliny, *NH* VIII, 68/145.

³² *Ann.* V, 3-4.

³³ *Ann.* XIV, 60, 6-61, 2.

of his ashes, brought by his widow Agrippina, and in the next year the trial of Cn. Piso on a charge of treasonable actions against him, culminating in his murder. For anyone who was in Britain in the first week of September 1997, it is absolutely impossible now to read this narrative without thinking of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, of the enormous popular reaction, of the way in which everything closed on the day of the funeral, of the *laudatio funebris* which, for good or ill, was heard by more people than any other in the history of the world, of the tens of millions of flowers which were laid not just at the royal palaces but at sites all over the country, and of the several million people who lined the route on the day of the funeral. There was also a darker note, the widespread suspicion that at the very centre grief was not felt with the same intensity as it was on the streets.³⁴

So it is, with of course even darker overtones, in the pages of Tacitus in book II of the *Annales*. News comes that Germanicus is ill, and rumours circulate of foul play: for he, like his father Drusus, had been put out of the way because they had thought of restoring equality and liberty to the *populus Romanus*. 'This popular talk was so inflamed by the actual news of his death, that before the *edictum* of the magistrates, before the *senatus consultum*, by the spontaneous adoption of a *iustitium*, the Forums were deserted, and houses closed'.³⁵

Then Tacitus comes in a single paragraph (II, 83) to the posthumous *honores* for Germanicus which were now thought up and *decreti*—the word implies that they were voted specifically by the Senate. We will come back to this passage, for it is here, in the light of the Tabula Siarensis, that the limitations of Tacitus' account begin to show up. He then goes on, in book III, to describe the events of the following year, when huge crowds of mourners

³⁴ For the comparison see the illuminating remarks by Jasper and Miriam Griffin, 'Show us you care, Ma'am', *New York Review of Books*, Oct. 9, 1997, 29, and in *Omnibus* 35 (January, 1998), 1.

³⁵ *Ann.* II, 82, 1-4.

awaited Agrippina at Brundisium when she arrived with Germanicus' ashes, and filled every town along the route, weeping and offering sacrifices. Germanicus' adoptive brother Drusus and his real one, the future Emperor Claudius, along with Germanicus' children, met the cortege at Tarracina. The two consuls of AD 20, and 'a large part of the *populus* (of Rome)' also came out along the road. Tiberius and Livia did not, and nor did Germanicus' mother Antonia, for reasons which Tacitus could not discover. Then came the funeral.³⁶

The streets of the city were crammed, torches blazing across the Campus Martius. There were the soldiers in arms, the magistrates without their insignia, the *populus* arranged by tribes—they shouted that the *res publica* had fallen, that there was no hope left, so vigorously and openly that you would think they had forgotten their rulers. Nothing, however, pained Tiberius more than the feelings of the people inflamed in support of Agrippina. They called her the glory of the *patria*, the sole descendant of Augustus, the only representative of ancient values. Turning to the heavens and the gods, they prayed that her children would be safe, and survive their enemies.

Perhaps I can leave this all too loaded narrative there, except just to note Tacitus' account of popular comparisons of the funeral of Germanicus with the much more elaborate and traditional one which had been accorded to his father Drusus—and to mention the excellent book by Harriet Flower, published in 1996, on ancestor masks and their role in Roman society.³⁷ Tacitus' account concludes with Tiberius' *edictum* urging the people to restrain their grief, as not being in accordance with Roman tradition, and to resume normal life.³⁸

³⁶ *Ann.* III, 1-4. The passage quoted is ch. 4.

³⁷ *Ann.* III, 5; H. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (1996).

Later, Tacitus comes to Piso's leisurely return to Rome, and his trial in the Senate, on a charge of the murder of Germanicus, and of a whole series of treasonable acts, committed while Germanicus was on a special mission to settle affairs in the Eastern provinces, and Piso was the regular governor (*legatus*) of Syria.³⁹ Here too, a popular reaction is recorded during the proceedings. A crowd surrounded the Curia, and shouted that they would not keep their hands off Piso if the Senate did not condemn him. In a typical use of symbolism, they took statues of Piso to the Gemonian Steps and would have smashed them but for the intervention of the Emperor.⁴⁰

Before the trial reached a conclusion, Piso committed suicide. Tacitus' narrative then devotes several paragraphs to subsequent senatorial debates, directed to dissociating his widow, Plancina, and his two sons from their father's alleged crimes, and to preserving their status.⁴¹

These two separate stages in the events which took place in Rome in the aftermath of the death of Germanicus are the two moments which are now illuminated, in a quite remarkable way, by new documents. The two stages are, firstly, the votes of the Senate in December AD 19, following on the arrival of the definitive news of his death; and secondly the debates in the Senate which took place after Piso's suicide, and a year later, in December AD 20.

It would take volumes to explore the significance of the two texts concerned for both the institutions and the ruling ideology of the early Principate. In a quite real sense our study of the period

³⁸ *Ann.* III, 6.

³⁹ *Ann.* III, 9-18.

⁴⁰ *Ann.* III, 14, 5-6.

⁴¹ *Ann.* III, 16-18.

has to begin all over again, and what is said here touches only on a few salient points, which do however really tell us something new about what 'the Roman city-state under the Emperors' was. For the documents not only fill in a mass of detail about the working of the *res publica*—the communal institutions of Rome—under Tiberius, and the way in which these were being affected by the existence of an Emperor. They also show that Tacitus' picture of events simply leaves out the constitutional role which was still exercised by the *populus Romanus*. We like to think of Britain as a democracy, and beyond doubt it was popular feeling which dictated the form and the extent of public mourning in Britain in September 1997. But there was no place, before death or after, for actual voting by the people.

Rome on the other hand was, as it may seem, an autocracy, tempered to some extent by Republican traditions and values as maintained by the Senate. But in Rome, as we now know, both the position which Germanicus occupied at the time of his death and the honours for his memory which were decided on posthumously were the subject of *leges* (laws) put to the people, and voted on by them.

The first of the two documents, that of December AD 19, is a single incomplete text, which is preserved, apart from a few fragments, in two quite separate inscriptions, discovered in different countries several decades apart. The last 62 lines of the text are found on the bronze tablet known as the 'Tabula Hebana', found in Tuscany, and published in 1947. The bulk of the earlier part comes from the Tabula Siarensis, namely fragments of a bronze tablet found in Andalusia, the Roman province of Baetica, and first published as a coherent text in 1984. An overlap of a few lines makes it certain that the two main *inscriptions* contain large parts of what was originally a single *text*. It was this which, as we saw earlier, was issued from Rome to the cities of Italy and the

coloniae of the provinces. It was also to be put up 'in as prominent place as possible' by the provincial governors.⁴²

It is rather remarkable that it was a whole twelve years after the publication of the first full text of the *Tabula Siarensis*⁴³ before anyone published a combined text of both the two main inscriptions and the fragments. This is now available, along with an English translation, in the major work edited by Michael Crawford, *Roman Statutes*.⁴⁴ But there has still been no full study of the combined text of some 150 lines. Along with the composite *senatus consultum* embodying the various votes of the Senate after Piso's death, to which we will come in a moment, it represents by far the best evidence which we have for the public ideology, the rhetoric and the evolving institutions of the early Empire.

Only a few features of the text can be underlined here: the self-conscious emphasis on the propagation of the approved public ideology through the putting-up of written texts, in Rome, Italy and the provinces; the new political and ceremonial topography of Rome, with the 'tumulus', which we call the Mausoleum, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, where the Senate now regularly met, the temple of Mars Ultor, and the as yet unbuilt temple of Divus Augustus; the new elements of the religious calendar, with the *Ludi Augustales*, instituted in AD 14; the new role of the *equites* belonging to the *decuriae* of jurymen, who now had a place in the constitutional order, voting in the *comitia centuriata* in new centuries along with the senators. I will not dwell on the details concerning voting. It is enough to mention that the *Tabula Hebana* confirms what we knew anyway from Pliny the Younger and

⁴² Fr. (b), Col. II, ll. 26-7, trans. Crawford.

⁴³ J. González, 'Tabula Siarensis, Fortunales Siarensis et Municipia Civium Romanorum', *ZPE* 55 (1984), 55; *AE* 1984, no. 508; J. González, *op. cit.* (n. 24), no. 11.

⁴⁴ M. H. Crawford (ed.), *Roman Statutes I-II* (1996), nos. 37-8 (vol. I, pp. 507-543).

Cassius Dio, that meetings of the assemblies for voting in elections continued through the Julio-Claudian period, and indeed long after it.⁴⁵ When Tacitus wrote baldly that in AD 14 'the elections were then for the first time transferred to the *patres* (the Senate)',⁴⁶ he was referring to the practice of arranging a single list of names to go before the People. But the vital *principle* remained in force, that public office could only be conferred by a popular vote.

The *Tabula Hebana* had already revealed, half a century ago now, that the new voting arrangements set up in AD 19 to commemorate Germanicus had been modelled on those instituted in AD 5 to commemorate Gaius and Lucius. The formal procedure then had been a law, a *lex*, which had been put to the People by the consuls of that year: 'in conformity with the law which Lucius Valerius Messalla Volesus (and) Cnaeus Cornelius Cinna Magnus carried'.⁴⁷ Thus in AD 5 a change in the constitution had required the passing of a law by the People meeting in their assembly. So it would again in AD 19/20, after Germanicus' death. But you would not know this from Tacitus' narrative. If we go back to the relevant chapter (II, 83), we find that he gives a quite detailed summary of many of the steps which we can now see as attested in a contemporary document. But two vital aspects are missing: firstly, there is no reference in Tacitus to the new voting arrangements; and secondly all the *honores* are represented as being voted (*decreti*) by the Senate. But this picture is incomplete. One of the most striking features of the *Tabula Siarensis* is that it shows that in December 19 the Senate formally advised the

⁴⁵ Pliny, *Pan.* 63, 2: 'vidit te (Trajan) populus Romanus in illa vetere potestatis suae sede; perpressus es longum illud carmen comitorum'; 92, 3: 'tua voce renuntiati sumus, ut idem honoribus nostris suffragator in curia, in campo declarator existeres'. Cassius Dio XXXVII, 28, 3; LVIII, 20, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ann.* I, 15, 1.

⁴⁷ E.g. *Tabula Hebana*, ll. 10-11: 'ex lege quam L. Valerius Messalla Volesus, Cn. Corn[el]ius Cin[na Magnus] cos. tulerunt'.

incoming consuls of AD 20 to incorporate all the steps taken in a law which should be put without delay to the People:⁴⁸

That M. Messalla and M. Aurelius Cotta Maximus, the consuls designate, when they had entered office—on the first occasion as far as the auspices allow—without giving notice of two or three *nundinae*, should see that a statute on the honours for Germanicus Caesar be presented to the people.

No such law appears in Tacitus' account of the year 20; for him the decisions of the Senate were enough.

Exactly the same point is brought out by the inscribed record which contains a consolidated, or composite, version of the various votes of the Senate passed a year later, in December AD 20, and after the suicide of Piso. This text, much better preserved, and in a number of different copies, has been the subject of an exemplary edition, with German translation and historical commentary, by Werner Eck, Antonio Caballos and Fernando Fernández.⁴⁹ Here too there are endless revelations concerning (for instance) the sycophantic public rhetoric of the period, the topography of Rome, the early history of the *fiscus*, the conduct of funerals and the role of *imagines*, the importance attached to inscriptions, the administration of justice, and the role of the praetors who then managed the Aerarium, the public treasury in Rome. But I will leave all that aside, to focus on another aspect in which Tacitus' narrative is revealed to be incomplete. In his account of the year 17, Tacitus had recorded that by the *decretum* of the Senate Germanicus had been entrusted with the provinces 'which are divided by the sea' (that is the eastern provinces), and also had

⁴⁸ Tabula Siarensis, fr. (b), col. II, ll. 27-9, trans. Crawford.

⁴⁹ W. Eck, A. Caballos, F. Fernández, *Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (Vestigia 48, 1996). Note also the parallel Spanish edition, A. Caballos, W. Eck, F. Fernández, *El <<senado consulto>> de Cne. Pisone padre* (1996). See now also the extended discussion, with an English translation of the text, by M. Griffin, 'The Senate's

Story' JRS 87 (1997), 249.

been granted an *imperium* superior to that of the governor in any area which he visited.⁵⁰ But, as the new text now shows (ll. 29f.), that was not the whole story. The initiative for the appointment of Germanicus to his eastern mission had indeed come from Emperor and Senate: Germanicus 'had been sent by our Princeps on the *auctoritas* of this *ordo* (the Senate) to put in order the condition of transmarine affairs'. Piso ought therefore to have seen himself, in his role as *legatus* of Syria, as being a helper (*adiutor*) of Germanicus. But instead he had neglected not only the *maiestas* of the Domus Augusta but also the *ius publicum*, the public law. For he had been subordinated to Germanicus in his role and status as proconsul, and not just as any proconsul, but as one invested with special powers by a *lex*.⁵¹

To that proconsul, concerning whom a law (*lex*) had been put to the *populus* to the effect that, to whatsoever *provincia* he came, he should possess a superior *imperium* to him who governed that province *pro consule*, given that in all matters a greater *imperium* should attach to Tiberius Caesar Augustus than to Germanicus Caesar.

This last provision beautifully confirms the reality of the tensions which marked the Imperial house in the 20's of the first century. Other aspects of the law are puzzling—why did it refer only to governors *pro consule*, and how did it apply to someone like Piso, who was not a proconsul but a *legatus*? But these are minor points compared to the essential. Both of the two new texts reveal as never before that there was still a *res publica*, in which, in a

⁵⁰ *Ann.* II, 43, 2: 'tunc decreto patrum permissae Germanico provinciae quae mari dividuntur, maiusque imperium, quoque adisset, quam iis qui sorte aut missu principis obtinerent.'

⁵¹ *Senatus consultum*, ll. 32-5: 'neclecta | maiestate domus Aug(ustae), neclecto etiam iure publico, quod adlect(us) pro co(n)s(ule) et ei pro co(n)s(ule), de quo | lex ad populum lata esset, ut in quamcumq(ue) provinciam venisset, maius ei imperium | quam ei, qui eam provinciam proco(n)s(ule) optineret, esset, dum in omni re maius imperi | um Ti. Caesari Aug(usto) quam Germanico Caesari esset.'

certain formal sense, the sovereign was the *populus Romanus*. One could describe the Roman system of the first century as an autocracy, as an Empire, as a constitutional monarchy, as a nation-state, as a city-state, as a *res publica*, even as a sort of democracy, in which constitutional power could only be conferred by the votes of the People. Few political systems have been quite so complex a mixture of old and new, autocratic and popular, monarchic and communal. I am not arguing that within the Roman system of the first century AD the People still had any real power to choose—and in any case, when Germanicus' son Gaius was murdered in AD 41, the People were to show unambiguously that they wanted an Emperor.⁵² But I am arguing that, in a formal sense, legislation, constitutional change and the occupation of office all still required validation by a vote of the People. I am also arguing that Tacitus' concentration on the effective votes in the Senate does tend to obscure this aspect of what the Roman *res publica* now was. Reading Tacitus is still essential. But we can now go beyond, or behind, his narrative to encounter new Latin texts which we can call 'documents', but which are also powerful evocations of contemporary oratory. Far from being objective reports, they are literary constructions in themselves, and no less so for being inscribed on bronze tablets. It is these remarkable, and in many ways profoundly repellent, texts expressing the official version of the relationship between the *res publica* and the Imperial house, which should now provide our starting-point in studying the Roman city-state under the Emperors.

⁵² This emerges beyond question from the important narrative account of the murder of Gaius and the steps which led to the accession of Claudius given by Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* XIX, 1, 1-4, 6 (1-273). See esp. the discussion, translation and commentary by T. P. Wiseman, *Death of an Emperor* (Exeter Studies in History 30, 1991).

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1. Professor R.E. Smith
The Aristocratic Epoch in Latin Literature (1947)
2. Harold Mattingly
The Emperor and his Clients (1948)
3. Professor (later Sir) Ronald Syme
A Roman Post-Mortem (1950)
4. Sir John Sheppard
The Initiation of Aeneas (1955)
5. Sir Frank Adcock
The Character of the Romans in Their History and Their Literature (1961)
6. Professor C.O. Brink
On Reading a Horatian Satire (1965)
7. Professor E. Badian
Lucius Sulla — The Deadly Reformer (1969)
8. Professor E.T. Salmon
Augustus the Patrician (1974)
9. Professor G.W. Williams
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