

ARMINIUS AND FLAVUS ACROSS THE WESER¹

My paper has two parts. In the first, I argue that a passage of Tacitus' *Annals* has intertextual potential. In the second, I explore how that intertextual potential can affect how we understand the nature of Tacitus' historiographical endeavour; here, my point is that this intertextual moment may be read as not merely peripheral to a presumed 'real' historiographical business of recording discrete events and facts or communicating explicit authorial analysis. The intertextual potential of this passage bears in two ways on the *analytical* power of Tacitus' writing, and not merely on any easily separable ornamental or aesthetic function; moreover, the analytical dimensions of the passage opened up by intertextual reading, while historiographically significant, are entirely unavailable if we are not interested in reading intertextually—they simply aren't *there*.

First, let's look at the intertextually potent moment: *Ann.* 2.9–10. The Roman prince Germanicus is pursuing submission from the Cherusci. Along the march, his army finds itself facing them across the Weser. The Cheruscan chieftain Arminius calls out for a colloquy with his brother, called 'Flavus', who is serving in Rome's army. Flavus' rank and role are spelled out, although he seems once to have been an auxiliary and now to be a citizen; he may be serving as a citizen centurion in an auxiliary cavalry unit. After a grant of permission, Flavus comes forward; Arminius dismisses his bodyguard and gets the Romans in turn to have their archers move back. These withdrawals suggest that the two now stand alone between the armies. Flavus had lost an eye fighting under Tiberius, and Arminius asks about this injury. Flavus tells him how he got it, and Arminius asks what he had got in return. Flavus enumerates the rewards and decorations he has received, and Arminius sneers at the 'cheap rewards of servitude' (2.9.3) Flavus then begins to extol the advantages of collaboration with Rome, and Arminius calls him a traitor to his people and family. The brothers then turn to slinging insults, and an officer rushes forth to restrain Flavus as he is howling for his weapons and a mount to go after his brother. While this is going on, the Romans can still see Arminius across the river shouting threats and calling for battle; much of what he said he said in Latin, we hear, since he himself had served as a leader of auxiliaries under

¹ This argument was presented orally at the Classical Association Conference in Bristol in April 2015 and again at the Association of Ancient Historians Conference in Santa Barbara in May 2015. Aside from the adjustment of some of the more oral features and the inclusion of some citations, the text remains substantially as it was presented in those forums.

Roman command. Nothing comes of the encounter and we pick up the campaign narrative on the next day.

This is a memorable, entertaining, somewhat intense and somewhat comical scene. It also carries substantial intertextual potential, and I would ask us to think about the ‘type scene’ of individual confrontation in narratives of early Republican history, particularly that of Livy. Salient here are the defence of the Pons Sublicius by Horatius Cocles (Livy 2.10) and the combats of Manlius Torquatus (Livy 7.9.6–7.10) and Valerius Corvus (Livy 7.26.1–10) against Gallic champions, although Mucius Scaevola’s confrontation with Lars Porsenna (Livy 2.12–13.1) and the execution of the younger Manlius (Livy 8.7–8.8.2) also belong here. For purposes of this paper, I refer to Livy’s account of Torquatus and the Gaul as the most helpful single intertext. To take quickly the points of potential reminiscence. The protagonists face each other across a river, between their respective armies. The river forms a boundary between politically and culturally distinct groups. The broader conflict within which they face each other has political independence at stake. The protagonists initially represent their distinctive culturally associated behaviours. The foreign protagonist challenges the Roman. The protagonist on the Roman side receives permission to come forward (the request for this permission or its lack is crucial to the stories I am calling to mind). In the confrontation, both figures ‘stand’ for attitudes about Rome, Flavus endorsing and expressing allegiance to it and Arminius mocking it; in the intertexts, these attitudes are sometimes performed not articulated but they are nonetheless clear elements. These resemblances of scenario are in turn supported by resemblances of detail. The parley kicks off with Arminius asking about Flavus’ missing eye, and Horatius Cocles’ missing eye is written into his name ‘Cocles’. In his enumeration of his decorations, moreover, Flavus mentions that he has received a torque; he has received it as a medal not as a unique spoil stripped from an enemy like that of Manlius Torquatus, but the detail nonetheless puts us in a Manlian framework and puts Flavus (at least at the moment) on the Roman side of this confrontation. He also mentions a crown among his *dona*, and both Manlius Torquatus and Valerius Corvus are rewarded by their commanders with a *corona aurea*. When Arminius begins flinging threats across the river, he is described with the adjective *minitabundus* (*Ann.* 2.10.3); adjectives in that form are not a Tacitean favourite though they do appear, but Livy likes them, and he uses precisely the same word when Lars Porsenna is threatening his captive Mucius Scaevola (Livy 2.12.12). Although that is a scene in which rivers, boundaries, and questions of difference in political form and cultural norms are quite prominent, it is also worth thinking about the energetically menacing Arminius next to the energetically singing Gaul (*cantabundus*, *FRHist* F 6) who faces Manlius Torquatus in the noted fragment of Quadrigarius’ history. Next, while Livy’s Torquatus has a breast that is ‘filled with silent wrath’ (*irae ... tacitae plenum*, Livy 7.10.8) as he stands in perfect self-control in front of the singing, capering Gaul,

Tacitus' Flavus as he sheds all discipline and needs to be restrained by Stertinus is 'filled with wrath' (*plenum irae*, *Ann.* 2.10.2) that is anything but silent: he is shouting for his arms and his horse to take on his brother. Finally, Livy's Gaul taunts Torquatus by sticking out his tongue in contempt (*linguam ab inrisu exserentem*, *Livy* 7.10.5) while Arminius expresses contempt for his brother's military decorations (*inridente Arminio*, *Ann.* 2.9.3).

We see here a moment readily available to intertextual interpretation; the intertextual potential lies not in a relationship to a single passage but to a distinctive kind of scenario and on top of that to its specific manifestations in Roman historical writing. It is also worth observing that to read a compound reference is also to recognise the scenario as a meaningful 'type', as a kind of scene that is familiar from narratives of early Roman history and thus can characterise such narratives as well.

Now, what can we do with that? If we are committed to a maximally 'identifying' perspective between ancient and contemporary historiography, well, we don't really do anything with it. It's a reported event that shares some details with other reported events and does so either by mere coincidence—i.e., it's just what happened—or in a merely ornamental way: it's possible that it adds an ancient or familiar *colour* to the scene, but not in a way that expects further thought on our part. While leaving things here is an available option—the study of intertexts is nothing if not fundamentally open-ended—it is also an option that leaves inert a great deal of provocative detail, and that asks us to leave at the door for purposes of reading historical writing a whole set of interpretive skills that we regard as basic to the ancient reception of vast swathes of other Latin literature. I would draw out a couple of distinct options that might be followed if we assume at least a set of ancient readers inclined to find allusions and to think about the relationship between the text at hand and other texts they have read. In different ways, these paths, if followed, have repercussions for the meaning of *Annals* as a work that communicates understanding of the past.

One direction is to explore this scene as a polemic against the assumptions of Livy. The scenes in question from Livy and elsewhere present substantial clarity and a contrast of values: the controlled, disciplined, Roman side stands in contrast to an exuberant, showy, wild enemy (even when the value of *disciplina* has to be reinforced in a case like that of the punishment of Manlius), and the Roman struggle for their *libertas* stands in contrast to the threat of restored monarchy or subjection to an alien power. In Tacitus' scene, the initial impression is that we will be revisiting such a scene of contrast as Flavus comes forward with the permission of his commander and puts up with the taunts of his brother. This falls apart, though, as we see Flavus turn into a mirror of his brother, screaming across the river and abandoning the *disciplina* whose forms

he initially followed, but also as we realise the different geopolitical circumstances: out here at the Weser, it isn't the subjection of Rome that is in question, but that of Germania. These are also significant observations for other ways of understanding this passage, but within a Tacitean polemic against Livy, they would work in this way. Livy does not grasp how complicated and messy situations work, situations in which the two sides aren't mere cartoons and in which the value of freedom isn't wholly distributed to Rome; in Tacitus, by contrast, we see an important level of the operation of values and conflict of power that goes undescribed in iconic traditional scenes. Livy shows you a thing readily understood, while Tacitus shows you something descriptive of the behaviour of people individually and in the aggregate. This would be an instance of struggle between authors—between the behemoth Livy and his latter-day competitor—but it is one that turns on a point that affects how we regard the explanatory value of *Annals* as an account of the past. On this elaboration of the intertext, Tacitus is the one who shows something meaningful while his superannuated predecessor gives you what Sempronius Asellio calls children's games. If this sort of professional contrast is to be found here, it would stand in line with other notable moments of *Annals* at which Tacitus derides people who are not interested in understanding. This point would bear on what Tacitean historiography claims to offer that is different as an account of the past: a *real* understanding, rather than one that fits a world that we do not live in.

This is only one way of thinking through this intertext. Now I want to explore another, attractive, one that appears to stand at odds with it. This views the passage not from the perspective of struggle with Livy and the outlook of his work, but from a vantage point that takes those exemplary stories of early Roman history seriously as descriptions of events. This approach sees the contrast between the classic stories and the face-off across the Weser as making a point about the long development of Roman history. Such clarity and simplicity once existed, and these events occurred when Rome was small, threatened, local, homogeneous, and characterised by *libertas*. The narrative of *Annals* deals with another time and in this scene makes significant contrasts with the early Republic; it shows how Rome looks *now*, as opposed to *then*, after fundamental changes. While once a certain set of propositions may have been true of Rome and its difference from and relation to other peoples, these simply no longer hold, for historical reasons. When you fit an event from Germanicus' campaigns against the framework of a basic story pattern that makes sense only within the limited world of a local, Republican Rome, the result is disarray and farce: there is no one to play the requisite roles. The 'Roman' in the scenario is a soldier whose instincts are Cheruscan and who can't maintain the part when faced by his brother. The opponent, in turn, is not an Etruscan monarch seeking to reinstall the Tarquins or an innumerable horde rising up in the Cisalpina, but an outside community whose independence is threatened

by Roman *imperium*. Rome is here both bigger and different from what it was in the early Republic. The size of Rome now means that a single confrontation of this sort could not bear decisively on Rome's independence, and *it* now represents the threat to others' independence; it menaces others' rivers.

For reasons related to its size, Rome is also now different. First, Rome's army looks different: it is not comprised solely of Roman citizens. It incorporates a substantial element of aliens, the auxiliaries who perform vital, unique roles. Their collaboration is all the more alarming for its importance: they fight under Roman command but are not Roman. Doubts about their reliability are illustrated ideally by our brothers: Arminius had served as an auxiliary commander enough to learn the Latin he fits into his taunts before opting to resist the Roman cause in the most spectacular way possible, and Flavus, despite having accepted the loss of an eye, cannot hew to the forms of *disciplina* when exposed to his brother. By the time of Germanicus' campaigns, confrontations of Roman and foreign armies cannot be what they once were in terms of cultural contrast: they are a mess and a mix, and the sides of the river have blurred.

Second, Rome itself has changed since the era of Republican confrontations. The king Horatius Cocles and Mucius Scaevola had repelled is already ensconced back at Rome. Germanicus is on the scene as commander, in his odd role as scion of the imperial household and embodiment of certain values and norms of the Republic. *Libertas* has within the narrative of *Annals* come to its death throes, even as Germania still has a *libertas* that (it turns out) it has vindicated in the face of Roman sway. This scene, on this understanding, captures a historical shift, from the world and rules that had enabled such encounters to be clear in their implications and decisive in their repercussions, to a world and rules that cause this particular encounter to conclude in absurdity: a canonical scenario in the early Republic had tended to unfold in one direction, while that same scenario when imposed on the conditions of the early Principate plays out in a different way.

These directions of interpretation that we would I think reflexively think of as fundamentally literary bear substantially on historiographical questions. The one, the expression of difference from Livy, can be described as methodological and concerns how practitioners ought to understand their subject: to what extent are human interactions tidy and readily amenable to deployment as *exempla*, and to what extent are they more complicated? The other serves an analytical point about historical development: it pins up for consideration a dramatic difference between the conditions of early Roman history and those of the Tiberian principate and makes the nature of and reasons for that difference part of what *Annals* is exploring. This is a particularly *notable* moment for assessing the importance of literary modes of interpretation to the Tacitean historiographical project in that here intertextual thinking does not *supplement*

or *enrich* ideas already articulated explicitly in the text: there is nothing here about *how* to understand human action in the past or about the difference between the early centuries of the Republic and the present of Germanicus' expedition. These are historiographical dimensions of *Annals*, in other words, that are simply not available here *unless* we are prepared to read them in, unless we are willing to grant an intertextual relationship the status of a phenomenon and use it as the basis for further interpretation, interpretation that at least in this case bears on possible understandings of the practice and content of Tacitean historiography in the *Annales*.

The story of Arminius—though not the story of Flavus—comes to a close at the very end of *Annales* 2, and in a way that we may find encouraging to our interest in this intertext and to our efforts to think about it. Arminius' necrology and the book conclude in this way:

liberator haud dubie Germaniae et qui non primordia populi Romani, sicut alii reges ducesque, sed florentissimum imperium lacesierit, proeliis ambiguus, bello non uictus. septem et triginta annos uitae, duodecim potentiae expleuit, caniturque adhuc barbaras apud gentis, Graecorum annalibus ignotus, qui sua tantum mirantur, Romanis haud perinde celebris, dum uetera extollimus recentium incuriosi.

No question but he was the liberator of Germania, and a figure who challenged not the first beginnings of the Roman people—as other kings and leaders did—but the empire when it was at the height of its potency; in battles he was mixed, but in war he was not bested. Thirty-seven years of life he completed, twelve in power, and still is sung among the barbarous peoples. He is unknown to the annals of the Greeks, whose eyes are drawn only by their own stories, and is not recognised as he ought to be in those of the Romans, in our adulation of what is ancient to the neglect of what is recent.

The passage is rich with possible resonances with the ways I have suggested we might read the Weser confrontation and the Arminius-story more generally; most salient and I think well recognised is the sense in which we might see Arminius as a Brutus figure. My inclination is to see acknowledged retrospectively here the importance of early Republican history to the story of Rome and Germania that focuses on Arminius and to see registered an implication that *recentia* and *uetera* belong together in our thinking and indeed are in a contest with each other. Attractive to observe is that this juxtaposition of *uetera* and *recentia* serves a point that could not be any more historiographical: it addresses both the mode of representation and what is deserving of record

and attention. For one thing, what we Roman writers (and perhaps just Romans; *Romanis* is ambiguous after *Graecorum annalibus*) do with the old and new stories is different: the *uetera* we exalt—that is, recount with praise—and the *recentia* we do not apply *cura* to, that is, possibly, we simply do not inspect adequately. That difference in mode might point to a methodological difference akin to the tussle with Livy I have imagined: improving admiration versus illuminating scrutiny. On the other hand, the complaint about neglect of *recentia* in relation to *uetera* could as well be taken to promote a long prospect that includes *uetera* and *recentia* alike as significant points to be taken onboard and assessed in relation to each other: if we address our attention to what is recent, we recognise the difference Tacitus lays out for us here. Arminius faces a Rome that the Etruscans and Gauls and Italians had never confronted, not the *primordia populi Romani*—a live Livian phrase, I would observe, recollecting the preface (*primordio urbis*, Livy *praef.* 1; *primordia urbium*, Livy *praef.* 7)—but the Empire in full swing. Arminius’ story, and his colloquy with his brother, on this view concern that difference, and tell us what that Empire is like.

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