

THE PROBLEM OF TACITUS' GERMANIA

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ABSTRACT

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Tacitus' Germania was completed in A.D. 98. In it he provided much information on the Germans. Tacitus chose to devote all of his attention to describing a foreign people in a single work instead of including that description within a larger work as was the practice of previous Roman writers. The historian thus employed a new genre in writing his Germania. His sources were chiefly literary since he gives us no reason to believe that he himself ever visited Germany. Tacitus seems to have had two principal motives for his interest in the Germans. One was to draw attention to the moral contrast between the virtues of the German barbarian and the vices of the civilized Roman; the other was to set down a political proposal. The two purposes are implicitly and sometimes explicitly indicated in the work. As a result the attitude which he adopts towards these German barbarians is different from the one which Romans were accustomed to adopt towards barbarians in general.

INTRODUCTION

The Germania has always been a puzzle to scholars. The main problem lies in the structure of its composition. It is clearly divided into two parts not seeming to have much to do with each other. The first part develops the concept of the barbarians' moral superiority, the second analyses the various tribes which make up Germany. Because this work cannot be classified easily under any of the usual literary genres employed by classical writers before the time of Tacitus, there has always been disagreement over his purpose. This thesis was undertaken in order to help throw some light on Tacitus' motives for writing the Germania.

The contents of the Germania make it plain that Tacitus is much impressed by the moral standards of the Germans and takes the opportunity to allude to the degeneracy of Roman society. That he has this contrast in mind is apparent from the way in which he exposes that degeneracy in a later work, the Annals. The Germania has political implications too. Tacitus' description of the German tribes emphasises the total German question and lends support to a new policy which a new emperor should continue to follow. While some authorities also state that Tacitus has a moral purpose for writing the Germania, critics of this theory often question its total validity because of the seemingly irrelevant second part of the Germania. My thesis counters this criticism by pointing out that the second part provides information

which complements the earlier chapters on customs and habits. The relevance of those latter chapters becomes apparent when it is recognized, as Tacitus and the ancestors of Rome did, that military strength derives, to a large extent, from sound moral qualities. For not only do the German barbarians exhibit high moral standards for the most part, but also they have been inflicting many defeats on the Romans and have been proving very difficult to conquer. Tacitus' moral and political purposes go hand in hand.

Since the Germania is an ethnological work of a special type, I consider it appropriate to deal with the way in which some Greek and Roman writers up to the time of Tacitus treat ethnology. As a result the thesis opens with this study of ethnological writing. It devotes some attention to the use of the digression by Roman writers because this is the usual way in which an ethnological subject is treated. However the Germania is different because the whole of it is an ethnological treatise.

The second chapter is concerned with Tacitus' sources. The thoroughness with which Tacitus does his research is a recognition that the German is no ordinary barbarian to be treated in the normal Roman fashion. The suggestion is that he is one to be reckoned with and taken seriously. In any event Tacitus is credited¹ by Pliny with a reputation for 'diligentia' and with a habit of

¹H. Furneaux (ed.), Annals of Tacitus (2 Vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934) I.24.

research even before he undertakes his major works. The Germania is evidence of this.

The chief part of the thesis comes in Chapters III and IV. The fundamental point is that Tacitus, in the Germania, intends to draw a moral comparison between the Germans and the Romans. His sometimes satirical observations about Romans in the Germania and many examples of low moral standards and bad taste in the Annals emphasize this comparison. As a corollary to his moral purpose, his description of the German tribes and reminders of their military strength point to a political one as well. One point must be emphasized regarding the theory of a moral comparison which my thesis supports. Tacitus' judgement of Rome's moral degeneracy suffers from an acknowledged weakness. His criticism is concentrated on the ruling upper class. As a moralist his points are valid; as a historian his view is narrow. But he is explicit in his reasons for taking this position. The Romans who count most for him are those of the higher ranks of society. Tacitus' colleague, Juvenal, also attacks Rome's moral decline. Part of his target is also the upper class.

In view of the fact that Tacitus' attitude toward the Germans is so different from that of his predecessors, Chapter V brings the thesis to a close by considering what the Roman attitude toward barbarians and non-Roman cultures has been. Tacitus shows little evidence of scorn or contempt for the Germans.

The contents of the thesis represent what I call the problem of Tacitus' Germania. For a man who confronts the

civilized Romans with lessons to be learned from the German barbarians not much is known of Publius Cornelius Tacitus. The little information there is about him comes from Pliny the Younger, his friend and contemporary. His birthdate is set around 54 or 56 A.D. He seems to have established himself as an orator at an early age and later pursued a very successful senatorial career. His literary career also begins early with the dialogue De Oratoribus followed later by the Agricola and the Germania in quick succession around 97 or 98 A.D. Then follows the Histories and after another interval he brings out his Annals in 115 or 116 A.D. He is the Roman historian of the Silver Age. There are a few noteworthy events in his life. One is that he is an eye witness to Domitian's reign of terror (93-96 A.D.); another is that his marriage to the daughter of Agricola, who himself was a senator of great integrity, indicates that he is not only a man of moral excellence but also one of assured position and promise. A third and perhaps most pertinent for our purposes is his absence from Rome for four years, 89-93 A.D. It is likely that he spent this time in command of a province near Germany's border called 'Gallia Belgica', a position in which he may have acquired some knowledge of and interest in the German peoples.

CHAPTER I

ETHNOLOGICAL WRITING UP TO THE TIME OF TACITUS

Those of the Roman historians who devoted some attention to ethnology in their work seem to have been attracted in their study to the sociological and the moral aspects of the life of the barbarian. To writers such as Caesar and Sallust, for example, he was considered a subject of scientific inquiry since the historian wanted to know more about his way of life and institutions. The historian also wanted to reveal as much as he could about the barbarian to the Roman reader. There was a contrast between his simple way of life and the sophisticated manners of the Romans. Among the Roman historians, Tacitus was particularly interested in the customs and culture of the barbarian as is made clear in his Germania in which he provides a detailed account of the geography, ethnography, and natural products of the country; of its political and religious institutions and of the social life of the Germans at large, followed by a description of particular tribes.

This chapter will attempt to deal with the way in which Roman historians generally approached the subjects of ethnology and geography. In addition it will try to say something about the work of certain Greek historians who may serve as a background against which the Roman writers later wrote. Discussion will centre on the digressions by Caesar, Sallust, and Tacitus in their respective works the Gallic War, the War with Jugurtha, the Agricola and the Histories particularly as they apply to the description

of people and places. Because a digression was standard practice among these historians this discussion will help to underline the difference between the approach which Tacitus used in the Germania and the one used in those works mentioned above. I intend to show in Chapter III that the Germania is indeed a work of unique character and does not fit into the type of historiographical pattern which can be attributed to those already mentioned. The digressions in the Annals seldom, if ever, touch on ethnology and so do not form part of this present discussion.

Certain types of digression were common and familiar in the writing of history in Tacitus' day. For example, if a historian found an incident which interested him he included it in his narrative¹ or he might provide a statement as a kind of personal explanation.² There are digressions which deal with individuals. In the Jugurtha,³ Sallust introduces information about Lucius Sulla because he will not talk about him again elsewhere and because previous writers, he claims, were unjust in their treatment of him. Tacitus gives a long account of Helvidius Priscus in the Histories⁴ because this man, by his frankness, had won great distinction in the eyes of some senators, but was in disfavour with others. In addition Tacitus realized that he would have to mention his name

¹ Tacitus, Histories II.50.

² Livy, IX 17; Tacitus, Annals IV. 32, 33.

³ Sallust, Jugurtha 95.

⁴ IV. 5. 1.

quite often. There are also decorative digressions. Sallust provides a good example in the Jugurtha.⁵ The citizens of a town called Lepcis have come to the Roman officers for aid. The discussion of the people of Lepcis leads to a discussion of the surrounding region. Because the place brings to mind a memorable event, Sallust launches into a description of it. After devoting a rather lengthy chapter to this description he ends with the words 'nunc ad rem redeo', which clearly indicate that he is conscious of having made a digression. In an episode in the Agricola,⁶ Tacitus does nearly the same thing when he uses a chapter to give account of a great adventure remarkable enough to deserve record. The episode is, as it were, an interlude in his biographical account. Examples can also be cited in the Histories.⁷

But more than any other, the topic of geography and ethnology became the most common type of digression in historical narrative and as a result formed an integral part of the historian's stock-in-trade. There was good reason for this. Writing, as they were, for a Roman public, it was necessary for the historians to acquaint their readers with the various foreign places and peoples

⁵ Jugurtha 79.

⁶ Agricola 28.

⁷ For example, Histories IV. 83 and 84 where Tacitus writes about the origin of the God Serapis whom Vespasian wanted to consult about the fortunes of the empire.

against whom the Romans were or had been at war.

The digression is essentially a break in the time sequence and is inserted for a variety of reasons by the more skillful historians. For the most part, it has two purposes. One of these is to carry the reader forward from the historical events to the time of composition in order to listen to a comment by the writer. The other purpose is to carry the reader's attention back to some former situation which the writer considers of importance or interest in connection with the event which he is at the time narrating. This is an informative type of digression and ethnology and geography are subjects which fall into this category. Caesar, Sallust and Tacitus use this informative type of digression which, they realise, would be of absorbing interest to their readers. Livy, the only other familiar Roman historian of any importance, is not included in this discussion for the simple reason that most of his work which may have been relevant is lost and secondly he is often criticised for his lack of clear knowledge of the countries in which the action is taking place.⁸

These writers do not haphazardly stumble into ethnological and geographical description but make a deliberate effort to present the information systematically. In this sense a pattern

⁸ H. J. Rose, A Handbook of Latin Literature, (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1966) p. 299.

or formula emerges in their work. Indeed, as Anderson observes,

it was the long established practice of historians, when they reached a point in their narrative where the scene of events changed, to give the reader his bearings by describing the land and the people concerned.⁹

Here, for example is Caesar in his Gallic War:

Since I have arrived at this point, it would seem to be not inappropriate to set forth the customs of Gaul and Germany and the difference between these nations.¹⁰

The pattern can also be recognized in Sallust's War with Jugurtha:

My subject seems to call for a brief account of the geography of Africa and some description of the nations there with which the people of Rome has had wars or alliances.¹¹

The same is evident in Tacitus' Agricola:

I shall describe the geography and ethnology of Britain, subjects which have been recorded by many historians, not with a view to comparing skill and ability, but because it was then for the first time thoroughly subdued,¹²

or in the Histories: "As I am about to relate the last days of a famous city, it seems appropriate to throw some light on its origin."¹³

⁹ J. G. C. Anderson, (ed.), Tacitus Germania, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1938), p. xiii. (All further references to the Germania are those in Anderson's edition unless otherwise stated).

¹⁰ Caesar, The Gallic War, vi, trans. A. J. Edwards (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946) (This is the translation used in subsequent references to The Gallic War).

¹¹ Sallust, War with Jugurtha 27, trans. J. C. Rolfe, (London; W. Heineman, 1921).

¹² Tacitus, Agricola 10, trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Broadribb, (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1906).

¹³ Tacitus, Histories, iv. 2, trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Broadribb, (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1906).

Although the Roman historians drew attention to the barbarian by the use of their digression, they were by no means original in their attempt at making a scientific study of him. Providing geographical and ethnological detail was an important part of the tradition of the Hellenistic approach to history which influenced the Romans greatly. Consequently the Roman historian was

heir to an established tradition of ethnological writing with definite rules of form, method of treatment and descriptive style which had been developed by a long line of Greek authors.¹⁴

There was, therefore, definite outside influence.

The first scientific description of lands and peoples was given by Hecataeus of Miletus who wrote toward the end of the sixth century B. C. T. A. Sinclair points out that

The significant thing is that he (Hecataeus) is the first Greek writer to attempt to give a picture of the world as he saw it, not merely the position of the different states, but their fauna and flora, the customs and characteristics of their inhabitants, their laws and religion. He was the first anthropologist as well as the first geographer.¹⁵

A much travelled man, Hecataeus is also one of the early Greek prose writers among whom there is no distinction between "history" and "geography". It is all 'ἰστορίη' or "enquiry".

Another Greek historian in this category is Herodotus.

¹⁴ Anderson op. cit., p. xiii.

¹⁵ T. A. Sinclair, A History of Classical Greek Literature, (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1934), p. 161.

Like Hecataeus, he is well known for the length and variety of his journeys. His major work is the war between the Greeks and the Persians, but it also contains excursions of all kinds largely geographical and ethnological.¹⁶

Polybius, the Greek historian of the second century B.C., travelled widely to gather material for his History. He was able to draw on his experience to include accounts of peoples and places in his writing. He contributed much to the knowledge of Africa, Spain and Central Europe and was later to serve as a model for Livy.

Posidonius (135 - c.55 B.C.)¹⁷ also engaged in extensive travel and much of what he wrote included ethnology. As a philosopher, historian and ethnographer he profoundly influenced both Greek and Roman historians. Indeed he was considered the most learned man of his time and though best known as a Stoic philosopher he wrote widely on geography. What is more, his writings continue from the point where Polybius leaves off. Only fragments of his work remain, but some of his ideas are embodied in the writings of such men as Diodorus Siculus, who describes, among other things, the peoples and geography of Europe and Asia, and Strabo, the great geographer whose monumental work, the Geographica covering Europe, Asia, Egypt and North Africa is an invaluable source for the description of

¹⁶ H. J. Rose, Handbook of Greek Literature, (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1964) p. 299.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 361.

those countries and the manners of the people there.

This long Greek tradition of ethnological writing was adapted by the Roman historians to suit their purpose. For while a pattern of including some geographical and ethnological information emerges, it is erroneous to think that there is a strict rule as to the point in the record where the digression should be inserted. Each writer knows when the time is right for introducing his digression. Caesar writes: 'Quoniam ad hunc locum perventum est'; Tacitus, in the Histories, 'sed quoniam tradituri sumus ...', in the Agricola, as if by implication since at last information 'rerum fide tradentur'; Sallust, before he becomes too involved in his narration of the war, must 'Africae situm paucis exponere et eas gentis ...'

Caesar at the very beginning of his Gallic War mentions that

Gaul is divided into three parts, one of which is inhabited by the Belgae, another by the Aquitani, and a third by a people called in their own tongue Celtae, in the Latin Galli. All these are different one from another in language, institutions and laws.¹⁸

This introductory remark gives a general idea of his work, but the digression into a closer study of these barbarians does not come until much later. There is an explanation for this. Caesar is practical and wants to give just enough information at the beginning in order to make his narrative intelligible. When

¹⁸ Caesar, Gallic War 1.1.

the digression on the Gauls -- and the Germans -- does occur in Book VI of a work which included seven books, it takes place at the most opportune point in his story.

Sallust, on the other hand, in the Jugurtha, a work consisting of one hundred and fourteen chapters, goes into his description of Africa and the nations there at chapter seventeen. Tacitus' digression in the Agricola is also early. In a narrative of forty chapters, Britain and the Britons are described at chapter ten. In both works where the digression comes early, the pattern is deliberate since Tacitus, when he wrote the Agricola, was said to be passing through what has been referred to as his Sallustian period. Furneaux has observed that

the general plan of composition of the Agricola shows resemblances to that of the Catalina and the Jugurtha which can hardly be accidental... the description of Britain, with which the central part of Tacitus' narrative is prefaced, has its counterpart in that of Africa (Jug. 17-19).¹⁹

In the Histories, by which time Tacitus can be said to be in his post-Sallustian period, the digression on the origin of the city of Jerusalem does not come until chapter two of the fifth and last book. Although only five books are extant, it is likely that the total number was six. The digression, therefore, occurs late in the entire work. But it is understandable. Whereas the Agricola is a short, ordered monograph on

¹⁹ H. Furneaux, (ed.), Tacitus Agricola (2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. xxxi. (All further references to the Agricola are those in Furneaux's edition).

Britain and Tacitus' father-in-law, the Histories on the other hand covers a plethora of other subjects. Yet it follows the pattern used in ethnological description.

Caesar, Sallust and Tacitus all seem to use an identical approach to the introduction of their geographical and ethnological discussion. Each indicates that he realises the pertinence of his digression. Caesar considers his 'non alienum'; Tacitus, in the Histories, thinks his 'congruens'; while Sallust is really being rhetorical when he writes 'res postulare videtur'. Tacitus in the Agricola at first appears somewhat apologetic for his inclusion since 'situm populosque multis scriptoribus memoratos', but he has every good reason to add to what has already been contributed because Britain 'tum primum perdomita est'. It is now in Roman hands and so more light must be shed on it.

Whereas a single sentence suffices to introduce the subject of foreign peoples and places, the amount of space attributed to actual discussion varies. Caesar devotes eighteen chapters²⁰ to a full description of the customs of the Gauls and Germans noting, as he warns his readers, the difference between these nations. Sallust is much briefer in his work.²¹ In this regard Syme says that

²⁰ Caesar, Gallic War, vi. 11-28.

²¹ Chaps. 17-19.

Roman historians do not always choose to proclaim or even disclose geographical information which they undoubtedly possessed. Literary tradition and written sources tend to be on show rather than personal experience. Sallust appropriately inserts a digression on Africa. It is of extreme brevity as he is careful to state and repeat. ²²

There are three occasions on which Sallust speaks of this brevity; at the very outset of his introduction there is the sentence 'res postulare videtur paucis exponere', then 'cetera quam paucissimis absolvam', and some lines later 'quam paucissimis dicam'. As if to reinforce his argument for brevity he closes his digression with the words 'De Africa et eius incolis ad necessitudinem rei satis dictum'.

Tacitus in the Agricola, following Sallust, devotes three chapters ²³ to the subject. In the Histories the description of the Jews and their city takes up as many as eight chapters. ²⁴

There is one instance in the Gallic War ²⁵ where Caesar launches into a digression without, as it were, an introductory notice. There, on the whole, he pays more attention to the geography than to the ethnology of the Britons. A passing reference to some eating habits, to a few peculiarities and to marriage customs of the Britons is overshadowed by the time spent in describing the produce, shape, climate and size of

²² R. Syme, Tacitus (2 Vols.; Oxford: University Press, 1958), II, 152.

²³ Chaps. 10-12.

²⁴ Book V, Chaps. 2-9.

²⁵ V. 10 - 14.

the country.

There is no strict order of presentation in the ethnological discussion of these authors. Caesar alone gives a somewhat extended treatment of the religion, society, political system, education, marriage, funerals and warfare of the Gauls. As for the Germans, he is concerned mostly with their daily life and military character since, he concludes, "vita omnis in venationibus atque in studiis rei militaris consistit." 26 Their religion is touched upon also:

Nam neque druides habent, qui rebus divinis praesint, neque sacrificiis student. Deorum numero eos solos ducunt, quos cernunt et quorum aperte opibus iuvantur, Solem et Vulcanum et Lunam, reliquas ne fama quidem acciperunt." 27

Caesar dwells on the religious habits and customs of the Gauls because in a theocracy such as theirs the religious as well as the political authority is exercised by the Druids. The emphasis which is placed on this class -- the one of two classes which are of any account in Gaul, the other being the Equites -- with its responsibility for human and animal sacrifice can be justified on the grounds that this must have been a very strange phenomenon to the Romans. The same emphasis on religion runs through Tacitus' description of

26 Ibid., vi. 21.

27 Ibid.

the Jews.²⁸ Some slight references to it are made in the Agricola. Tacitus thinks that the Britons borrow their religious practices from the Gauls: "eorum sacra deprehendas ac superstitionum peruationes!"²⁹ Sallust, however, confines his ethnological digression to a historical account of the genealogy of the Africans. He is concerned not so much with the various facets of the primitive culture of the races as he is with their origin and the results of their intermingling. What he places emphasis on is 'qui mortales initio Africam habuerint'. It is to be noted that Tacitus, in another instance of imitation of Sallust, uses almost the identical phrase concerning the original inhabitants of Britain. He writes 'Britanniam qui mortales initio coluerint'.

We have seen how Caesar, Sallust and Tacitus in their respective treatments, make the barbarian a subject of scientific enquiry by the use of digression in their narrative. Pliny the Elder, on the other hand, who devotes four out of thirty-seven books in his only extant work, The Natural History,³⁰ to geography and ethnography, has made the most thorough enquiry of all. But he falls into a different category from the other three mentioned above. Above all, Pliny is setting out to give

28 Histories, V, 4-5.

29 Agricola, 11, 4.

30 Books 111 - VI.

his readers encyclopaedic information about peoples, places and events of the world then known to him. He has no need for the pattern used by the other historians. His work, far from being narrative, is factual. His description of the tribes and people of Europe, Asia and Africa is a whole work in itself designed to provide reference material for the future. It is not a pause in the discussion of wars or battles, nor is it an inclusion in a wider work. It simply provides new, or adds to existing, knowledge.

There is much evidence that the Roman writers were influenced by the Greeks in dealing with the subject of ethnology. Men like Caesar, Sallust and Tacitus himself make use of the digression in historical writing to acquaint their readers with various peoples and places. Each does it in a variety of ways. In spite of all the wealth of tradition on which he has to draw, Tacitus in the Germania, does not do this. This is why a discussion of the Germania does not fit into this context. His approach is so very different that his work takes on the appearance of a new genre. Instead of devoting a few chapters out of a larger work to describe the Germans, Tacitus finds it necessary to compose an entire monograph on them. His Germania tends to bear some analogy to Pliny's style of ethnological writing except that The Natural History is designed for reference whereas Tacitus is describing a people who are a rather pressing problem to the

Romans. By concentrating on the digressions found in such works as the Jugurtha, the Gallic War, the Agricola and the Histories this chapter has emphasised, by implication, the very different direction which the Germania takes.

CHAPTER 2

TACITUS' SOURCES

It was noted in Chapter 1 that Tacitus' Germania falls, to a considerable degree, outside the usual pattern employed by Roman historians in the discussion of peoples and places. However, this is not so as far as his sources are concerned. This chapter will show that Tacitus followed traditional lines in researching his Germania; and that he had no single source but made use of a variety of sources.

The form and style of early historical writing provided no place for footnotes and bibliography, standard features among modern historians. This is not to say that no research was undertaken. On the contrary there is usually ample evidence in the content of a work itself to suggest the source or sources to which the author was indebted. This is indeed true of Tacitus' work under discussion. On a few occasions, authorities are directly revealed, whereas in several instances he leaves the reference to his sources vague by writing words like, for example, 'adfirmant'. He does not always make it clear whether he is referring to other writers or to the Germans themselves.

Examples of naming sources can generally be found in his works. In the Germania, he makes the comment "validores olim Gallorum res fuisse 'summus auctorum, Divus Iulius tradit'."¹

¹ Germania, 28. 1.

In discussing the geography of Britain in the Agricola, he acknowledges that "formam totius Britanniae Livius veterum, Fabius Rusticus recentium eloquentissimi auctores ... bipenni adsimulavere."² While he is indebted to some authors for content, Tacitus relies on others for style in composition. In one passage of his Annals he very admiringly regards Sallust as "rerum Romanorum florentissimus auctor."³

An early example in the Germania of using a vague source is his reference to the origin of the Germans: "Quidam, ut in licentia vetustatis plures deo ortos pluresque gentis appellationes, Marsos Gambrivios Suebos Vandilios adfirmant."⁴

After interposing what can be considered a confirmatory phrase --- eaque vera et antiqua nomina --- the historian resorts, by use of indirect discourse, to his sources once again: "ceterum Germaniae vocabulum recens et nuper additum."⁵

In his discussion of the German war heroes Tacitus makes another vague reference to his source. Chapter three opens with the observation: "Fuisse et apud eos Herculemmemorant."⁶ The passage later continues:

² Agricola, 10. 3.

³ Annals, iii. 30, 3.

⁴ Germania, 2. 4.

⁵ Ibid., 2. 5.

⁶ Ibid., 3.1.

ceterum et Ulixen, quidam opinantur longo illo et fabuloso errore in hunc Oceanum delatum; aram quin etiam Ulixi consecratam ... eodem loco olim repertam, monumentaque et tumulos quosdam Graecis litteris inscriptos in confinio Germaniae Rhaetiaeque adhuc extare. ⁷

Tacitus is not prepared to take this information for granted. He can sense the presence of legend --- fabuloso errore. In effect, he says to his readers 'take it or leave it'. There is no doubt that he is taking up a neutral position as he reveals his indifference to the Ulysses' story. "Quae neque confirmare," he maintains, "argumentis neque refellere in animo est: ex ingenio quisque demat vel addat fidem." ⁸ On the other hand he does take a position about the origin of the Germans and his view inclines to that of other unnamed authorities:

Ipsae eorum opinionibus accedo qui Germaniae populos nullis [aliis] aliarum nationum conubiis infectos propriam et sinceram et tantum sui similem gentem extitisse arbitrantur. ⁹

The historian makes his readers aware of one of the noble traits of the German women by referring to another of his vague sources: "Memoriae proditur quasdam acies inclinatas iam et labantes a feminis restitutas...." ¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 3.3.

⁸ Ibid., 3.4.

⁹ Ibid., 4.1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 8.1.

But the crowning reference to an unnamed source or sources comes at the end of the first half of his treatise on the Germans:

Haec in commune de omnium Germanorum origine ac moribus accepimus: nunc singularum gentium instituta ritusque quatenus differant, quaeque nationes e Germania in Gallias commigraverint, expediam.¹¹

Tacitus accepts this general account of the Germans which --- 'accepimus' --- 'we find given' and does so without comment, nor does he tell us by whom this account is given. The reason for this is that he has no single source.

Besides treating Germany as a whole, Tacitus has set out to deal, as he himself says, with 'the institutions and practices of the nations severally', Not only does he continue to make use of words similar to 'adfirmant' but he also imputes some of his information to rumor: "ipsum quin etiam oceanum illum temptavimus, et superesse adhuc Hercules columnas fama vulgavit;"¹² or, on occasion, to superstition or popular belief: "sonum insuper emergentis audiri formasque equorum et radia capitis aspici persuasio adicit."¹³ But Tacitus himself gives us no reason to believe that he

¹¹ Ibid., 27. 3.

¹² Ibid., 34. 2.

¹³ Ibid., 45. 1.

accepted rumors or popular belief without much critical examination. Indeed he is so skeptical about the 'Pillars of Hercules' story that he immediately questions it:

sive adiit Hercules, seu quicquid ubique magnificum est, in claritatem eius referre consensimus. Nec defuit audentia Druso Germanico, sed abstulit Oceanus in se simulatque in Herculem inquiri. Mox nemo temptavit sanctiusque ac reverentius visum de actis deorum credere quam scire.¹⁴

In the case of the story about the setting sun, he is quick to set down what is true as if to serve as a contrast to the popular belief which he has just mentioned — "thus far only (and the report is true) extends the world."¹⁵

He is, however, more circumspect when he tells about the Suebi, a people who do not constitute a single nation but who are divided into several tribes: "vetustissimos nobilissimosque Sueborum Semmones memorant."¹⁶

The examples cited above are intended to indicate that Tacitus does make considerable use of literary and other sources for the composition of his Germania. Broadly speaking, the possible sources of information open to a historian would naturally be, first, information acquired at first hand by the author himself. This would entail a personal visit to the country under discussion in order to acquaint himself with the territory and to get as much geographical

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 45.1.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39.1.

detail as possible. It would also give him an opportunity to gain an intimate knowledge of the people and to observe their habits and customs. A second method would be the gathering of material at second hand, furnished by persons who had either gone into the country or had reached its frontiers. These would include men who had served in the army, private visitors or traders. A third method would involve recourse to literary records which dealt with the geography and ethnography of the country.

The problem of determining the specific sources for the Germania is plagued by a number of difficulties. Whether or not the theory that Tacitus did get some of his information at first hand is accepted, the task of separating the first hand knowledge from the second hand notes is still there. Moreover when once some conclusion has been reached about his secondary sources, there still remains to be determined which authors he consulted most or which had the greatest influence on him and, at times, what contradictions he makes of earlier writers. For example, both Caesar and Tacitus write about Germany and the Gauls. Not always does Tacitus' account agree with that of Caesar. Above all, the pitfall involved in trying to arrive at some satisfactory conclusion regarding Tacitus' consultation of secondary sources is the fact that few of those sources are extant. As this chapter continues, it will show that Tacitus in fact relies almost entirely on secondary information and will suggest

that, by implication, he points to works, now lost, as his guide.

Nowhere does Tacitus leave the impression that he himself visited Germany and thus acquired primary knowledge of the subjects he discusses in the Germania. Indeed there is a strong case for rejecting this view. For if we are to interpret him correctly, he questions the wisdom of anyone wanting to visit Germany in his very revealing second chapter:

Ipsos Germanos indigenas crediderim minimeque aliarum gentium adventibus et hospitibus mixtos, quia nec terra olim sed classibus advehebantur qui mutare sedes quaerebant, et immensus ultra utque sic dixerim adversus Oceanus raris ab orbe nostro navibus aditur. quis porro, praeter periculum horridi et ignoti maris, Asia aut Africa aut Italia relicta Germaniam peteret, informem terris, asperam caelo, tristem cultu aspectuque nisi si patria sit? ¹⁷

It is highly unlikely, to say the least, that Tacitus would put such a question -- 'quis porro ... Germaniam peteret' -- if he had visited or intended to visit Germany. What is more, the passage quoted confirms the view that so many secondary sources were available to Tacitus that he was in a position to sift them and come to his own conclusions as is shown by his cautious assertion in the word 'crediderim'. Scholars like Gudeman¹⁸ and Anderson¹⁹ are right in

¹⁷ Germania, 2.1.

¹⁸ Alfred Gudeman, "The Sources of the Germania," Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, vol. xxxi (1900), p. 94.

¹⁹ J. G. C. Anderson, op.cit. p. xix.

believing that Tacitus never did visit Germany and therefore did not have any first hand knowledge of the country and people. It is worth noting here, however, that Tacitus spent four years away from Rome between 89 and 93 in command of a province called Belgic Gaul which was close to the German border.

There is little doubt that Tacitus made use of both Greek and Roman authorities. Posidonius, who had also a tendency to idealize past times and Barbarian communities, must have provided much help for Tacitus. It is not difficult to justify Gudeman's contention that

Under these circumstances it does not seem plausible that Tacitus would have failed to avail himself of the labors of so suggestive so trustworthy, and so great an authority, whose very attitude of mind and historical perspective had so much in common with his convictions and feelings.²⁰

It can be conjectured that the legend of the divine descent of the race, for example, may be traced to Posidonius. But

Although the precise nature and extent of this indebtedness must, of course, remain problematical, there is at least one piece of detailed information in the Germania for which Posidonius seems reasonable certain to have been if not the direct, yet the ultimate source.²¹

This 'piece of detailed information' is the identification of Germanic deities with the gods of Greece and Rome: "Sed deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant."²² This was familiar to Caesar who, in his Gallic War, points out that whereas the Gauls worship

²⁰ Gudeman, op.cit. p.109.

²¹ A. Gudeman, (ed.), Tacitus, Agricola and Germania, (Boston: Allen and Bacon, 1899), p.xlix.

²² Germania, 43.4.

Mercury, Apollo, Jupiter and Minerva,²³ the Germans worship only the sun, Vulcan and the Moon.²⁴ It is clear that Caesar drew on some other earlier source since, as Gudeman argues,

There is no one, save Posidonius, to whom its general introduction can plausibly be attributed, for he is the only previous scholar, so far as is known, who paid any attention to the mythology of the Germanic and Celtic races.²⁵

Gudeman alleges²⁶ that, in addition to German mythology, Posidonius was the source for remarks about religious ceremonies and ritual. There is merit in this argument since Tacitus, in discussing these topics, refers not to any direct source but to some earlier authority. This earlier authority takes the form of the third person plural such as 'adfirmant' or 'memorant' or 'quidam opinantur'. However, this manner of writing is in line with the practice of ancient historians whose use of plurals like 'ἐνίοι' or 'φασί' does not necessarily imply more than one writer.²⁷

Turning to Roman sources, Tacitus seems to have relied mainly on Caesar, Livy and the Elder Pliny. Caesar, who also would have been familiar with Posidonius, devotes some space in his Gallic War to a description of the Suebi²⁸ and to an account of German habits and customs.²⁹ Judging from the reference Tacitus makes in his Agricola,³⁰

²³ The Gallic War VI. 17.1.

²⁴ Ibid., VI. 27.2.

²⁵ Gudeman, op. cit. p. ix .

²⁶ Ibid., p. LVII.

²⁷ Ibid..

²⁸ Gallic War IV 1-3.

²⁹ Ibid. , VI 21-24.

³⁰ Agricola, 10.3.

he knew Livy's work and the part of the 104th book, now lost, which gives a description of Germany and its inhabitants. The chief Roman source for Tacitus appears to have been Pliny's Bella Germaniae. This narrative in twenty books, also lost, contains an account of all Roman wars with Germany.³¹

The value of Caesar's Gallic War to Tacitus is that it is the earliest Roman contribution to the knowledge of Germany. The work was thoroughly familiar to the historian as is shown by his complimentary appraisal of Caesar as being summus auctorum.³² This encomium, whether uttered with sarcasm or not, is undoubtedly accorded to his account of Gaul rather than that of the Germans because his contact with the latter was far slighter than with the former. Tacitus' Germania comes some 150 years after Caesar's Gallic War. There is some question as to how much use Tacitus does make of it since

a careful comparison between the two authors where they deal with the same or similar topics, reveals the fact that there is but a single passage in the Germania which can be said to betray the direct influence of Caesar.³³

Tacitus opens his Germania with the words "Germania omnis..." while Caesar says in his work "Gallia est omnis...". But Gudeman has certainly overlooked the number of parallels which occur in the two works. One is therefore led to believe that Tacitus does make some use of Caesar's Gallic War. Some of these parallel passages are worth noting.

³¹ Tacitus, Annals I.69.3.

³² Germania, 28.1.

³³ Gudeman, op. cit., p.xlix.

Writing about the clothes of the Germans, Caesar states:
 "quod et promiscua...pellibus aut parvis renonum tegimentes utuntur magna corporis parte nuda."³⁴ Tacitus says: "Tegumen omnibus sagum fibula aut gerunt et ferarum pelles...nudae bracchia ac lacertos; sed et proxima pars pectoris patet."³⁵ On marriage Caesar notes one of the extraordinary features of German society when he writes: "Duae fuerant Ariovisti uxores una Sueba natione...altera Novica regis Voccionis soror quam in Gallia duxerat a fratre missam."³⁶ Tacitus seems to have been guided by this information, but took it some steps further by saying: "Nam prope soli barbarorum singulis uxoribus contenti sunt, exceptis admodum paucis, qui non libidine sed ob nobilitatem plurimis nuptiis ambiuntur."³⁷ There is also some similarity between the remarks of Caesar and of Tacitus on the subject of the presence of women on the battlefield. Caesar observes:

Omnemque aciem suam raedis et carris circumdederunt ne qua spes in fuga relinqueretur. Eo mulieres imposuerunt quae in proelium proficiscentes passis manibus fluentes implorabant.³⁸

Tacitus writes:

non casus nec fortuita conglobatio turmam aut cuneum facit, sed familiae et propinquitates; et in proximo pignora, unde feminarum ululatus audiri, unde vagitus infantium...ad matres, ad coniuges vulnera ferunt.³⁹

³⁴ De Bello Gallico, VI. 21,5. (References taken from Kennedy's Edition, Cambridge University Press, 1960).

³⁵ Germania, 17.1.

³⁶ De Bello Gallico, 1.53.4.

³⁷ Germania, 18.1.

³⁸ De Bello Gallico, 1.51,2.

³⁹ Germania, 7,3.

On agriculture, Caesar simply notes: "Agricolturaerae non student."⁴⁰

Tacitus says much the same thing but more fully and elaborately "nec enim cum ubertate et amplitudine soli labore contendunt, ut pomaria conserant, ut prata separent ut hortos rigent."⁴¹

There are other resemblances from which we single out the remarks of the two authors on hospitality to strangers. Here is Caesar: "Hospitem violare fas non putant...hisque omnium domus patent victusque communicatur."⁴²

Tacitus records: "Quemcumque mortalium arcere tecto nefas habetur; pro fortuna quisque apparatis epulis excipit."⁴³ In one instance the similarity

is so close that the remarks are almost identically worded in the two authors. But this may be a coincidence. Caesar writes: "Deum maxime Mercurium colunt."⁴⁴ Tacitus: "Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt."⁴⁵

It should, however, be noted that there are also contradictions and divergences between Caesar and Tacitus. Caesar represents the Suebi as "multum sunt in venationibus"⁴⁶ and the Germans in general as a people whose "vita omnis in venationibus atque in studiis rei militaris consistit."⁴⁷ But we learn from Tacitus that the Germans

40 De Bello Gallico, VI. 22, 1.

41 Germania, 26.2.

42 De Bello Gallico, VI. 23. 9.

43 Germania, 21.2.

44 De Bello Gallico, VI. 17. 1.

45 Germania, 9.1.

46 De Bello Gallico, IV. 1. 8.

47 Ibid., VI. 21. 3.

"Quotiens bella non ieunt, non multum venatibus plus per otium transigunt, dediti sammo ciboque."⁴⁸ Caesar thus pictures the Germans as hunting when not fighting. Tacitus contends, on the contrary, that when the Germans are not engaged in fighting, they spend only a little time on hunting, but much more on idling.

We have already mentioned Livy, whom Tacitus cites in his Agricola⁴⁹ and no doubt examined for his Germania. But he seems to have relied most on Pliny the Elder. Both of his works - the Naturalis Historia and the Bella Germaniae would have been known to Tacitus since Pliny flourished during a period very close to Tacitus' own lifetime. There is not much likelihood that the Naturalis Historia provides any real source material for Tacitus, since with the exception of a short chapter in Book IV there are merely a few references to Germany in the work. Even if he did consult the work, it was in order to contradict and not to follow his predecessor. Pliny's division of the Germans into five large groups runs counter to Tacitus' classification of three.

It is reasonable to agree with Anderson⁵⁰ and Syme⁵¹ who maintain that Tacitus consulted Pliny himself and his Bella Germaniae as principle sources for his Germania. Tacitus himself refers to him in his Annals as 'C. Plinius, Germanicorum bellorum scriptor'. For

⁴⁸ Germania, 15.1.

⁴⁹ Agricola, 10.3.

⁵⁰ Anderson, op. cit., p. xxv.

⁵¹ R. Syme, Tacitus, Vol. 1, (Oxford: University Press, 1958), p. 127.

his Bella Germaniae Pliny was able to draw on his own experiences.

He knew the Rhine area having served as a Roman officer in both Upper and Lower Germany. This point, plus the fact that Pliny was Tacitus' contemporary, places added emphasis on Tacitus' dependence on Pliny.

Apart from the literary sources, Tacitus probably consulted eyewitnesses like Pliny mentioned above. Traders, for example, also seem to have played a part in contributing to the knowledge of the Germans. For example Tacitus writes: "Proximi ob usum commerciorum aurum et argentum in pretio habent formasque quasdam nostrae pecuniae adgnosunt atque eligunt,"⁵² and later: "gaudent praecipue finitimarum gentium donis...iam et pecuniam accipere docuimus."⁵³ Much information would have been gleaned from people trading with the tribe of the Hermunduri who, observes Tacitus, are a "civitas fida Romanis...passim sine custode transeunt."⁵⁴ This freedom of movement must have been accompanied by a freedom of expression. In this way information about the Germans would readily be available.

On the whole Tacitus used various means of gathering information for his Germania. That he himself was an eyewitness who visited Germany can be dismissed as unlikely. He indicates that he consulted many secondary sources. Although he makes reference to Caesar in the body of the work, he prefers to rely not so much on him as on unnamed

⁵² Germania, 5.4.

⁵³ Ibid, 15.3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 41.1.

sources. These appear to be the Histories of Posidonius, and most notably of all the Bella Germaniae of Pliny the Elder. The probability exists that Livy's 10th book was one of his sources. In addition there is evidence that Tacitus had recourse to information supplied by individuals, notably traders.

CHAPTER III

TACITUS' REASONS FOR WRITING THE GERMANIA

Tacitus brought out his monograph on the Germans in A. D. 98. This date can clearly be established as a result of his remarks on the German question in chapter 37 of the Germania where he reckons the years of the German wars with Rome up to the second consulship of Trajan. The Agricola was completed in A.D. 98 also. In chapter three of that work, Tacitus notes how times are once more happy under a new emperor, Trajan. The two works are quite different in content. The Agricola, for the most part, falls into the category of a laudatory biography - the closing sentence of its first chapter makes this clear - whereas the Germania is a lengthy dissertation on a country and its people. However a common theme can be detected in both works. In the former, Tacitus, in addition to singing the praises of his father-in-law, is writing about the decline of freedom of expression among the senators under the emperor Domitian. In the latter, he is pointing to the decline of Roman morality by describing, in contrast, the admirable virtues of the German barbarian. In the Dialogus, completed some years earlier, Tacitus had shown some concern over the decline of oratory. Therefore in each of his minor works the historian seems to have been developing a specific point - namely the 'decline' of one thing or another.

To make a moral comparison between the Romans and the German barbarians is one of the reasons given by commentators¹ for the writing of the Germania. It is undoubtedly the most important. Of his forty six chapters Tacitus devotes the first

¹ For example, W. B. Donne; see page 33 for his view.

twenty seven to a description of the public and private life of the Germans and in so doing succeeds in contrasting the mores, either implicitly or explicitly, of the Roman and the barbarian.

Writers like Furneaux² and Anderson³ minimize this possible motive for the writing of the Germania by suggesting that to strike out at and to make glaring the vices of Roman civilization in contrast with the virtues of healthy barbarism is insufficient explanation to account for the work as a whole, since chapters twenty eight to forty six have little relevance to this topic. Boissier,⁴ too, does not subscribe to that view, though conceding that moral descriptions loom large in this work of Tacitus.

This objection can be countered by pointing out that the second part of the Germania, that is, chapters twenty eight to forty six dealing with individual tribes, does have some relevance to the first and more important part dealing with the land, the people and their private and public lives. Since Tacitus has, in the first half of the book, established the moral superiority of the Germans, he goes on to give in some detail a description of the tribes with whom Rome could possibly find herself at war. Tacitus is aware that it was that same virtue of moral superiority which formerly enabled the Romans to move

² H. Furneaux, (ed.), Cornelii Taciti De Germania, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), p.5.

³ Anderson, op. cit., p. ix.

⁴ G. Boissier, Tacitus and other Roman Studies, (London: Archibald, Constable & Co. Ltd., 1906), p. 32.

from one conquest to another and thus enlarge their empire. Since Roman military policy had not yet been fixed so far as these Germans were concerned, Tacitus no doubt feels the need to emphasise his point that moral and military superiority complemented each other. By giving details of the German tribes which, admittedly, takes up much space in the work, Tacitus hopes to incite his fellow Romans to a reflection on their own moral conduct. Thus the second part of the Germania is a necessary addition to the first.

Donne⁵ is therefore on firmer ground when he claims that there are plausible grounds for supposing that there is a satirical element in the Germania. When, for example, Tacitus writes about the German woman in chapter 19, his praise of her is a direct reproach to the Roman woman. Later in his account, Donne is right when he concludes that "in these notes on the domestic condition of the Germans, it is hardly possible to mistake the purpose of Tacitus."⁶ This supports my argument that Tacitus has a moral purpose for writing the Germania.

Tacitus leaves no doubt that domestic conditions at Rome left much to be desired. One has only to look at the picture he paints in his Annals. Here he comes through as a moralist. Since his concept of history postulates an ethical purpose⁷ it is natural for him to

⁵ W. B. Donne, Tacitus, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1873), p. 39.

⁶ Ibid, p. 46.

⁷ See his Annals I. 1. 6; III. 65. 1.

be concerned with the contemporary Roman moral climate. This is what helps to make the moral comparison theory in the Germania valid.

The senatorial order had suffered a bitter experience especially under Domitian whose oppressive policies Tacitus deplores. In Chapters two and three of the Agricola, for example, he leaves no doubt about his feelings in this regard. He is relieved by the return of free speech under a new emperor. But in general he deplores the degeneracy inherent in the office and during the era of the Principate. He condemns the deliciae, the luxus and the opes of his upper class colleagues. He is alarmed at the decline of older Roman mores et virtus. When he writes about Arminius' being the "liberator haud dubie Germaniae" he no doubt pictures him with qualities reminiscent of the Roman of old - "proelio ambiguus, bello non victus."⁸

In the Germania, Tacitus takes the opportunity to show how bitter he has become towards the moral and ethical state of Rome. This bitterness is reflected in the way in which he emphasizes the virtues of the noble savage and how he uses sarcasm to ridicule Roman society. For example he tells his readers "nemo enim illic vitia ridet, nec corrumpere et corrumpi saeculum vocatur."⁹ It is in large measure, this need to reflect the spirit of the age (saeculum) which contributes to Rome's moral decline. The obvious implication here is

⁸ Annals II. 88, 2.

⁹ Germania, 19, 3.

that the present generation is so much worse than previous ones. There are other passages which reinforce this moral criticism of Rome. Later in the same chapter Tacitus rather nonchalantly writes "plusque ibi boni mores valent quam alibi bonae leges."¹⁰ There is no mistaking the sarcastic contrast between the 'ibi' and the 'alibi' - Germany and Rome. In the chapter where he discusses children and heirs he closes by saying "nec ulla orbitatis pretia"¹¹ - a great contrast to what goes on at Rome among legacy-hunters fawning on wealthy childless men.

Mendell states that more than one critic has been led

to put the Germania in the category of satiric writings and to believe its chief object was to show the contrast between the degenerate Roman and the noble savage.¹²

However, he himself disagrees with that conclusion. Nevertheless, he concedes that Tacitus does display a certain pessimism in his attitude towards Roman society. Mendell has ignored altogether the satirical element which is undoubtedly there and to which I have drawn attention above. Moreover these references to corruption as reflecting the spirit of the age indicate that Tacitus is a man out of harmony with his society. His most effective weapon would be satire. While it is true that Juvenal and Martial - both satirists - are his literary colleagues that is not to say that Tacitus is capitalising on the

¹⁰ Germania, 19.5.

¹¹ Ibid, 20.5.

¹² C. W. Mendell, Tacitus, the man and his work, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p.27.

contemporary literary tendency. He has reason to be satirical.

By using the Germania to decry the moral standards of the Romans, Tacitus keeps casting his thoughts back to the days of the mores antiqui. This ridiculing of society in general and of the office and era of the principate in particular betrays Tacitus' republican sympathies. This is not to say that he himself was ill treated by the emperors. In the Histories, Tacitus states that his elevation to high position in the state "was commenced by Vespasian, augmented by Titus and carried still higher by Domitian."¹³ His own advancement in public office was rapid, for he rose to the position of praetor by the age of thirty three. Each office he held at the pleasure of the emperor and by his favour. Tacitus realized that if the Empire was to be governed efficiently, it had to be governed by one hand. But as a member of the much weakened Senate he saw the gradual corrupting influence of the principate. As a citizen he witnessed the demoralizing example which some emperors of the first century A. D. had set. Though constantly taking a backward glance at the Republic, Tacitus, in an earlier work, had remarked "Let everyone make the most of the blessings his own times afford without disparaging any other age."¹⁴ Thus a Tacitus resigned to the circumstances of the present becomes a eulogist of the past. One result of this acquiescence is the composition and publication of the Germania.

¹³ Tacitus, Histories 1.1.

¹⁴ Tacitus, Dialogus 41.8.

The complementary nature of the two parts of the Germania gives support to the second important reason for the composition of the work. The second part helps to explain what can be called the political pamphlet theory. Once Tacitus has indicated the moral superiority of the Germans, he turns to military prowess which, as the Romans themselves knew, derived solely from moral strength. The detailed description of the tribes underlines the military threat which they constituted to the Roman state.

When Nerva died early in 98 A.D. after a short rule, Trajan was proclaimed emperor while still with his army on the Rhine. In the Agricola, Tacitus is complimentary to Trajan:

In the first dawn of our blessed age Nerva Caesar harmonized the old discord of autocracy and freedom; day by day Nerva Trajan is enhancing the happiness of the times. ¹⁵

Tacitus' obvious disillusionment with the Empire especially under Domitian has now been replaced by what certainly is pleasure at the anticipation of Trajan's reign:

happy he (Agricola), had he been permitted to see the dawn of this blessed age and the principate of Trajan, a prospect of which he often spoke to us in wistful prophecy. ¹⁶

We can be fairly sure that the Agricola and the Germania must have come to the attention of the new emperor. It is apparent that compliments expressed in the former would have been well received and must have helped to advance Tacitus. The latter work would naturally be

¹⁵ Tacitus, Agricola 3.i. This and subsequent translations used for the Agricola and Germania are those of H. Mattingly (London: Penquin Books Ltd., 1948).

¹⁶ Ibid., 44.5.

of special interest, and perhaps use, at this time though it is not meant as propaganda either for or against any military scheme. It turned out, however, that Trajan spent a further year and a half on the frontier before returning to Rome. A case can, therefore, be made to lend support to the political pamphlet theory.

Domitian's attempts to push back the northern frontier had ended in disaster. Not only are the Germans now strong in numbers and warlike in spirit but also their moral fibre has been so nourished that it is far superior to that of the Romans. Trajan's prolonged stay on the Rhine frontier is some indication of the threat of these northern barbarians. So menacing are these noble savages that Tacitus hopes they will keep fighting among themselves so that they will not have time to fight the Romans, the foundations of whose empire are now tottering-- "urgentibus imperii fatis".¹⁷ The historian is playing the role of the prophet. Livy, the historian of the Republic uses similar language when Rome's doom seems imminent: "iam urgentibus Romam urbem fatis";¹⁸ and again concerning the fall of Veii "postremo iam fato quoque urgente."¹⁹

Tacitus is thus predicting the fall of the empire at the hands of the Germans if the new emperor is led into a war with them. What he seems to be implying is that there has to be a change of policy in dealing with these people. He makes this clear when he points out that

¹⁷ Tacitus, Germania 33.2.

¹⁸ Livy, Ab urbe condita V. 36, 6.

¹⁹ Ibid, V. 22, 8.

Rome was in her six hundred and fortieth year when the alarm of the Cimbrian arms was first heard....Reckoning from that year to the second consulship of our emperor Trajan, we get a total of just about two hundred and ten years - that is the time it is taking to conquer Germany.²⁰

The fact that Tacitus chooses to put the German question in the context of a two hundred and ten year period culminating with the consulship of Trajan seems to suggest that he is hopeful of a change in Roman policy towards these Germans.

In the course of that long period of conflict, the Romans have given and taken much punishment. They have learned far more painful lessons at the hands of the Germans than from the rest of their enemies including the Carthaginians and the Parthians. Tacitus gives a long list of generals, with their armies, who have been their victims. Even Caesar suffered set backs at their hands. Varus and his three legions are notable examples. To crown it all and to make a mockery of Rome's best efforts, "they have in recent times supplied us with more triumphs than victories."²¹

The implication of Tacitus' point is that a policy of consolidation on the northern frontier should be followed. Here is a chance for the new emperor to settle the German problem by pursuing a line not of further conquest which, Tacitus makes clear, is well nigh impossible, but of finding a peaceful solution. It is worth noting that Trajan's extended stay on the northern frontier was to consolidate

²⁰ Germania, 37, 2.

²¹ Ibid, 37, 3.

the boundary of the empire and not to pursue any further conquest. In one passage in the Agricola Tacitus has Calgacus, the leader of the Britons say "Robbery, butchery, rapine the liars call Empire, they create a desolation and they call it peace".²² These are strong words but they are a reflection of Tacitus' thinking because he feels that conquest could disturb the equilibrium of the Empire. He depicts Trajan as one who shares this view; as a "princeps proferendi imperi incuriosus erat".²³ The emperor demonstrates the accuracy of this description by cutting back the six garrisons left by Domitian to four, an action which accounts for the peace in the two provinces of Germany for the following sixty years.

Some commentators ²⁴ object that Tacitus is advancing a political proposal on the grounds that he does not set this down as one of his purposes at the beginning of the work. However for Tacitus to come out openly and say that he is advocating guidelines for any particular policy would be to usurp the prerogative of the emperor himself. In any event it is not in keeping with his character to play the role of mentor to any emperor. Tacitus is to be pictured as one who is commenting editorially on the menace of the German people.

²² Agricola 30.6.

²³ Annals IV. 32, 2.

²⁴ For example F. R. D. Goodyear, Tacitus, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) p. 10.

There are other considerations given for the purpose of the work.²⁵ One is that the Germania is meant to serve as an introduction to a larger work. Nowhere does Tacitus give this impression. Another is that the Germania is to be used as a digression in a larger work. This explanation overlooks the lengthiness of such a digression.

The Germania must be recognized as a unique work which is logically divided into two complementary parts. Its underlying purposes are to point a moral contrast between the simple ways of a barbarian people and those of the civilized Romans and to advance a political proposal. Tacitus' use of satire effectively points up this contrast while his lengthy description of individual tribes emphasises the need for a different policy towards the Germans who, historically, have been a thorn in the side of the Romans.

²⁵ Anderson, in his introduction to the Germania, discusses these points on p. xiii.

CHAPTER IV

THE GERMANIA AND THE MORAL DECLINE OF ROMAN SOCIETY

The contents of the Germania help to reveal Tacitus' concern with contemporary Roman society. So do the contents of his Annals. Although he shows a republican bias in his writings it is not the political as much as the moral ideal which he is trying to uphold. In his Annals Tacitus is concerned with analysing the character of the emperors and by so doing is acutely aware of the decline in moral standards among the Roman nobility in particular. This description of moral deterioration is heightened by the very different description of the barbarian in the Germania where Tacitus, for the most part, is expressing himself with a scarcely concealed sense of shame and disgust. It is the purpose of this chapter to focus attention on that decline and wherever possible to show the contrast with the German barbarian which it is Tacitus' purpose to indicate.

One point must be made clear. The concern which Tacitus shows for the degeneracy of Roman society is a reflection on him here more as a moralist than as a historian; for the barbarian is contrasted only with a particular segment of that society, namely the nobility. It is Tacitus' feeling that "the masses and the commons are usually bent on their own concerns."¹ They care mostly

¹ Agricola, 43-1.

for 'panem et circenses' he believes. Tacitus' lack of sympathy for the lower classes is the result of his own senatorial and aristocratic background. For him, therefore, the moral decline of the nobility is the moral decline of Roman society. This, admittedly, is a flaw in his depiction of the whole scene, but it does not invalidate the claim that a moral comparison can be effectively made. Tacitus leaves no doubt that in the Germania the barbarian has some moral lessons to teach the sophisticated Roman.

In the past Roman writers had provided their readers with examples comparing Rome with other peoples. The contrast of Rome's 'fides' with the mendacity of the Greeks or the perfidy of the Carthaginians is well known. Vergil alludes to the former in his episode on the wooden horse in the Aeneid² while Livy mentions the latter in his account of the Punic Wars.³ Tacitus' contrast, however, makes Rome not the model to be imitated by the delinquent to be avoided.

Tacitus' critical consideration of a degenerate Roman Society begins with the elevation of Tiberius to the principate. Early in the Annals he observes that "meanwhile at Rome people plunged into slavery--consuls, senators, knights. The higher a man's rank, the

² Vergil, Aeneid II, l. 44-49.

³ Livy, XXII, 23, 4.

more his hypocrisy."⁴ This is one example of Roman moral decline. Another and more glaring example is found in Tacitus' references to the moral decline among the women of Rome.

Since Tacitus' chief interest in history lies in its moral value, his object "is not to relate at length every proposal of the senate but only such as were conspicuous for excellence or notorious for infamy."⁵ As an example of this methodological principle in his writing we can point, in his Germania, to his description of women whose moral standards are conspicuous for excellence as compared with those of some Roman women whose are notorious.

When Tacitus is describing the German women and children in the Germania⁶ there is no escape from the conclusion that he has his thoughts on the Roman women and the Roman's attitude to children. The role which the German women play and the virtue which they exhibit are reminders, for Tacitus, of a cherished Roman tradition of days past. Besides being the product of a close family relationship they are part of the German's dearest possessions. Tacitus represents these German women as being close at hand in battle, ready to look after the wounded and to care for and encourage their men generally. So strong is their influence that they have been known to restore the morale of armies wavering on the brink of collapse.⁷

⁴ Annals, I, 7.

⁵ Ibid., III 65, 1.

⁶ Germania, 7, 3.

⁷ Germania, 8, 1.

On the other hand, in the Annals, the Roman woman's presence in almost similar circumstances has a decidedly different effect.

Tacitus recalls a point of view expressed in the senate that:

A train of women involves delays through luxury in peace and through panic in war....Not only is the sex feeble and unequal to hardship....but they show themselves off among the soldiers and have the centurions at their beck...⁸

The German women are held in high regard and a further measure of their importance is the belief that there resides in them "an element of holiness and prophecy and so they (the men) do not scorn to ask their advice or lightly disregard their replies."⁹ There is even a certain awe and veneration for them since Tacitus notes that

in the reign of deified Vespasian we saw Velda long honoured by many Germans as a divinity whilst even earlier they showed a similar reverence for Aurinia and others, a reverence untouched by flattery or any pretence of turning women into goddesses.¹⁰

The most glaring contrast between the Roman women and the German women can be seen in connection with marriage. Tacitus says¹¹ that there is no feature in their morality which deserves higher praise. In general "German women live in a state of chastity which is impregnable, uncorrupted

⁸ Annals, III, 33.

⁹ Germania, 8, 2.

¹⁰ Germania, 8, 3.

¹¹ Ibid., 18, 1.

by the temptations of public shows or the excitement of banquets."¹²
As a result divorce and adultery are rare.

Tacitus, in his Annals tells a very different story about the women in the upper classes of Roman society. During the first century A. D. many of Rome's leading women were indeed the bane of Roman social and political life. Livia, the wife of Augustus, Julia his daughter and Messalina, one of the four wives of Claudius, were all infamous women of the court. The last mentioned went so far as to marry another man while still legally married to Claudius. It is an interesting commentary on Roman society that Tacitus in recording the celebration of the marriage should write that "this is no story to excite wonder."¹³ Tacitus is, therefore, making it clear that adultery and licentiousness were common practices among the Roman upper class society. There are other examples of immoral conduct among women. Agrippina's marriage to her uncle, Claudius, was intended merely to promote her own and her son Nero's ambitions. Poppaea Sabina, one of Nero's mistresses, combined infamy with influence.

The German woman's role was domestic, not one of rivalry and intrigue for political honours. Indeed in his description of the various tribes of Germany, Tacitus makes a very significant point about women in high places. He says that "continuous with the

¹² Ibid., 19, 1.

¹³ Annals, XI, 27, 2.

Suiones are the nations of the Sitones. They resemble them in all respects but one--woman is the ruling sex. That is the measure of their decline." ¹⁴ The question which can be legitimately posed here is 'does Tacitus not have in mind those influential women around the various emperors?'

It must be admitted that in this discussion of Roman women there has been a concentration on the better known ones of the nobility who were close to the emperor. However, for his argument Tacitus is careful not to mention the "good" Roman women and those of the middle and lower classes since they are irrelevant to that argument. He wants to make a point and the strict logic of it is not important. He does occasionally write about upstanding women like Octavia.¹⁵

But women were not the only source of social and moral decay. Luxury and riches turned the society into a decadent collection of self-seekers. Juvenal takes a critical look at his fellow Roman in his Satires. His description of the "sportula"¹⁶ is one example of his satirical commentaries on Roman society. The "sportula" was simply a kind of welfare system which grew out of the old "patronus"--"cliens" relationship. But the abuses which it suffered had turned it into a racket. Its worst feature was that a great number of would-be patrons were members of the bourgeoisie who tried desperately

¹⁴ Germania, 45, 9.

¹⁵ Annals XIV, 63, 4.

¹⁶ Satires I, 1, 95 and following.

to imitate the refinement of the aristocracy. The latter, in turn, was

under intense social pressure to put up as big a show as the new-rich; and among the well-to-do all, whether in Rome or the municipalities, sought, each on his own scale, to ape the lavish example set by the imperial courts.¹⁷

This system was thus permeating the whole of Roman society. While the 'sportula' was benefitting the new-rich class, a hand-out was still, for many, an absolute necessity. "Such an evil system," continues Trever, "born of a socially degenerate society, with its fawning parasitism, obsequiousness and haughty insolence, was by no means limited to the poor clients."¹⁸ This observation is substantially correct, for even the 'Troiuigenae'--the blue blood of the old Roman nobility--had to jostle one another right up to the rich man's doorstep. This wealthy patron was required to visit a higher patron, possibly the emperor himself. A hand out for a poor client was not always a certainty. After following his patron around all day in the hope of a dinner he was sometimes turned away.

Tacitus would have been familiar with Juvenal's description of the 'sportula' and no doubt would have found it appropriate, for it provides another contrast between the two societies. This absence of hospitality is unknown among the Germans since they regard it as wrong to turn any man away from their door. On the contrary the host

¹⁷ Albert A. Trever, History of Ancient Civilization, Vol. II, The Roman World, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1939), p.441.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.449.

welcomes his guest with the best meal he can afford.¹⁹

But even when a Roman did condescend to invite someone outside of his class for dinner, it was very often for the sake of ridiculing him; to see how bad his table manners were or what a horrible bore his visitor was, or, in some cases, to subject him to a recital of the host's poetry or prose.²⁰ Even if the patron's guests were his peers, their discussion especially on political issues was inhibited since delators were rampant and a host never really knew who was a secret agent for the emperor.

The German banquet, on the other hand, provided the opportunity of a free discussion:

at no other time, they feel, is the heart so open to frank suggestions or so quick to warm to a great appeal. The Germans are neither canny nor cunning, and take advantage of the occasion to unbosom themselves of their most secret thoughts; every soul is naked and exposed.²¹

Hypocrisy was thus unknown among the Germans.

Delation was not confined to the Roman dinner table. The Pisonian conspiracy during Nero's reign, for example, proved a fertile ground for informers and allowed them not only to grow rich but also to enjoy the confidence of the emperor. The profession of these paid informers thus grew in reward and reputation and so provided further proof of the degradation of a society which allowed its practitioners to be proud of their art and even to be envied and admired.

¹⁹ Germania, 21, 2.

²⁰ Juvenal, Satires V and XI, ll. 179-182.

²¹ Germania, 22, 3.

Unlike Rome, Germany had no delators nor were there paid mourners among the barbarians. There was no pomp or fanfare about their funerals; no town crier to summon a whole line of idle mourners. The Germans quickly abandoned their weeping and wailing. The Romans usually exaggerated their grief before spectators. Says Martial of a certain Gellia: "whenever she is alone, she does not weep for her dead father, but if anyone is present the tears stream down at her bidding."²² This pretense of sorrow was just another example of the moral decay of Roman society. Yet another was legacy-hunting. It was common for men to prey upon rich old bachelors or childless husbands in the hope of being left a sum of money in the latter's wills. This was unknown among the Germans as Tacitus himself remarks, "Childlessness in Germany is not a paying profession."²³

Added to all this was luxurious living with its attendant evils which probably reached their climax during the reign of Nero. Witness his own Domus Aurea or Golden House. The Germans had no lust for silver and gold²⁴ or for the luxury which wealth inevitably brought----a feature common among Rome's ancestors.

Nero's example of luxury and extravagance was matched by his own immoral behaviour. Tacitus points out that "he polluted himself by every lawful or lawless indulgence, had not omitted a single abomination

²² Martial I, 33.

²³ Germania, 20, 5.

²⁴ Germania, 15, 3.

which could heighten his depravity."²⁵ He also heightened the depravity of the sons of the nobility by enticing them on to the stage, thus rewarding their degradation with offers of money. The games he instituted gave rise to a similar kind of degeneracy, this time bred by foreign tastes. As a result "never did a more filthy rabble add a worse licentiousness to our long corrupted morals."²⁶ Leading the rabble was Nero himself, backed by a servile and submissive senate. The low point of Roman decay came with the use of compulsion. As one critic has correctly noted:

A bad example will be infinitely more corrupting when it is reinforced by terror...and the reign of such men as Caligula, Nero and Domitian not only stimulated the grossness of self indulgence, but superadded the treachery and servility of cowardice.²⁷

The wave of terror which followed the Pisonian conspiracy was to be repeated, on a larger scale, some twenty years later by the emperor Domitian. There was a struggle for power following Nero's death in 68 A.D. and the year of the four emperors, 68-69 A.D., culminated in the accession of Vespasian. Fortunately Roman society found in him an emperor more akin to old Roman ideals and thus the Romans were able, for a while, to stem the tide of degradation and decay which was evident under earlier emperors and especially Nero.

²⁵ Annals, XV, 37, 2.

²⁶ Ibid., XIV, 15, 4.

²⁷ S. Dill, Roman Society from Nero to M. Aurelius, (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1904), p. 71.

The German leaders, it is true, were in some respects not entirely righteous and upright. On the whole, however, Tacitus speaks well of them except when they indulge in gambling or drunkenness.²⁸ The moral decadence of the Roman aristocrats is nowhere to be found among the German leaders.

The challenge which the Germania presents to the Romans can best be appreciated when the conduct of the barbarian is set against that of the sophisticated Roman nobility of the first century A.D. The bold effort of Augustus to raise the standard of Roman morality slips further and further into the background with each succeeding emperor and reaches its lowest point when Nero is princeps. This emperor's reign best illustrates the degeneracy of Roman society. It is during this period, 54-68 A.D., that all the immoral forces come together in equal measure. The conduct of the women at and around the court, already bad, becomes even worse; luxury is surpassed only by outrageous licentiousness; there is servility on the one hand; dishonest and dishonourable ways of making a living on the other. To all this must be added the shameful example of the emperor himself and the wave of terror later in his reign.

On the morality of the Roman nobility, we are forced to come to the same conclusion as that expressed by Trever who says:

with all due allowance for rhetoric, prejudice, pruriency, and puritanism in the contemporary writers, however, their portrayal of the seamy side of life in Roman high society of the early Empire must be accepted as substantially correct.²⁹

²⁸ Germania, 24, 2.

²⁹ Trever, op. cit., p. 445.

CHAPTER V

THE ROMAN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BARBARIAN

I have tried to indicate Tacitus' point of view in the Germania by showing that he had a high regard for most of the moral qualities which the Germans displayed. To understand why Tacitus' view of the barbarian was such a departure from the usual Roman thinking, this final chapter will consider what the Roman attitude toward barbarians and non-Roman culture was in general.

The feeling among most Romans was that the only meaningful contact with foreigners was made if a process of Romanization of the barbarian took place. Far from falling under the influence of the Romans, the Germans maintained their independence and set a standard of moral conduct which, when weighted against that of the more enlightened masters of the Mediterranean world, turned out to be, in most areas, exemplary.

The general view of the barbarian comes from people like Caesar who write about the Gauls, the Germans and the Britons; Strabo, who says a great deal about the barbarians of Western and Northwestern Europe; and Velleius Paterculus who provides a glimpse of the Roman attitude in his writings. Most of all, though, this chapter will depend on Tacitus and the hints he provides in his Germania as well as in his other works. In addition, his contemporary, Juvenal, gives a vivid description of the Roman attitude in his Satires.

Caesar's early attitude toward the Gauls was coloured by his

political ambitions. Since he was, no doubt, aiming at the goal of military prestige comparable to that of Pompey it was necessary for him to point out to his reading public at Rome the need to adopt the attitude that Gaul must be conquered at all cost. But while setting about the reduction of Gaul, Caesar necessarily came into conflict with the German barbarians who refused to stay on their side of the Rhine.

The conditions which existed in Gaul prior to Caesar's attempt to subjugate it help to reveal the exploitative attitude toward the barbarian provincials. Very often the business men and publicani followed the armies and imposed so heavy a financial burden upon the provincials that "not a single sesterce in Gaul ever changes hands without being entered in the account-books of Roman citizens."¹ If there was an appeal for help the attitude at Rome would be similar to that adopted by the officials in the province. It was an attitude which seemed to suggest that here was a backward people who could be milked dry of their resources. As for the military outlook of Caesar, he felt that the opportunity was present to bring these homines barbari et imperiti to heel and at the same time to convince his fellow Romans at home that this was the correct stand to take. Moreover, to reinforce this attitude Caesar regarded his attack on the Gauls as resulting in a definite benefit to the conquered people. As Scullard has observed, "indeed if Rome had not stepped in, the Germans would

¹ H. H. Scullard, From the Gracchi to Nero, (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1963), p.130, quoting Cicero, Pro Fronteio.

probably have done so; and they would have brought, not a higher civilization, but a retrogression to barbarism."² This is a very interesting observation and suggests that the German military strength was greater than that of the Gauls, for the Gauls had become corrupt by being too close to a higher civilization. What we learn from Tacitus in the Germania suggests, too, that some of the qualities of the Germans would have done even the Romans proud.

Caesar was aware of Gallic disunity. He also endeavoured to foment the general disunity among all barbarians with whom he was in conflict by playing off one set against the other. For example, he had a certain Diviciacus, a Gaul, say about Ariovistus, a German, that "the uncivilized barbarians had acquired a taste for residence in Gaul, with its good land and high standard of life."³ Caesar himself pictured Ariovistus an "ill-tempered, headstrong savage"⁴ whose tyranny over the Gauls he could no longer endure. He rightly saw that the barbarian Germans, once they made a habit of crossing the Rhine into Gaul, posed a serious threat to Rome. If they were able to occupy the whole of Gaul they would obviously be tempted next to cross into Italy. Tacitus himself reminds his readers that "Rome was in her six hundred and fortieth year when the alarm of the Cimbrian arms was first heard."⁵ Thus there was a threat before.

² Ibid., p. 138.

³ De Bello Gallico, I, 31, 5.

⁴ Ibid., I, 31, 12.

⁵ Germania, 37, 2.

While Caesar's main preoccupation was with the Gauls he was also much concerned about their German neighbours. He recognized that the civilization of the former was mixed, in some respects advanced, in others backward and this no doubt was why he limited his description of some of them to "homines barbari et nostrae consuetudinis imperiti."⁶ But the Germans, in Caesar's opinion, were a breed apart and this is why he viewed them as "homines feri ac barbari."⁷ He reserved this epithet feri for the northern barbarians since it was their savagery and wildness which left its mark on his mind. Compared with the Gauls, the Germans, he found "multum ab hac consuetudine differunt."⁸

Caesar emphasized this difference by the negative comments he made about the Germans:

They have no Druids to control religious observances The Germans are not agriculturalists No one possesses any definite amount of land as private property In peace time there is no central magistracy.

In summing up his description of the two races, he not only established the contrast between the two but also intimated the Roman attitude of benevolent superiority:

While the Germans still endure the same life of poverty and privation as before the Gauls, through living near the Roman Province and becoming acquainted with seaborne products, are abundantly supplied¹⁰

⁶ De Bello Gallico, IV, 22, 1.

⁷ Ibid., I, 31, 5.

⁸ Ibid., VI, 21, 1.

⁹ Gallic War, VI, 21, 2; 22, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., VI, 28.

On the whole Caesar showed a tolerant attitude towards the Gauls but distrusted and feared the Germans.

Strabo, who wrote during the Augustan era and undoubtedly came into contact with barbarians in his travels, did so under conditions obviously different from those under which Caesar laboured. His intolerant attitude toward mere differences in a way of life must have been a reflection on his Greek heritage. He saw the northern barbarians merely as men who lacked reasoned behaviour, who inhabited an uncivilized wilderness and were characteristically barbaric. Basically the attitude he adopted was snobbish:

He shows how strong was the sense of cultural superiority and cultural difference possessed by an educated Greek of the late Hellenistic world, how violent was the shudder of horror that such a man felt at the savage ferocity of the remote barbarians, the peoples who lived in huts and caves, in its extreme manifestations...He is fair when he finds some laudable characteristics, but on the whole he does not find much to admire in the temperament and personal characteristics of the northern barbarian and very little in their way of life.¹¹

Sherwin-White's comments about Strabo's attitude to these barbarians are very interesting because of the attitude, very different from this, which Tacitus adopts in the Germania.

Velleius Paterculus knew about this 'savage ferocity.' He was an officer in the relief force which came to the rescue of the Romans serving under Varus. This Roman governor with his arrogant attitude was soundly defeated and slaughtered by the Germans under Arminius in A.D. 9, causing Augustus to lose three of his best legions in the process.

¹¹ A. N. Sherwin-White, Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome, (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), p.42.

Velleius had thus come face to face with the German tribes at the height of their conflict with Rome. His observations were made under the influence of fear. This attitude of alarm was to prevail; for although the expedition under Tiberius showed the Germans that the Romans were still in control, there was no attempt to conquer Germany, which, therefore, was never Romanized and thus retained its independence. Velleius also wrote about the Pannonians and their revolt late in Augustus' reign. Although this revolt posed as serious a threat as the Varian slaughter yet his attitude toward them was different from that toward the Germans because Pannonia was already a province of Rome.

Tacitus, who wrote many years after Caesar, Strabo and Velleius seems to have adopted a much more broad-minded and tolerant attitude toward the German barbarian. Unlike Caesar and Velleius, he did not have to confront the barbarian in military campaigns nor did he have the same kind of Hellenistic complex as Strabo. What makes Tacitus' attitude so different from that of his predecessors is the fact that he finds in these uncivilized barbarians "those ancient civilized virtues of which Roman writers had long been deploring their own loss." ¹² Sherwin-White is right; Tacitus goes so far as to adopt an attitude of approval of the barbarian whose virtues as I have shown above, in Chapter IV, form a vivid contrast to the vices of contemporary Roman society. His description of some of the various tribes in the second part of the Germania demonstrates this attitude. He shows great

¹² Ibid., p. 40.

admiration for Chatti. They possess unusual mental vigour and can rise to an unusual achievement, a characteristic, notes Tacitus,¹³ which is usually reserved for Roman discipline. He also pays them a compliment when he writes: "other Germans may be seen going to battle; only the Chatti into war."¹⁴ He is full of praise, too, for the Chauci¹⁵ who are one of the noblest peoples of Germany and who maintain their greatness by their sense of justice. They possess a reputation of acknowledged superiority without resorting to aggression. He notes that the Hermunduri are on very good terms with the Romans.¹⁶ Tacitus writes about the pride which some barbarians feel in being regarded as German. "The Treveri and the Nervii even go out of their way to claim German descent. Such a glorious origin they feel should clear them of any resemblance to the nerveless Gauls."¹⁷

While Tacitus' attitude is flexible enough to allow the good qualities of the Germans to strike a responsive note, it should not be construed as meaning that he is completely uncritical of the features of German life. He disapproves of the German's drunkenness and his gambling. All the tribes are by no means like the Chatti and Chauci. The Fenni,

¹³ Germania, 30, 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30, 3.

¹⁵ Ibid., 35, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 41, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., 28,4.

for example: "are astonishingly wild and horribly poor. They have no arms, no horses, no homes They eat grass, dress in skins and sleep on the ground They care for nobody, man or god."¹⁸

Whereas Caesar's attitude to the barbarians is conditioned by the supposition that they are seeking or defending their liberty, Tacitus is limited by no such notion in his Germania. Rather he sees the Germans as a threat to Roman security and expresses his concern on more than one occasion:

We were even gratified with the spectacle of a battle. Over 6,000 Germans fell, and not by Roman swords and javelins, but---what is more splendid still---to gladden Roman eyes. Long I pray, may the Germans persist if not in loving us, at least hating one another, for fortune has no better gift for us than the disunion of our foes.¹⁹

Becoming more specific, he reminds his readers that:

The Germans routed or captured Carbo, Cassius, Aurelius Scaurus, [sic] Servilius Caepio, and Mallius Maximus, and robbed the Roman people almost at one stroke of five consular armies. From Caesar they stole Varus and his three legions. It was not without painful loss that C. Marius smote the Germans in Italy, that the deified Julius smote them in Gaul, that Drusus, Nero and Germanicus smote them in their own homes.²⁰ Then the last threats of Caius Caesar ended in a farce.

When Tacitus, in his Agricola, writes about another nation of barbarians--the Britons--his attitude is not the same when writing about the Germans. He leaves the impression that his attitude is one of scorn when he says: "Who the first inhabitants of Britain were, whether natives or immigrants remains obscure; one must remember we are

¹⁸ Ibid., 46, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 33, 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 37, 5.

dealing with barbarians."²¹ This attitude of scorn turns to one of superiority. Agricola found it necessary to spend time "on schemes of the most salutary kind. To induce a people hitherto scattered, uncivilized and therefore prone to fight, to grow pleasantly inured to peace and ease."²² Like that of some of the German barbarians, the condition of some of the barbarian Britons was capable of remedy since the sons of the leading men displayed some civilizing tendencies and responded favourably to the learning of the Latin language. The Roman culture so permeated this upper class that it even adopted the toga as its dress. If the Germans are described by Caesar, for example, as feri, the Britons, in Tacitus' view merit no more complimentary remarks than "dispersi ac rudes ... imperitos."²³ There is too, in the words of one Briton, the familiar Roman attitude of exploitation:

We gain nothing by submission except heavier burdens for willing shoulders. Once each tribe had one king, now two are clamped on us. The legate to wreck his fury on our lives, the procurator on our property.²⁴

Like Gaul, Britain was domita and this condition would naturally have influenced the Roman attitude. There was no need for Tacitus to consider whether or not they had qualities which the civilized Roman could do well to copy, because they were a conquered or tamed people.

²¹ Agricola, 11, 1.

²² Ibid., 21, 1.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 15, 1.

The Britons commanded his attention from the point of view of their fight for libertas, since they saw their condition as servitus. We read that the Britons, "freed from their repressions by the absence of the dreaded legate, began to discuss the woes of slavery."²⁵ As a result, they combined their strength under their queen Boudicca to hunt down Romans in their scattered outposts and to make attacks on forts and colony itself "in which they saw their slavery focused."²⁶ The burden of their servitus was well reflected in a speech by Calgacus, a man of outstanding valour and nobility, who is made to say:

"Whenever I consider why we are fighting and how we have reached this crisis, I have a strong sense that this day of your splendid rally may mean the dawn of liberty."²⁷

The only individual barbarian of any prominence and prestige who is taken into serious consideration by Tacitus in his Annals is Arminius. Tacitus' attitude is undoubtedly one of respect for this remarkable barbarian whom he regards as

the deliverer of Germany, one who had defied Rome, not in her early rise, as other kings and generals, but in the height of her Empire's glory; had fought, indeed, indecisive battles, yet in war remained unconquered He is still a theme among barbarous nations.²⁸

In the Histories, the revolt of Civilis and his Batavi takes up a considerable number of chapters.²⁹ This is a measure of the importance

25 Ibid., 15, 6.

26 Ibid., 16, 1.

27 Ibid., 30, 1.

28 Annals, II, 88, 3.

29 Histories, IV, 12 and following.

of this barbarian leader and his tribe, and these chapters help to give some idea of Tacitus' attitude towards him. If he is not in the same class as Arminius, Tacitus nevertheless realizes that he is a force to be reckoned with since "he was, indeed, far cleverer than most barbarians."³⁰ In spite of Civilis' 'sollertia', Tacitus throughout his description in the Histories, pictures him as a double-dealer working not only underhandedly but also in his own interest and this, therefore, colours the historian's attitude towards him. He is also made to sound quite belligerent in his speech before the uprising.³¹

On the other hand, Tacitus, puts Civilis in the worst possible light whenever he gets an opportunity. Roman readers are reminded of his barbarism; "His speech was received with great approval, and he at once bound them all to union using the barbarous ceremonies and strange oaths of his country."³² Tacitus reinforces this attitude on a later occasion:

When Civilis first took up arms against Rome he made a vow, such as is common with barbarians, to let his ruddled hair grow wild; now that he had at last accomplished the destruction of the legions he had it cut. It is said that he put up some of the prisoners for his little son to shoot in sport with javelins and arrows.³³

This is evidence of what Tacitus calls his 'saevitia ingenii'.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., IV, 13, 6.

³¹ Ibid., IV, 14, 1.

³² Ibid., IV, 15, 1.

³³ Ibid., IV, 61, 1.

³⁴ Ibid., IV, 63, 3.

If, in the Annals, Tacitus is so impressed with Arminius that he positively admires the barbarian leader and if, in the Agricola, his concern with the theme of libertas prevents him from expressing a strong antipathy to the Britons, in the Histories, he shows, as Sherwin-White remarks:

more detachment than elsewhere. A more critical portrait is the result. The German appears as an untrustworthy, undisciplined character, capable of occasional savagery and other behaviour abhorrent to a civilized man. But there is no strong feeling of disapproval.....³⁵

Sherwin-White's remarks tend to leave the impression that in the Germania, for example, Tacitus is so involved in his subject that there is not much room for detachment in his attitude toward the Germans. But this is not altogether so. Tacitus notes the good points in the barbarian's favour because he wants to make his case about Roman degeneracy as strong as possible. However he does not overlook the barbarian's weaknesses. He is quite critical of them. Nor does he put the several tribes he discusses in the later chapters of the work in the same category. He tries to describe each on its own merits.

In spite of the feeling of superiority which the Romans showed over, say, the Gauls and the Britons, there was usually present an attitude of tolerance to these same peoples. The emperor Claudius, in a clear statement of policy before the senate, outlining the attitude to be adopted toward non-Romans, had so made his point that "the Emperor's speech was followed by a decree of the Senate, and the

³⁵ Sherwin-White, op. cit., p. 48.

Aedui were the first to obtain the right of becoming senators at Rome."³⁶ Thus the once trousered and long-haired Gauls became togaed senators. The Britons also had adopted the toga. Nowhere do we find the Romans making political and cultural overtures of these kinds to the Germans. The reason for this is simple. The chief feeling of the Romans in their dealing with the Germans was one of fear, based on ignorance. There was little or no opportunity for making Roman influence felt among them.

As far as physical characteristics of the barbarian are concerned, the attitude of the Roman toward him, whether he was a German, Briton or Gaul, turned from one of scorn to fear. The Roman was sensitive to his great and animal size. "The German," Tacitus tells us, "grew up to that strength of limb and size of body which excite our admiration."³⁷ Elsewhere he tells us about their "magna corpora et tantum ad impetum valida"³⁸ and their "procera membra."³⁹ In the Agricola some Britons are characterised by the remark that "magni artus Germanicam originem adseverant."⁴⁰ Caesar, too, takes note of their size and records the panic caused in his army by the "ingens magnitudo corporum"⁴¹ of the men of Ariovistus.

36 Annals, XI, 25, 1.

37 Germania, 20, 1.

38 Ibid., 4, 2.

39 Annals, I, 64, 3.

40 Agricola, 11, 2.

41 De Bello Gallico, II, 39, 1.

The Roman attitude toward the northern barbarian seems to have been focused on details of character, customs and physical attributes. However the real feeling towards aliens is well expressed by those senators who tried to block the efforts of foreigners seeking the privilege of obtaining public office at Rome. "There was much talk of every kind on the subject," said Tacitus, "and it was argued before the Emperor with vehement opposition."⁴² This is a reflection on the attitude of Romans towards the extension even of citizenship and the historian himself speaks with some disgust when he says, "Romana civitas olim data, cum id rarum nec nisi virtuti pretium esset."⁴³

This attitude of disdain for aliens or non-Romans is perhaps best illustrated by Juvenal, whose anti-barbarism bias is most often directed against those from the eastern part of the Empire. The satirist reserves his harshest words for the Greeks and in one of his more celebrated passages he writes:

non possum ferre, Quirites,
Graecam urbem; quamvis quota portio faecis Aethaei?
iam pridem Syrus in Tiberim defluxit Orontes.⁴⁴

His attitude of bitter disgust is heightened by the effective use of the metaphor - Syrian Orontes has long since flowed into the Tiber. What really irks Juvenal is the fact that the Graeculus esuriens has not only immigrated to Rome - that was bad enough - but he has

⁴² Annals, II, 23, 3.

⁴³ Ibid., III, 40, 2.

⁴⁴ Juvenal, Satires, I, 3, vv. 60-62.

brought with him, for example, his degenerate morals:

Besides all this, there is nothing sacred to his lusts; not the matron of the family, nor the maiden daughter, nor the as yet unbearded son-in-law to be, nor even the as yet unpolluted son: if none of these be there, he will debauch the grandmother.⁴⁵

In addition, the Greek is a man of many parts. He is a teacher, a soothsayer, a physician - to mention only a few of the usual occupations of Greeks in Rome. He is ready to accommodate himself to any circumstance and to tackle any job and in so doing, supplants the native Roman. In fact

omnia novit
Graeculus esuriens; in caelum, iusseris, ibit.⁴⁶

Greeks are not the only foreigners infiltrating Rome. The Jews are making their presence felt - a presence which, as far as Juvenal is concerned is undesirable:

Here, where Numa used to make assignations with his nocturnal mistress, the grove of the once-hallowed fountain and the temples are in our days let out to Jews, whose whole furniture is a basket and bundle of hay. For every single tree is bidden to pay a rent to the people, and the Camenae having been ejected, the wood is one mass of beggars.⁴⁷

What causes concern to Juvenal, therefore, is the fact that a city once full of the proud tradition derived from its history and the character of its people should lose all of its religious and sacred character and be let out to a group of foreign squatters. Nothing else matters except the revenue that comes in from the real estate. This destruction

⁴⁵ Juvenal, Satires, 1, 3, 110 and following, trans. G.G.Ramsay, Loeb Classical Library edition, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1918 and later).

⁴⁶ Satires, 1, 3, 77-78.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12-18.

of Roman traditions by foreigners is allowed to take place right in the heart of the city.

Juvenal, even though his writing is satirical, nevertheless reveals one of the most bitter of Roman prejudices - contempt for foreigners. The Jews, a devoutly religious minority, brought their religion with them. Since their aloofness meant that they would not readily be assimilated, their religious activity was a matter for concern. The Greeks brought with them their philosophy. Juvenal's sarcastic comment sums up the Roman attitude:

et quoniam coepit Graecorum mentio, transi
gymnasia.⁴⁸

The Greek schools of philosophy seem to have had an influence on no less distinguished a Roman than Agricola, but Roman mistrust did not allow him to benefit from it. He was educated at Marseilles,

a place where Greek refinement and provincial puritanism meet in a happy blend. I remember how he would often tell us that in his early manhood he was tempted to drink deeper of philosophy than a Roman and a senator properly may, but that his mother, in her wisdom, damped the fire of his passion.⁴⁹

The attitude toward slaves of an alien race or culture is the same as that toward the Greeks and Jews. Indeed in advocating the ultimate punishment of a whole group of slaves for the murder of their master, Tacitus puts these remarks in the mouth of one Gaius Cassius; "But now that we have in our households nations with different customs from our own, with a foreign worship or none at all, it is only by

⁴⁸ Ibid., 114-115.

⁴⁹ Agricola, 4, 3.

terror you can hold such a motley rabble." 50

The treatment of the Christians after the great fire at Rome in A.D. 64, epitomizes quite succinctly the attitude of the Romans towards a foreign religion. Tacitus says quite plainly that "to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for its abominations."⁵¹ What he calls exitiabilis superstitio had once more broken out "not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular." ⁵² The historian reveals his own attitude when he calls them "criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment."⁵³ It is extremely interesting that Tacitus should adopt this attitude toward people who were, after all, Roman citizens and yet we find that his attitude in the Germania, where he is describing barbarians, is far more respectful and approving.

The Romans generally regarded themselves as a superior race and held all barbarians in contempt. On occasion a degree of tolerance makes an appearance in their attitude. Tacitus himself despises the Britons and the Gauls but his treatment of the Germans is different. For the most part he speaks approvingly of them, even though he occasionally

50 Annals, XIV, 44, 5.

51 Ibid., XV, 44, 3.

52 Ibid., XV, 44, 4.

53 Ibid., XV, 44, 8.

frowns upon some of their habits and finds it necessary to explain that while he admires certain German tribes, he finds others far from civilized. Various other writers shape their attitude according to their own experiences. One like Juvenal reflects the Roman's attitude to foreigners, civilized though they are. Those Roman citizens who exhibit a foreign culture or practice an alien religion turn out to be as abhorrent to the native-born Romans as the barbarian's immense size which creates a feeling of awe and fear.

CONCLUSION

Considering that he does not have first hand knowledge of the Germans Tacitus presents a great amount of information about them in his Germania. There is general agreement that he consulted literary sources chief of which was the work of Posidonius and the Bella Germaniae of Pliny. The 10th book of Livy which contained some information on Germany would also have been familiar to Tacitus. In addition Caesar's De Bello Gallico was no doubt known and used by him.

There has not been, however, much agreement over the Germania's purpose. My own conclusion is that two specific purposes come to the fore. One is to establish, by comparison, the moral superiority of these particular barbarians over the Romans and the other is to set down a political proposal. Writers like Furneaux and Anderson and more recently Goodyear who disagree with this conclusion consider that the Germania simply provides information about the habits and customs of a certain people.

There is more to the Germania than a mere disinterested accumulation of facts. Tacitus is full of praise and admiration for most of the qualities he discovers in the German barbarians. He is also aware of the degeneracy of Roman society and mentions examples of it in his own work, the Annals. His contemporaries, notably Juvenal, also strike out at the shortcomings of that society. In the Germania the satirical references to Rome's moral decline are unmistakable. In the Annals the historian himself announces his interest in and concern for ethics and morality. There are grounds, therefore, for supposing that Tacitus

has in mind a moral contrast between the Romans and the Germans. He sees in these particular barbarians virtues which Rome's ancestors possessed. What he witnesses among his own fellow Romans are vices. This is not to say that he is blind to the weaknesses of the Germans. He is critical of these weaknesses. But he sees more among the Germans to praise than to criticize, especially when he reflects upon the higher civilization which Rome is supposed to enjoy. It is not satisfactory, therefore, to minimize or even reject the moral comparison implied in the Germania. Even though Tacitus confines the description in his Annals to the conduct of some emperors and the ruling upper class, the point of his contrast between a barbarian and a civilized society is still valid, since it is that class in Rome that really matters.

The political proposal which Tacitus intends is a necessary corollary to the moral comparison of the two societies. The Germania is clearly divided into two parts. Tacitus reinforces the point made in the first part of his monograph with a description, in the second part, of the various tribes of Germany. Tacitus knows that moral superiority is the source of military success. Rome's ancestors provided examples of this. Some of the tribes in Germany also illustrate this point. These German barbarians are proving more difficult to conquer than any of Rome's other enemies. What is more they have been inflicting heavy losses on the Romans. The objection to the political proposal as one of the purposes of the Germania is that Tacitus nowhere makes such a proposal directly and explicitly. What he does is to draw attention to the military strength of these barbarians. Since Tacitus was Rome's leading historian, any emperor and his

advisers would pay some attention to Tacitus' remarks even if they were not addressed specifically to them. Trajan's military policy towards Germany bears this out. It is apparent that the contents of the Germania are topical and bear a relevance to Rome's immediate situation. To fail to see that Tacitus implies a political proposal in the Germania is to overlook the menace of the Germans themselves. He even goes so far as to predict the fall of the Empire at their hands if they are not checked, but he is hopeful of some change in strategy under the emperor Trajan.

Tacitus' considerable and thorough research indicates that the Germania was to be a monograph of some importance. Rather than have the description of the Germans take a subordinate position in a larger work, Tacitus has devoted all of his attention to them in a completely new genre. Accustomed in the past to hold all barbarians and non-Roman cultures in contempt, the Romans are challenged to pay attention to the Germans whose moral standards, though not without their blemishes, can serve as a model for them and whose military strength they have experienced. Thus Tacitus endeavours to force the Romans as a whole to the realization that they must adopt a new and different attitude to these particular barbarians.

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