



2006

## Potior utroque Vespasianus: Vespasian and His Predecessors in Tacitus's Histories

Cynthia Damon

University of Pennsylvania, [cdamon@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:cdamon@sas.upenn.edu)

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### Recommended Citation

Damon, C. (2006). Potior utroque Vespasianus: Vespasian and His Predecessors in Tacitus's Histories. *Arethusa*, 39 (2), 245-279. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/are.2006.0012>

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## Potior utroque Vespasianus: Vespasian and His Predecessors in Tacitus's Histories

### Abstract

The Histories are threaded through with incidents that allow a comparison between two or more *principes*. Readers need to be alert to such passages, for Vespasian was preceded by three emperors who got as far as he did but failed to keep their footing there. In essence, Tacitus tells the stories of fall (Galba, Otho, Vitellius) and rise (Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian) three times each, and uses the failures of Vespasian's predecessors to help explain Vespasian's success. Given what remains of the Histories (the last two weeks of Galba, the three months of Otho's principate, Vitellius's uprising against Galba, his defeat of Otho, and his eight-month principate, the Flavian uprising against and defeat of Vitellius, and Vespasian's first eight or so months as princeps in absentia), we can see only how Vespasian succeeded in establishing himself. As to how far, according to Tacitus, success carried into the rest of his decade in power, we are in the dark.

In saying that Tacitus creates a portrait of success for Vespasian, I do not mean to imply that his account of that emperor's principate is wholly positive. Indeed, some of the parallel episodes considered below suggest that the civil war context in which Vespasian came to power is characterized by a certain number of constant negatives, such as the excessive influence of imperial freedmen and the fickleness of the Roman populace, and even by deterioration over time, as is illustrated by the decline in military discipline and the increase in senatorial servility. My point is that the presence of parallel incidents in two or more principates enables, and indeed encourages, the reader to measure one princeps against the others and that Vespasian emerges from such an assessment with more to his credit than any of his predecessors. The first such comparative assessment is present in the text: public opinion in Rome in 69, says Tacitus, considered Vespasian better than either Otho or Vitellius (1.50.4: *potior utroque Vespasianus*). Better, but not necessarily good.

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**POTIOR UTROQUE VESPASIANUS:  
VESPASIAN AND HIS PREDECESSORS  
IN TACITUS'S HISTORIES**

CYNTHIA DAMON

The *Histories* are threaded through with incidents that allow a comparison between two or more *principes*. Readers need to be alert to such passages, for Vespasian was preceded by three emperors who got as far as he did but failed to keep their footing there. In essence, Tacitus tells the stories of fall (Galba, Otho, Vitellius) and rise (Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian) three times each, and uses the failures of Vespasian's predecessors to help explain Vespasian's success. Given what remains of the *Histories* (the last two weeks of Galba, the three months of Otho's principate, Vitellius's uprising against Galba, his defeat of Otho, and his eight-month principate, the Flavian uprising against and defeat of Vitellius, and Vespasian's first eight or so months as *princeps in absentia*), we can see only how Vespasian succeeded in establishing himself. As to how far, according to Tacitus, success carried into the rest of his decade in power, we are in the dark.

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any of his predecessors.<sup>1</sup> The first such comparative assessment is present in the text: public opinion in Rome in 69, says Tacitus, considered Vespasian better than either Otho or Vitellius (1.50.4: *potior utroque Vespasianus*).<sup>2</sup> Better, but not necessarily good.<sup>3</sup>

## I. HONORING FREEDMEN

I begin with three passages on imperial freedmen awarded extraordinary honors by their emperors. As is well known, Tacitus expresses vehement and repeated disapproval of the prominence of freedmen in public affairs during the civil war; in his eyes, there was an inverse relation between the influence of freedmen and the *libertas* of the traditional ruling classes (see, e.g., 1.76.3, 2.95.2–3). The passages considered here concern the award of equestrian status to freedmen of Galba, Vitellius, and Vespasian.<sup>4</sup> These incidents are not major public events, nor are they the stuff of high drama or standard historiographical topoi, but in Tacitus’s analysis, they nonetheless have historical significance.

Galba’s freedman was called Icelus, at least before the “grant of rings” that made him an *eques Romanus* and gave him the “equestrian name” Marcianus instead. Tacitus introduces him as one of the three most influential men under Galba; his peers are a consul and the commander of the praetorian guard: “nec minor gratia Icelo Galbae liberto, quem anulus donatum equestri nomine Marcianum vocitabant” (1.13.1: “Equally influential was Galba’s freedman Icelus, whom they kept calling by the equestrian name Marcianus after he had been presented with rings”).<sup>5</sup> Since equestrian

1 The list of episodes considered in the present paper is exemplary, not exhaustive; for more, see Appendix 3 of my commentary on *Histories* 1. This paper refrains entirely from consideration of other significant contrasts, such as that between Vespasian and his sons.

2 Galba is absent from this assessment because he is already dead. Public opinion is comparing the three current claimants to imperial power: Otho in Rome, Vitellius in Germany, and Vespasian in the east.

Except where otherwise noted, the text of the *Histories* is Heubner’s (Stuttgart 1978); translations are my own.

3 For analysis of the negatives in the portrait of Vespasian, including his superstitions and the character of his sons, see Ash 1999a.127–46.

4 On Otho’s freedmen, see note 11 below.

5 The right to wear gold rings marks membership in the *ordo equester*. “Marcianus” proclaims affiliation with the *gens Marcia*, but does not in itself indicate equestrian status; rather, when substituted for “Icelus” (Plut. *Galba* 7.3), it removes the allusion to a servile or non-citizen past that could be read into a foreign cognomen. Tacitus’s use of the fre-

status was proof of free birth going back (at least) two generations, the new rank effectively erased Icelus's servile past. Tacitus restores it in the man's death notice by using his servile name and by remarking that Icelus, "as a freedman," is executed openly (1.46.5: "in Marcianum Icelum ut in libertum palam animadversum").<sup>6</sup>

The fiction of free birth by imperial fiat appears next under Vitellius on behalf of his freedman Asiaticus. The setting is Vitellius's camp in Germany. He and the rear guard of his army are en route to Rome and have just learned that the first wave of Vitellian forces has won the war against Otho (2.57.2):

vocata contione virtutem militum laudibus cumulat. postulante exercitu ut libertum suum Asiaticum equestri dignitate donaret, inhonestam adulationem compescit; dein, mobilitate ingenii, quod palam abnuerat, inter secreta convivii largitur, honoravitque Asiaticum anulis.

Having summoned an assembly, he heaps his soldiers with praises. When the army requests that he award equestrian rank to his freedman Asiaticus, he restrains the disgraceful flattery. But later, such was the changeableness of his character, he bestowed in the privacy of a party what he had publicly denied, and honored Asiaticus with rings.

Once again, the elevation in rank is referred to by one of its visible manifestations, the (gold) rings that a man of equestrian rank had the right to wear and a freedman did not. This may simply be a convenient shorthand for the man's new status, but given Tacitus's insistence on distinguishing between the superficial and the significant, it is worth noting that, in the

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quantitative *vocitabant* ("they kept calling") in place of the simple *vocant*, which he uses in such expressions elsewhere (i.e., with an unspecified third-person plural subject: cf. *Agr.* 10.4: *insulas quas Orcadas vocant*, "islands that they call 'Orcades'"; *Ann.* 3.43.2: *cruppellarios vocant*, "they call [them] 'cruppellarii'"), may point to the artificiality of the name. In its other two occurrences in Tacitus, the verb has a sarcastic edge: *Dial.* 17.6 (on improper labeling): "ne . . . antiquos ac veteres vocitetis," "unless . . . you would call 'ancient' and 'old'" and *Hist.* 5.2.1 (on an unconvincing etymology): "accolas Idaeos . . . Iudaeos vocitari," "the inhabitants of [Mt.] Ida . . . get called 'Iudaei.'"   
 6 In restoring the man's servile name at 1.46.5, Tacitus is pre-empted by his character Otho (1.37.5: *iam plus rapuit Icelus*).

next breath, he not only ignores Asiaticus's new rank, but returns him to his pre-emancipation state: he was "foedum mancipium et malis artibus ambitiosum" (2.57.2: "a slave of foul character who sought to rise by his vices"),<sup>7</sup> as he does in reporting Asiaticus's eventual execution: "Asiaticus (is enim libertus) malam potentiam servili supplicio expiavit" (4.11.3: "Asiaticus, since he was a freedman, atoned for his wicked power by [suffering] a form of punishment used for slaves").<sup>8</sup> The scene in Vitellius's camp is strikingly incongruous: Vitellius praises the *virtus* of his soldiers; the soldiers request an honor for an imperial freedman. Vitellius's soldiers have just won him the throne, but what has Asiaticus done for the Vitellian cause? Tacitus provides no information.<sup>9</sup> Presumably the soldiers are trying as hard to please Vitellius as he is to please them, but in our ignorance of their reasoning, we are left with the assessment in the text: this is *inhonesta adulatio*.

*Adulatio* is also the keynote of the brief scene in which equestrian rank is given to Vespasian's freedman Hormus (4.39). The award was made at the first meeting of the senate in the year 70. Vespasian is still absent from Rome, but senators are eager to honor him and his. Tacitus reports a few items of business. First, a praetorship is taken away from an official who acted irresponsibly. Second, "equestrian rank is given to Hormus." Third, Vespasian's son Domitian assumes a praetorship (4.39.1–2). Once again, the juxtaposition with business not normally associated with freedmen has shock value: how is the rank of a freedman, however influential, comparable to the selection of magistrates of the Roman state? Hormus's influence had been documented by Tacitus in the previous book: "is quoque inter duces habebatur" (3.12.3: "he, too, was counted among the leaders"). As had his thoroughly disreputable character. According to sources available to Tacitus, either Hormus or Antonius Primus (a legionary legate and the most active of Vespasian's generals—on whom see below) was respon-

7 The translation "who sought to rise by his vices" is Fyfe's.

8 Namely, crucifixion; cf. the punishment of a slave who, for a timely betrayal, had been elevated by Vitellius to equestrian rank: he was "affixed to a cross in the very rings that he used to wear by Vitellius's gift" (4.3.2: "patibulo adfixus in isdem anulis, quos acceptos a Vitellio gestabat"; see 3.77.1 for the betrayal). An abstract expression similar to that in our passage was used earlier apropos of a slave: 2.72.2: "sumptum de eo supplicium in servilem modum," "Punishment was exacted in the slave mode."

9 In his comment on Asiaticus at 2.95.2–3, Tacitus simply echoes the negative generalization given here. Suetonius, though he reports many details about Asiaticus's earlier life, says no more than Tacitus about his actions under Vitellius (*Vitellius* 12).

sible for the sack of Cremona, a city on Italian soil (3.28.1): “Hormine id ingenium, ut Messalla tradit, an potior auctor sit C. Plinius, qui Antonium incusat, haud facile discreverim, nisi quod neque Antonius neque Hormus a fama vitaque sua quamvis pessimo flagitio degeneraverit,” “Whether the plan was Hormus’s, as Messalla reports, or whether the more authoritative account is that of (the elder) Pliny, who accuses Antonius (Primus), I’d find it difficult to say, but in a crime however awful, neither Primus nor Hormus failed to live down to his reputation and record.”

As we saw above with Icelus, the influential freedman is paired with a man whose title to rank and status is based on traditional criteria, here military command and military victory. And on the first day of the new year, a man capable of “a crime however awful” is elevated by the senate to equestrian rank, apparently without any prompting on the part of Vespasian and certainly without his presence.<sup>10</sup> What a mere six months earlier had seemed *inhonesta adulatio* even to Tacitus’s not-very-scrupulous Vitellius was now an unblushing senatorial decree. Tacitus does not mention Hormus’s gold rings; so debased has the coinage of flattery become, perhaps, that there is no longer any difference between form and substance.

The passages on these pseudo-equestrians, these freedmen in borrowed finery, are clearly linked by content and tone.<sup>11</sup> They constitute one strand of Tacitus’s broader fabric of comment on publicly active freedmen.<sup>12</sup> That freedmen should function as “part of the state” (1.76.3: “partem se rei publicae faciunt”) is, in his eyes, always reprehensible, but calls for particular scorn when it coincides with the rising tide of flattery. These passages

10 Nothing is known about Hormus’s subsequent activities or fate.

11 The presence of freedmen-turned-equestrians in Tacitus’s account of the reigns of three of the four emperors of 69 makes one look again for influential freedmen in his account of Otho’s short reign (15 January–14 April). At 1.25.1, the freedman Onomastus is put in charge of “the future crime,” i.e., the assassination of Galba. At 1.87.2, the freedman Moschus is in charge of Otho’s fleet and has the additional task of “keeping an eye on the loyalty of better-born men.” At 2.53.3, a freedman is the bearer of Otho’s *suprema mandata*. All remain freedmen throughout.

12 See, in addition to the passages mentioned above, 5.9.3: “ius regium servili ingenio exercuit,” “He exercised a king’s authority with a slave’s character”; *Agr.* 12.60.4: “cum Claudius libertos . . . sibi que et legibus adaequaverit,” “When Claudius put his freedmen . . . on a par with himself and the laws”; 13.2.2: *modum liberti egressus*, “having departed from the manner of a freedman”; 14.39.2: “dux et exercitus . . . servitiis oboedirent,” “Commander and army . . . obeyed slaves.” Compare Tacitus’s admiration for the absence of publicly active *liberti* in Germany: “liberti non multum supra servos sunt, raro aliquod momentum in domo, numquam in civitate,” “Freedmen are not much above slaves, are rarely of any weight in the household, never in the state” (*Germ.* 25.2).

also supply characteristic details for the portraits of the emperors involved. Galba's award to Icelus looks like the gift of a *patronus*, a supplement to the award of freedom that made Icelus his freedman. Vitellius's response to the suggestion of his soldiers is typically weak, first a no, then a sneaking yes. Vespasian is not implicated in the award to Hormus; here as elsewhere, the regrettable events associated with the beginning of Vespasian's principate happen without his knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

For Tacitus, the narrative value of these freedmen lies in what their prominence says about their world. He shows, with some asperity, that they were honored as men of influence, but says almost nothing about how they used their influence.<sup>14</sup> They are present in the narrative as symptoms, so to speak, of the three principates under which they flourished rather than as protagonists of important events. Tacitus's diagnosis of the ills of 69 is, as we will see, rich in comparisons. No one of the emperors looks better or worse in this particular comparison. The growing influence of imperial freedmen reflects (in Tacitus's view) a confusion in social values that did not begin to find a remedy until the political turmoil died down (cf. *Ann.* 3.55.4 on Vespasian's positive influence). But most of the comparisons examined in this paper will allow a relative assessment, albeit sometimes only tentative.

## II. PREVENTING CRIME

The problem of what to do with one's rival's supporters faced all three of the emperors who came to power in 69. Both Otho and Vitellius found, early on, that their own supporters, though willing to kill for them, were reluctant to exercise mercy on their behalf: "apud saevientes occidere palam, ignoscere non nisi fallendo licebat" (1.58.2: "in the presence of ravening men, open murder was permissible, but one could forgive only by deceit"). This is said apropos of Vitellius, who wanted to preserve Julius Burdo, Galba's commander of the Rhine fleet, and was only able to do so by

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13 Cf. Levick 1999.53: "The exorbitant financial demands of the Flavians had been put down to Mucianus. Certainly Vespasian could not be held responsible for the sack of Cremona. His hands were clean, although ultimate power rested with him. His strategy, to win Italy with a minimum of bloodshed, had been abandoned by Primus; post-war cruelties were Mucianus'."

14 The only decision credited to any of these men is Hormus's freeing of the fleet commander who betrayed Vitellius for Vespasian (3.12.3).



putting him in prison. Over time, the ravaging soldiers forgot about Burdo and he was released (1.58.2). Much the same predicament had faced Otho in Rome, when his soldiers brought Marius Celsus, a Galban loyalist, before him and expected the gratification of an execution (1.45.2):

Marium Celsum, consulem designatum et Galbae usque in extremas res amicum fidumque, ad supplicium exposculabant, industriae eius innocentiaeque quasi malis artibus infensi. caedis et praedarum initium et optimo cuique perniciem quaeri apparebat, sed Othoni nondum auctoritas inerat ad prohibendum scelus; iubere iam poterat. ita simulatione irae vinciri iussum et maiores poenas daturum affirmans praesenti exitio subtraxit.

Marius Celsus, consul designate, Galba's loyal friend to the bitter end, they demanded for punishment, hating his energy and innocence like evil qualities. What they were looking for, clearly, was an opening for blood, plunder, and death to all good men. Otho did not yet have the authority to prevent crime, though he could order it. So, acting angry, he ordered Celsus bound, promising that he would be punished even more severely; by so doing, he saved him from immediate execution.

Again the emperor thwarted the bloodlust of his supporters by imprisoning the man he wanted to save, and again Tacitus uses an epigram ("nondum auctoritas inerat ad prohibendum scelus; iubere iam poterat") to capture the fact that power achieved by violence remains, at least for a time, violent.<sup>15</sup>

The next incident in the series occurs in the Flavian army led by Antonius Primus when Vespasian and his other key supporter Mucianus are still far from Italy. Primus's army, which is relatively small, has occupied Verona, but is worried about facing the Vitellians before the arrival of the rest

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15 Rhiannon Ash points out to me that this epigram is reformulated at 4.1.3 with reference to Flavian generals: "duces partium accen<den>do civili bello acres, temperandae victoriae impares," "The party leaders, vigorous in kindling civil war, were incapable of tempering victory." Vespasian himself is once again *hors-concours*.

of the Danube legions. When troops are spotted outside the walls, treachery is suspected. Tampius Flavianus, who despite his family ties with Vitellius (3.4.1: *adfinitas cum Vitellio*) is the pro-Vespasian governor of Pannonia and is with Primus in Verona, is the target of the soldiers' anger; there were calls for his execution (3.10.2: *ad exitium poscebatur*). Neither Flavianus's pleas nor those of a fellow consular commander have any effect, and even Primus, whom Tacitus explicitly credits here with eloquence and authority (3.10.3), is unable to stop the escalation of violence. Like Vitellius and Otho before him, he brings out the chains (3.10.3): "ubi crudescere seditio et a conviciis ac probris ad tela et manus transibant, inici catenas Flaviano iubet. sensit ludibrium miles, disiectisque qui tribunal tuebantur extrema vis parabatur," "When the mutiny had gained strength and the soldiers were passing from taunts and insults to weapons and violence, (Primus) orders Flavianus put in chains. The soldiers understood the trick, whereupon the commander's guard was scattered and they prepared to kill him."

This time the chain ruse fails. Primus only succeeds in preventing murder by exposing himself to the soldiers' swords (3.10.4).<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, the longer the civil war lasts, the weaker military discipline becomes. What is surprising is that Vespasian, even absent, is able to protect the object of the soldiers' wrath. Flavianus leaves Verona that night and is freed from danger by the arrival of letters from Vespasian (3.10.4: "profectus eadem nocte Flavianus obvius Vespasiani litteris discrimini exemptus est"). Of course, it also helped that Flavianus put some distance between himself and the men clamoring for his execution. But as Tacitus tells it, Vespasian seems to possess the kind of authority that does not need to resort to *ludibria*, "tricks."<sup>17</sup>

Vitellius's eventual failure as emperor is signaled by a vignette

16 A similar incident is related in the next chapter. When the soldiers turn their anger from Flavianus to the consular who had tried to defend him (Saturninus), his fellow officers accomplish nothing (3.11.3): "nec tam Primus et Aponianus et Messalla, quamquam omni modo nisi, eripuerunt Saturninum, quam obscuritas latebrarum, quibus occultabatur, vacantium forte balnearum fornacibus abditus," "It was not Primus and Aponianus and Messalla who rescued Saturninus, although they tried everything, but the obscurity of the hiding place in which he was concealed, having stowed himself in the furnace of a bath complex that happened to be out of service." Not even Primus can master the soldiers now.

17 Other officers threatened by their men also take refuge with Vespasian and his agents: a legionary legate who feared assassination (2.85.1–2; cf. 4.40.2), a camp prefect disliked for his harsh discipline (3.7.2), the Vitellian commander who handed the Ravenna fleet over to the Flavians (3.12.3), and the commander of Vitellius's land forces in Italy, who declared for Vespasian before the second battle of Bedriacum (3.31.4). All are preserved.

that benefits from comparison with those we have just examined. Late in 69, as the first Flavian army is approaching Rome, the Vitellian party momentarily regains the upper hand in the capital when the Capitolium, on which Flavian partisans have taken refuge, burns. The leader of the partisans, Vespasian's brother Flavius Sabinus, is captured and brought before Vitellius by soldiers who continue to support his lost cause. They want Sabinus's blood. Vitellius, however, wants to keep him safe so as to have a claim on Vespasian (cf. 3.67.1: "cura . . . ne pertinacibus armis minus placabilem victorem reliqueret coniugi ac liberis," "he was concerned lest by obstinate military resistance he leave a less easily appeased victor for his wife and children") (3.74.2):

Sabinus et Atticus onerati catenis et ad Vitellium ducti nequaquam infesto sermone vultuque excipiuntur, frementibus qui ius caedis et praemia navatae operae petebant.

Sabinus and Atticus [a pro-Flavian consul; see 3.73.2], weighted down by chains and brought before Vitellius, are received with an utter lack of hostility in his words and mien, to the noisy objections of men who were after the right to kill and the rewards of a task well done.

Once again, we have contrasting aims on the part of emperor and soldiers, but this time the emperor fails to obtain his ends: Sabinus is killed (3.74.2; for Atticus's survival, see 3.75.3). As Tacitus had put it a few chapters earlier in language that echoed the epigrams on the emperors' incomplete *auctoritas*, Vitellius was "unable to command or to forbid" (3.70.4: "neque iubendi neque vetandi potens").<sup>18</sup> Even the precarious control exercised by Otho and Vitellius himself earlier is now beyond him: "He was no longer an emperor, but only an excuse for war" (3.70.4: "non iam imperator sed tantum belli causa erat").

The final episode in this series pertains to the fate of Vitellius once the Flavian victory seems sure. Vitellius's supporters, despairing of

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18 Atticus escapes with his life thanks to a stratagem of his own: he offers himself as scapegoat for the burning of the Capitolium: it was his fault, he said, not that of Vitellius's troops (3.75.3).

a negotiated outcome that will leave their emperor safe, continue to fight even when they know defeat to be inevitable. Their position is stated in phrasing by now familiar: “nedum Primus ac Fuscus et specimen partium Mucianus ullam in Vitellium nisi occidendi licentiam habeant” (3.66.3: “much less would Antonius [Primus] and [Cornelius] Fuscus and that Flavian poster boy Mucianus have any power with respect to Vitellius except to kill him”). Vespasian’s generals will have power, yes, but power to kill, not power to preserve.

The comparable epigrams on Otho and Vitellius, however, were the author’s, whereas this, as is clear from the tone even of this brief excerpt of their tirade, is the opinion of desperate Vitellians. Tacitus himself has given the reader some grounds for thinking it unduly pessimistic. Three chapters earlier, he had shown Flavian generals offering Vitellius a secure retirement in Campania (3.63.2). Vitellius, at least, was inclined to trust their offer, merely quibbling about the number of his future attendants and the choice of beach. Attendants and beaches were not, of course, in Vitellius’s future, but as Tacitus tells it, his death in Flavian hands was not due to the fact that the new emperor and his generals had license only to kill. They are, in fact, all absent from the scene: Vespasian in Alexandria, the commanders in Rome simply unaccounted for; the highest ranking officer mentioned in the narrative of the capture, public humiliation, and execution of Vitellius (3.84.4–85) is a praetorian tribune. The violence manifested by the soldiers and the urban mob on this occasion is not measured against the power of the Flavian high command. Though we saw earlier that the absent Vespasian succeeded in shielding a man from unruly troops, this final incident leaves the question of how far the new regime could control its forces quite open.

The passages so far examined do a better job of illustrating civil war conditions—unusual and, to Tacitus, distasteful access to rank and status for imperial freedmen, the corruption of military discipline—than of illustrating success for Vespasian where his predecessors failed. One might go so far as to say that Tacitus excuses the absent Vespasian from evaluation on these two topics.<sup>19</sup> The next sets of passages, however, place Vespasian more firmly within the year’s series of emperors, showing some of the grounds for Tacitus’s apparent assent to the public’s verdict *potior utroque Vespasianus*. In the first set of passages (section III, below), as in that just

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19 Cf. note 15 above.

discussed, Vespasian is compared to Otho and Vitellius. In the second (section IV), a contrast exists with all three predecessors.

### III. MEETING THE DEMANDS OF THE JOB

In the passages to be considered in this section, the role of the emperor himself comes more clearly into focus. On the criterion of meeting the demands of the emperor's job, Vitellius scores low (1.62.2): "torpebat Vitellius et fortunam principatus inertis luxu ac prodigijs epulis praesumebat, medio diei temulentus et sagina gravis, cum tamen ardor et vis militum ultro ducis munia implebat," "Vitellius was lethargic and spent his imperial good fortune on pointless luxury and lavish banquets, drunk as he was at mid day and loaded with food, while the enthusiasm and strength of the soldiers carried out the leader's duties."

Upon *torpebat* hinges a comparison with Vitellius's current rival, Otho, about whom Tacitus says a few chapters further on (1.71.1): "Otho interim contra spem omnium non delicijs neque desidia torpescere. dilatae voluptates, dissimulata luxuria et cuncta ad decorem imperii composita, eoque plus formidinis afferebant falsae virtutes et vitia reditura," "Otho meanwhile, contrary to everyone's expectation, was not slowed by sensual delights or lethargy. Pleasures were put off, luxury concealed, and everything was arrayed with an eye to its suitability for an emperor. But these pretended virtues and the vices that could return only aroused more fear."

The negative expression used here (*non . . . torpescere*) is balanced by the positive expression of Otho's attention to what needed to be done (1.77.1: "Otho ut in multa pace munia imperii obibat," "Otho went about the ruler's tasks as if peace obtained"). On the face of it, we have one contrast on general energy levels (no energy, *torpebat*, vs. energy, *non . . . torpescere*), another between enjoying the prerogatives of the principate now ("fortunam principatus inertis luxu ac prodigijs epulis praesumebat") and putting them off (*dilatae voluptates*), and a third on who was doing the emperor's job (under Vitellius, the soldiers, under Otho, Otho himself). This does not, however, add up to a contrast between failure (Vitellius) and success (Otho), because Tacitus includes disturbing details in his portrait of an active Otho. First, Otho's behavior was unexpected, and, worse, it was perceived as a sham; contemporaries remained fearful of his future self. Moreover, his acts as ruler were performed *ut in multa pace*, when, in fact, he had a war on his hands.

*Torpere* and its derivative *torpescere* are verbs with a strong moral "color"; lethargy is never a morally appropriate level of activity for a Roman

public official. More to the point in the present argument, it is declared inappropriate for Vespasian by his principal ally, Licinius Mucianus (2.76.2): “torpere ultra et polluendam perdendamque rem publicam relinquere sopor et ignavia videretur, etiam si tibi quam inhonesta tam tuta servitus esset.” “To remain inactive and leave the state to be debased and destroyed would have the appearance of lethargy and cowardice, even if it were as safe for you as it is degrading.”

It soon becomes clear that Vespasian is the reverse of sluggish.<sup>20</sup> Consider the description of the initial phases of his rebellion (2.82.1–2):

prima belli cura agere dilectus, revocare veteranos; destinantur validae civitates exercendis armorum officinis; apud Antiochensis aurum argentumque signatur, eaque cuncta per idoneos ministros suis quaeque locis festinabantur. ipse Vespasianus adire, hortari, bonos laude, segnis exemplo incitare saepius quam coercere, vitia magis amicorum quam virtutes dissimulans. multos praefecturis et procurationibus, plerosque senatorii ordinis honore percoluit.

His first wartime measures were to initiate enlistments and to recall veteran soldiers. Reliable cities were selected as sites for weapons factories. At Antioch, gold and silver coins were struck. All of these tasks were hurried forward by suitable agents in the various places. Vespasian himself met with them; he encouraged them and aroused the good men with praise and the lazy ones by his example rather than by punishing them, purposely ignoring the vices of his friends but not their virtues. He sought the good will of many with posts as prefect and procurator and of a goodly number with senatorial rank.

The energy level shown by Vespasian is reflected in the sentence structure; the asyndetic list captures just how many things Vespasian was

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20 A preliminary sketch of Vespasian’s dynamism was given at his introduction into the narrative: *acer militiae*, “vigorous in military matters” (2.5.1), etc. When Flavians delay, as they do while Otho and Vitellius are striving for primacy, the delay is policy, not habit (2.7.1: *bellantibus aliis placuit expectari*, “While others were waging war, it pleased him to wait”). I owe these points to Rhiannon Ash.

doing at once:<sup>21</sup> recruiting, manufacturing weapons, coining money, exhorting his active agents, setting an example for the sluggish, securing his finances, filling positions in the administration, making a bid for the goodwill of men who could fill other important roles. The list continues beyond the passage quoted above: the soldiers are promised a donative, neighboring states are placated, supporters are put in charge of key zones, letters are written to the commanders and men of Rome's armies (2.82.3). Content and form here demonstrate Vespasian's energy in its details, and the details make a powerful contrast with both the torpid Vitellius and the temporarily not-torpid Otho. Moreover, Vespasian is clearly doing the job that Vitellius so signally failed to do, and suiting his actions to their context, something Otho failed to do.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. MEETING SOLDIERS' DEMANDS

As Vitellius's army shows, in civil war conditions, soldiers are disposed to be active even without an effective leader. Indeed, controlling their activity and, on occasion, repressing their enthusiasm, can be a challenge. Military discipline is a pervasive topic in the surviving books of the *Histories*. The parallel episodes considered next show how the four emperors of 69 measure up in respect to an important component of control: saying no to soldiers' demands.

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21 Cf. Keitel 241–42 in this volume on the impact of asyndeton at *Histories* 1.47.1.

22 The second portion of the three-part comparison mentioned above, that relating to the enjoyment of pleasures, also has its counterpart in the description of Vespasian. The link depends on another verbal echo. The verb *strepere* is used metaphorically of places noisy with preparations for both Vitellius and Vespasian, but for the former, it is the noise of preparations for dinner (2.62.1: "irritamenta gulae gestabantur *strepentibus ab utroque mari itineribus*," "Belly-stimulants were being carried with a clatter on roads from [Italy's] two seas"), for the latter, the noise of preparations for war (2.84.1: "navium militum armorum paratu *strepere* provinciae," "The provinces were clamorous with the preparation of ships, soldiers, weapons"). Another verbal echo in the vicinity of these two passages complements (and complicates) this contrast: both Vitellius and Vespasian are said to have had "teachers" who helped them learn the emperor's job. In both cases, the education exaggerated the men's innate vices. On Vitellius, see 2.63.1: "sed Vitellius . . . inrepentibus dominationis magistris superbior et atrocior," "But Vitellius . . . as instructors in mastery edged in, [grew] more arrogant and harsh"; on Vespasian, 2.84.2: "indulgentia fortunae et pravis magistris didicit aususque est," "From fortune's indulgence and vicious teachers, he learned and dared" (referring to the exercise of *avaritia*, Vespasian's principal fault according to Tacitus, see 2.5.1).

In the crisis precipitated by Vindex's rebellion in 68, Nero created a new legion from soldiers serving in the marines (1.6.2; cf. Plut. *Galba* 15.3, Suet. *Galba* 12.2). In their new unit, the terms of service were considerably more favorable (twenty years of service rather than twenty-six, higher pay, citizenship upon enlistment rather than discharge), as were the opportunities for profit. Their former colleagues were naturally eager to capitalize on the precedent. Galba's reaction is told very briefly in Tacitus's retrospective on his reign.<sup>23</sup> Met at the Milvian bridge by marines seeking legionary status, Galba had the troops who had accompanied him from Spain attack (1.6.2). The marines were unarmed, the casualty count high, the deaths ominous (1.6.2: "introitus in urbem trucidatis tot milibus inermium militum infaustus omine atque ipsis etiam, qui occiderant, formidolosus," "His arrival was portentous with the slaughter of so many thousands of unarmed soldiers, frightening even to those who had done the killing"). The men who survived the attack were put in prison, whence they were released by Otho when he was mustering troops to face the Vitellian invasion. In fact, he not only released them, he enrolled them in a legion, thereby, says Tacitus, showing other troops, too, that they could hope for service in a more prestigious branch of the military (1.87.1: "facta et ceteris spe honoratae in posterum militiae"). A similar emergency measure was adopted by Vitellius when threatened by the Flavians (3.55.1: *e classicis legio*).

The notice on Vitellius's new legion is neutral in tone, but those on Otho's and Galba's incorporate a measure of criticism. Galba's "no" was too harsh (*infaustus, formidolosus*), Otho's "yes" encouraged soldiers' hopes. When the Flavians recruit marines into the legions, however, Tacitus emphasizes the positive (3.50.3): "ad has copias e classicis Ravennatibus legionariam militiam poscentibus optumus quisque adsciti: classem Dalmatae supplevere," "In addition to these troops, the best of the marines from the Ravenna fleet, who were demanding legionary posts, were enrolled. Men from Dalmatia brought the fleet up to strength." Not only were the Flavians duly selective in promoting men, they also took care to fill the vacancies thereby created in the fleet.

One might dismiss the difference between this notice and the earlier ones as more rhetorical than substantive, possibly even as the product of Tacitean bias in favor of the dynasty that fostered his political career (1.1.3), were it not for Flavian success at coping with a far more dangerous group of aspirants.

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23 The historical record on ex-marine legionary units in this period is confused; for a recent discussion, see Morgan 2003. The present paper focuses on Tacitus's account.



After Vitellius's legionaries defeated Otho's praetorians in the first battle of Bedriacum, the ranks of the praetorian units were promptly filled from the legions. The former praetorians, "retired" by Vitellius, quickly joined the Flavian cause (2.67.1; cf. 2.82.3), which could restore them to "their" posts, as Antonius Primus makes clear when trying to spur these men on to fight harder at the second battle of Bedriacum (3.24.3): "mox infensus praetorianis 'vos' inquit 'nisi vincitis, pagani, quis alius imperator, quae castra alia excipient? illic signa armaque vestra sunt,'" "Turning in fury to the praetorians, he said, 'Only victory will keep you out of civilian clothes. What other emperor, what other camp will welcome you? Your standards and weapons are over there.'"

The ensuing victory transferred to the Flavians the challenge of filling the praetorian ranks for which there were now many more aspirants than positions (4.46.1):

praetorianam militiam repetebant a Vitellio dimissi, pro Vespasiano congregati; et lectus in eandem spem e legionibus miles promissa stipendia flagitabat; ne Vitelliani quidem sine multa caede pelli poterant; sed immensa pecunia tanta vis hominum retinenda erat.

Posts in the praetorian guard were reclaimed by the men dismissed by Vitellius who had mustered around Vespasian. Legionary soldiers who had been encouraged in the same hope demanded the promised positions. Nor could the Vitellian praetorians be dismissed without serious bloodshed. But to keep so great a number of men in arms was hugely expensive.

The situation was complicated by the presence in Rome of legionaries and auxiliary soldiers who had been fighting for Vitellius in Campania; a riot was in the making (4.46.1). Tacitus reports the Flavian solution to the problem in considerable detail. Nobody gets punished—the defeated Vitellians take an oath of loyalty to Vespasian (4.46.2–3)—and nobody is retired against his will (4.46.4):

spernunt oblatos agros, militiam et stipendia orant. preces erant, sed quibus contra dici non posset; igitur in praetoriam accepti. dein quibus aetas et iusta stipendia, dimissi

cum honore, alii ob culpam, sed carptim ac singuli, quo tutissimo remedio consensus multitudinis extenuatur.

They refuse the offered land grants. Military posts and pay are what they plead for. Pleas, yes, but not such as could be denied. So they are taken into the praetorian ranks. Later, those who had the requisite age and years of service were given an honorary discharge. Others (were discharged) for misbehavior, but intermittently and one by one, which is the safest remedy for weakening a mass movement.

The problem of soldiers with a sense of entitlement was not solved quickly or cheaply, but solved it was. From Tacitus, *tutissimum remedium* is high praise indeed.<sup>24</sup>

## V. PARDONING SENATORS

In terms of military discipline—giving orders that will be obeyed, doing the commander’s job, restraining soldiers—the Flavian record was superior to that of their predecessors and reflected the battlefield outcome that put political power in Vespasian’s hands. But for Tacitus, himself a prominent senator, the relationship between emperor (as *princeps senatus*) and senators was another crucial aspect of his record. Though the senate as a corporate entity was mute (or worse) during the military struggles of 69, the (Tacitean) records of Galba, Otho, and Vespasian include parallel episodes involving individual senators.<sup>25</sup>

The senators in question had all been condemned in a senatorial court for serious crimes. The first to win restoration to the senate was Antonius Primus. Pardoned and appointed legionary legate by Galba, ignored by Otho, he led the first phase of the Flavian fight against Vitellius. Tacitus reports his restoration, presumably by Galba, at 2.86.1, adding a dollop of editorial comment: “is legibus nocens et tempore Neronis falsi damnatus inter

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24 Praise for moderation in punishment also accrues to Otho (1.85.1: *severitatis modus*) and the Vitellian general Valens (2.29.3: *utili moderatione*), but the detail with which Tacitus relates it here and the superlative adjective give extra luster to the Flavian compromise.

25 For Vitellius’s record on this point, see note 27 below.

alia belli mala senatorium ordinem reciperaverat" ("Among other evils of the war, Primus, who was guilty under the laws and had been convicted of fraud during Nero's reign, regained senatorial rank"). Commentary at even greater length follows the names of senators restored under Otho (1.77.3):

redditus Cadio Rufo, Pedio Blaeso, †Saeuino Promquo†<sup>26</sup>  
senatorius locus. repetundarum criminibus sub Claudio ac  
Nerone ceciderant. placuit ignoscentibus verso nomine,  
quod avaritia fuerat, videri maiestatem, cuius tum odio  
etiam bonae leges peribant.

Senatorial rank was restored to Cadius Rufus, Pedius Blaesus, and †Saevinus Promquus†. They had succumbed to extortion charges under Claudius and Nero; those who pardoned them were content that what had been avarice should seem to have been treason, the odium of which charge undid even good laws.

Men convicted of fraud and extortion were *infames*, ineligible to participate in public life. Tacitus's belief that all of these senators won restoration on improper grounds is clear, as is his dislike of interference with the verdicts of the senatorial court (and perhaps the presence of former convicts on the senatorial benches beside him).

The Flavian party, too, has a record on this issue. Early in Vespasian's reign, Mucianus either denies or, more probably, cancels the restoration of two other former senators (4.44.2): "Mucianus, ne sperni senatus iudicium et cunctis sub Nerone admissis data impunitas videretur, Octavium Sagittam et Antistium Sosianum senatorii ordinis egressos exilium in eadem insulas redegit," "Lest it seem that he was rejecting the senate's verdict and that impunity had been given to everyone convicted under Nero, he returned the former senators Octavius Sagitta and Antistius Sosianus to exile on the same islands." The authorial comment, couched as Mucianus's reasoning, conveys overall approbation, despite the hint of asperity in the emphasis on appearances (*ne . . . videretur*).<sup>27</sup>

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26 The third name is garbled in the manuscripts. Heubner reads Scaevino Paquio.

27 Tacitus's report on senators and senatorial activity under Vitellius is extremely thin. The longest passage is a sad little *pas de deux* involving Vitellius and Helvidius Priscus at

## VI. CONTROLLING SUPPORTERS

As important (to Tacitus) as was the emperor's treatment of the senate, it is a relatively subdued and occasional theme in the narrative of 69. Of far greater prominence is the relationship between the *princeps* and his supporters, which is the subject of the passages considered in the remainder of this paper. I begin with some incidents illustrating the basic quality that holds a party together, namely, *fides*. In this first set of passages, as in some considered earlier, the Flavian party is contrasted with Otho and Vitellius, especially the latter.<sup>28</sup>

### A. Assessing *Fides*

In revolutionary conditions, loyalty, *fides*, is a problematic virtue.<sup>29</sup> The loyalty of those on one's own side is good, indeed essential, but loyalty on the other side prolongs the conflict. No surprise, then, that of the three praetorian tribunes sent by Galba to win back the support of the newly Othonian praetorians, the one deemed most loyal to Galba met with the most hostile reception (1.31.3):

pergunt etiam in castra praetorianorum tribuni Cetrius Severus, Subrius Dexter, Pompeius Longinus, si incipient adhuc necdum adulta seditio melioribus consiliis flecteretur. tribunorum Subrium et Cetrium adorti milites minis, Longinum manibus coercent exarmantque quia non ordine militiae sed e Galbae amicis fidus principi suo et desciscitentibus suspectior erat.

The praetorian tribunes Cetrius Severus, Subrius Dexter, and Pompeius Longinus went to the barracks to see if the still-nascent sedition could be deflected by better plans.

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2.91.2–3. Even the topic of punishing Neronian *delatores*, which surfaces under Galba (2.10.1, 4.6.1–2), Otho (2.10.1–3), and Vespasian (4.42), has no Vitellian counterpart: the attack on Eprius Marcellus at 2.53.1 occurs after Otho's death and before Vitellius arrives in Rome, and it is abandoned by its author without Vitellius's intervention.

28 The specific topic of these passages, the response of the victorious party to expressions of loyalty to the defeated, would have been most visible for Galba in the early days of his principate, which Tacitus treats summarily.

29 On *fides* in *Historiae* 1, see further Keitel in this volume.

Subrius and Cetrius the soldiers only threatened, but Longinus they took hold of and disarmed. Not a military man but one of Galba's friends, his loyalty to the emperor made him the more suspect to those breaking away.

Longinus's fate is unknown, but we saw earlier that these same Othonian soldiers clamored for the execution of Marius Celsus for much the same reason: he was "Galba's loyal friend to the bitter end" (1.45.2: "Galbae usque in extremas res amicum fidumque"). Or, as Tacitus puts it somewhat later, because he was guilty of "the crime of maintaining unbroken loyalty towards Galba" (1.71.2: "constanter servatae erga Galbam fidei crimen"). In the case of Celsus, at least, they did not get their way: Celsus, having confessed to the "crime" of loyalty, argues that it is, in fact, a virtue (*exemplum ultro imputavit*, "He claimed credit for setting an example") and promises that his loyalty will now be devoted to Otho, who gives Celsus a place among his friends and military leaders. As the sequel shows, his trust was well placed: Celsus served Otho as loyally as he had served Galba (1.71.2, quoted below).

In the hands of the Vitellians, men actively loyal to Galba were less fortunate. On 1 January 69, four centurions who opposed the first outbreak of disaffection in the legions of Upper Germany by protecting the *imagines* of the emperor that the soldiers were intent on toppling were seized and bound (1.56.1). When the rejection of Galba turned into support for Vitellius, these men reappear in the narrative (1.59.1): "Nonium, Donatium, Romilium, Calpurnium centuriones, de quibus supra rettulimus, occidi iussit, damnatos fidei crimine, gravissimo inter desciscentes," "The centurions Nonius, Donatius, Romilius, and Calpurnius, whom I mentioned above, he ordered killed, condemning them for loyalty, the most weighty charge in the eyes of those breaking away."

The outlook in Vitellius's army is much the same as that among Otho's praetorians when they get their hands on a loyal supporter of Galba, and in both cases, the attitude is only to be expected in soldiers who have betrayed their emperor (*desciscentes*). The outcome in Vitellius's army, however, is worse, and surfaces again after the Vitellian victory over Otho's forces, when centurions deemed particularly loyal to Otho were killed (2.60.1: *interfecti centuriones promptissimi Othonianorum*).

As Tacitus tells it, the root of the difference lies in Vitellius, who has a thoroughly topsy-turvy attitude towards loyalty and betrayal. When, after their defeat, Otho's generals say to Vitellius that they did their best

to lose so that he could win (2.60.1: *proditionem . . . imputabant*, “They claimed credit for betrayal”), he rewards their treachery to Otho with a pardon: “Vitellius credit de perfidia et fidem absolvit (2.60.1: “Vitellius credited their story of disloyalty and acquitted them of loyalty”).<sup>30</sup> The generals survived. Even more perverse is the fate of Junius Blaesus, a man tenaciously loyal to Vitellius (3.39.2: *Blaeso . . . fidei obstinatio fuit*, “In Blaesus, loyalty was obstinate”), whom Vitellius (so the story goes—Tacitus tells it at length in 3.38–39) kills by a secret poison.

As the murder of Blaesus suggests, Vitellius doesn’t recognize loyalty when he sees it. Tacitus devotes a long paragraph (3.54) to the story of a brave and loyal Vitellian centurion who completes a dangerous mission to assess the strength of the Flavian invasion only to have his information disregarded by Vitellius on the grounds that he had been bribed by the Flavians to mislead. The centurion kills himself to prove to Vitellius that he had nothing to gain from a false report. The waning weeks of Vitellius’s principate are filled with incidents showing him expecting *fides* where it wasn’t and failing to notice it where it was: at 3.55.3, Vitellius is said to be dependent on unreliable advice (*infidis consilii obnoxius*); at 3.56.3, he squanders, indeed betrays, his most loyal troops (“acerrimum militem et usque in extrema obstinatum trucidandum capiendumque tradidit”); at 3.58.2, we hear that the more distinguished his friends were, the less loyal they proved (“amicorum eius quanto quis clarior, minus fidus”). Eventually there is a competition, as it were, among his officers to see who can betray him most effectively (3.61.3: *perfidiae certamen*). The sorry story of Vitellius’s failure to comprehend *fides* comes to an end in Tacitus’s obituary notice for him: “amicitias dum magnitudine munerum, non constantia morum contineri putat, meruit magis quam habuit” (3.86.2: “Given that he thought that friendships were maintained by the lavishness of gifts rather than by constancy of character, he rather deserved than had them”).

Under Otho and Vitellius, then, *fides* is not a virtue but a crime (*crimen*) or moral failing (*obstinatio*); in addition to the obvious verbal

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30 Tacitus uses similar language with a negative to distance himself from Vitellius’s “logic” when he says in the obituary for Vitellius that those who in the end betrayed him cannot win credit for their perfidy (3.86.2: *imputare perfidiam non possunt*) on the grounds that it was a good thing for the state that Vitellius be removed. That some claimed it is clear from 2.101.1: “curam pacis et amorem rei publicae, corruptas in adulationem causas, tradidere,” “They said that it was ‘concern for peace’ and ‘patriotism,’ explanations falsified for flattery.” Tacitus’s disdain for this argument is audible in both passages.

links between the passages we have examined, the numerous oxymora (*fidei crimen, proditorem . . . imputabant, credidit de perfidia, fidem absolvit*) provide a continuity of tone, conveying as they do the author's tight-lipped outrage. Vitellius seems not so much vicious as confused about this fundamental virtue, but the emperor's confusion proved fatal both to those who deserved better of him and, in the end, to himself.

The Flavian record on *fides* in the surviving books is presented with less moralizing, more calculation. *Fides* is a quality to be valued but also one to be evaluated. A single episode will suffice for illustrating the moral framework. At the beginning of Book 3, Tacitus describes the council of war that laid the plans for the Flavian invasion of Italy that was spearheaded by units from the Danube legions. To facilitate their passage, certain precautions are taken, among them the placement of troops on the river Inn to cut off Vitellian reinforcements that might arrive via Raetia, where the procurator, Porcius Septiminius, was a man "of uncorrupted loyalty to Vitellius" (3.5.2: *incorruptae erga Vitellium fidei*). The adjective *incorrupta* shows that, from the Flavian point of view, *fides*, even *fides* to their enemy, was a good thing, something that could be damaged. That this is also the view of Tacitus himself is clear from his epigram on Marius Celsus: "mansitque Celso velut fataliter etiam pro Othone fides integra et infelix" (1.71.2: "Towards Otho, too, Celsus's loyalty—as seemed to be his fate—remained unbroken and unlucky"). Septiminius's loyalty was neither lucky nor unlucky, since no battle was joined on the Inn, and the contest between Vitellius and Vespasian was decided elsewhere, but the Flavian attitude as Tacitus depicts it here—wary but admiring—is an obvious difference between the successful Vespasian and his failed predecessors.

More typical of the Flavian attitude is Mucianus's canny advice to Vespasian at the outset of their bid for power. When someone pushes you towards a risky undertaking, says Mucianus, you should ask yourself whether he is putting his own safety at risk (2.76.1: "ipse qui suadet considerandus est, adiciatne consilio periculum suum"). A simple profession of *fides*, it is implied, will not suffice. Mucianus is at this very point urging an extremely risky undertaking on Vespasian, and the narrative, as we will see below, gives plentiful evidence of his having linked his fate to Vespasian's.

This pragmatic form of *fides* is also demonstrated by Antonius Primus, who, after urging the commanders of the Danube legions to move quickly against Vitellius rather than wait for Mucianus and the legions of the east, says that he himself will put the plan into effect: "idem suasor

auctorque consilii ero” (3.2.4: “I will both urge and carry out the plan”). Like Mucianus, he follows through.<sup>31</sup>

Whether the loyalty of supporters such as Mucianus and Primus can be maintained in the long term is a question raised (in his own self-interest) by Vespasian’s elder son Titus before he departs for the final phase of the war that made the Flavian triumph palatable in Rome. Sons, he says, are the surest supports an emperor has, better than legions or fleets (4.52.1: “non legiones, non classes proinde firma imperii munimenta quam numerum liberorum”). “Friends are weakened, changed, and lost by the effects of time and chance, sometimes also by greed or mistakes” (4.52.1: “amicos tempore fortuna, cupidinibus aliquando aut erroribus imminui, transferri, desinere”), “but a man’s kin cannot be split off, especially an emperor’s, whose prosperity is enjoyed even outside the family but whose reverses affect those closest to him” (“suum cuique sanguinem indiscretum, sed maxime principibus, quorum prosperis et alii fruuntur, aduersa ad iunctissimos pertineant”). In Titus’s view, *pietas*, the bond that connects sons to fathers (and brothers to brothers; cf. 4.52.2), is reliable, whereas *fides* is subject to change and needs, therefore, constant reassessment.<sup>32</sup> Vespasian’s record on the scrutiny to which he subjects his supporters and the authority he exercises over them is distinctly superior to those of his predecessors. Superior, but not perfect. Two sets of passages make the point clear.

## B. Investigating Crimes

All of the emperors of 69 were threatened by ultimately abortive military uprisings in the provinces, and in all four cases, the emperors’ local supporters restored stability by summary executions of the ringleaders, Roman officers though they were. Since the incident under Galba is somewhat obscure owing in part to the fact that it is reported in the extremely condensed retrospective on Galba’s reign rather than in the narrative proper (1.7.1), I begin with the uprising in Corsica under Otho (2.16).

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31 Cf. the list of services to Vespasian at 3.53, summarized as *pericula sua*, “his hazards” (3.53.1).

32 His view is itself called into question by passages on the rivalry of brothers (e.g., 4.86.2) and by the elaborate defense (allotted to Galba, 1.15–16) of choosing an imperial heir by merit rather than blood. Helvidius Priscus, another reputable spokesperson, asserts that *amici* are an emperor’s best support (4.7.3: “nullum maius boni imperii instrumentum quam bonos amicos esse,” “There is no better instrument of good government than good friends”). Tacitus does not settle on any one view.



The island's procurator, Decumius Picarius, being ill-disposed to Otho, decided to contribute Corsica's (puny) resources to Vitellius. The islanders, fully aware of the danger posed by Otho's nearby fleet, assassinated Picarius and his entourage while they were in the baths. The victims' heads were taken to Otho as proof of the island's loyalty to him. The islanders "were neither rewarded by Otho nor punished by Vitellius; in the vast cesspool of the age, they were mixed in with greater crimes" (2.16.3: "neque eos aut Otho praemio adfecit aut puniit Vitellius, in multa conluvie rerum maioribus flagitiis permixtos").<sup>33</sup> The editorializing appended to this narrative emphasizes the shameful fact, characteristic of the "cesspool" that was Rome under Otho and Vitellius, that criminal acts had no consequences.

In the Corsican incident, Otho turns a blind eye to murders done on his behalf. Tacitus reports the same reaction in Vitellius in connection with a rebellion in Africa, where the procurator appointed to Mauretania by Nero and retained by Galba and Otho, Luceius Albinus, became restive under Vitellius and threatened to invade Spain. He was also rumored to be sporting the insignia and name of a king (2.58). Eventually, however, his followers, dismayed at the thought of facing Vitellius's German legions, have a change of heart, whereupon Albinus, three key officers, and Albinus's wife are killed (2.59.1). Vitellius heard the report and did nothing: "nihil eorum quae fierent Vitellio anquirente: brevi auditu quamvis magna transibat" (2.59.1: "However important events were, Vitellius accorded them but a brief hearing, inquiring into none of the things that were being done"). Here again, Tacitus's language—the paradoxical antithesis *brevi* . . . *magna*—conveys his conviction that there should have been an investigation into these deaths.

Under Galba, there were two similar murders: that of another African procurator by his order, and that of the governor of Lower Germany at the hands of two legionary legates *antequam iuberentur* (1.7.1: "before they received an order"). The latter was explained variously, but the emperor was believed to have accepted, indeed approved, the fait accompli (1.7.2): "fuere qui crederent . . . Galbam mobilitate ingenii, an ne altius scrutaretur, quoquo modo acta, quia mutari non poterant, comprobasse," "Galba was thought to have given his approval, either because his mind was changeable<sup>34</sup> or so that

33 The translation "the vast cesspool of the age" is Fyfe's.

34 The phrase *mobilitate ingenii*, not echoed in any other description of Galba's character, may indicate that Galba's initial approval of Capito and ratification of his command were effectively reversed by acquiescence in his murder.

the investigation would go no further; since the deed was done and could not be altered, however it had been done.”

This passage emphasizes public opinion about Galba, not Tacitus’s opinion, but his view of Galba’s laxity towards crimes committed on his behalf is soon given (1.12.3): “hiantes in magna fortuna amicorum cupiditates ipsa Galbae facilitas intendebat, cum apud infirmum et credulum minore metu et maiore praemio peccaretur,” “The greed of Galba’s friends, gaping at their great good fortune, was strengthened by his laxity: while the emperor was infirm and trusting, crimes could be committed with less fear and more profit.”<sup>35</sup> If Galba did refrain from investigating the death of Capito, as some thought, his “unawareness” was wilful ignorance like that of Vitellius.

The murderous suppression of rebellions is perhaps an inevitable component of civil wars. Judging from the authorial comment and tone in the episodes just discussed, what the historian (as opposed to the emperors) couldn’t let go unnoticed was the fact that nobody tried to find out what really happened: Otho didn’t determine who deserved what reward, Vitellius accepted the news as it was told to him, Galba avoided inquiry into motive. Tacitus’s report of the murder of a provincial governor under Vespasian offers some obvious contrasts with these three episodes but also some disturbing parallels. One contrast is structural: the Flavian episode is much the longest. Tacitus devotes three chapters, two of them unusually long, to the murder of the proconsular governor of Africa, L. Piso (4.48–50).<sup>36</sup> Another is contextual: this victim occupied a position that both Vespasian and Vitellius had held before him (2.97.2). But the sequence of events is familiar.

The province of Africa was unsettled at the beginning of Vespasian’s reign. His governorship had left a negative impression (2.97.2), die-hard Vitellians had taken refuge there (4.49.1), and the political structure put in place by Gaius—the province was headed by a governor who had no troops and controlled by a legionary legate who had no political authority (4.48.1)—was fertile of power struggles (4.48.2). Piso had reason to fear for his own security, since the man who was his cousin and son-in-law had

35 Cf. a passage from his obituary for Galba: “amicorum libertorumque, ubi in bonos incidisset, sine reprehensione patiens, si mali forent, usque ad culpam ignarus” (1.49.3: “He was indulgent to his friends and freedmen, incurring no blame when he chanced upon good ones, but when they were bad, he was criminally unaware”).

36 O’Gorman 284–85 in this volume also discusses the proconsul’s death.

been killed by Mucianus's order (4.49.2; cf. 4.11.2). Someone is, in fact, sent to kill Piso; it turns out to be the man who had eliminated Galba's governor of Africa (4.49.4; cf. 1.7.1). Piso survives this threat but is killed by his province's legionary legate, who was "a man of expensive extravagance, outsized desires, and insecure because of his connection to Vitellius" (4.49.1: "sumptuosae adulescentiae neque modica cupiens et adfinitate Vitellii anxius"). The dismal story does not end here. Complicit in the crime is one Baebius Massa, a procurator of Africa and unforgivable (to Tacitus) villain: "iam tunc optimo cuique exitiosus et inter causas malorum, quae mox tulimus, saepius rediturus" (4.50.2: "Already at this point deadly to good men, he was all too often to return as one of the causes of the evils we were soon to suffer"). And the legionary legate punishes and rewards some of his own officers, *neutrum ex merito* (4.50.3: "in neither case for due cause"), further undermining military discipline.

As Tacitus tells the story (and he is the only source to tell it), none of this receives a response from Vespasian. Both the reference to the future misdeeds of Baebius Massa, who prospered until late in the reign of Domitian,<sup>37</sup> and Tacitus's statement at the outset of the narrative that the whole story could no longer be told because "the killer's influence" had suppressed some details (4.49.1) suggest that the principals were not punished for this murder.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Tacitus does not accuse Vespasian of failing to investigate the crime, and Tacitus himself clearly has a great deal of information about what happened in Africa, even if some of his questions remain unanswered. Perhaps there was an investigation after all.<sup>39</sup> Even if there was, however, it cannot be said to redound loudly, in Tacitus's surviving narrative, to Vespasian's credit. And lacking his narrative of later years, we cannot see how Tacitus presented the fact that those responsible for this murder enjoyed the rewards of loyalty, however dubiously earned. But the next set of passages credits Vespasian with an important success in the management of violent and unruly supporters.

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37 He was a notorious *delator* (Juv. 1.35; cf. Tac. *Agr.* 45.1) until convicted of extortion (Pliny *Epist.* 7.33). Tacitus told the narrative of Massa's conviction in the *Histories*. In the letter cited above, Pliny supplies an anecdote about his own role in the trial to supplement what he says Tacitus will find in the public records of the trial (7.33.3: *acta publica*).

38 The killer, Valerius Festus, was prominent under Vespasian, serving as consul in 71 and in three consular posts in the 70s. His career inscription survives (*ILS* 989).

39 Pliny mentions the murder as an established fact at *Epist.* 3.7.12, alluding to Piso "qui a Valerio Festo per summum facinus in Africa occisus est," "who was most criminally killed by Valerius Festus in Africa."

### C. Éminences Grises

Galba's (lack of) control over his key supporters is formulated in abstract terms early on (1.13.1): "potentia principatus divisa in Titum Vinium consulem, Cornelium Laconem praetorii praefectum, nec minor gratia Icelo Galbae liberto," "The *potentia principatus* was divided between the consul Titus Vinius and the praetorian prefect Cornelius Laco. Equally influential was Galba's freedman Icelus."

So abstract, indeed, are the terms here that there is disagreement over the meaning of the as yet untranslated phrase *potentia principatus*. Similar expressions on this topic in Plutarch (*Galba* 20.4: "for these were the most powerful [οὗτοι γὰρ ἦσαν ἐν δυνάμει μάλιστα] of those at court"<sup>40</sup>) and Suetonius (Suet. *Galba* 14: *regebatur trium arbitrio*, "He was ruled by the power of three men") support, respectively, "power in the government" and "power over the *princeps*," the first of which puts direct power in the hands of subordinates, the second only indirect.<sup>41</sup> Tacitus's reference to the offices held by Vinius and Laco suggests that he has directly administered power in mind. And this is, in fact, the kind of power he ascribes to the subordinates of Otho and Vitellius.

Under Otho, "the prestige of command was in the hands of his brother Titianus, its clout and power in the hands of the praetorian prefect Proculus" (2.39.1: "honor imperii penes Titianum fratrem, vis ac potestas penes Proculum praefectum"). Standing in antithesis to *honor* here, *vis ac potestas* govern an implicit *imperii* and form a phrase closely analogous to *potentia principatus* but clearer in meaning.<sup>42</sup>

Equally unambiguous is the antithesis on the location of power under Vitellius: "Vitellio nihil auctoritatis. munia imperii Caecina ac Valens obibant" (2.92.1: "Vitellius had no authority. The duties of command were performed by Caecina and Valens").<sup>43</sup> The events of 69 show that the *potentia*

40 Plutarch makes a similar point in his Nymphidius Sabinus narrative (*Galba* 13.2) and again in his obituary for Galba (29.4).

41 Fyfe's translation "the real power of the throne," though somewhat anachronistically monarchic in expression, catches what I take to be the implied antithesis ("the real power" as opposed to "the appearance of power," which belonged to Galba).

42 For the term *vis*, compare 2.99.2, where Caecina, in betraying Vitellius for Vespasian, seeks "gratiam viresque apud novum principem," "favor and power from the new *princeps*" and 4.39.2: *vis penes Mucianum erat*, "Power was in Mucianus's hands."

43 Cf. the passages (both quoted above) where the phrase *munia imperii obibant* is used of Otho as *princeps* (1.77.1) and of Vitellius's soldiers doing the tasks their commander should have been doing (1.62.2).

of subordinates was unstable, leading to crimes (e.g., those that made Galba hated, 1.6.1, and the murder of Junius Blaesus under Vitellius, 3.38–39), competition (e.g., that between Vitellius's legates, 2.30.3, 2.99.2, and often), backstabbing (e.g., that experienced by Primus under Mucianus's regency; see below), insubordination (e.g., Primus's at 3.8.2; see below), and even betrayal (e.g., Caecina's: see note 42 above).

As we saw earlier, adult (or nearly adult) sons were one of Vespasian's strengths as a candidate for empire (4.52.1; cf. 2.77.1), but like his predecessors, he relied heavily, particularly in the early months of his bid, on *amici*, not sons. Tacitus credits Vespasian with a major success in establishing authority over a supporter who had been instrumental in putting him on the throne, namely, Antonius Primus. But the *Histories* break off before reaching the end of an even more important narrative, Vespasian's handling of Mucianus. I begin with the story of Primus.

Vespasian shows careful pragmatism in dealing with potentially volatile supporters. In the earliest phases of his campaign, he refrains from public censure of his friends' failings, though by his actions—setting them an example to emulate—he made it clear that he was aware of them (2.82.1, quoted above).<sup>44</sup> But when his power is relatively secure, he faces squarely up to the task of controlling Primus, his most aggressive supporter. Primus, as we saw earlier, was largely responsible for the rapid Flavian advance into Italy, against Vespasian's own intent (3.8.2: “*quae ignara Vespasiano aut vetita*,” “things that were unknown to Vespasian or forbidden by him”). After his decisive victory over the Vitellians on the Po (3.25), Primus treats Italy as a conquered land, pampers his legions, and lays the groundwork for this own *potentia* (3.49.1), particularly as against that of Mucianus, who is drawing near en route from Syria (3.49.2). His behavior provokes his fellow Danubian commanders, who consider it excessive (3.52.1: *nimius iam*), as well as Mucianus, who mobilizes his supporters to write to Vespasian disparaging Primus (3.52.3). Primus writes his own letters to Vespasian (3.53). Conflict among an emperor's *amici* was a major problem for the principates of Galba and Vitellius, but no lasting problems arose from the *graves similitates* (3.53.3) between Primus and Mucianus, which reached their crisis at the beginning of Book 4. Just before the arrival of Mucianus, Primus is said

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44 2.82.1: “*vitia magis amicorum quam virtutes dissimulans*,” “concealing his friends' vices rather than their virtues,” on Vespasian (see page 256 above), is echoed, with a difference, by 2.92.1: *male dissimulata pravitas amicorum* on Vitellius (“The viciousness of his friends was scarcely concealed”).

to be the most powerful man in Rome (4.2.1: “summa potentiae in Primo Antonio”), and just after Mucianus’s arrival, Primus’s power is said to have been broken (4.11.1: *fracta Primi Antonii . . . potentia*). The breaking of Primus’s power was, in fact, a long affair. What Mucianus begins as soon as he gets to Rome, Vespasian finishes months later.

Primus was worrisome to Mucianus because his military successes had won him the support of soldiers and populace alike and because there were rumors that he was urging a well-placed senator to challenge Vespasian (4.39.3). As he would do later in dealing with the clamorous would-be praetorians (4.46, discussed earlier), so here Mucianus proceeds with caution (4.39.4):

igitur Mucianus, quia propalam opprimi Antonius nequibat, multis in senatu laudibus cumulatam secretis promissis onerat, citeriorem Hispaniam ostentans discessu Cluvii Rufi vacuum; simul amicis eius tribunatus praefecturasque largitur. dein postquam inanem animum spe et cupidine impleverat, vires abolet dimissa in hiberna legione septima, cuius flagrantissimus in Antonium amor.

Since Primus could not be opposed openly, Mucianus heaps praise on him in the senate and loads him with secret promises, pointing out that Nearer Spain is an open post owing to the departure of Cluvius Rufus and all the while lavishing military posts on his friends. Then, when he had filled Primus’s empty head with hope and desire, he destroys his power by sending the seventh legion, which was passionately devoted to Primus, into winter quarters.

This is extraordinarily detailed reportage, but the task was an important one, both practically and symbolically. Later Mucianus excludes Primus from Domitian’s circle (4.80.1), whereupon Primus again takes up matters with the still absent Vespasian, who finishes the job of reining him in with deliberation equal to that of Mucianus (4.80.1–2):

profectus ad Vespasianum Antonius ut non pro spe sua excipitur, ita neque averso imperatoris animo. trahebatur in diversa, hinc meritis Antonii, cuius ductu confectum haud

dubie bellum erat, inde Muciani epistulis; simul ceteri ut infestum tumidumque insectabantur, adiunctis prioris vitae criminibus. neque ipse deerat arrogantia vocare offensas, nimium commemorandis quae meruisset: alios ut imbelles, Caecinam ut captivum ac dediticium increpat.

Having made his way to Vespasian, Primus is received, not as he had hoped, but also not with a hostile attitude on the part of the emperor, who was torn between the merits of Primus, on the one hand, under whose leadership the war was certainly won, and by the letters of Mucianus, on the other. At the same time, others were criticizing Primus as dangerously aggressive, adding references to the crimes of his earlier life. Nor did Primus himself fail to irritate, such was his arrogance in mentioning too often his deserts and in criticizing others as cowardly, Caecina in particular, as someone who had surrendered himself to the enemy.

There is no willful blindness in Vespasian but rather a careful search for the right balance among due reward for merit, the claims of his other supporters, and his own safety and authority. Vespasian uses velvet gloves, amiably reducing Primus to insignificance: “unde paulatim levior viliorque haberi, manente tamen in speciem amicitia” (4.80.3: “From this point on, Primus was gradually treated as less important and less useful, though the appearance of friendship was kept up”). Securing authority over those who put him on the throne, as Vespasian does here, is a milestone of imperial success that only Vespasian of the emperors of 69 managed to reach.

Success is never final, however. From the very beginning of his bid for power, Vespasian's most important ally, the man who joined his four legions to Vespasian's three, who contributed his own fortune to Vespasian's war chest, who led the troops from the east to Rome, and, most importantly, who administered virtually everything in Rome for the months between his own arrival (December 69) and Vespasian's (autumn of 70), was Licinius Mucianus: *vis penes Mucianum erat* (4.39.2: “Power was in the hands of Mucianus”).<sup>45</sup> Tacitus's coverage of Mucianus's “regency” is

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45 2.83.1: “socium magis imperii quam ministrum agens,” “acting as a partner in power rather than as an aide”; cf. 3.75.2: *consortem imperii*, “colleague in power” and 4.11.1: “vim

generous. The following is a bare list of episodes that Tacitus narrates at length, with internal deliberations, letters, speeches, and more: in addition to dealing with Primus (and other restive Flavian generals: see above and 4.39), Mucianus dispatches legions to provinces (4.39), puts a stop to the senatorial vendetta against *delatores* (4.44), calms a military sedition (4.46), sends an assassin to deal with a dangerous provincial governor (4.49), responds to the outbreak of Civilis' revolt (4.68), and orders the death of Vitellius's son (4.80). Particularly interesting, given what Titus had said about sons, are Mucianus's successes in reining in Domitian, who is eager for political power and military glory (cf., e.g., 4.68.3: *flagrantem retineret*). Mucianus allows Domitian cameo appearances in both spheres: Domitian gets to sign official letters and edicts (4.39.2) and to address the senate at the beginning of their debate about *delatores* (4.44.1, cf. 4.40.1);<sup>46</sup> he also speaks to seditious soldiers, but only after they have been calmed (4.46.4). Mucianus and Domitian start off together against Civilis (4.66.3), but Mucianus makes sure that they never reach the front (4.85). He also, as we saw earlier, keeps Primus and Domitian apart (4.80.1). Owing in part to Mucianus's careful management, none of Domitian's actions in 69 is significant, whether in support of his father or against him.

That Tacitus regarded Mucianus's *potentia* as problematic is clear from a passage of authorial commentary where Mucianus is aligned with key supporters of Galba and Vitellius (2.95.3): “magna et misera civitas, eodem anno Othonem, Vitellium passa, inter Vinios Fabios, Icelos Asiaticos varia et pudenda sorte agebat, donec successere Mucianus et Marcellus<sup>47</sup> et magis alii homines quam alii mores,” “The city, magnificent and pitiable, suffering in a single year Otho and Vitellius, lasted through people such as Vinius, Fabius, Icelus, and Asiaticus with a variously disgraceful lot, until Mucianus and Marcellus and others took their place. New names, same behavior.”

principis amplecti, nomen remittere,” “To grasp the power of the *princeps*, renounce the name.” Even in the introduction to the narrative of the Flavian bid for power, Mucianus stands alone: “alii legati amique . . . et Mucianus,” “other commanders and friends . . . and Mucianus” (2.76.1).

46 On Domitian at 4.40.1, see Pomeroy 175–76 in this volume.

47 “Marcellus” is T. Eprius Marcellus (*cos* 62, *cos II* 74), a Neronian-age *delator* who filled important magistracies and priesthoods under Vespasian. He was accused of conspiracy late in Vespasian's reign and took his own life (Dio 66.16.3).



Vinius and Icelus exercised power under Galba, Fabius (Valens) and Asiaticus under Vitellius; as we have seen, none of them, in Tacitus's view, was a credit to his emperor. In response to Titus's homily at 4.52.1, Vespasian expresses his intention to tend to public and domestic affairs (4.52.2: "sibi pacem domumque curae fore," "Peace and their household will occupy his attention") while Titus goes off to Jerusalem to complete the war, but the intention remains unfulfilled in the extant books, where Vespasian's power remains in Mucianus's hands (cf. 4.11.1, quoted above). Even after Vespasian's return to Rome, Mucianus was a powerful figure, suffect consul in 70 and again (for the third time) in 72. Titus, however, as ordinary consul with his father in those two years and on five other occasions during Vespasian's reign, and simultaneously Vespasian's (sole) praetorian prefect, was clearly his father's second-in-command. Mucianus seems to have been edged out (like Primus) rather than cut out (like Caecina and Marcellus), but the specifics elude us.<sup>48</sup>

On the issue of the *potentia principatus* under Vespasian, then, Tacitus's analysis is incomplete when the *Histories* fall silent. Tacitus explains in some detail the challenge facing Vespasian and has Vespasian express his intention of meeting it, but Vespasian has not met it by the middle of 70 and may, in fact, have done so eventually only by default. This unanswered question is a useful reminder of the fact that more of the *Histories* was about the Flavian dynasty than was about the civil wars that brought it to power, and that Tacitus's overall assessment of Vespasian rested on more than the initial steps that are all we now see.

Vespasian's success at remaining emperor was not owing to a lack of challengers: in the extant books, four men are encouraged to declare against him and there were other challengers later.<sup>49</sup> His success did not depend on what others failed to do but on what he himself did or caused to be done and what he was. The passages examined here are not must-have incidents in the narrative of 69 (such as, for example, the death scenes of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and the two battles of Bedriacum, which are reported in all of the surviving sources), but small details and descriptions,

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48 Cf. Levick 1999.194: "Mucianus was not an easy subject, even though he had not aspired to be emperor, and his death, perhaps already by 74, certainly by 77, may have been a relief to both Vespasian and Titus."

49 Calpurnius Galerianus (son of the Piso who conspired against Nero) at 4.11.2, Scribonianus Crassus (elder brother of Galba's adopted heir, Piso Licinianus) at 4.39.3, L. Piso (the governor of Africa and a relative of Vitellius) at 4.49, and Domitian himself at 4.86.1.

passages that serve an authorial design beyond that of covering the material. Many of them, as we have seen, are accompanied by authorial commentary. That is to say, the comparisons that we have examined are present in the text because Tacitus wanted the reader to see the parallels and contrasts, not because these events demanded inclusion. Cumulatively they constitute an explanation for the success of the Flavian beginning. The dynasty does not remain (and perhaps never was) a paragon—the work that tells the story of the dynasty will be, Tacitus promises, a history of the darkest hue: “opus . . . opimum casibus, atrox proeliis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pace saevum” (1.2.1: “a work rich in disasters, bristling with battles, riven with seditions, even when peaceful, cruel”<sup>50</sup>), but by Tacitus’s account, its rule begins well, and the parallel passages we have examined contribute to his explanation of how it did so.<sup>51</sup>

#### APPENDIX: HISTORIES 1.52.2: AVIDITATE IMPERANDI

The theme of the relationship between a *princeps* and his supporters was the subject of the lengthy section VI, above. In this appendix, I argue that it is also the subject of a passage in which Tacitus’s difficult Latin has proven resistant to interpretation.

The passage in question is part of Tacitus’s explanation of the “beginnings and causes of the Vitellian movement” (1.51.1: “nunc initia causasque motus Vitelliani expedium”). One of the many factors discussed in this long section (chaps. 51–54) is the pressure Vitellius faced from those by whom he found himself surrounded in Lower Germany. His initial actions as governor were received with disproportionate enthusiasm (1.52.2: “nec consularis legati mensura sed in maius omnia accipiebantur;” “The yardstick of a consular legate wasn’t applied; everything was credited with a greater significance”), a situation illustrated in the next sentence (1.52.2): “et <ut> Vitellius apud severos humilis, ita comitatem bonitatemque faventes vocabant, quod sine modo, sine iudicio donaret sua, largiretur aliena,” “In the estimation of the upright, he demeaned himself, but his supporters called it affability and good will that, without measure or judgment, he gave away what was his and squandered what belonged to others.”

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50 Cf. 2.1.1: “laetum rei publicae vel atrox,” “happy or terrible for the republic.”

51 This paper profited from comments by Rhiannon Ash, C. P. Jones, and the audiences who heard oral versions at Boston College, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The University of Pennsylvania, Wesleyan University, and Yale University. I am grateful to all for their help, but I do not mean to imply that they vouch for or even agree with everything in the paper.

The problematic passage follows (1.52.2): “simul aviditate imperandi ipsa vitia pro virtutibus interpretabantur;” “At the same time, *aviditate imperandi*, they took his very faults to be virtues.” The meaning and even the Latinity of the here untranslated phrase *aviditate imperandi* are disputed. In a recent paper, Gwyn Morgan (2002) reviews the debate and offers one explanation. I offer another.

Many of the steps in the argument have already been taken: Joseph Hellegouarc’h, in the Budé edition, identifies *aviditate* as a causal ablative, Morgan himself says that it is to be taken with *interpretabantur* not *vitia* (344), and Heinz Heubner (who considers the phrase in origin a gloss and therefore excises it from his Teubner text) explains the mix of attitudes in the preceding sentence: he considers *donaret sua, largiretur aliena* to be the words of the *faventes*, and *sine modo* and *sine iudicio* to be Tacitean editorializing.<sup>52</sup> The last point, in particular, allows us to say that the subject of the deponent verb *interpretabantur* is *faventes*, those who called Vitellius’s lavish expenditure of money “affability and good will” and that it is they who are acting *aviditate imperandi*, “out of greed for control.”<sup>53</sup> With Morgan’s dismissal (2002.340–45) of the long-influential “difficulty” of taking anyone but the *imperator* as the implied subject of the gerund *imperandi*, I am entirely in agreement.

Morgan goes on, however, to argue that *aviditate* here characterizes Vitellius, not his supporters, and that *imperandi* refers to his power as consular governor of Lower Germany, not to imperial power (2002.345–48). True, paragraph 1.52 begins with a description of Vitellius’s well-intentioned entry into his command: “hiberna legionum cum cura adierat” (1.52.1: “He had taken pains in his approach to the encamped legions”). His “pains” as Tacitus reports them (1.52.1) consist exclusively in restoring ranks to officers demoted or dismissed by his predecessor. *Ambitio*, as well as *iudicium*, is said to motivate him (1.52.1), which would accord well enough with an “eagerness to play the role of *consularis legatus*,” as Morgan’s paraphrase of *aviditate imperandi* goes.<sup>54</sup>

52 In saying (2002.346) that Heubner “asserted that the opinion of the *severi* extends no further than *humilis*, and that the subjunctives convey Tacitus’s own editorializing about Vitellius’s conduct,” Morgan does not do justice to Heubner’s analysis. Heubner’s view (in his commentary, ad loc.) is that “zwei verschiedene Aussagen haben sich überlegt,” that is, that the editorializing *sine modo* and *sine iudicio* have replaced a more favorable adverb (such as “unstintingly,” perhaps) in the expression of the *faventes*.

53 *Imperare*, besides referring to the giving of specific orders (*OLD* 1–4), is also used more abstractly to mean “rule” (*OLD* 6, e.g., of the Roman emperor), and even more generally “be in command” or “exercise control” (*OLD* 7–8). Tacitus uses it in all three senses; for the last, cf. *Agr.* 31.3, where *imperantibus* stands in antithesis to *subiectorum*.

54 Attempts to make *imperandi* refer to any higher ambition on Vitellius’s part founder on the passivity and *ignavia*, “indolence,” of Tacitus’s portrait of Vitellius (e.g., in the obituary notice at 3.86.1: “principatum ei detulere qui ipsum non noverant; studia exercitus raro

But despite his earlier demonstration of the difficulty of making *aviditate* dependent on *vitia*, Morgan's argument requires it. His full paraphrase (2002.346) is: "the 'vices' Vitellius was currently exhibiting thanks to his eagerness to play the role of *consularis legatus*," where "exhibiting" (on which "eagerness" depends here) has no counterpart in the Latin and the "scare quotes" around vices are hard to justify. They may represent *ipsa*, which is otherwise unaccounted for in the paraphrase, but *ipsa* ought to mean something like "the vices themselves"—that is, Vitellius's lack of moderation (*sine modo*), lack of judgment (*sine iudicio*), and, perhaps, also the aforementioned *ambitio*—and express a contrast with the actions, such as the distribution of cash and promotions, consequent upon them. I cannot see how *ipsa* would turn vices into "supposed vices" or "things called vices (i.e., by the *severi*, but not the *faventes*)" *vel sim*. Be that as it may, if *aviditate* refers to Vitellius, it cannot be taken with anything but *vitia*, certainly not with *interpretabantur*.

Supplementing Morgan's own earlier arguments against this construction, I would say that tying Vitellius's "vices" (or vices) to his eagerness to play the part of governor places a peculiar limitation on *interpretabantur*: was it just the vices connected with his governorship that his supporters viewed as virtues? The parallel passage in Dio, who likewise connects *vitia* and support for Vitellius, suggests not: "That he had been a sex object for Tiberius and continued to live in accordance with that licentiousness concerned them not at all, or rather, they deemed that he suited them for precisely this reason" (64.4.2).

In my view, the passage should be translated as follows: "In the estimation of the upright, he demeaned himself, but his supporters called it affability and good will that without measure or judgment he gave away what was his and squandered what belonged to others. Indeed,<sup>55</sup> out of greed for control, they took the faults themselves to be virtues." The passage is built around a typically Tacitean antithesis between surface and reality, between the flattering labels Vitellius's supporters applied to his actions ("they called") and the actual value they accorded them ("they took . . . to be"). It is symptomatic of civil war's moral chaos that the same kinds of words appear on opposite sides of the antithesis ("affability and good will . . . virtues").

To the arguments based on syntax and style, I add one based on the pattern investigated in the present paper: the presence of parallel passages relating to two or more of the emperors of 69 that contribute to the explanation of Vespasian's

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cuiquam bonis artibus quaesita perinde adfuere quam huic per ignaviam," "Those who handed him the principate did not know him; rarely has anyone who earned the army's favor by good means enjoyed it to the degree that he did through his indolence"). See further Morgan's note 39 (2002.346).

55 For *simul* "introducing a further argument," see *OLD* 5b, and cf. *Hist.* 4.23.4, where *simul* . . . *sperabantur* supplements *haud ignari* in much the same way that "simul aviditate imperandi . . . interpretabantur" supplements *faventes vocabant*.

uniquely successful first steps as emperor. In the discussion of *potentia principatus* above, we saw numerous supporting figures, from magistrates and army officers to soldiers en masse, possessed of *vis* and *potentia* and carrying out the *munia imperii*. To any of these men, when they were supporting a bid for power, one might reasonably ascribe *aviditas imperandi*, a phrase that belongs where Tacitus put it, in the description of Vitellius's entourage at 1.52.2.

*Amherst College*