

ROMANS AND BARBARIANS IN TACITUS' BATTLE NARRATIVES

by

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(Under the direction of Dr. Susan Mattern-Parkes)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine how Tacitus constructs ethnic stereotypes, namely those of the Romans and of the barbarians, in his battle narratives. The first section of the study explores his descriptions of technical aspects of the battle narrative, such as topography, use of weaponry, battle formations, and sieges. The second section examines the value judgments that Tacitus makes about the combatants and their actions, discussing the themes of discipline and *virtus*, as well as the leaders' ability to lead by example and stifle dissent. In his descriptions of both the technical and the "moral" aspects of battle, Tacitus shapes his Romans quite differently from his barbarians.

Tacitus constructs identities in his battle narratives possibly to satisfy his audience's expectations or to make the scenes more understandable. Such constructions indicate that ethnocentrism plays an important role in Latin historiography, revealing racial prejudice in Roman society.

INDEX WORDS: Tacitus, battle narratives, Roman army, barbarians, ethnicity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Battle narrative in western historiography has always been problematic. Scholars and critics have tended to focus their attention on problems of historical accuracy, ranging from the validity of military historians' explanations of victories and defeats to the accuracy of their portrayals of the life of the soldier under the stress of battle.¹ Since problems result from the impracticality of describing every minute detail of the chaotic event of battle, a military historian usually concentrates on the aspects of the battle that seem to decide its outcome, seem most intriguing, or might hold the interest of a reader who could be without any military training or expertise.² Furthermore, the historian tends to use conventional methods of writing battle stories and models established by his

¹ For the great debate over Tacitus' historical and technical accuracy in depicting battles, see T. Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* vol. 5 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1894), 165; B. W. Henderson, *Civil War and Rebellion in the Roman Empire, AD 69-70: A Companion to the Histories of Tacitus* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), viii; E. G. Hardy, "Tacitus as a Military Historian in the *Histories*," *The Journal of Philology* 31 (1910): 123-152; R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 157ff; and J. H. Parks, "Tacitus on War and Peace," *The Classical Bulletin* 46 (1969): 17-20. For discussion of the realities of combat and its impact on the individual soldier, see J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976); and P. Sabin, "The Roman Face of Battle," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 1-17.

² Keegan (see above, n. 1), 63.

predecessors to counter the complexity of the battle, not only for the readers' benefit but also for his own.³

This thesis will not focus on questions of historical accuracy in the battle narratives of Tacitus; rather it will be a literary analysis of how he constructs ethnic stereotypes in his battle scenes. A careful analysis of all of his battle narratives in the *Annales*, *Historiae*, and the *Agricola* reveals that Tacitus is concerned with defining ethnic boundaries, or identities, namely those of the Romans and of the barbarians. Almost invariably, he portrays them differently and in stereotypical ways. For example, Romans like to fight on an open and firm plain; barbarians prefer swamps and forests. Romans are organized into battle formations; barbarians are not. Roman soldiers plunder after the battle is over; barbarian soldiers plunder during the battle. These are a just a few of the typical distinctions between Tacitus' Romans and barbarians in combat that will be discussed in this thesis.

Before treating Tacitus' battle narratives, it is important to distinguish the battle narrative from the war narrative. War narrative comprises more topics than this thesis encompasses, such as army conscriptions, marches, and reactions to the war back in Rome. Additionally, it often covers multiple campaign seasons. Imbedded within the war narrative, the battle narrative is restricted to descriptions of combat and of the moments immediately before and after combat.

There are forty-seven battles scenes between Romans and foreign armies in Tacitus, and they vary in length and in complexity. Major battles narratives—such as those that describe the great Roman battles against Arminius, Boudicca, and Calgacus—

³ A. K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War: 100 BC—AD 200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3-6; and Keegan (see above, n. 1), 62-63.

normally contain much more information and include more features than shorter battle scenes, such as those that describe the African and Thracian battles. While the major battles may be reported in a scene of approximately a dozen paragraphs, the shorter battles may only take up one or two.

The narrative structure of Tacitus' battle scenes typically falls into a pattern. Although this pattern is not a rigid one, there are several common elements which can be seen. Tacitus usually starts his battle narratives with preliminary features—predominantly the causes of the specific battle and sometimes a commander's plan of attack—while he often concludes the narratives with an account of the number of losses and casualties, the awards bestowed on the victorious army, or simply with a reference to the surrender of the defeated party. Between the preliminary and concluding features, he usually describes the Romans' and the enemy's order of deployment, the speeches of both commanders, the topography of the battlefield, and then the fight.⁴

The tradition of describing foreigners has its roots in Homeric poetry and continues into late antiquity.⁵ However, the Greeks and Romans never formally recognized ethnography as a genre, as they did history or tragedy. Ethnic descriptions of other peoples in classical literature—sometimes exaggerated and unlikely—are more often found as digressions in historical narratives.⁶ Greek and Roman writers might

⁴ K. Wellesley, "Tacitus as a Military Historian" in *Tacitus*, ed. T. A. Dorey (New York: Basic Books 1969), 84-85.

⁵ R. F. Thomas, *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: The Ethnographical Tradition*, The Cambridge Philological Society, supplementary vol. 7 (Cambridge, U.K., 1982), 1; and S. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy* (University of California Press, 1999), 72-73.

⁶ Thomas (see above, n. 5), 124-125; and Mattern (see above, n. 5), 73, 79.

represent other peoples either negatively (as savage and uncivilized) or in an idealized manner (as simple and noble). Almost always, though, they characterized the barbarians as essentially different from themselves.⁷

For the most part, Tacitus depicts barbarians negatively in his battle narratives. This is obvious even in his use of the word *barbarus*.⁸ According to Y. A. Dauge, Romans used various words to indicate foreigners, and sometimes these words do not carry any negative connotations. *Barbarus*, though, has a strictly negative meaning.⁹

Ancient writers may also idealize barbarians as simple and noble folk, whose lives are uncomplicated and less corrupted than those “tainted” by civilization. Although this representation is less common in Tacitus’ battle scenes, it is strikingly apparent in his *Germania*, one of his early works and the first self-contained ethnographical monograph in classical literature.¹⁰ Tacitus’ purpose in writing this treatise is unclear.¹¹ But one salient aspect of Tacitus’ *Germania* is the respect he shows for the Germans, depicting their lives and characters as more pure and simple than those of his countrymen. In this

⁷ J. B. Rives, *Germania* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 15; and P. S. Wells, *The Barbarians Speak* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 100.

⁸ For the Germans labeled as *barbari* in Tacitus’ battle scenes, see *Ann.* 1.61, 64-65, 68; 2.14, 16, 21; for the Numidians, *Ann.* 3.21; 4.25; for the Thracians, *Ann.* 4.47, 49, 51; for the Parthians and those surrounding their empire, *Ann.* 6.31-32; 12.12, 14; 15.9; for the Britons, *Ann.* 12.35; *Agr.* 33; for the Jews, *Hist.* 5.2; and for the Batavians, *Hist.* 4.13, 15, 29; 5.14-15.

⁹ Y. A. Dauge, *Le Barbare: Recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation*, Collection Latomus, vol. 176 (Brussels, 1981), 396-407.

¹⁰ Thomas (see above, n. 5), 125.

¹¹ H. W. Benario, *Tacitus’ Agricola, Germany, and Dialogue on Orators*, rev. ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 60-61; Rives (see above, n. 7), 48-56; and Thomas (see above, n. 5), 125.

work, Tacitus often idealizes the practices of Germans because he thinks he views in them something akin to the moral standards of the early Romans.¹² However, Tacitus' attitude towards the Germans is complex as there are also some unfavorable characterizations of them in the *Germania*.¹³ Nevertheless, because the idealizations of barbarians are mainly limited to his *Germania*, it is evident that Tacitus believes that describing barbarians in battle narratives requires a different strategy.

Identifying the Romans in Tacitus' work is not always a simple task. Both legionary and auxiliary forces are generally depicted as Roman, though it can be argued that Tacitus shows some favoritism to the legions.¹⁴ Possibly, Tacitus views them as more "Roman" than their auxiliary counterparts. His partiality toward the legions may be evident in the fact that he more often names legions in combat than auxiliary units.¹⁵ Naming a force could bring recognition to a particular group, especially when the force performed a notable deed. His auxiliaries, though, are described in several scenes as performing excellently on the battlefield. For instance, the famous battle at Mons

¹² W. Beare, "Tacitus on the Germans," *Greece & Rome* 11 (1964): 69, 71; Syme (see above, n. 1), 530; Thomas (see above, n. 5), 125; Rives (see above, n. 7), 15-16, 61-63; and Benario (see above, n. 11), 60-61.

¹³ For example, the Germans are undisciplined in many facets of their lives (*Germ.* 6, 11, 15), and they are usually drunk (14, 22-23); see Chapter 3 (pp. 44-50) for a discussion of barbarian discipline and drunkenness.

¹⁴ D. B. Saddington, "Tacitus and the Roman Army," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II. 33 (1991): 3486; and I. Kajanto, "Tacitus' Attitude to War and the Soldier," *Latomus* 29 (1970): 713-714.

¹⁵ For Tacitus naming legions, see *Ann.* 1.64; 4.46, 73; 14.32, 34; 15.9; *Hist.* 1.79; and *Agr.* 26; for naming auxiliaries, see *Ann.* 2.16 and *Agr.* 36.

Graupius is primarily fought by Roman auxiliaries; the legions are held in reserve (*Agr.* 35-37).¹⁶

This thesis is concerned with Tacitus' foreign wars and not with his civil wars. However, the difference between foreign and civil wars for Tacitus is complex and deserves some discussion. It appears that Tacitus considers the war in 69 among the Othonian, Vitellian, and Vespasian armies to be a civil war, though he sometimes gives the impression that it was a foreign revolt originating in Gaul.¹⁷ Despite the fact that the battles in this war were predominantly fought in Italy, why is this "civil war" different from other wars that we may consider "foreign," like the Batavian Revolt or the Revolt of Sacrovir and Florus, both of which had Roman contingents fighting against other Romans? The answer may lie in how Tacitus portrays the armies involved in the conflict.

In a foreign war, Tacitus clearly distinguishes the two armies according to their ethnicity. Characterizing armies in a civil war, though, presents a greater challenge to him. Here, there is no ethnic distinction between the armies, making it difficult to perceive one side as less "Roman" than the other.¹⁸ Thus for Tacitus, the Batavian Revolt and the Revolt of Sacrovir and Florus are foreign wars because he can emphasize an ethnic distinction between the Roman army and the opposing army of former Roman

¹⁶ Other scenes where auxiliaries fought excellently: *Ann.* 2.16-17; 12.31; and 14.37. It can be argued, though, that Tacitus believes that a non-Roman army is more expendable than a legionary one: C. M. Gilliver, "Mons Graupius and the Role of Auxiliaries in Battle," *Greece & Rome* 43 (1996): 63.

¹⁷ V. Rosenberger, *Bella et expeditiones: Die antike Terminologie der Kriege Roms* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 82-83.

¹⁸ R. Ash, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 2.

auxiliaries. One side emerges as more “Roman,” but it further illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing between foreign and civil wars that the more “Roman” army is sometimes the army of rebellious auxiliaries.¹⁹ These problems will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The barbarians in Tacitus’ battle scenes are the external enemies of Rome: unconquered, not civilized by Roman peace, and inhabiting lands far from Rome. These include the Germans, the northern Britons (Caledonians), and the Parthians. Tacitus’ barbarians, however, may also be rebellious provincials, such as the Africans, Thracians, Jews, and southern Britons. In his battle scenes, these seditious foreigners are portrayed in ways similar to unconquered barbarians.²⁰ In fact, he labels them both as *barbari*.²¹

Tacitus does recognize differences between northern, southern, and eastern barbarians. The northern barbarians are noted for their immense size and brawn, the Africans for their mobility, and the Parthians for their accuracy with the bow.²² Tacitus, however, discusses Germans and Britons more often and in greater detail than other barbarians, such as Africans, Thracians, and Sarmatians. Ethnographic discussions of

¹⁹ Reversals of normal characterization are not uncommon in Tacitus’ battle narratives, especially in his depictions of “former” Romans. See pp. 9-10.

²⁰ A. N. Sherwin-White argues that barbarians were usually admired when they fought on the Romans’ side, “and not always even then.” Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 47.

²¹ See above, n. 8.

²² For the immense physique of the northern barbarian in Tacitus’ battle scenes, see *Ann.* 1.63, 64; 2.14, 21; and *Hist.* 5.15, 18; for the mobility of the Africans, see *Ann.* 3.20, 21,74; and for the mounted Parthians and their accurate bows, see *Ann.* 13.38.

these northern barbarians are also found in his *Germania* and *Agricola*, indicating perhaps that Tacitus had a special interest and expertise in these peoples.²³ Tacitus' descriptions of battles involving Parthians and other eastern barbarians are extremely brief, providing little substance for interpretation. For example, there are no descriptions of topography and weaponry in the battles involving the Parthians. Tacitus' apparent lack of interest in detailing the Parthians in combat may be surprising considering that some Romans viewed the Parthians as important rivals, both politically and militarily.²⁴ Tacitus, though, views the Parthians as less of a military threat to Rome than the Germans (*Germ.* 37).

My analysis will be divided into two parts: the Scientific and the Moral Dimensions of Battle. The Scientific Dimension (Chapter 2) focuses on the technical aspects of Tacitus' battle narratives, in particular his descriptions of topography, weaponry, battle formations, and sieges. The Moral Dimension of Battle (Chapter 3) focuses on the value judgments that Tacitus seems to make about the combatants and their actions. In his descriptions of both the "scientific" and the "moral" aspects of battle, Tacitus shapes his Romans quite differently from his barbarians.

²³ Ronald Syme writes that Tacitus' interest in northerners may be a result of his Gallic origin: Syme (see above, n. 1), 623. The customs and habits of the Germans and Britons are prominent in ancient literature: see, for example, Caes. *BG.* 5.12-14; 6.21-25; Strabo 1.7; Mela 3.25-28; and Dio 76.12.

²⁴ See Manilius 4.674-675; and Strabo 2.9. For more discussion of the Roman perception of the Parthians' power, see B. Campbell, "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 B.C.-A.D. 235," in *War and Society in the Roman World*, eds. John Rich and Graham Shipley (New York: Routledge, 1993), 216-220; and Mattern (above, n. 5), 58, 66. Tacitus seems more interested in Parthian politics than in their combat techniques. In fact, his descriptions of the Parthian government often mirror his descriptions of Nero's government: E. Keitel, "The Structure of Tacitus, *Annals* 11 and 12" (Ph. D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1977), 42-43, 190.

As stated above, Tacitus' barbarians are generally depicted in a negative fashion in his battle scenes, while the Romans are usually idealized. However, there are some cases where Tacitus reverses his normal characterizations of Romans and barbarians. In such instances, he appears to barbarize the Romans or to create a more "Roman" barbarian. Many such reversals occur in Tacitus' account of the Batavian Revolt (69-70 C.E.), which is described in the fourth and fifth books of his *Historiae*. At the end of both Chapters 2 and 3, I will explore such reversals one by one and attempt to determine the reasons for each.

It may be useful here to summarize briefly the events that took place and the characters involved in the Batavian Revolt so that discussion of these events will be less confusing. The Batavians were one of several Germanic tribes in Gaul. According to Tacitus, they served a special role in the Roman empire. Having a time-tested alliance with the Romans, they did not pay any tribute to them. Instead, they provided their military (*Germ.* 29; *Hist.* 4.12); essentially, they become Roman auxiliaries. In fact, they are depicted by Tacitus as fighting with distinction in the wars against Arminius (*Ann.* 2.11) and British insurgents (*Ann.* 14.29; *Agr.* 36).

When Vitellius was rising to power in 69, he demanded a levy be made in the Batavian nation to help him secure his campaign for the imperial throne (*Hist.* 4.14). The Batavians resented this conscription because those in charge of the levy appeared greedy.²⁵ The Batavian chieftain Julius Civilis took advantage of his people's distress over the conscription to launch a rebellion against the Romans, which also furthered his own private ambition to found a Gallo-German Empire for himself (*Hist.* 4.14, 61). The

²⁵ According to Tacitus, the Roman recruiters sought the old and weak Batavians so that they might make a profit for releasing them, and they hunted the handsomest Batavian youth to satisfy their lust (*Hist.* 4.14).

rebellion lasted for two years before Civilis finally surrendered (*Hist.* 5.24) but not without many initial successes.²⁶

When Tacitus describes the Batavians fighting alongside the Romans, he portrays them as Romans. When they rebel from Rome, though, they are shown to be “former” Romans, and thus barbarians. This is obvious in Tacitus’ use of *barbarus* (*Hist.* 4.13, 15, 29; 5.14-15) and in his comparison of Civilis to Hannibal (*Hist.* 4.13). Interestingly, Tacitus also compares Civilis to Sertorius (*ibid.*), the provincial administrator in Spain who led an insurrection against Rome and was eventually defeated by Pompey. The comparison to both a legendary barbarian and a seditious Roman of the past reveals the complexity in describing these rebellious Batavians. There are numerous occasions in Tacitus’ account of the Batavian Revolt when the Batavians maintain their “old” Roman identity and are depicted in Roman fashion. Likewise, there are other occasions when the Batavians are depicted in barbarian characterization.

The study of how “others” were constructed in the classical world is a popular topic these days, in particular the study of the Greek’s perception of others, but the barbarian in Latin authors, including Tacitus, has also been examined.²⁷ The reasons for this sudden enthusiasm for examining ancient people’s view of others may be related to changes within, and outside, classical studies, such as the mounting influence of social

²⁶ For more discussion of the events that took place in the Batavian Revolt, see P. A. Brunt “Tacitus on the Batavian Revolt,” *Latomus* 19 (1960): 494-517; and K. Wellesley, *The Long Year: A. D. 69*, 2nd edition (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 168-183.

²⁷ See T. Harrison, ed., *Greeks and Barbarians* (New York: Routledge, 2002); E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); D. Williams, *Romans and Barbarians: Four Views from the Empire’s Edge, 1st Century A.D.* (London: Constable, 1998); R. F. Thomas (above, n. 5); A. N. Sherwin-White (above, n. 20); and P. S. Wells (above, n. 7).

anthropology, as well as social history.²⁸ These studies have been useful to this thesis because they examine not only common techniques of describing other peoples but also the cultural and moral implications of how identity is defined.

Evaluating Tacitus as a military historian has always been problematic. Scholarship on Tacitus' military narratives has traditionally focused on issues of technical accuracy. When Theodor Mommsen stated over a century ago that Tacitus is "the most unmilitary of all historians," he based his argument on the lack of technical information that Tacitus provides, such as the actual location of the battle and the formation of the troops involved.²⁹ His argument was taken up by B. W. Henderson, who in 1908 suggested that Tacitus' military information represents nothing more than "the common gossip of the camp."³⁰ In response to Mommsen and Henderson's comments, a wellspring of support for Tacitus followed. For example, E. G. Hardy argued that some of the inaccuracies found by Henderson are questionable.³¹ John Parks and Ronald Syme argued that Mommsen's charge is perhaps misdirected because Tacitus' own sources may have been inaccurate.³² Recently, though, the debate over Tacitus as the "most unmilitary" historian has subsided, and a handful of scholars have analyzed some of the compositional elements of Tacitus' battle scenes. Out of this group, only Kenneth

²⁸ Harrison (see above, n. 27), 13-14; and Hall (see above, n. 27), ix.

²⁹ Mommsen (see above, n. 1), 165.

³⁰ Henderson (see above, n. 1), viii.

³¹ Hardy (see above, n. 1), 123-152.

³² Parks (see above, n. 1), 17-20; and Syme (see above, n. 1), 157ff.

Wellesley has looked at most of the battles together;³³ the rest have concentrated on specific battles.³⁴

Exploring why a certain author describes a battle in the way he does enables us to understand something about the culture of the author's society. In the case of his battle scenes, Tacitus is aiming to meet his audience's expectations. How Romans and barbarians fight, how they succeed or fail, and how they are generally portrayed all reflect these expectations. My analysis, in describing how Tacitus uses ethnic stereotypes to write his battle scenes, will illuminate this cultural significance as well as some important aspects of Tacitus as a military historian.

³³ Wellesley (see above, n. 4), 63-97.

³⁴ See R. Ash, "An Exemplary Conflict: Tacitus' Parthian Battle Narrative (*Annales* 6.34-35)," *Phoenix* 53 (1999): 114-135; M. G. Morgan "Cremona in AD 69: Two Notes on Tacitus' Narrative Techniques," *Athenaeum* 84 (1996): 381-403; V. Pagán "Beyond Teutoburg: Transgression and Transformation in Tacitus *Annales* 1.61-62," *Classical Philology* 94 (1999): 302-320; and Brunt (above, n. 26), 494-517.

CHAPTER 2

THE SCIENTIFIC DIMENSION OF BATTLE

“The Scientific Dimension of Battle” refers to some of the technical elements in Tacitus’ battle narratives, such as descriptions of topography, weaponry, battle formations, and sieges. I shall attempt in this chapter to map Tacitus’ manipulation of these elements to see how they play a role in constructing distinct ethnic types or identities of Romans and barbarians. In some cases, Tacitus reverses his normal characterization, and in some of these reversals he appears to barbarize the Romans or to create a more “Roman” barbarian. At the end of this chapter, I shall examine Tacitus’ reversals and attempt to explain why he deviates from his standard characterizations.

Despite some of the problems that scholars find in his topographical information, Tacitus’ descriptions of the battlefield offer insight to his construction of ethnic types.³⁵

³⁵ One of the most debated problems concerning Tacitus’ topographical information is his inclusion of mysterious place names and locations. The most famous mystery battle site in Tacitus is that of the battle at Mons Graupius (*Agr.* 29-37). For attempts to locate this battle site, see A. R. Burn, “In Search of a Battlefield: Agricola’s Last Battlefield,” *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland* 87 (1952-53): 127-133; L. Keppie, “Mons Graupius: The Search for a Battlefield,” *Scottish Archaeological Forum* 12 (1981): 79-88; and A. Henderson, “From 83 to 1883: On the Trail of Mons Graupius,” *The Deeside Field* 18 (1984): 23-29. For discussion of other battle sites in Britain, see C. M. Gilliver, *The Roman Art of War* (Stroud, U. K.: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 1999), 95. For battles sites in Africa, see F. D. R. Goodyear, ed., *The Annals of Tacitus: Books I.55-81 and II* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 350-351. Veit Rosenberger examines inscriptions that could indicate the locations of certain Tacitean battles: Rosenberger (see above, n. 17), 73-75. For a discussion of general topographical inaccuracies found in Latin literature, see N. Horsfall, “Illusion and Reality in Latin Topographical Writing,” *Greece & Rome* 32 (1985): 197-208.

Within his battle narratives, Romans are commonly associated with solid and open ground. In two particular scenes, the Romans use the solid and open ground as an invitation for battle (*Ann.* 3.20 and 4.49).³⁶ On the other hand, Tacitus usually refers to uneven and thicketed terrain in the narratives describing combat with northern barbarians. This distinction between the Romans and barbarians may be strengthened by the fact that Tacitus considers swamps and forests to be dangerous for the Romans and favorable for the barbarians (*Ann.* 1.63). Caecina might be responding to this danger when he urges his men to remain within the camp when the barbarians attack; he admonishes that those who risk venturing out will find *pluris silvas, profundas magis paludes* (*Ann.* 1.67).

The plain, or at least the firm and even ground, is often associated with the Romans. The Roman partiality for this terrain type may have been common knowledge among Tacitus' audience since there are few examples where Tacitus explicitly says that the Romans chose a particular battlefield.³⁷ The preferred terrain in these few examples is indeed the solid and even field—free of swamps and forests. Suetonius Paulinus selects a *planitiem* for his battle against the Britons (*Ann.* 14.34). In Germany, with the barbarian attack becoming inevitable, Caecina develops a bold plan: he instructs his men to allow the Germans to invade their camp because outside the ground is wet and uneven,

³⁶ In the second battle against Tacfarinas, Tacitus says that the Roman leader, Decrius, *ut copiam pugnae in aperto faceret aciem pro castris instruit* (*Ann.* 3.20); in the Thracian Revolt of 26, the Roman general, Sabinus, *exercitum aequo loco ostendit, si barbari successu noctis alacres proelium auderent* (*Ann.* 4.49).

³⁷ Roman generals often chose the battlefield that accentuated the strengths of their own army while compromising the strength of their enemies: D. J. Breeze, "The Logistics of Agricola's Final Campaign," *Talanta* 18 (1986): 14; A. K. Goldsworthy, (see above, n. 3), 128; and Gilliver (see above, n. 35), 97-98. According to Vegetius, the apt general should know that a large part of victory depends on the battle terrain (*Mil.* 3.13).

but within the camp the ground is not (*Ann.* 1.68). In the second battle near Vetera in the Batavian Revolt, Petilius Cerialis learns of a solid tract of terrain to the enemy's rear; in an attempt to avoid the marsh in front of him, he dispatches a force to take advantage of the opportunity to fight on firm terrain (*Hist.* 5.18). Likewise, in Germany, Caecina's legions abandon their flanking position amid the marsh in order to locate solid ground (*Ann.* 1.65).

Tacitus does not explicitly state that the barbarians cannot fight effectively on the plain. As a matter of fact, the Cherusci rout the Roman-allied Batavians after they had drawn the Batavians onto the *planitiem* (*Ann.* 2.11). For the most part, however, the barbarians are over-matched against Roman legions on the plain, and often defeated.³⁸

Therefore, the barbarians usually select a terrain that compromises the Romans' strengths, usually swampy ground. In their second battle against Arminius, the Romans struggle in the waterlogged soil, while the barbarians maneuver with ease because of their long limbs and enormous lances, as well as their familiarity with fighting on this type of terrain (*Ann.* 1.63-64). At Idisiaviso, Arminius selects a location that is between a stream and the forests with a narrow, waterlogged plain in the center. Another deep bog surrounds the forests (*Ann.* 2.19).

Tacitus believes that the barbarians understood the advantages they had in fighting the Romans on uneven and swampy ground. For instance, both Arminius and Civilis redirect streams and rivers so as to flood battlefields (*Ann.* 1.64; *Hist.* 5.14). Arminius, in the third German battle of the *Annales*, wants to allow Caecina and the Romans to exit the safety of their camp so that the barbarians can entrap them once more

³⁸ See Roman victories on the solid and even ground in *Ann.* 1.68; 2.16, 20; 14.37; *Agr.* 36; and *Hist.* 5.18.

in the wet and broken country (1.68).³⁹ In the second battle near Vetera in the Batavian Revolt, the barbarians try to lure the Romans into entering the marsh that separated the two armies (*Hist.* 5.17).

The Romans, on the other hand, are often found struggling on this type of terrain. During his account of Caecina's dangerous trek through the swamps, Tacitus comments that the ground is deep in mud—too unstable for the Romans to stand their ground and too slippery for advancing (*Ann.* 1.64). The Romans' inability to advance in swampy terrain is described in the subsequent battle scene as well (1.65). The slippery conditions even hinder the Romans from throwing their spears great distances (1.64).

Also, extremely wet terrain is important in the first battle near Vetera in the Batavian Revolt (*Hist.* 5.14-15). When Civilis floods a plain that is adjacent to the Rhine, he turns the field into a body of water—Tacitus ironically calls the battle, which takes place on this flooded plain, a naval engagement (5.15). The Romans begin to flounder in the water; even if they find firm ground, they have to exert all their energy just to secure it. Tacitus mentions that the barbarians, on the other hand, are accustomed to fighting in water and that their great physical stature keeps their bodies afloat (*ibid.*).

In addition to solid terrain, the Romans are also associated with the open plain; they even try to avoid locations where forests and swamps surround the parameters of the battlefield—a situation that would give the barbarian the advantage of cover. Thus, Caecina's flanked legions abandon their position in order to escape the narrow swampy alley and to locate not only solid (see above, p. 15) but also open ground (*Ann.* 1.64); Decrius leads his cohorts to the open field to challenge Tacfarinas (*Ann.* 3.20); at Mons

³⁹ Arminius' strategy, though, is stymied by the alternate plans of his military council (*Ann.* 1.68).

Graupius, Agricola's forces confront the barbarians on the open plain (*Agr.* 36); and Suetonius Paulinus selects an open plain, which is devoid of cover and allows no opportunity for an enemy ambush (*Ann.* 14.34).⁴⁰

Conversely, thick woods in Tacitean battle scenes are commonly associated with the barbarian. The forest seems to be a location where the barbarian will hang about until the appropriate time to ambush. Arminius exits the forest in order to attack Germanicus (*Ann.* 1.63). In the subsequent battle, when Caecina is marching through a swampy terrain, Tacitus mentions that *silvae* gently rose around the swamp. From these woods, Arminius and his men dash out for a surprise attack (*ibid.*). Later on in the German battle narratives, the barbarian cavalry hides in the *propinquis lucis* so as to wait for a suitable time to attack (*Ann.* 2.19).

Even when the barbarians choose the level plain for their battlefield, they select a location where the woods are close at hand, seemingly to provide a safe haven for them. Arminius fixes his position on a plain along the skirts of forests (*Ann.* 2.16), and later occupies a plain between a stream and the forests (2.19). The Cherusci draw the Roman-allied Batavians onto the level plain, which is distinguished as being surrounded by *saltibus* (*Ann.* 2.11). In the Thracian Revolt of 26, many barbarians are concentrated in the groves (*Ann.* 4.47). A few, more daring, rebels show themselves on the nearby open hills. When the Romans attack, only those hiding in the wooded areas survive; those stationed in the open are easily routed (*ibid.*). Sometimes the barbarians camp in places where the surrounding woods provide protection: Tacfarinas is confident in the security

⁴⁰ Suetonius does elect to have a forest to his rear only when he is sure that the enemy is clearly at his front (*Ann.* 14.34).

of his garrison because it is encircled by enormous woods—his camp is the site of the Romans' final battle against him (*Ann.* 4.25).

Forests, as well as swamps, are also places for the barbarian to hide upon retreat. At Idisiaviso, some of the Germans who are stationed in the plain begin to dive into the forests for safety (*Ann.* 2.17); while some of the Sarmatians who survive their battle against the Romans take cover in the swamps (*Hist.* 1.79). Tacitus even writes that Agricola's entire war against the Britons would have been over after he repelled the attackers from his camp had not the barbarians received cover from the swamps and forests upon their retreat (*Agr.* 26). If ever the Romans retreat, they seek a terrain commonly associated with their identity: when Caecina's legions leave their position amid the swampy ground, they seek open and solid ground (*Ann.* 1.65).

Tacitus' descriptions of the battlefield and his association of specific terrains with certain ethnic types may be either a simple matter of tactics,⁴¹ or an opportunity for him to discuss the unfamiliar geography of these barbarians lands.⁴² His descriptions, however, appear to have deeper, moral overtones. For example, the barbarians' association with swamps and forests gives the impression that they prefer territory that, like the barbarians themselves, is uncultivated. Moreover, as we have found, swamps and forests are places where the barbarians hide. Tacitus, therefore, suggests that the barbarians' preference for these hiding places reveals their hesitation to confront the

⁴¹ Catherine Gilliver discusses the advantages the Romans had on firm ground, stating that the solid terrain provided the necessary footing for the legions; she also discusses the disadvantages the Romans had on the swampy ground. See Gilliver (above, n. 35), 96-98.

⁴² In the *Germania*, Tacitus states that Germany is covered either by swamps or forests (5). He discusses the extreme moistness of the British soil in his geographical digressions of the *Agricola* (12), but this description concerns the province's agriculture.

Romans face-to-face. The Romans, on the contrary, are shown as preferring the open and solid battlefield, which implies that they seek a confrontation on a fair and even field.

Unlike their adversaries, the Romans wish to encounter their foe face-to-face, giving the impression that Romans are more courageous than barbarians.

Descriptions of weapons and equipment are included in less than half of Tacitus' battle scenes; it is important, nonetheless, to note how these descriptions function when they do occur since styles of weaponry can reflect certain ethnic characteristics. With the exception of the different types of artillery, there are no detailed descriptions of Roman weaponry in Tacitus' battle narratives. The lack of description suggests that the design and function of Roman weaponry and equipment may have been common knowledge among Tacitus' contemporary audience.⁴³ For the barbarian, however, Tacitus can be far more descriptive. He depicts the design and function of the barbarians' offensive and defensive equipment as a way to distinguish the barbarians' arsenal from what the Romans use. In effect, Tacitus often emphasizes the impracticality of barbarian weaponry in combat.

Tacitus characteristically describes the swords and spears of the barbarians as enormous, and sometimes unwieldy, at least in comparison to the legionary *gladius* and *pilum*, as well as the auxiliary *spatha*. The German *hastae* are described as *ingentes* (*Ann.* 1.64), *enormes* (*Ann.* 2.14), and *praelongae* (*Ann.* 2.21; *Hist.* 5.18). Tacitus notes in the final battle against Arminius that the Germans are unable to extend or retract their

⁴³ Substantial bibliography on Roman weaponry exists. See A. K. Goldsworthy, *Roman Warfare* (London: Cassell, 2000), 32, 43-45, 53ff.; B. Campbell, *The Roman Army, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4-7, 91-102; and L. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 173-186. For how archaeology has contributed to our understanding of Roman weaponry, see Sabin (above, n. 1), 3.

praelongas hastas in close quarters (*Ann.* 2.21), a situation that Germanicus foresees in his speech to his men in an earlier battle scene (2.14). Like the German *hastae*, the British *gladii* are described as *ingentes* and *enormes* (*Agr.* 36). Interestingly, Tacitus also describes the British swords as *sine mucrone* (*ibid.*).⁴⁴ The size and dullness of the Britons' swords made fighting at close quarters more difficult for the Britons (*ibid.*). The Sarmatians customarily use swords, as well as pikes (*conti*), that are described as *praelongi* and require both hands to wield (*Hist.* 1.79).⁴⁵ The Sarmatians are described as being helpless at close quarters due to their heavy weaponry, as well as their defensive equipment (*ibid.*). All of the descriptions of these large and cumbersome weapons mention that they are not properly designed for the common battle occurrence of hand-to-hand fighting.

Tacitus usually does not detail Roman defensive equipment any more than he discusses Roman offensive weapons.⁴⁶ Yet, he does discuss the design and function of shields of the Germans, Britons, and Sarmatians. The German shields are *immensa* (*Ann.* 2.14), complementing their large spears and swords. Tacitus further describes the German shields as *tenua* and not made of toughening metal or hide, but rather boards of wickerwork; because of their size and structure, Germanicus believes that the German

⁴⁴ Cf. Livy 22.46. For a discussion of this British dull sword, see R. M. Ogilvie and I. Richmond, *De Vita Agricola* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 274-275; and H. Heubner, *Kommentar zum Agricola des Tacitus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 104-105.

⁴⁵ In their battle against the Parthians, Tacitus notes that the Sarmatians ignored their short-ranged bows, and rushed on with their pikes and swords (*Ann.* 6.35).

⁴⁶ On Roman shields, see G. Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 126-127; Y. Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1994), 122-123; and Goldsworthy (above, n. 43), 18, 32, 53ff.

shields are not conducive to hand-to-hand combat (*ibid.*).⁴⁷ The Britons have *parva scuta*, also labeled *caetra* (*Agr.* 36), which was originally a Spanish word denoting a leathered shield—smaller than the legionary and auxiliary shields.⁴⁸ The smallness of these shields hindered the Britons at close quarters (*ibid.*). Tacitus offers no description of the size of the Sarmatian shield but comments that it is not intended for defensive purposes (*Hist.* 1.79).⁴⁹ He describes the Sarmatians as being powerless against the Romans at close quarters because of the ineffectiveness of their shields, as well as their heavy weaponry (see above, p. 20). Despite the different descriptions of these three shields, they are all described as being unsuitable for hand-to-hand fighting.

The standard armor for the Roman legionary consisted of both a helmet and breastplate (the armor of the auxiliaries seems to vary).⁵⁰ The Germans and the Britons, in contrast, lack both (*Ann.* 2.14; 12.35). In fact, the Romans are instructed to strike at the Germans' faces because they are without helmets (*Ann.* 2.14, 21).⁵¹ Tacitus does describe the Roman breastplate as *facilis* in the Sarmatian Revolt (*Hist.* 1.79); in this case, Tacitus is contrasting the practical Roman armor with that of the impractical

⁴⁷ When Tacitus describes the Germans' *levitas armorum* in the first battle near Vetera in the Batavian Revolt (*Hist.* 5.14), he may be referring to the Germans' light shields in this description: G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' Histories IV and V* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 98.

⁴⁸ Ogilvie and Richmond (see above, n. 44), 272.

⁴⁹ Tacitus does not tell us what the Sarmatian shields are actually designed to do.

⁵⁰ See Webster (above, n. 46), 121-126, 151-155; Le Bohec (above, n. 46), 122-123; and Goldsworthy, (above, n. 43), 32-33, 42-43, 50-53.

⁵¹ Tacitus mentions in the *Germania* that the Germans are either lightly clad in short cloaks or naked, and that few have breastplates and helmets (6).

Sarmatian armor. The Sarmatians are weighted down by their coats of mail, which are made of scales of iron or hard hide. Though impenetrable to blows, the armor makes it difficult for the wearer to get up when overthrown (*ibid.*).

Similarly, the Gallic rebel Sacrovir has a contingent of gladiatorial slaves who are encased in full armor and called *cruppellarii*; Tacitus describes their armor as impenetrable (*Ann.* 3.43).⁵² During Sacrovir's battle (*Ann.* 3.46), the legionaries' weapons are no match for this type of body armor. Thinking quickly, the legionaries snatch the primitive weapons of Sacrovir's other forces and knock the *cruppellarii* down on the ground. Being heavily laden with the armor, the *cruppellarii* find themselves lying on their backs unable to get up and continue fighting. Altogether, Tacitus gives the impression that barbarian armor—which may be lacking or overly burdensome—is not effective in Roman-oriented combat.

When Tacitus includes descriptions of barbarian weaponry, he suggests that the weaponry is impractical for combat, particularly hand-to-hand combat. Does this mean that the barbarians are more effective in long-range combat? At Mons Graupius, the Britons are able to brush aside the Roman artillery and launch their own dense volley of missiles; moreover, Tacitus writes that when the Romans advance in order to fight the enemy at close quarters, the Britons are not as efficient in this style of fighting as they are at long-range combat (*Agr.* 36). Within Arminius' ranks, the Cherusci are successful at

⁵² A. J. Woodman and R. H. Martin argue that the act of naming particular contingents of barbarian troops (in this case, *cruppellarii*) draws attention to the “otherness” of non-Romans: *The Annals of Tacitus: Book III* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 340. For discussion of Sacrovir's gladiatorial troops, see T. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators* (London: Routledge, 1992), 27, 43; and G. Ville, *La gladiature en occident des origines à la mort de Domitien*, Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, vol. 245 (Rome, 1981), 294.

long-range fighting (*Ann.* 1.64; 2.11). There are more descriptions, however, of the barbarians using artillery with little success.⁵³ Yet, unlike his descriptions of the barbarians' swords, spears, shields, and armor, Tacitus' descriptions of their artillery are not distinguishable from his descriptions of Roman artillery. Although Tacitus does not explicitly mention that the barbarians are better equipped for long-range fighting, he leads us to believe that their weaponry is better suited for it.

It is evident from his descriptions of weaponry that Tacitus is contrasting what is "Roman" and what is the "other." Although there is no detailed description of Roman weaponry in his battle scenes, the descriptions of barbarian swords, spears, shields, and armor are clearly contrasted with the Roman arsenal. Since the barbarian weaponry is described as impractical and ineffective in certain combat situations, Tacitus implies that the barbarians lack the military capacity necessary to design effective weapons.

Most of Tacitus' battle scenes are pitched battles, and at the beginning of many of these scenes he places a description of the battle formations. There appears to be a distinct difference between Tacitus' descriptions of Roman battle lines and those of barbarian battle lines.⁵⁴ For Roman battle formations, Tacitus often describes in detail how and where certain forces are positioned, but he either describes barbarian formations

⁵³ See *Ann.* 2.14, 20; 6.35; 12.35; 14.37; and 15.4. We are told from various sources that the Parthians traditionally fought on horseback with long-range arrows, but detailed descriptions of the Parthian long-range fighting are absent in Tacitus' battle scenes: see Trogus (Justin) 41.2; Dio 40.14-15; and Plut. *Crass.* 24-25. Tacitus briefly describes the Parthian cavalry's long-range dominance in his description of the failed treaty negotiations between Corbulo and Tiridates (*Ann.* 13.38). For discussion of Parthian weaponry, see Goldsworthy (see above n. 43), 131-136.

⁵⁴ Battle formations, in general, will often vary according to the individual circumstances and terrain: Goldsworthy (see above, n. 3), 133.

as disorderly or offers no description. He, thus, gives the impression that the Romans are organized in their battle lines, and that the barbarians are not.

Tacitus' descriptions of Roman battle lines commonly provide information about where specific forces are positioned. In the first battle against Tacfarinas, Camillus positions his legion in the center and places his auxiliary infantry and cavalry on the wings (*Ann.* 2.52). On guard against a sudden enemy ambush in Germany, Caecina places his men in formation while marching through the swamps: he puts the Twenty-first and Fifth legions on the left and right flanks, respectively; the First legion in the front; and the Twentieth in the rear (*Ann.* 1.64).

Tacitus' depictions of the barbarians' formations, on the other hand, are less descriptive. For example, the Frisian, Parthian, and Iberian formations are only labeled *acies* in their battles (*Ann.* 4.73; 6.35). Moreover, Tacitus sometimes explicitly says that the barbarian formations lack any order at all. One of the ways in which he suggests that barbarian formations are disorderly is his use of *caterva*. Usually translated as a "band" or "horde," the term *caterva* is applied only to barbarian troops, and gives the impression that their formations are hardly organized.⁵⁵

When the Romans cross over to the island of Mona to combat British refugees, they find the barbarians in a *diversa acies* (*Ann.* 14.30). During an earlier battle in Briton against Caratacus, Tacitus says that the barbarians are positioned in their *catervae* (*Ann.* 12.33). In Germany, the Roman-allied Batavians are instructed to assail the German *catervas* (*Ann.* 2.11). In the Batavian Revolt, the Batavian leader Julius Civilis fills both banks of the Rhine with *Germanorum catervis* before their successful assault of the

⁵⁵ D. B. Saddington, *The Development of the Roman Auxiliary Forces from Caesar to Vespasian* (Harare, Zimbabwe: University of Zimbabwe, 1982), 31, 39.

Roman camp at Vetera (*Hist.* 4.22). During the Thracian Revolt of 26, the *barbari* speed down their embankments in *catervae* during their assault on Sabinus' defenses (*Ann.* 4.51). And in the first battle of the Revolt of Sacrovir and Florus, the victorious army of Indus (the Gallic chieftain allied to the Romans) is described as disorganized in its formation opposite the rebel Florus (*Ann.* 3.42). Even though Indus and his men are fighting on the behalf of the Romans, their barbaric identities are maintained by this description of their disorderly formation.

The distinction between the descriptions of Roman and barbarian formations can be more easily noticed when Tacitus describes both formations within a single battle narrative. In the final battle of the Boudiccan Revolt, Tacitus first describes the Roman formation: legions posted in crowded ranks, light armed troops on either side, and the cavalry massed on the extreme wings (*Ann.* 14.34). He then describes the barbarian infantry and cavalry as being positioned in every direction (*passim*) and in *catervae* (*ibid.*). In the final battle against Tacfarinas, Tacitus does not detail the Roman formation, but his description still gives the impression that the Romans are organized: the Roman infantry is in massed formation and the cavalry is set in order (*Ann.* 4.25).⁵⁶ Tacfarinas' Numidians, on the other hand, are said to be without order and without a plan (*ibid.*). Likewise, during the Sarmatian invasion of Moesia, Tacitus does not go into too much detail concerning the Roman formation, but he does write that everything was ready for battle on the Roman side (*Hist.* 1.79). The barbarians, however, are *dispersi*, *incuriosi*, and *vagi* (*ibid.*).

⁵⁶ *Ab Romanis confertus pedes, dispositae turmae, cuncta proelio provisa* (*Ann.* 4.25).

At Mons Graupius, Tacitus writes that Agricola places the auxiliary infantry in the center, the cavalry on the wings, and the legions in reserve. He then describes the Britons' formation as merely *acies* (*Agr.* 35), and later as *catervae* (37). Tacitus does mention that the British war chariots fill up the intervening plain. However, the chariots are depicted as moving in every direction (35). In Armenia, Corbulo places his men in formation while on the march as he expects Tiridates to ambush: the Sixth and Third legions on the left and right flanks, respectively; a detachment of the Tenth in the center; a thousand *equites* in the rear; and the rest of the cavalry and archers on foot on the wings. The barbarian formation, on the other hand, is once again only described as *acies* (*Ann.* 13.40). At Idisiaviso, Tacitus describes the Roman formation in unusual detail. Germanicus has his battle order fashioned in such a way that it could easily be ready for a sudden enemy ambush: in the front, there are Gallic and Germanic auxiliaries with archers on foot; next come four legions, two praetorian cohorts, and selected cavalrymen; then all the other legions, light armed troops, mounted archers, and the rest of the auxiliary cohorts (*Ann.* 2.16). Conversely, Tacitus merely mentions that the *barbara acies* is posted on the plain (*ibid.*) and that they are positioned in *catervae* (2.17).

Tacitus' ethnic constructions can easily be seen in his descriptions of battle formations, especially when the different descriptions of Roman and barbarian formations are found within one battle narrative. The Roman battle line is often described in detail. Barbarian lines are not. Such a contrast gives the impression that the Romans are more organized in their formations. This contrast is more evident when Tacitus clearly describes the barbarians, unlike the Romans, as disorderly.

Tacitus also constructs his ethnic types in his siege narratives.⁵⁷ The Romans' ability to master siege warfare appears to be a reflection of their ingenuity in engineering.⁵⁸ In contrast, Tacitus associates a technological incompetence in siege warfare with the barbarians. These two divergent stereotypes are illustrated by his detailed descriptions of the Romans' technical and mechanical feats and by his omission of any such detail when describing the barbarian sieges. Even when the barbarians are successful in conducting a siege, Tacitus emphatically faults the Romans' defensive efforts.

There are at least eight narratives describing Romans besieging barbarians, and within most of them occur numerous technical descriptions of Roman siege weaponry, engines, and constructions. In the final battle against Arminius, there is a brief siege of the barbarians' *agger*, during which Roman spears are flung from artillery engines (*Ann.* 2.20). In Britain, when the Romans ascend the barbarian *aggerem*, Tacitus mentions that the Romans form a *testudo* to ward off enemy fire (12.35).⁵⁹ At Volandum, Corbulo divides his army to perform several different tasks in order to keep the defenders busy at many fronts: one group forms a *testudo* to undermine the walls; the second group uses

⁵⁷ I shall discuss not only the sieges of towns and cities, but also the sieges of military camps, garrisons, and natural fortifications.

⁵⁸ Webster (see above, n. 46), 239.

⁵⁹ The tortoise formation (*testudo*) is constructed by the overlapping shields of the legions and forms a continuous roof above the legionaries' heads: Goldsworthy (see above, n. 43), 18.

scalas to climb over the walls; the third group launches *multos faces et hastas* from *tormentis*; and the fourth group casts long-range missiles (13.39).⁶⁰

In the Romans' circumvallation of the barbarians in the Thracian Revolt of 26, Sabinus constructs a long *fossam loricaeque* (about four miles in circumference) around the enemy's fortifications (*Ann.* 4.49). At the same time, he builds an *aggerem*, from which stones, spears, and firebrands are launched on the barbarians (*ibid.*). When Sabinus' circumvallation forces the Thracians to try to break out of the enclosure, the Romans strike them down with missiles, repel them with shield bosses, and hurl *muralia pila* and massive piles of rocks on the scaling barbarians (4.51).⁶¹ At Uspe in Bosphorus, the Roman siege towers are built higher than the city's walls, and from these towers firebrands and spears are showered on the barbarians (*Ann.* 12.16). At Legerda in Armenia, the barbarians yield to the Roman *aggeri* and *armis* (*Ann.* 14.25). And at the siege of Jerusalem, the Romans begin their assault by constructing mounds and mantlets. Tacitus even mentions in his account of this siege that the Romans employ every piece of equipment known in siege warfare (*Hist.* 5.13).⁶² All of these descriptions of Romans

⁶⁰ Gilliver believes that Tacitus' description of Corbulo's siege of Vollandum is a "textbook example" in Roman historiography showing how a general should conduct a siege: Gilliver (see above, n. 35), 147-148.

⁶¹ Sabinus' circumvallation of the rebel Thracians invites many comparisons with Caesar's description of Alesia, and Tacitus could be influenced by that passage: A. J. Woodman and R. H. Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus: Book IV* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 206-207.

⁶² *Cuncta expugnandis urbibus reperta apud veteres aut novis ingeniis struerentur* (*Hist.* 5.13). Unfortunately, Tacitus breaks from his narrative of the siege of Jerusalem just after his descriptions of the Roman preparations and of the omens seen in the city in order to jump back to the Batavian Revolt, after which the *Historiae* breaks off. The most complete account of the siege is found in Josephus, *B.J.* 5.47-6.356. For discussion of this siege, see P. B. Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare* (Bloomington: Indiana

besieging barbarians result in a Roman victory, and such descriptions of siege weapons, engines, and construction repeatedly emphasize the Romans' ability to master the technical and mechanical aspects of siege warfare.

The barbarians, on the other hand, lack this technological aptitude. According to Tacitus, there is nothing so completely unknown to the barbarians as the machines and stratagems of siege operations (*Ann.* 12.45, *nihil tam ignarum barbaris quam machinamenta et astus oppugnationum*). This comment comes from the same narrative that describes the Iberian leader, Radamistus, bribing the Romans after his unsuccessful attempts to besiege a Roman stronghold in Armenia (*ibid.*). Tacitus also describes the Numidians as despising siege operations (*Ann.* 3.21).

In his accounts of barbarians besieging Romans, Tacitus hardly discloses any of their siege operations. Moreover, descriptions of barbarian siege weaponry, engines, and constructions are rare. For example, Tacitus does not discuss any of the Thracian and Numidian methods or technology in their unrewarding attempts to take the city of Philippopolis (*Ann.* 3.39) and the Roman stronghold at Thala (*Ann.* 3.21), respectively. When Monaeses tries to take the Armenian town of Tigranocerta, little detail of the siege is included except that the Parthians lack the boldness to engage in the hand-to-hand fighting demanded for the prosecution of a siege (*Ann.* 15.4).

Even when the barbarians eventually succeed in breaching Roman walls, there is little description of their methods. In fact, Tacitus appears to discount these successes by indicating that the Romans' defenses do not provide a formidable challenge. Thus, he offers few details about the Icenians' operations in their successful capture of the Roman

University Press, 1999), 314-322; Goldsworthy (above, n. 43), 138-141; and Wellesley (above, n. 26), 124-126.

colony Camulodunum, but he does mention that the Romans did not take the necessary precautions in defending the colony (*Ann.* 14.32).⁶³ In the first act of war in the Batavian Revolt, Tacitus does not reveal any of the Batavians' operations in their siege of two Roman winter camps, except to note that they attacked by sea. He dismisses the Batavians' success by saying that the Romans did not foresee the assault and even if they did, they would not have had the strength to ward off the enemy (*Hist.* 4.15).⁶⁴ Likewise, when the Batavians breach Cerialis' garrison in the second year of their revolt, we are not told of their methods. Tacitus only says that the Batavians notice that the Roman sentinels are not alert (*Hist.* 5.22).

Even in these descriptions of the barbarians successfully breaching Roman walls, Tacitus has little interest in discussing their methods. In fact, he ignores their operations altogether. Tacitus' silence concerning the barbarians' technical and mechanical feats gives the impression that the barbarians lack the technological aptitude to prosecute a siege. This, as we have seen, is not how Tacitus commonly describes a Roman siege.

Thus far, I have shown that Tacitus constructs a clear and definite distinction between the Romans and barbarians using his descriptions of topography, weaponry,

⁶³ The procurator of Britain, Catus Decianus, acting in the absence of the governor, does not send an adequate number of forces to Camulodunum (*Ann.* 14.32). Moreover, the Romans do not secure the colony with a moat or rampart. Additionally, they do not remove the women and the elderly from the colony. Tacitus says that the colonists are as carelessly guarded as if the world is at peace (*ibid.*).

⁶⁴ Tacitus says that the name of the legion defending the garrison is mightier than the strength of the army (*nomen magis exercitus quam robur*); the reason, according to Tacitus, is that Vitellius had withdrawn the effective cohorts and recruited a useless crowd from nearby tribes (*Hist.* 4.15). For more discussion of this passage and the first battle of the Batavian Revolt, see Chilver (above, n. 47), 35; and Wellesley (above, n. 26), 170-171.

formations, and sieges. It is important, at this point, to examine how and when Tacitus reverses these stereotypes.

It was noted that barbarians are commonly associated with uneven, swampy ground. The Romans, on the other hand, often struggle on this type of terrain. In the Sarmatians' invasion of Moesia (*Hist.* 1.79), the barbarian cavalry is unable to advance or hold their ground in the wet snow. The weight of the Sarmatians' armor causes them to sink deep; the wet snow hinders their ability to wield their weapons; and the Sarmatian cavalry, a more formidable force than their infantry, is described as slipping on the roads (*ibid.*).

The challenges the Sarmatians encounter on account of the snow are strikingly similar to the hardships the Romans find in the German swamps (*Ann.* 1.64-65). Tacitus, however, does not appear to suggest that the Sarmatians are less barbaric and more "Roman" because they struggle on loose terrain. Tacitus emphasizes the Sarmatians' barbarian characteristics when he describes them as being disorganized when the Romans attack and being more intent on securing plunder than fighting (*ibid.*).⁶⁵ Moreover, these were the same Sarmatians, according to Tacitus, who defeated two Roman cohorts in the previous winter, possibly in the same snowy conditions (*ibid.*). It appears that Tacitus is noting a bizarre occurrence when the barbarian is unprepared for battle on a terrain with which they should be familiar.

There is also a reversal of Tacitus' normal characterizations in his descriptions of forests in two particular scenes with Germanicus. In Tacitus' battle scenes, Romans typically avoid forests, while the barbarians commonly use the wooded terrain to hide. In

⁶⁵ For discussion of the barbarians' uncontrollable desire for plunder in Tacitus' battle scenes, see Chapter 3 (pp. 44-47).

one of his speeches, however, Germanicus surprisingly says that the solid and open plain is not the only suitable terrain for the Romans to fight, declaring that the barbarians would find the forest to be a hindrance to them given their enormous and unwieldy weapons and the restricted space of the woods (*Ann.* 2.14). And in the subsequent battle (2.20-21), Germanicus actually charges into the forests, which the Germans occupy. Tacitus mentions in this particular battle narrative that the barbarians, like Germanicus predicted, are indeed handicapped by their weapons in the narrowness of the forests.

This remarkable reversal may result from any or all of three authorial intentions. First, the reversal may be a tribute to Germanicus' tactical skills: the Roman commander notices that the barbarian actually has no tactical advantage in the woods and is able to motivate his men to fight in the woods, a place which Tacitus deems dangerous for Romans (*Ann.* 1.63). Tacitus, however, may be emphasizing the foolish recklessness of the imperial prince. Six years before Germanicus' war with Arminius, the legionary commander Varus suffered one of the most brutal and embarrassing Roman defeats to the same enemy in Teutoburg Forest.⁶⁶ Thus, is it intelligent to follow the footsteps of Varus (that is, advance a Roman army into the woods against a proven victor like Arminius) and risk suffering the same misfortune? Recent scholarship has questioned the long held argument that Germanicus is the pillar of excellence in books 1 and 2 of the *Annales*, the popular hero to the villainous Tiberius.⁶⁷ Tacitus' characterization of Germanicus is, in

⁶⁶ Tacitus recounts Varus' disastrous battle when Germanicus stumbles upon their remains (*Ann.* 1.61-62).

⁶⁷ For scholars who believe Tacitus' partiality for Germanicus is self-evident, see Syme (above, n. 1), 254, 418, 492; E. Koesterman, *Annalen: Buch 1-3*, Band 1 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1963), 39; B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the Writing of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952), 118; and C. W. Mendell, *Tacitus: The Man and His Work* (New Haven, 1957), 130.

fact, inconsistent and faulty, and recent scholarship has found several unfavorable descriptions of him in Tacitus, in particular of his mishandling of the German mutiny.⁶⁸ Perhaps then, Tacitus is recognizing Germanicus' imperfection as a leader by describing Germanicus doing the unthinkable, only to succeed somehow.

Thirdly, Tacitus' reversal in this narrative could also be a redemptive device. I do not want to suggest that Tacitus invented Germanicus' success against Arminius in the forest. Yet, in this final battle against Arminius, it seems highly suggestive that Germanicus' victory occurs on the same terrain that Arminius used successfully for an ambush in the first German battle of the *Annales* (1.63) and in the defeat of Varus at Teutoburg. Perhaps, Germanicus' victory in the woods is designed by Tacitus to palliate, or even reverse, the humiliation of the past.

As noted in the discussion of sieges, Tacitus portrays the barbarians as lacking technological aptitude. The Jews in their defense of Jerusalem, however, are an exception, as Tacitus details the grand fortifications of the great city. He says that the city stands on an eminence and that the Jews had defended it with works and fortifications well enough (*satis*) to defend a city resting on level ground (*Hist.* 5.11). The walls had been skillfully built, projecting out or bending in such a way that the flanks of a besieging army would be under fire. The towers marvelously rose to heights of sixty to one hundred and twenty feet. Inside, the temple was built like a citadel and splendidly defended (*ibid.*).

⁶⁸ D. O. Ross, Jr., "The Tacitean Germanicus," *Yale Classical Studies* 23 (1973): 214-227; C. Pelling, "Tacitus and Germanicus," in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, eds. T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 60-85; and H.Y. McCulloch, Jr., *The Narrative Cause in the Annals of Tacitus*, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, vol. 160 (Königstein: Verlag Anton Hain Meisenheim, 1984), 68, 81, 89-92.

There is no comparable description of barbarian engineering anywhere in Tacitus. However, this passage does not appear to create a more “Roman” barbarian. Just before the siege narrative, Tacitus goes to great length to describe and emphasize the “otherness” of the Jews (*Hist.* 5.5).⁶⁹ More importantly, though, Tacitus says that the founders of the city had foreseen that there would be many wars against them because their customs were so different from other nations, and therefore they designed their fortifications in such a way to make any assault on them a long and difficult one (*Hist.* 5.12). This siege, indeed, became a long and arduous, yet successful, one for the Romans. If Tacitus planned on continuing his description of the siege of Jerusalem, then it is possible that he was attempting in this reversal to justify the initial Jewish success or to glorify the Roman engineering that produced their eventual success.

Reversals of the Roman and barbarian identities can also be found in descriptions of battles against former Roman auxiliaries. In 21 C.E., Julius Florus of the Treviri and Julius Sacrovir of the Aedui lead a relatively small revolt in Gaul because the wars in Germany incurred endless taxations in their communities (*Ann.* 3.40-46). Both are aristocrats, Roman citizens, former Roman officers in auxiliary regiments, and of noble families with a long association with Rome (3.40).⁷⁰ Working together in different areas

⁶⁹ Tacitus says the following concerning the “otherness” of the Jews in his ethnographic digression (*Hist.* 5.5): their customs are perverse and disgusting; they abstain from intercourse with foreign women, but within their own race nothing is unlawful; and they use circumcision to distinguish themselves from other men.

⁷⁰ Grants of citizenship were commonly offered to successful auxiliary leaders: see F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 477ff. For more discussion of Julius Sacrovir and Julius Florus, see J. F. Drinkwater, “The Rise and Fall of the Gallic Iulli,” *Latomus* 37 (1978): 818-821.

of the province, they launch a fruitless revolt against Rome: Florus is routed by the Gallic chieftain, Indus, who is allied to Rome (3.42), while Sacrovir loses his battle against the advancing Upper German legions (3.46).

In general, Tacitus' barbarians are associated with wooded areas, while his Romans are, conversely, identified with the open plain. In the narrative of this revolt, Florus and his men are shown as seeking (*petebant*) the forest (*Ann.* 3.42), while Sacrovir deploys his men in formation on the open plain (*Ann.* 3.45). Tacitus also details Sacrovir's battle line as he often does when describing Roman formations: Sacrovir stations his fully armored gladiators in the front, his cohorts on the wings, and his half-armed men in the rear (*ibid.*). Florus' battle line, on the other hand, is not detailed—a common omission by Tacitus in his descriptions of barbarian formations.

In Tacitus' description of this revolt, Sacrovir, thus, maintains portions of his Roman identity, while his counterpart, Florus, does not. The reasons why Tacitus sometimes wants to “Romanize” Sacrovir yet treat Florus as a “barbarian” are not clear.⁷¹ It is possible that Sacrovir appears more “Roman” because he is more successful than his counterpart. Tacitus' attempts to depict Sacrovir as displaying more “Roman” traits than Florus, nevertheless, provide a nice balance to the composition of the narrative as a whole: Florus, the “barbarian,” battles another barbarian, the Gallic chieftain, Indus; and Sacrovir, the “Roman,” clashes against the Roman commander Silius. This

⁷¹ Tacitus' extensive account of this relatively quiet rebellion is even more perplexing. There is no indication that a *civitas* officially revolted from Rome. The in-depth treatment of the revolt may be a result of the Romans' heavy interests in Gallic affairs: J. F. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 27. Tacitus, in general, tends to relate Gallic affairs with special interest because of his Gallic origin: Syme (see above, n. 1), 623.

compositional symmetry of a “barbarian” versus another barbarian and a “Roman” versus another Roman may be the reason for this reversal.⁷²

Many reversals occur in Tacitus’ account of the Batavian Revolt (69-70 C.E.), described in the fourth and fifth books of his *Historiae*. In his accounts of this war, Tacitus sometimes portrays the Batavians as “Romans” and the Romans as “barbarians” possibly because he considers the Batavians the most “Roman” and the most noticeably brave of all the German tribes in Gaul (*Germ.* 29). They are the most trusted auxiliary force of the early empire (*ibid.*), and fight with distinction in the wars against Arminius (*Ann.* 2.11) and British insurgents (*Ann.* 14.29; *Agr.* 36). Their commanders, who formerly served in the Roman ranks, had attained Roman citizenship and bore Roman names.⁷³

Another reason why Tacitus depicts the Batavians as “Romans” could be because this rebellion may have been considered a civil war rather than a foreign one. Some scholars describe the Batavian Revolt as a civil war since the revolt of Roman auxiliaries takes place in the course of Vitellius and Vespasian’s fight for the imperial throne.⁷⁴ However, Tacitus suggests that the Batavian Revolt was indeed a foreign conflict. First, he says that Civilis’ true purpose in this conflict was to found a Gallo-Germanic empire,

⁷² Woodman and Martin investigate other parallel elements in Tacitus’ composition of this battle narrative: Woodman and Martin (see above, n. 52), 327ff.

⁷³ For discussion of the Batavian leaders, see K. Wellesley (above, n. 26), 169ff. For auxiliary leaders receiving Roman citizenship, see Millar (above, n. 70), 477ff.

⁷⁴ For discussions of the Batavian Revolt as a civil war, see Syme (above, n. 1), 174-175; G. Walser, *Rom, das Reich und die fremden Völker in der Geschichtsschreibung der frühen Kaiserzeit* (Baden-Baden: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1951), 103-109; and Brunt (above, n. 26), 497ff.

of which he himself would be emperor (*Hist.* 4.61). Secondly, the accounts of the Batavian Revolt are placed in Books 4 and 5 of the *Historiae*, thus removing the Batavian conflict from the Civil War accounts of Books 1-3. In fact, at the beginning of Book 4, Tacitus says that the Civil War is over (4.1), and he begins his narrative on the Batavian Revolt much later (4.12).⁷⁵ Although Tacitus appears to view the contest as a foreign war, the fact that it could be interpreted as a civil war (because of its timing and of the status and reputation of those revolting) might help to explain why Tacitus usually portrays the Batavians as “Romans.” Furthermore, Tacitus may be reversing some of the Roman descriptions as a way to account for the duration and difficulty of the rebellion and the many Batavian victories. Indeed, when the Romans find some success later on in the revolt, we find fewer reversals in the descriptions of these battles.

Batavian formations are often depicted in detail and described as orderly. In contrast, Roman formations are not detailed, and sometimes the Romans are, surprisingly enough, without any order at all. For example, the Batavian attack on Vocula’s camp is so unexpected that Vocula, the commander of the Twenty-second legion, is unable to address his soldiers or form a proper battle line (*Hist.* 4.33). His auxiliaries, moreover, are described as *passim circumfusa* (*ibid.*). In the subsequent battle, the Romans engage the enemy without even forming a battle line; the Batavian formation is not described, but Tacitus does say that the Batavian commander Julius Civilis is ready for battle (4.34). Although the Romans successfully ward off the enemy in these two scenes, Tacitus treats these two battles as Pyrrhic victories for the Romans, saying in both cases that they failed to gain any ground or momentum (*ibid.*).

⁷⁵ Josephus treats the revolt as primarily a German revolt (*BJ.* 7.75-78), and Frontinus refers to a *bellum Germanicum* (*Strat.* 4.3, 14).

In Civilis' first battle against the Romans, Tacitus mentions that the Canninefates, Frisians, and Batavians are *in propriis cuneis* (*Hist.* 4.16). In a subsequent battle, the Batavians *in cuneos congregantur, densi undique et frontem tergaque ac latus tuti* (4.20). The Roman battle line, in contrast, is merely an *acies* (*ibid.*). In both of these battle scenes, the Romans are defeated.

Tacitus continues to describe in detail the Batavian formation even when the Roman commander Petilius Cerialis arrives (*Hist.* 4.71) and the Romans begin to experience some success. In the second battle after Cerialis' arrival, Civilis is said to have organized his line as follows: the Ubii and Ligones in the center, the Batavian cohorts on the right, and the Bructeri and Tencteri on the left (4.77). The Roman formation under Cerialis is described in some detail: the troops are drawn up *per cohortis et manipulos* (4.78). This slightly more elaborate description of the Roman formation, as compared with the limited descriptions in 4.16 and 20, could be an indication of the Romans winning back their identity, as they are able to hold off Civilis in this particular scene. In the final battle of the revolt, which the Romans win, we find that both the Batavian and Roman formations are described in detail and appear to be orderly. Civilis places his men *haud porrecto agmine sed cuneis*; moreover, Tacitus says that the Batavians and the Cugerni are positioned on the right flank, while the tribes from across the Rhine are on the left (*Hist.* 5.16). The Roman formation is described as follows: the cavalry and auxiliary cohorts are located in the front, legions on the second line, and *delecti* in reserve (*ibid.*).

I have shown earlier in this chapter that the Romans, unlike the barbarians, are commonly depicted as having a technological aptitude for siege warfare. Tacitus

illustrates this aptitude by describing in detail the Romans' siege operations. The descriptions of barbarian sieges, though, normally lack technical detail. In two siege narratives from the Batavian Revolt, we find an interesting barbarian reversal.

During Civilis' siege of Vetera, Tacitus details the barbarian siege operations by describing the use of ladders and a *testudo* to scale the Roman walls (*Hist.* 4.23). When the Romans repel these barbarian efforts, Civilis orders *machinae* to be made. However, the barbarians have no idea how to build these siege machines and have to rely on the help of deserters and captives to explain the construction of these devices to them (*ibid.*).⁷⁶ The Batavians learn how to build a bridge-like structure (*in modum pontis*) made of timber with wheels underneath (*ibid.*). Some of the Batavians stand on top of the structure to fight at a better elevation, while others, concealed underneath, work to undermine the walls. When the Roman artillery easily knocks out the enemy's *informe opus*, Civilis decides to change his tactics and resorts to delay, effectively starving the Romans within their camp (*ibid.*)—a strategy reminiscent of Sabinus' circumvallation of the Thracian stronghold (*Ann.* 4.49).

When Civilis attempts to besiege the Romans at Gelduba in the subsequent siege narrative (*Hist.* 4.28-30), we once again find Tacitus describing the barbarians' methods, particularly the construction of *machinae* and the use of siege weaponry (4.28). The Batavians even construct a tower two stories high that they push towards the gate of the camp (4.30). Tacitus' account of this siege, however, reveals superior Roman ingenuity

⁷⁶ Walser criticizes Tacitus' use of *insolitum* (*Hist.* 4.23) to describe the barbarians' inability to construct siege machines, suggesting that auxiliaries were indeed familiar with siege warfare: G. Walser (see above, n. 74), 100. Chilver, however, argues that the Batavians, when they were in the Roman ranks, probably never constructed or employed siege machines: Chilver (see above, n. 47), 43.

in engineering: after demolishing the barbarian tower by means of poles, the Romans construct their own *machina*—a well-balanced device that when suddenly dropped would catch one or more of the enemy and with a shift of counterweight deposit them within the Roman camp (*ibid.*).⁷⁷ Civilis and his men, at the sight of this device, quickly abandon their siege.

In the barbarian sieges of Vetera and Gelduba, Tacitus illustrates the Batavians' "Roman" identity by describing their siege operations and some technological prowess. Even Civilis' tactic of patiently starving the Romans suggests that the Batavians (as former Roman auxiliaries) maintain their "Roman" identity. However, the Batavians' engineering skills are clearly inferior to those of the Romans, and Tacitus cleverly suggests the Batavians' true ethnicity by showing that they have to rely on others to learn how to make siege machines.⁷⁸ Even so, with the exception of the Jews in the siege of Jerusalem, the Batavians show more technological proficiency than any other barbarian in Tacitus. Unlike his portrayal of the Jews, though, Tacitus' depiction of the Batavians in their sieges is intended to create a more "Roman" barbarian.

Tacitus shapes his portrait of Romans as opposed to barbarians with his descriptions of topography, weaponry, tactics, and sieges. When one of these elements is present within his battle narratives, we noticed that it is used to flesh out the contrast between the Roman identity and that of the "other." Tacitus carefully reverses the

⁷⁷ For more discussion of the Roman device known as the *tolleno*, see Wellesley (above, n. 26), 180.

⁷⁸ It is apparent from these particular sieges that the engineering skills of the Roman army were found in the legionary component: Wellesley (see above, n. 26), 180.

identities in much of the Batavian Revolt, implying that the frequent Batavian success was a result of a more “Roman” barbarian army and more barbaric “Roman” one.

In Tacitus’ battle narratives, the barbarians characteristically avoid face-to-face encounters and use the swamps and forests to hide, while the Romans commonly choose to confront their foe on the equal plain. Moreover, their impractical barbarian weaponry, their disorganization in forming battle lines, and their lack of technology in prosecuting sieges paint the barbarians in a different light than the Romans. Tacitus suggests that the barbarians commonly lack a kind of art of warfare, or military science, which the Romans normally possess. The “scientific,” or technical, elements of the battle narrative, however, do not wholly exhaust Tacitus’ techniques of constructing identity. In the following chapter, I shall investigate how Tacitus makes use of “The Moral Dimension of Battle” to further distinguish the “Roman” from the “other.”

CHAPTER 3

THE MORAL DIMENSION OF BATTLE

Success in battle, according to Tacitus' battle narratives, is not wholly dependent upon possessing superior technical and tactical skills; rather one's conformity with a set of values and principles in combat appear to be just as important. Therefore, this chapter focuses on Tacitus' value judgments concerning Roman soldiers and leaders, as compared to their barbarian counterparts.⁷⁹

Four themes will be analyzed in this chapter: discipline, *virtus*, the problem of divided leadership, and a commander's ability to lead by his own example. In emphasizing these four moral themes, Tacitus creates a clear and distinct difference between Romans and barbarians as combatants. Tacitus constructs this distinction both in straightforward narrative passages and also when he removes himself from the narrative and allows his characters to speak for themselves—that is, during their battle speeches. As with the themes discussed in the previous chapter, Tacitus sometimes reverses his normal characterization of Romans and barbarians. At the end of this chapter, I will examine Tacitus' reversals and attempt to explain why he deviates from his standard characterizations.

⁷⁹ Recent scholarship has explored how historiographers portray the individual in combat, in particular the common soldier. The focus of these scholars has been to determine the accuracy with which the historiographers depict the realities of warfare and the stress an individual endures in combat: Keegan (see above, n. 1); Sabin (see above, n. 1), 1-17; and Goldsworthy (see above, n. 3), 3-11. I will, once again, avoid any discussion of Tacitus' accuracy, and will instead focus on how ethnic identities play an important role in his descriptions of soldiers and leaders.

The Romans' *disciplina militaris*, which they took pride in and even deified,⁸⁰ seems to involve a sophistication, or precision, of battle tactics: the ability of thousands to act and maneuver as one unit against the enemy.⁸¹ However, it also appears to have certain moral implications. It is defined by self-control, overcoming powerful motives, such as greed and corruption, which appear to be a result of idleness.⁸² In general, Tacitus believes that wars tend to harden the soldiers' discipline, while inactivity weakens it by leading to decadence and corruption.⁸³

While Tacitus does sometimes portray discipline as a problem for the Roman army, depictions of their lax discipline in his foreign battle scenes are rarely found. Accounts of corrupt behavior during combat—such as unwarranted plundering, defecting

⁸⁰ For discussion of *Disciplina* as a deity for the Roman army, see G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (Bristol, U. K.: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 131; and Le Bohec (above, n. 46), 107. Roman military success was attributed by the ancients to Roman discipline: Joseph. *BJ.* 2.20; 3.5, 10, 71-75; Polyb. 6.39; and Veg. *Mil.* 1.1.

⁸¹ A. Neumann, "Disciplina militaris," *Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Supplementband 10 (1965): 158-175; N. Rosenstein, *Imperatores Victi: Military Defeat and Aristocratic Competition in the Middle and Late Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 95-96; J. E. Lendon, "The Rhetoric of Combat: Greek Military Thought and Roman Culture in Julius Caesar's Battle Descriptions," *Classical Antiquity* 18 (1999): 281-290; and Goldsworthy (see above, n. 43), 125-129.

⁸² The respite that Junius Blaesus gives to his legions on the Rhine in 14 C.E., according to Tacitus, demoralizes the troops, who accordingly turn to luxury and idleness. Moreover, they begin to loathe *disciplina* and their duties (*Ann.* 1.16). Later in the *Annales*, Tacitus writes that the Roman general Corbulo on two occasions finds his new forces greedy for money and apathetic to military work. In Lower Germany in 47 (11.18) and in Syria in 54/55 (13.35), Corbulo employs severe methods to discipline his men. For a discussion of the relationship between idleness and military lax discipline, see E. Wheeler, "The Laxity of Syrian Legions," in *The Roman Army in the East*, ed. D. L. Kennedy (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1996), 229ff; and Mattern (above, n. 5), 203.

⁸³ *Ann.* 1.16, 31; 13.35; *Agr.* 16; and *Hist.* 1.88; 2.20, 80.

in return for money, and excessive carousing—are more often associated with the barbarians than the Romans, demonstrating the barbarians’ lack of discipline.

As noted above, Tacitus perceives greed as one of the human drives that discipline is meant to control. Specifically, the ability of Tacitus’ Romans to suppress their greed for plunder on the battlefield illustrates their discipline, while his descriptions of barbarian greed during combat demonstrate the opposite. In Tacitus, both Romans and barbarians plunder, but they do so in different ways.⁸⁴ The barbarians are often depicted as seeking plunder before the battle is over, indicating that they are more concerned with spoils than with winning a battle, or even fighting in one.⁸⁵ On the contrary, Tacitus’ Roman soldiers have the discipline to curb their hunger for loot until the battle ends. Thus, in a sense, the Romans participate in “controlled plundering;” the barbarians, “uncontrolled plundering.”

The greed of the Germans, in particular, is prominent in Tacitus. In the *Germania*, he writes that they prefer seeking plunder to farming (14). In the *Annales*, the Roman commander Caecina is only saved during his battle against the Germans in the swamps by the barbarians’ *aviditas* for spoils (1.65). The Germans, in the subsequent battle, decide to attack Caecina’s camped army only in order to reap the spoils within the garrison (1.68). When the Batavian leaders address their men before their second battle against Petilius Cerialis in the Batavian Revolt, they implore the Gauls to fight for *libertas*, the Batavians for *gloria*, and the Germans for *praeda* (*Hist.* 4.78). In the same

⁸⁴ It is a common motif in Caesar and Livy that common soldiers, Roman and barbarian, often display an extreme desire for loot: Caes. *BC.* 2.39; *BG.* 5.19, 6.34; and Livy 2.11, 26, 47; 8.36, 38; 21.11.

⁸⁵ Cf. Polyb. 2.7, 19, 22; 3.78; and Strab. 4.4.

battle, the entire barbarian army appears to have a victory in their hands until they become preoccupied with securing their plunder (ibid.).

Other barbarians are shown to be greedy for plunder during combat. In their second war against the Romans in 20 C.E., Tacfarinas' men, who are *suetos ad praedam et raptus* (*Ann.* 2.52), are so overloaded with their plunder that the massive amount of booty weighs down this otherwise mobile force, allowing the slower Romans to entrap them (*Ann.* 3.21).⁸⁶ The Sarmatian cavalry is extremely mobile as well. In their battle against the Romans in Moesia, however, they are slowed down, according to Tacitus, by the slippery ground and by their greed for plunder (*Hist.* 1.79). The Sarmatians, a *gens . . . praedae magis quam pugnae intenta*, are too encumbered by their plunder to escape the Romans (ibid.). The Boudiccan army's desire for attaining more plunder preoccupies their minds also. Tacitus writes that they are indifferent to anything other than spoils, such as securing better tactical positions before the arrival of Suetonius Paulinus' legions (*Ann.* 14.33).⁸⁷

There appears to be an allusion to excessive barbarian greed in Tacitus' description of the Armenian war of 35 between the Parthians and Iberians. In his speech to his men, the Iberian leader Pharasmanes refers to the Parthians as Medes decorated

⁸⁶ Tacitus says that one of the causes of the second war against Tacfarinas was the looting of African towns by his men (*Ann.* 3.20).

⁸⁷ For more discussion of this proverbial barbarian stereotype, see A. M. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in The Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 122-124; and Mattern (above, n. 5), 73-75.

with gold (*Ann.* 6.34, *picta auro Medorum agmina*). The Iberian commander may be referring to the Parthians' armor as plunder in order to motivate his men.⁸⁸

Tacitus' Roman soldiers appear to be just as motivated to attain plunder as the barbarians. In fact, during the mutiny on the Rhine, Germanicus tries to appeal to his restless men saying that they have conquered many and have acquired much booty in the process (*Ann.* 1.42). The Roman soldiers' appetite for loot is evident in Tacitus' battle narratives as well. Corbulo uses the prospect of loot to encourage his men before the siege of Volandum, instructing them to consider glory and plunder equally (*Ann.* 13.39, *gloriaeque pariter et praedae consulerent*). Just before the siege of Jerusalem, the Romans clamor for an immediate assault partly because of the potential loot within the great city's walls (*Hist.* 5.11). And after the Gallic rebel Sacrovir takes Augustodunum (the prosperous capital of the Aedui), the Roman soldiers are so eager to encounter Sacrovir's forces that they complain of slow marches and long bivouacs; the standard-bearers are described as racing against each other to Augustodunum (*Ann.* 3.45). Perhaps the Romans wish to crush the rebellion quickly in order to get to the wealth of the town.

Unlike his barbarians, though, Tacitus' Romans achieve victories first, and then they plunder, thus displaying a greater discipline. The Romans begin plundering at Idisiaviso only after their victory against the Germans (*Ann.* 2.18).⁸⁹ In Britain, Suetonius Paulinus tells his men just before their final battle against Boudicca to forget about the prospect of loot and concentrate on crushing the enemy. He concludes by

⁸⁸ Ash (see above, n. 34), 120.

⁸⁹ Interestingly, Tacitus says that among the spoils collected by the Romans were chains, which Tacitus believes were "undoubtedly" (*non dubio*) to be used for Roman prisoners (*Ann.* 2.18).

saying that all of the barbarians' possessions would belong to the Romans once victory had been gained (*Ann.* 14.36). In the Thracian Revolt of 26, after two successful engagements against the rebel Thracians, the Romans allow the allied forces of the Thracian king to ravage and plunder, so long as their havoc is limited to the daylight, another example of the Romans' controlled plundering (*Ann.* 4.48). Roman plundering after victory, rather than during an engagement, is further shown in the sieges of Volandum (*Ann.* 13.39) and Rigodulum (*Hist.* 4.72), and in the battle at Mons Graupius (*Agr.* 38).

Along with plundering, a soldier could also become rich by accepting enemy bribes in return for defection. Bribes and defections, though, are usually associated with the barbarians in Tacitus, and rarely with the Romans.⁹⁰ For example, in his description of the Armenian war of 35 between the Parthians and Iberians, he writes that the Sarmatians have accepted the gifts of both the Parthians and Iberians and have enlisted in opposite camps, an act which Tacitus characterizes as a customary habit of their race (*Ann.* 6.33, *more gentico*).⁹¹ And in a later struggle for the possession of Armenia in 51 C.E., the Parthian leader, Gotarzes, dispatches bribery agents to buy the defection of the

⁹⁰ In the Batavian Revolt, there are several instances of Roman soldiers, legionary and auxiliary, defecting to the enemy: *Hist.* 4.16, 18, 33, and 58. However, Tacitus does not mention that the defection is based on money, or that there is any exchange of money for the defection. It appears that the Batavian leaders simply coerce some Roman units to fight on behalf of their cause.

⁹¹ For more discussion of this passage, see Ash (above, n. 34), 121.

allies of Meherdates, the king of Armenia (*Ann.* 12.14).⁹² The defection of Meherdates' contingents is in accordance with their *levitas gentilis* (*ibid.*).⁹³

When a German strolls up to Caecina's legionary camp, he offers the Romans a cash gift—a hundred *sesterces* per man—for their defection (*Ann.* 2.13).⁹⁴ The legionaries reject the lucrative bribe, exclaiming that they, when the opportunity comes, will take whatever they want from the Germans. Tacitus' description of the legionaries' refusal contrasts with his characterization of the barbarians described above.⁹⁵

Descriptions of barbarians' excessive drinking and carousal—either on the battlefield or in camp directly before or after a battle—suggests a lack of discipline, especially in comparison to the Romans, who are not depicted in this fashion in any Tacitean battle scene. For instance, in the Thracian Revolt of 26, the rebel Thracians, before the battle commences, are leaping about in song and dance in front of the Romans, as is their custom (*Ann.* 4.47, *more gentis*). After one of Julius Civilis' battle speeches,

⁹² *Missis corruptoribus exuendam ad fidem hostes emercari* (*Ann.* 12.14). Meherdates was the new king of Armenia installed by Claudius in 47 C.E.

⁹³ Tacitus remarks after the defection that these barbarians are more inclined to seek their kings from Rome than to keep them (*Ann.* 12.14). E. Keitel discusses Tacitus' accounts of Parthian bribes, as well as other vices described in this passage: Keitel (see above, n. 24), 155-156.

⁹⁴ H. Furneaux believes that the offer was probably made to a small group of legionaries because the barbarians more than likely could not afford the allotment to a large group of men: Furneaux, ed., *The Annals of Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884-1891), 303; cf. Goodyear (see above, n. 35), 220.

⁹⁵ The severe penalties for defections may have deterred many Roman soldiers from deserting: J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army: 31 B.C.-A.D. 235* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 301ff.

the barbarians respond with customary dancing (*Hist.* 5.17, *ita illis mos*).⁹⁶ Following a successful skirmish against Caecina's legions in the marsh, the Germans, in high carousal, sing songs that fill the valleys and woods (*Ann.* 1.65). Tacitus' description of the German festivities contrasts with his somber depiction of the Roman camp (*ibid.*). Tacitus contrasts the atmosphere of the Roman and barbarian camps in the Batavian Revolt as well: after a stalemate in one of their later battles, the Batavians spend the night singing and shouting; the Romans in rage and threats of retaliation (*Hist.* 5.14).

Barbarian drunkenness was a typical stereotype in ancient literature.⁹⁷ For example, in his *Germania*, Tacitus mentions that the Germans have endless drinking contests that are considered in no way disgraceful to them (32), and that they do not have any self-control when drinking (33). Tacitus' battle narratives also include descriptions of this proverbial barbarian stereotype. He describes the Batavians as being drunk during their fight against the Romans at Gelduba. After a barbarian respite for feasting, the battle continues into the night. The Batavians, inflamed with wine, rush into battle recklessly (*Hist.* 4.29).

Even barbarians fighting on behalf of the Romans can be portrayed as drunkards. Allied to the Romans in the Thracian Revolt of 26, the Thracian king's forces are instructed by the Romans to protect the rear lines with garrisons.⁹⁸ Tacitus says that initially they provide adequate defense. Soon, though, they begin to abandon their posts

⁹⁶ For rhythmic dancing as characteristic of barbarian warriors, see also Livy 38.17.

⁹⁷ Mattern (see above, n. 5), 71-74; and Eckstein (see above, n. 87), 121-123.

⁹⁸ These are the same native Thracians, as discussed above (p. 47), who are allowed by the Romans to plunder in a controlled manner during the day (*Ann.* 4.48).

for wild and drunken parties (*Ann.* 4.48). These soldiers, for whom Tacitus has little regard, thus behave like stereotypical barbarians, demonstrating a lack of discipline when their vigilance is most needed: the enemy notices the revelry in the client-king's camp and successfully besieges the garrison in a night attack (*ibid.*).

It is clear that Tacitus views discipline as essential for military success. However, in these descriptions of discipline, he is not suggesting that the common Roman soldier does not desire wealth or pleasures. Rather Tacitus gives the impression that the Romans possess a greater self-control over powerful motives that might undercut the chances of victory. In a sense, it seems that the barbarians are usually more concerned with uncontrolled plundering, defecting for money, and excessive revelry (all of which are often described by Tacitus as “customary to their race”) than with winning their battles.

Along with discipline, *virtus* is a moral quality that pervades Tacitus' battle narratives. *Virtus* was an ideal quality of a Roman soldier.⁹⁹ Traditionally translated as “courage” or “valor,” it was, in a military context, the display of manliness in combat—the opposite of cowardliness. For example, in the siege of Jerusalem, Tacitus writes that the Romans demand an immediate assault partly because of their *virtus* (*Hist.* 5.11).¹⁰⁰ In a sense, battle becomes a contest for masculine dominance.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ W. Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973), 23-76, 174-176; and T. J. Moore, *Artistry and Ideology: Livy's Vocabulary of Virtue* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1989), 6-10.

¹⁰⁰ The Romans clamor for immediate action, according to Tacitus, also because of their greed for plunder (*Hist.* 5.11; see above, p. 46). For more descriptions of Roman *virtus* as “courage” or “valor” in Tacitus' battle scenes, see *Ann.* 2.25; 12.35; and *Agr.* 27.

¹⁰¹ Varro writes that *virtus* is derived from *virilitas* (*LL.* 5.73; cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 2.43). See S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 230; and Kajanto (above, n. 14), 718. J. E. Lendon writes that the

Tacitus considers *virtus* to be a factor contributing to victory; however, it does not always guarantee victory. After the final German battle in the *Annales*, the German prisoners exclaim that the Romans possess *virtus* in both victory and defeat (2.25). While early in the Batavian Revolt, the Batavians' *virtus* does not lead them to victory, as the Romans win the battle with *fortuna* (*Hist.* 4.34).¹⁰²

Moreover, *virtus* in Tacitus' battle scenes sometimes corresponds with experience or achievement. For instance, the Roman commander Junius Blaesus, in the third war against Tacfarinas in 22, divides his forces into several groups, led by centurions of *virtutis expertae* (*Ann.* 3.74). In another battle narrative, *virtus* is contrasted with inexperience: the Roman commander Petilius Cerialis, in his first battle against the Batavians, believes that the *virtus* of his men would be an advantage over the green Batavian unit, which had been hastily raised (*Hist.* 4.71).¹⁰³ Along with experience or achievement, Tacitus, in several scenes, suggests that *virtus* is also the opposite of luck or fortune.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Tacitus perceives *virtus* to be a developed quality, not inherent to all men, and acquired through battle experience. It is not strictly a Roman quality in Tacitus,

masculine undertones associated with *virtus* in Caesar's battles causes them to resemble "a battle of roosters or of drunkards in a bar, a Florentine duel or a Sicilian vendetta": Lendon (see above, n. 81), 310.

¹⁰² According to Lendon, *virtus* in Caesar's battle scenes does not always decide the outcome: Lendon (see above, n. 81), 309.

¹⁰³ Similarly, Caesar says that his green legions, having been hastily recruited, are easily crushed by the enemy; however, his experienced centurions, promoted to their position because of their *virtus*, are distinguished as fighting bravely to their deaths (*BG.* 6.40).

¹⁰⁴ *Ann.* 2.20; and *Hist.* 4.29, 34.

and not all Roman soldiers are described as possessing it. But his Romans do demonstrate it more often than barbarians.

In Tacitus, only the barbarians of Germany, Britain, and Gaul are described as having *virtus*; his other barbarians, for the most part, are not, which implies that the courage of other barbarians is either non-existent or hardly noteworthy.¹⁰⁵ An exception is the description of the Sarmatians' lack of *virtus* in their invasion of Moesia. Before the fight commences, Tacitus writes that no race is so cowardly (*tam ignavum*) when fighting on foot; however, when they fight on horseback, as is their custom, they are tougher to defeat (*Hist.* 1.79). He also says that it is remarkable to note that all of the Sarmatians' *virtus* is outside themselves—that is, in their horses (*ibid.*, *namque mirum dictu ut sit omnis Sarmatarum virtus velut extra ipsos*).¹⁰⁶ Even here, such *virtus* as he allows to the Sarmatians is not inherent, but adopted.

Even though Tacitus' northern barbarians possess *virtus*, theirs is depicted differently from the Romans'. While Tacitus describes groups of Romans as possessing *virtus*, only individual barbarians, particularly barbarian leaders, seem to have it. The centurions selected by Blaesus, as described above (*Ann.* 3.74; see p. 51), and the legionaries at the siege of Jerusalem (*Hist.* 5.11) collectively have *virtus*. On the other hand, some northern barbarian generals, such as Arminius (*Ann.* 2.17), his ally Inguiomerus (*Ann.* 2.17; 2.21), and the Gallic leader Sacrovir (*Ann.* 3.41), possess *virtus*;

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 1 (pp. 7-8) for discussion of Tacitus' depictions of northern barbarians versus other barbarians, in particular the Parthians.

¹⁰⁶ Kajanto (see above, n. 14), 716.

their men do not. Thus, Tacitus gives the impression that Romans, both common soldiers and their superiors, acquire this ideal quality, while amongst barbarians, only leaders do.

Although some of Tacitus' barbarian leaders have *virtus*, his Roman characters never acknowledge it, as they only recognize their own *virtus*. For instance, in Britain, the Romans, speaking of the nearly impregnable Silurian defense, shout that everything is capable of being overtaken with *virtus* (*Ann.* 12.35, *cuncta virtute expugnabilia clamitare*); and when the Romans defeat the Britons, who had invaded Agricola's camp, the Roman soldiers claim that nothing can stop their *virtus* (*Agr.* 27, *nihil virtuti suae invium*). The Roman commanders Suetonius Paulinus and Agricola both recognize the *virtus pristina* of their men in their battle speeches (*Ann.* 14.36; *Agr.* 33).

Barbarian characters, on the other hand, acknowledge their own *virtus* in one scene and the *virtus* of the Romans in another. When the besieging Britons lose to the Romans inside Agricola's camp, the defeated barbarians claim that they did not suffer defeat because of a lack of *virtus*, rather due to Agricola's masterful tactics (*Agr.* 27).¹⁰⁷ Thus, the Britons believe that they themselves possess *virtus*. After the Germans are defeated in their final battle against the Romans, they acknowledge the Romans' *virtus* (*Ann.* 2.21).

Although individual barbarians are depicted as having *virtus* and the Britons claim in one scene that they collectively possess it as well, the Romans, as a group, demonstrate *virtus* more frequently. In fact, it seems that Tacitus' Romans, by their

¹⁰⁷ When the Britons invade Agricola's camp, Agricola sends forces to the enemy's rear, thus trapping the barbarians (*Agr.* 26).

silence concerning barbarian *virtus*, perceive *virtus* to be only a Roman quality. Thus, it seems that Tacitus deems the Romans as superior in *virtus*.¹⁰⁸

Besides discipline and *virtus*, Tacitus further distinguishes Romans from barbarians in their leaders' abilities to stifle dissent. Divided leadership sometimes plagues Tacitus' barbarians, but not his Romans. For example, in the Thracian Revolt of 21, three powerful tribes under separate leaders take up arms against Rome. In his brief account of this revolt, Tacitus writes that this division of leadership saves the Romans from a *bellum atrox* (*Ann.* 3.38). And in the siege of Jerusalem, divisions in the barbarians' leadership lead to dissension. Each of the three Jewish leaders—Simon, John, and Eleazar—controls an area of the great city in its defense against the besieging Romans. When John attempts to take control of Eleazar's area, Eleazar is slain (*Hist.* 5.12).¹⁰⁹

Divided leadership among barbarian generals, more importantly, often creates problems when they propose contradictory strategies. In fact, barbarian tactical decisions are hardly described by Tacitus, unless there is some kind of squabble within their leadership. Thus, Arminius and his ally, Inguiomerus, differ on the subject of how to deal with Caecina's encamped army, which the Germans have surrounded. Arminius proposes to allow the Romans to march out of their camp so that the Romans would have to fight once more on marshy ground; while Inguiomerus argues that the Germans should storm the camp because the unexpected siege would produce more Roman captives and

¹⁰⁸ T. J. Moore makes the same argument concerning Livy's use of *virtus*: Moore (see above, n. 99), 13.

¹⁰⁹ Tacitus says that the assassination of Eleazar created tension among the entire Jewish army, who eventually settled their disputes when the Roman offensive commenced (*Hist.* 5.12, *ita in duas factiones civitas discessit, donec propinquantibus Romanis bellum externum concordiam pareret*).

booty. The Germans finally decide on the latter plan—a more violent strategy (*atrociora*) that pleases the barbarians—to their own misfortune, as the Romans are ready for their attack (*Ann.* 1.68). In this battle scene, Tacitus emphasizes that the sound stratagem of Arminius, who is portrayed as the main barbarian commander throughout the German narratives, is overturned by the irrational plan of the lesser character, Inguiomerus.¹¹⁰ Similarly, a decision of Julius Civilis, the main commander of the Batavian Revolt, is reversed by other leaders. Having the Romans on the ropes, Civilis wishes to wait for reinforcements before attacking. However, his ally, Julius Tutor, launches into a diatribe, insisting on an immediate assault because seasoned Roman legions are on their way to reinforce the weakened Roman army. A third Batavian leader, Julius Classicus, finally ends the dispute by siding with Tutor's plan (*Hist.* 4.76).¹¹¹

Tacitus' Roman commanders appear to be better than barbarians at resolving conflicts between themselves and their advisors and allies.¹¹² In the rare cases when Tacitus describes divided leadership among the Romans, he treats these disputes differently from his depictions of barbarian divided leadership. Either the main Roman

¹¹⁰ Inguiomerus is the uncle of Arminius, and for a long time had been respected by the Romans (*Ann.* 1.60). He is not, however, the central barbarian figure in Tacitus' German narratives as Arminius is.

¹¹¹ Julius Tutor's plan to attack immediately appears to be the better one; however, the Batavians lose the battle against the weakened Romans because they are too preoccupied with securing their plunder (*Hist.* 4.78).

¹¹² Traditionally, Roman generals consulted a *consilium* before a pitched battle, during which officers could voice their opinions on matters of tactics to the commander. Ancient writers suggest that the Roman commander usually had the final say: Goldsworthy (see above, n. 3), 121-125, 131-132.

commander does not allow his decision to be overruled by his advisors, or the dispute is quickly resolved.

When news arrives of the revitalization among the northern Britons in Caledonia, Agricola's military council demands that the Romans withdraw south in order to avoid losing (possibly) all of Britain, but Agricola promptly rejects their decision (*Agr.* 25). In the subsequent battle at Mons Graupius, when Agricola thins his battle line in order to compensate for the barbarians' superior numbers, most of his council warns him to bring up the legions he has in reserve. Agricola, again, ignores his advisors' counsel (35). In both of these battle scenes, Tacitus does not linger over his description of the disputes and suggests that Agricola promptly made the correct decisions, as the Romans succeed in both engagements.

When tension develops between Visellius Varro and Gaius Silius (commanders of separate legions) over how to counter the two-pronged Gallic revolt of Sacrovir and Florus, Tacitus portrays this dispute as quickly resolved. In contrast to the Jews in the siege of Jerusalem, who settle their power struggle by assassination, Varro—being old and weak—is described as abdicating his command in favor of the young Silius (*Ann.* 3.43, *mox Varro invalidus senecta vigenti Silio concessit*).

It appears from these descriptions of divided leadership that a leader's ability to stifle dissent is vital for military success. Tacitus' Roman leaders characteristically possess this ability, while barbarian generals are commonly unable to resolve internal conflicts quickly and effectively. Such dissension in barbarian leadership seems to weaken their chances of victory.

In order to achieve success in battle, commanders must also rally their men to give their best effort. In Tacitus, a leader inspires his men either with a battle speech or by his own example. Both Roman and barbarian battle speeches frequently inspire the troops.¹¹³ However, the distinction in their speeches lies in how they motivate their men. The Roman generals typically inform their men of the barbarians' cowardice; the barbarian commanders, of perpetual Roman tyranny.¹¹⁴

When Roman leaders speak of barbarians, they often discuss their cowardice. Corbulo tells his men that the Parthians reveal their *ignaviam* when they avoid engaging the Romans (*Ann.* 13.39). Gaius Silius describes the unwarlike nature of Sacrovir's forces, even instructing his men to have mercy on those fleeing (*Ann.* 3.46). Likewise, Suetonius Paulinus, before the final battle of the Boudiccan Revolt, describes the Britons as *inbellis* (*Ann.* 14.36). At Mons Graupius, Agricola argues that the reason the enemy has survived up to this point is because they are the *ceterorum Britannorum fugacissimi*; he continues by saying that his men have already encountered the bravest and most ferocious Britons—the remaining rebels are cowards (*Agr.* 34).

Barbarian generals, on the other hand, present the Romans as *raptores orbis* (*Agr.* 30), often complaining of their own role of servility to the Romans. Barbarian

¹¹³ *Ann.* 1. 60; 2.14, 15; 3.46; 12.34; 14.36; *Hist.* 4.71; 5.17; and *Agr.* 33; 35. For an excellent discussion of the dramatic purpose of battle exhortations in ancient historiography, see M. H. Hansen, "The Battle Exhortation in Ancient Historiography: Fact or Fiction?" *Historia* 62 (1993): 161-180. In Tacitus, see E. Keitel, "The Structure and Function of Speeches in Tacitus' *Historiae* I-III," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II. 33 (1991): 2772-2794; and K. Wellesley (above, n. 4), 67.

¹¹⁴ Both Roman and barbarian commanders encourage their soldiers by speaking of the potential glory and honor to be gained from victory: see the speeches of Arminius (*Ann.* 1.59), Pharasmanes (*Ann.* 6.34), Corbulo (*Ann.* 13.39), Calgacus (*Agr.* 31), and Agricola (*Agr.* 33).

commanders usually urge their men to fight for *libertas* in order to shake off *servitus*. For example, Arminius asks his men before the battle at Idisiaviso whether they wish to fight for freedom or suffer in slavery (*Ann.* 2.15; cf. 1.59).¹¹⁵ Likewise, the Gallic rebel Sacrovir mentions how magnificent it would be to gain *libertas* with a victory and how intolerable *servitus* would be if they lost once more (*Ann.* 3.45). Calgacus, Agricola's nemesis and commander of the Caledonians, who have not yet been enervated by Roman peace, wants to avoid any such servitude. He says in his address to his men before the battle at Mons Graupius that they, being free from Roman dominion because of their geographical location (*nos terrarum ac libertatis extremos*) and wanting no part in slavery, have the opportunity to bring the *initium libertatis* to all of Britain with a victory over the Romans (*Agr.* 30). Tacitus includes this "liberty or slavery" motif as well in the speeches of Caratacus (*Ann.* 12.34), Boudicca (*Ann.* 14.35), and Civilis (*Hist.* 4.14, 17, 32).¹¹⁶

It is difficult to assess Tacitus' attitude towards barbarian *libertas*. Are we led to believe that Tacitus considers *libertas* to be an ideal? If so, then possibly his barbarian generals are misusing the word, but this assessment may be incorrect considering Tacitus himself labels Arminius *liberator haud dubie Germaniae* (*Ann.* 2.88). Perhaps then, we are dealing with a modern misinterpretation of "freedom." According to P. A. Brunt, Romans valued their own *libertas*, which primarily related to the private rights of free

¹¹⁵ *Aliud sibi reliquum quam tenere libertatem aut mori ante servitium* (*Ann.* 2.15).

¹¹⁶ Barbarian references to freedom and slavery in their battle speeches are common in antiquity: see Thuc. 7.68, 69; Caes. *BG.* 3.8; 7.77; and Sall. *Iug.* 31.22; *Cat.* 58.8, 11. For more discussion of this theme, see Goodyear (above, n. 35), 90-91; and Woodman and Martin (above, n. 52), 347.

men, and did not welcome the freedom for some to revolt from Roman rule.¹¹⁷ Maybe Tacitus considers that provincials, upon their forceful entry into the empire, lost their *libertas* with the transfer of Roman customs. Yet, as Brunt argues, as subjects were fully “Romanized,” they imbibed Roman ideas and were ready to accept the amenities and benefits that Roman rule brought.¹¹⁸ Tacitus may agree with Caesar, who writes that it is natural for any man to aim at freedom and to despise their status as a slave (*BG.* 3.10), or he may not be expressing an opinion about the barbarians with this theme, but rather trying to convey a dramatic motivation for war.¹¹⁹ The impression he gives with barbarian *libertas*, nonetheless, is that the barbarians are different from the Romans—they are subservient to them.

Hardly any speaker in Tacitus’ battle speeches suggests a similarity between his army and that of his opponent. When a Roman commander describes the barbarians as cowards or unwarlike peoples, he gives the impression that his Roman soldiers are the opposite of that. The descriptions of the barbarians as cowards echo the Romans’ silence, as discussed above (pp. 53-54), concerning the barbarians’ lack of *virtus*, or lack of manliness. When a barbarian general employs the “slavery or liberty” theme in his speech, he not only provides a motivation for war but also indicates a distinct difference between his people and the Romans—that is, subject versus master.

In addition to battle speeches, leaders inspire their men by their own example; however, this ability is specific to the Roman leader. Tacitus’ Roman generals, unlike

¹¹⁷ P. A. Brunt, *Roman Imperial Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 125.

¹¹⁸ Brunt (see above, n. 117), 126.

¹¹⁹ Sherwin-White (see above, n. 20), 44.

barbarian leaders, can be seen fighting in the ranks and performing the most difficult and dangerous feats for themselves. In contrast, barbarian commanders are hardly seen in the fight at all. Often Tacitus does not mention them after their battle exhortations, implying that their presence on the battlefield does not inspire a greater courage among their men.

The Roman commander can be seen taking his position amid the ranks. Agricola dismisses his horse and takes his position on foot among his soldiers before the battle at Mons Graupius (*Agr.* 35). This gesture demonstrates to his men that he is going to stay and, if need be, die with them.¹²⁰ Caecina, too, dismounts from his horse before the expected attack on his camp begins. He donates his horse, and those of his officers, to his best fighters (*Ann.* 1.66). Roman generals in Tacitus are seen in the thick of combat, sometimes performing the most difficult feats themselves. In the final battle against Arminius, the Romans divide their forces in order to attack the Germans on several fronts. Germanicus decides that his specific unit will scale the German *agger*, which Tacitus says is the difficult part of the endeavor (*Ann.* 2.20). Once the Romans capture the *agger*, Germanicus takes off his helmet in mid-battle so that his men will recognize him (2.21). Germanicus is found in the thick of combat in the final battle in Germany as well (2.25). And Tacitus credits Agricola with being everywhere at once, leading and fighting simultaneously at the end of the battle of Mons Graupius (*Agr.* 37).

Apparently, Tacitus believes that a leader's presence on the battlefield inspires the men to fight with greater energy. Barbarian leaders often deliver a riveting speech to their men; however, as soon as the battle ensues they are hardly ever depicted. They are

¹²⁰ Goldsworthy (see above, n. 3), 151. Caesar sends his horse away and takes position on foot with his men in his battle against the Helvetii (*BG.* 1.25). Spartacus may have carried the gesture too far when he publicly killed his horse (Plut. *Crass.* 11.6).

seemingly absent or too far from the action. Thus, in a typical battle narrative the barbarian commanders appear to be motivated for victory at first, but as the battle progresses their drive toward victory is not described. For instance, the great speeches of Calgacus and Caratacus rouse their men (*Agr.* 33; *Ann.* 12.34). Neither leader, however, is shown in combat.

There are some occasions when Tacitus reverses his normal characterizations. One Roman who lacks discipline is Caelius Pollio, a camp prefect in Armenia. Rhadamistus—the son of the Iberian king, Pharasmanes—finds that his siege attempts on a Roman fort in Armenia are fruitless. Therefore, he decides to buy his victory from Pollio, who takes the barbarian's offer, which is an uncommon action for Romans. Pollio, in fact, lies to his soldiers, claiming that the enemy is too strong for them to defend against (*Ann.* 12.45). In this description, Tacitus is not emphasizing lax discipline among the Roman troops, but rather describing a corrupt leader.¹²¹

We have seen that Tacitus usually portrays Roman leaders as standing resolutely behind their decisions against the objections of their advisors, thus suppressing any dissension. This is not the case for Lucius Casennius Paetus, who, as Tacitus writes, could have stood a chance against the Parthian Vologeses had he the strength of mind to stand behind his own decisions; instead, Paetus wavers and eventually chooses a more damaging course (*Ann.* 15.10). This reversal may be employed by Tacitus to contrast the inept Paetus with Corbulo, who takes over the campaign and achieves some success. The

¹²¹ Pollio's centurion, Casperius, is outraged by his commander's avarice and leaves the garrison, intending either to deter the Iberian king from continuing the campaign or to relate the treacherous act to the Roman governor of Syria (*Ann.* 12.45). Elizabeth Keitel discusses the venality and perfidy common to many Roman administrators in the East found in book twelve of the *Annales*: Keitel (see above, n. 24), 188-193.

contrast between the two generals is a dominant theme throughout book fifteen of the *Annales*.¹²²

An exception to the rule that barbarian leaders are not shown in combat is found in the Armenian war of 35 between the Parthians and Iberians, as the leaders of both armies are depicted in the fight. Tacitus focuses on how the Iberian commander Pharasmanes and the Parthian general Orodes participate fearlessly in the fighting, even assisting those in difficulty (*Ann.* 6.35). As the battle concludes, Tacitus sets the stage for an epic clash between the two rival leaders. However, what occurs is an anti-climax.¹²³ Pharasmanes wounds Orodes through the helmet, but he is unable to make a fatal strike. Moreover, his excited horse carries him off and allows the wounded Orodes to be rescued by his officers (*ibid.*). The purpose of this description of an ineffectual duel between the two barbarian leaders appears to be to note a bizarre, and almost amusing, occurrence.

Another exception is Arminius, whom Tacitus describes as wounded yet leading his men in the fight (*Ann.* 2.17, *Arminius manu, voce, vulnere sustentabat pugnam*). In a subsequent battle, the German commander barely escapes death in combat (2.21).¹²⁴ In these descriptions of Arminius, Tacitus may be reversing his normal characterization of barbarians for several reasons. His attitude toward the Germans is very complex, as he often idealizes the incomparably warlike nature of these particular barbarians, a

¹²² K. Gilmartin, "Corbulo's Campaigns in the East," *Historia* 22 (1973): 610-626; and Wheeler (see above, n. 82), 270-271.

¹²³ Ash (see above, n. 34), 127.

¹²⁴ In both of these scenes depicting Arminius in the thick of combat, the Germans fail to defeat the Romans.

description found throughout his *Germania* and in our discussion of *virtus* above.¹²⁵ Also, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Tacitus sometimes “Romanizes” former auxiliaries. He may suggest that Arminius’ experience as a former auxiliary instilled in him a certain level of excellence that is expected of Tacitus’ Roman leaders.¹²⁶ However, Tacitus may also be reversing his normal characterization because Arminius was directly responsible for humiliating the Romans six years before in the Teutoburg Forest against Varus’ three legions (9 C.E.),¹²⁷ a disaster that not only led to the loss of Germany but also contributed to a fundamental change in imperial policy.¹²⁸ The memory of this massacre is seldom absent from German battle scenes, as well as the entire German narrative of book one (chaps. 55-71);¹²⁹ in fact, Tacitus describes the disaster *post factum* when Germanicus stumbles upon Varus’ remains during the first year of his German

¹²⁵ *Germ.* 7; 29-31; 37. For Tacitus’ complex attitude towards the Germans, see Chapter 1 (pp. 4-5, 7-8).

¹²⁶ For Arminius’ status in the Roman army, see *Ann.* 2.9; and *Vell. Pat.* 2.118.

¹²⁷ Herbert Benario writes that Varus’ defeat was the “most potent setback in Rome’s history up to that time,” arguing that other Roman military disasters, such as the battles at Claudine Forks and Cannae, only delayed the eventual Roman victory in those wars: Benario (see above, n. 11), 59. Victoria Pagán writes that the disaster at Teutoburg Forest was, for the Romans, comparable with Carrhae: Pagán (see above, n. 34), 305.

¹²⁸ Upon his death, Augustus recommended that his empire be kept within its current limits (*Ann.* 1.11). For a thorough investigation of Augustus’ frontier policy, see C. M. Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹²⁹ The disaster of Varus’ legions is recounted in the speeches of Segestes (*Ann.* 1.58) and Arminius (*Ann.* 1.59).

campaign (*Ann.* 1.61-62).¹³⁰ Thus, Tacitus sees the conqueror of Varus' legions as a more legitimate foe with certain excellent leadership skills. Tacitus has some admiration for Arminius, and writes in his epitaph for the German leader that Arminius is not as famous as he ought to be: Arminius, whose legacy was preserved in German songs, was never conquered in war (*Ann.* 2.88).¹³¹

There are a few reversals in the Batavian Revolt, depicted in books 4 and 5 of his *Historiae*. Sometimes the Batavians act like Romans in combat, possibly because they were once a part of the Roman military.¹³² As we have seen, Tacitus typically ascribes *virtus* to northern barbarians individually, while the Romans collectively possess it. Unusually, the Batavians, as a group, are described as having *virtus*. For instance, early in the revolt, they decide to initiate an attack on the Romans in order to show their *virtus* more clearly (*Hist.* 4.23).¹³³ In a subsequent episode, Tacitus describes a night battle that is so chaotic and dark that the *virtus* of the Romans and Batavians cannot be seen, thus implying that the Batavians possess *virtus* (4.29). Also, the Batavian commander Civilis is said to have trusted in his men's *virtus* (4.34). Another reversal of Tacitus' normal characterization involves Civilis' leadership. He is depicted, like Arminius, as taking a

¹³⁰ See Goodyear (above, n. 35), 67-68; and Pagán (above, n. 34), 302-320.

¹³¹ Herbert Benario suggests that Arminius was "the first great national German hero:" Benario (see above, n. 11), 59.

¹³² See Chapter 2 (pp. 36-40) for discussion of the Batavians as former Roman auxiliaries and how this plays a role in Tacitus' reversals.

¹³³ In this battle scene, the Batavians attempt to besiege the Roman camp at Vetera with machines constructed with the aid of captives and deserters. They eventually starve the Romans with a delay tactic (*Hist.* 4.23; see p. 39).

position in battle among his men (4.22), an action more often seen in Roman leaders. He is even found fighting in the final battle of the revolt, as the Romans spot him in one battle scene and try to make him the target of their missiles (5.21).¹³⁴

It was argued in Chapter 2 that Tacitus' barbarians characteristically lack the technical skills of combat that the Romans normally possess, such as employing their weaponry and organizational skills. In the "Moral Dimension" of Tacitus' battle narratives, it is clear that the barbarians, as men, are portrayed differently from the Romans. Tacitus creates a fundamental distinction between Roman combatants and their barbarian counterparts when he removes himself from the narrative, as well as when he is the narrator. When Tacitus describes the thoughts and words of his characters, we notice that the Romans and barbarians perceive themselves differently from their opponents. As the narrator, Tacitus typically describes the lack of *virtus* among common barbarian soldiery, which suggests that Tacitus considers the Romans superior in *virtus*. Depictions of barbarians' lax discipline, dissension among their leadership, and their leaders' inability to fight in the thick of combat give the impression that the barbarians, unlike the Romans, are controlled more by their emotions than by self-control and reason. Tacitus apparently considers their unstable nature to be self-destructive on the battlefield.

¹³⁴ Tacitus' Civilis, though, is depicted as a barbarian leader, as he is described as shrewder than the average barbarian and is compared to Hannibal (*Hist.* 4.13).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

According to Edith Hall, ethnic stereotypes that are commonly used in ancient literature are “socially produced” and “not inherent in nature.”¹³⁵ Thus, Tacitus in his battle narratives purposely constructs his barbarians as less familiar with the arts of warfare than Romans, and controlled by their emotions rather than by discipline or reason. This leaves questions as to why Tacitus does this and what are the effects of these constructions, especially on his readers.

Describing a battle is a difficult task for any author. The struggle arises from the impracticality of describing every minute detail of the chaotic events of battle. The author, therefore, often concentrates on the aspects of the battle that seem to decide its outcome, seem most intriguing, or might hold the readers’ attention.¹³⁶ In Tacitus, the typical characteristics of barbarians often explain their defeat in battle, as well as the Romans’ victory. Just the same, when the Romans lose, oftentimes it is because they have acted like barbarians in battle. Thus, Tacitus appears to use these ethnic boundaries to make his battle narratives more understandable for his readers.

Why Tacitus explains victory this way may lie in his audience’s expectations of how a battle ought to be described. Any historian must envision his audience’s interests and expectations before deciding how to write his narrative, and the assumptions he

¹³⁵ Hall (see above, n. 27), ix.

¹³⁶ Keegan (see above, n. 1), 63.

makes reveals a great deal about himself, as well as his contemporaries.¹³⁷ Tacitus may have believed that portraying barbarians unfavorably and Romans propitiously in his battle narratives would intrigue his audience. It is plausible that his audience was well aware of the outcome of a specific battle, or at least would have trusted him to give a straightforward account.¹³⁸ Their curiosity, in either case, would be piqued not by the accuracy of Tacitus' narrative, but by seeing how other people fight, as well as how Romans engage others in battle. This says a great deal about the ethnocentrism and chauvinism of the Romans, in particular of Tacitus and his audience.¹³⁹

Many ancients regarded the social and cultural differences of other peoples as essentially bad, and the image of the barbarian in art and literature characteristically functioned as a negative illustration of the "other" against which they could classify themselves as the model of civilization.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, another effect of Tacitus' ethnic descriptions is that he and his audience seem to believe that there is a civilized way to fight in battle. Viewing themselves as the center of the civilized world, their own army becomes a representative of their sophisticated culture in Tacitus' battle stories. In the

¹³⁷ J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20.

¹³⁸ M. J. Wheeldon, "True Stories: The Reception of Historiography in Antiquity," in *History as Text*, ed. A. Cameron (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 44.

¹³⁹ Hall (see above, n. 27), ix; and Harrison (see above, n. 27), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Rives (see above, n. 7), 16; and J. Balsdon, *Romans & Aliens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 2. Pliny, in fact, writes that the Roman *populus* was the *victor gentium* (*Pan.* 51.3).

same way, barbarian armies are viewed as representatives of their own uncivilized societies.¹⁴¹ Thus, Tacitus gives the impression that battle is a microcosm of the world.

Tacitus' historical accuracy in his battle scenes has been notoriously scrutinized by scholars, and some even consider him "the most unmilitary of all historians."¹⁴² Although Tacitus' battle stories are not works of fiction, he, nevertheless, carefully paints a conventional portrait of Romans and barbarians throughout most of his battle narratives. Separating and disregarding the literary worth of his ethnic constructions in order to focus, instead, on his apparent distortion of past events compromises what seems to be one of the major functions of Tacitus' battle narratives: to portray the Romans as vastly different from their barbarian enemy.

¹⁴¹ Arthur Eckstein writes that Polybius' barbarians are undisciplined in combat because they lead undisciplined lives; thus, Eckstein suggests that Polybius, like Tacitus, uses ethnic descriptions to mirror the cultures from which an identity comes: Eckstein (see above, n. 87), 123.

¹⁴² See pp. 11-12.

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