Subversive Geography in Tacitus' *Germania*

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ABSTRACT

Geography is a fundamental element of ancient ethnography, yet the account of the environment in Tacitus' Germania *is notably sparse. Standard elements of geographic description are absent, or are presented in restricted (and subversive) ways. This paper examines the presentation and structuring of Germanic spaces against a backdrop of contrasting contemporary geographic writings, and considers the implications of Tacitus' rejection of geographic norms.*

Keywords: Tacitus; *Germania*; Germany; geography; environment; Domitian; Rhine-Danube frontier; borders; itineraries

I INTRODUCTION

In the writings of many Roman authors geographical knowledge is co-opted in support of the imperial project; obtaining and expressing knowledge of the world and of its peoples is a first step towards their all but inevitable incorporation into the *imperium Romanum*.[1] In his *Germania*, however, Tacitus takes a subtly different approach. In place of toponyms, detailed description and ordered encounters we are confronted by a bleak, obtuse landscape. Indeed, many standard features of ancient geographical writing are absent from the text, with the effect that our understanding — our ability to mentally 'acquire' Germania — is consistently restricted.[2] The lands beyond the Danube and Rhine are, it is implied, resistant to both exploration and comprehension. Comparison with accounts of the transrhenane lands in other authors and in the rest of the Tacitean corpus reveals the approach taken in the *Germania* to be highly irregular. This paper identifies the ways in which the Tacitean text defies the norms of geographic description, and then

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[2] The geographic absences in the *Germania* have been noted briefly by Rives 1999: 50, and explored at length by Timpe 1992. Timpe notes that readers of ethnography and geography could reasonably expect information on borders, shape, orientation, distances, surface morphology, hydrography, climate, flora and fauna (259). He demonstrates that despite the phrase *De situ* in the most commonly received title in the manuscript tradition, *situs* is far from an accurate description of the *Germania*'s content, with Tacitus showing little interest in environmental description. Writing shortly after the reunification of Germany, Timpe aims to detach the text from the claims of 'das Richtige und die politisch-ideologischen Schatzsucher' (277), who would use the *Germania* to justify fascist notions of a historically cohesive German landscape. The absence also of history in the *Germania* is explored by Rives 2002. For a recent survey on geography in the ancient world, Dueck and Brodersen 2012. On the rôle of geographical knowledge in classical texts see, for example: Thomas 1982; Romm 1992; Sundwall 1996; Evans 1999; Evans 2005; Dueck 2000; Jones 2005; Krebs 2006; Riggsby 2006: 21–46.

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turns to the implications of such an approach. It is argued that in constructing a Germanic environment that rejects penetration, remaining impermeable and hermetic, Tacitus creates a Germania removed from the influence of Roman emperors. Subjective geography thus creates a space distanced and distinct from that of the Empire. The environment constructed within the text underscores criticism of the authenticity of Domitianic claims of conquest, and also hints at broader questions common to Tacitus' writings, concerning the possibility and nature of liberty under the Principate.

I begin (Section II) by examining the *Germania*'s presentation of the region's borders, contrasting Tacitus' approach with that of his contemporaries, and with the geopolitical realities of the day. Section III addresses the account of the landscapes within those borders: the text presents a uniformly pessimistic and hostile account of the environment, one which emphatically asserts the fundamentally remote and alien nature of Germania. I then turn to linear landscape features, in particular rivers (Section IV), as well as roads and itineraries (Section V), considering the organizational logic such features are able to lend geographical writings — and how such structure is withheld from the landscape by Tacitus. Not only is the Germanic interior boggy and bleak, it is also (I argue, deliberately) chaotic and obtuse, resistant to ordering, impatient with 'the acquisitive imperial gaze'.[3] Section VI explores the impact of this distorted landscape on Roman agents in Germania. Finally (Section VII), I address the influence of this tactic on our understanding of the geopolitical status of Germania, on Tacitus' engagement with Domitian's legacy, and the possibility of independence from (and in) the Empire.

II THE CONSTRUCTION OF GERMANIA'S EXTERNAL LIMITS

Rather than employing a more conventional prologue,[4] Tacitus opens his ethnography[5] with an account of the region's borders:

> All Germania is separated from the Galli and the Pannonii by the Rhine and Danube rivers, and from the Sarmatii and Dacii by reciprocal fear or by mountains; ocean surrounds the rest, embracing vast peninsulas and an immeasurable expanse of islands, where certain tribes and kings have only recently been made known to us, unveiled by war.[6]

Tacitus begins with a sentence strongly reminiscent of the opening of Caesar's *de Bello Gallico*. *Germania omnis* is an obvious parallel to *Gallia est omnis*, though it has been well noted that this is a stock phrase in ethnographic literature.[7] The use of *omnis* presents the associated noun as a discrete and incontestable unit. For Caesar, this cohesion provided a justification for his continued aggression, and defined the limits of his responsibilities.[8] For Tacitus, however, these first two words introduce the heart of

[3] A turn of phrase for which I thank one of the *Journal*'s readers.
[4] On the issue of the absent prologue, Beck 1998: 14–16.
[5] On the *Germania* as an ethnographic text, Lund 1991: 1862–70; O'Gorman 1993; Thomas 2009: 66–70 and *passim*; Gruen 2011: 159–78; Woolf 2011: 98–105; Krebs 2011.
[6] *Ger*. 1.1: 'Germania omnis a Gallis et Pannoniis Rheno et Danuvio fluminibus, a Sarmatis Dacisque mutuo metu aut montibus separatur; cetera Oceanus ambit, latos sinus et insularum inmensa spatia complectens, nuper cognitis quibusdam gentibus ac regibus, quos bellum aperuit.'
[7] For examples, Norden 1920: 324; Birley 1998: 98 n. 1. Pliny, *HN* 4.105 echoes Caesar's phrasing. The phrase has a much longer history in ethnographic digressions: Herodotus uses the phrase πάσης τῆς Σκυθίης at 4.17.
[8] Krebs (2006) argues persuasively that Caesar's depiction of Germania was largely determined by his own strategic goals and self-promotion. Whereas uncertainties about the Gallic environment are easily overcome, demonstrating Caesar's imperatorial ability, the Germanic environment is depicted as a trackless, unfathomable space. While Caesar is 'brave and daring enough an explorer to cross the Rhine and enter *terra incognita*', he is prudent enough to avoid risking his troops in a space not conducive to military action. Caesar employs

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his approach to Germania's geography: Germania is intact and, as the rest of the sentence asserts, external to the Empire.

Like all writers of geography, Tacitus is concerned with establishing limits: geographic digressions in Greco-Roman texts frequently begin with consideration of the limits of a space and of its bounded shape.[9] The straightforward tenor of his presentation of Germania's reach — west and south, east and north — belies its controversial nature. At the time of writing, perhaps 98 C.E., Rome had a history of direct engagement across the Rhine stretching back a hundred and fifty years.[10] The Varian disaster and Tacitus' gloomy monograph loom large in modern minds, foregrounding the abandonment of Augustus' plans to establish Germania as a province of the Empire as well as the continuing independence of its people. The extent to which the German question remained open during the early years of the Principate is easily overshadowed.[11] Moreover, during the course of the first century C.E. the idea of Germania became central to the military *virtus* of the emperors. From the period of the civil wars until the Batavian rebellion in 69 C.E. Germanic soldiers served as an élite bodyguard to Caesar, Pompey and their successors.[12] The name *Germanicus*, first given posthumously in 9 B.C.E. to Drusus I, was with one exception the only geographical agnomen taken by members of the imperial household in the first century C.E.[13] Germania, more than any other region, was presented as the personal battleground of emperors, an enduring *locus* of imperial victory. This activity reached a peak under Domitian, who established the provinces of Germania Inferior and Germania Superior in the 80s C.E. Crucially, these provinces were comprised almost entirely of lands on the western bank of the Rhine, created out of the eastern reaches of what had previously been known as Gallia Belgica.

Tacitus' assertion of the existence of a united *Germania omnis* beyond the Rhine and his identification of that river as the western edge of Germania are clear challenges to contemporary definitions of the Empire. This contested geography, presented not as opinion but in forthright challenge, is our introduction to Tacitus' project. Use of the Rhine as the western edge of Germania has precedent in Caesar, Strabo, Mela and Pliny — each of whom wrote before the Domitianic campaigns.[14] For Tacitus to employ the Rhine as boundary is blatantly anachronistic given the creation of the new provinces on the west bank.[15] To the south, the Danube had been established as the northern limit

geographic descriptors to 'create a boundless and indifferentiated [sic] space … In doing so he accounts for his (in) action in Germany' (Krebs 2006: 132; 124).

[9] For example, on Britain: Caesar (*B Gall.* 5.13), Strabo (4.5.1) and Tacitus (*Agr.* 10.2–3). On descriptions of the shapes of regions, Dueck 2005. Tacitus' description of the borders may be said to imply Germania's overall shape, but he does not attempt a clear exposition of its two-dimensional form, as he does for Britain in the *Agricola*. On the definition of the terms *fines*, *limites* and *ripae* see Trousset 1993; Isaac 1998.

[10] Schönberger 1969; Rüger 1996: 524–8; Wells 1972; Carroll 2001: 60–73. On the history of the concept of the Germani, Lund 1991: 1956–88; Timpe 2006: 3–18; Rives 1999: 1–11 and 21–4; Riggsby 2006: 50–5. On Roman writing about the Germani before Tacitus, Rives 1999: 35–41; Krebs 2011: 202–3, nn. 10–13.

[11] For decades after the *clades Variana* the emperors pursued connections with client (or puppet) rulers in Germania: see Wolters 1990: 239–77.

[12] Rives 1999: 33–4. The practice was resumed by Trajan.

[13] The exception being Claudius' use of *Britannicus*. The name was taken by Drusus I, his sons Germanicus (in childhood), Claudius (at birth), and grandson Caligula (at birth), and later adopted by Vitellius and his son, Domitian, Nerva and Trajan. It is with this last emperor, who took the titles *Dacicus* and *Parthicus*, that the practice of taking geographical agnomina in victory was revived in earnest. On the evolving rôle of the name *Germanicus*, Kneissl 1969: 27–69.

[14] Caes., *B Gall.* 1.1.3, 1.2.3, 1.28.4 — see also Krebs 2006: 119 and nn. 37–8; Strabo 4.4.2, 7.1.3; Pompon. 3.20; Pliny, *HN* 4.100.

[15] Rüger 2000, 533: '… from Augustus' day the Rhine was not conceived as a frontier, but was constantly being crossed by troops and controlled civilians.' Tacitus' account returns to the region at 28–9, providing a more nuanced picture. But while some Germanic peoples (the Treveri, Nervii, Vangiones, Triboci, Nemetes) are acknowledged as dwelling on the Gallic side of the river (28.3–5), nowhere do people of uncompromised Germanic ethnicity dwell in a Roman province. The Helvetii and Boii are considered Gauls (28.2); the Mattiaci

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of Rhaetia, the southern of Germania in the Augustan period; its appearance here also has precedent in earlier geographic writing.[16] But to use these two rivers as borders with no qualification was to deny the contemporary realities of south-western Germania. Beginning with Vespasian and continuing into the Antonine period, the 300 km-wide land corridor between the Rhine and the Danube became increasingly militarized and fortified, becoming what is now referred to as the *limes Germanicus*. While there is some debate about the precise dating of the fortifications, and how much of the early activity should be ascribed to the Flavians or to Trajan, significant Roman activity in the region is unquestioned.[17] By using the two rivers to circumscribe the limits of Roman influence, Tacitus denies Roman advances in the Neckar and Main river valleys: at best ungenerous to the Flavians, and at worst negating their advances outright.

The text's introduction also issues a strong challenge to geographical orthodoxy concerning Germania's eastern and northern limits. Whereas the southern and western borders of Germania contest the contemporary definition of the provinces of the Empire, Tacitus' presentation of the strange and distanced expanses of the North highlights the limitations of Roman knowledge, and lays down a challenge to any claim of *imperium sine fine*.[18] Tacitus separates the region from the Dacians to the east and from the Sarmatians to the north-east by means of mountains, and the strikingly non-geographical 'reciprocal fear'.[19] By employing *mutuus metus* in place of a more concrete border, Tacitus foreshadows the permeable, unstable qualities he will assign to these regions at the end of his monograph, where he concludes with an account of this fear-ridden space.[20] As he draws closer to the north-eastern frontier, the information he relates draws closer and closer to paradoxography, the edges of the map identified with the unnatural and bestial. With the narrative voice positioned on the shore of the Baltic Sea he declares, 'the rumour that the natural world extends only up unto this point seems true'.[21] Here live the Fenni, whose barbarism and baseness are sickening, beyond belief.[22] The final lines of the work confirm Tacitus' intention to distance these regions as much as possible from the known world:

have given over their hearts and minds to Rome (29.3: '… mente animoque nobiscum agunt'). At 29.4 Tacitus acknowledged the existence of an unnamed *provincia* (Germania Superior), a *sinus imperii* — but this is left undefined, and is inhabited by peoples who cannot be considered Germanic, and are instead the most useless kind of Gauls ('Non numeraverim inter Germaniae populos, quamquam trans Rhenum Danuviumque consederint, eos qui decumates agros exercent: levissimus quisque Gallorum …'). 'True' Germanic identity is exclusive of concord with Rome. The Domitianic provinces are named without difficulty in the *Annals* (see n. 97). On the problematic *agri decumates*, see with references Rives 1999: 242–3. On the instability of the Rhine border, Woolf 2011: 101–2.

[16] Strabo 7.1.1. The Alps are also considered a southern boundary for Germania by early imperial writers: Strabo 7.3.1; Pompon. 3.20. Similar objections to those raised against the Rhine (see n. 15) as a firm and unproblematic border can be raised against the Danube.

[17] For the view that the fortification of the *limes* dates to Trajan's rule, rather than that of Vespasian or Domitian, Sommer 1999.

[18] Vergil, *Aen.* 1.278.

[19] Timpe (1992: 264) notes that Pomponius Mela is a precedent for the view that the Sarmatians comprise a border of Germania (3.28), and that the use of *mutuus metus*, a psychological rather than physical border, is a remarkable assessment on Tacitus' part.

[20] Krebs (2005: 72–81) would have it that 'mutuo metu aut montibus' signifies a concrete and understood limit to Germania as a region, and that Tacitus gives the lands finite borders for the same reason that Caesar sharply circumscribes Gallia: to define the scope of a possible military command. Krebs reads the *Germania* as an argument and encouragement for the conquest of Germany, 'dass die Germanien-Frage nur einen Agricola braucht' (85). Whitton's review (2005) sums up my own feelings: 'It is hard to reconcile K.'s view with the descent into obscurity and myth which ends the work: "cetera iam fabulosa … quod ego ut incompertum in medium relinquam" (*Ger.* 46.4) scarcely leaves the impression of "eines scharf demarkierten Germaniens" (80).'

[21] *Ger.* 45.1: 'Illuc usque et fama vera tantum natura.' On the difficulties with the grammar and authenticity of this passage, Rives 1999: 316.

[22] *Ger.* 46.3: 'Fennis mira feritas, foeda paupertas.'

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> What is left belongs to fables: the Helusii and Oxiones, with their faces and features like men but their bodies and limbs like beasts. These inexplicable things I shall not take up.[23]

The nature and extent of the northern limits of the *oikoumene* had long been subject to debate — Tacitus' avoidance of detail is not surprising. However, his approach to his uncertainty or ignorance about these distant regions is markedly different to that usually displayed by ancient authors. Strabo's approach to uncertainties about the nature of the oceanic coast north and east of the Elbe is an important predecessor to Tacitus' later reconsideration of the same problem:

> The regions on the other side of the Elbe, towards the ocean, are completely unknown to us … However, it is clear from the *klimata* and the parallel distances [i.e. lines of latitude] that, travelling eastwards from here, one would arrive at the lands around the Dnieper and north of the Pontus.[24]

Strabo acknowledges his aporia, but engages methodically with his ignorance, applying the theories of Eratosthenes about the latitudinal division of the earth to determine the extent of unexplored northern lands.[25] The reader is not deceived about the scope of the author's knowledge, but neither is she left without resource.

Pliny's approach to uncertainty is even more authoritative. The geographical sections of the *Historia Naturalis*, with their perpetual interest in the shape and extent of borders, are consistent with the early imperial impulse towards exploiting geographical knowledge to assert territorial dominion:[26]

> The Greeks, and some of our own writers have recorded the Germanic coastline as stretching for 2,500 miles. Agrippa, including Raetia and Noricum in the measurement, gives its length as being 686 miles, and the breadth as 148 miles — but the breadth of Raetia alone is almost more than this. Admittedly, Raetia was only subdued around the time of Agrippa's death, and Germania was not well known in its entirety until many years after that. If I may be allowed to speculate, the coastline will not be found to be much less than the Greeks thought, and Agrippa's measurement of breadth [as the crow flies] also correct.[27]

Like Strabo, Pliny deals with doubt by invoking scientific principles. Although the reader is aware that the author still has questions about the geography of the North, Pliny's appeal to a tradition of scientific discourse combined with his methodical weighing of what evidence he does have obscures his uncertainty and obviates our own. He has enough mastery of the space to propose his own theory about Germania's unknown reaches, and to cast his conclusions in the apodosis of a future more vivid conditional; though the dimensions of Germania are not presently known, they *will* conform to the expectations of Greco-Roman science. The contrast with Tacitus' approach to uncertainty is stark. Where Strabo and Pliny appeal to scientific theory to soften the blow of ignorance, Tacitus confronts the reader with intractable difficulties. This association of Germania with the distortion of nature and the impossibility of understanding at the world's edge detaches *Germania omnis* from our understanding, distancing it from the grasp of *imperium*.

It is also surprising that Tacitus declines to use a river to define the north-eastern border.[28] Like Strabo, who had utilized the Elbe and the Dnieper for this purpose,

[23] *Ger.* 46.6: 'Cetera iam fabulosa: Hellusios et Oxionas ora hominum vultusque, corpora atque artus ferarum genere: quod ego ut incompertum in medio relinquam.'
[24] Strabo 7.2.4.
[25] Shcheglov 2006.
[26] See particularly Nicolet 1991: 1–14 and *passim*.
[27] Pliny, *HN* 4.98–9.
[28] Both Mela (3.28) and Pliny (*HN* 4.81, 4.97) employ the Vistula as the eastern limit of Germania.

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Tacitus in his own *Annals* repeatedly describes Germania as the lands between the Rhine and the Elbe, adhering to Augustan norms.[29] He has Arminius proclaim that, 'The Germani could never excuse the sight of rods, axes and togas between the Elbe and the Rhine'.[30] Germanicus motivates his troops by reminding them that they are 'closer now to the Elbe than to the Rhine'.[31] Yet the *Germania* appeals to neither toponym; nor are there the methodological expositions employed by Strabo and Pliny to deliver the reader from her uncertainties. Any sense of mastery over space is withheld from us, intellectual and physical dominion over the ends of the earth denied.

The rôle of Oceanus, the last border described at 1.1, perhaps demonstrates most effectively the textual separation of Germania from the known world. In the *Germania* and other first-century texts Oceanus is represented as a hostile force at the world's end, physically viscous and resistant to penetration by ships, actively opposed to Roman intrusion.[32] In the best tradition of paradoxography in liminal regions, it also harbours surreal and frightening monsters.[33] Although the sea is actively hostile to Roman activity at several points in our text, at 1.1 it seems rather to blend with the far reaches of Germania — as opposed to serving as an absolute, against which the northern shores might be constituted. Oceanus encircles *cetera*, the indefinably extensive northern expanse, an action further described as *complectens*. Tacitus first depicts the ocean not solely as an opposing entity that necessarily aligns all of Europe against itself, but as an inclusive force, drawing the northern lands into itself, towards the edge of the world.[34] By establishing Oceanus as a border of Germania, Tacitus distances its northern reaches, blending them with the limits of the earth.

Moreover, by not defining the areas that the ocean actually touches upon, either by some sort of geographical designation or a reference to *septentriones*, Tacitus leaves the question of the location of these *cetera* decidedly vague. The reader easily understands that it is the north coast being referred to, but in the text there is a distinct lack of geographical specificity. The lands which Oceanus embraces receive no more precise qualification, described as 'latos sinus et insularum inmensa spatia'. Objective measurements and grounded reasoning have no rôle here, and geography itself fails: the earth remains unwritten. The impression is of a vast, featureless space, integrated into the hostile ocean, and threatening in its scope.

In Romm's account of the characterization of the North Sea, Roman attitudes towards the deep are despairing: to enter into this space was to lose one's agency and to trespass uninvited on the divine.[35] However, consideration of Oceanus in the *Annals* and *Agricola* reveals a parallel motif: that while the ocean can indeed be strange and hostile, it is just as often a foil for Roman supremacy. Agricola's control of the seas is very much a means of conquest in Britain, the novelty of the environment a welcome challenge to the general's enterprise.[36] Britain is surrounded, encompassed by the action

[29] Strabo 7.1.1, 7.1.3, 7.2.4.
[30] *Ann.* 1.59.
[31] *Ann.* 2.14.
[32] See Romm 1992: 12–26 on the nature of Oceanus in ancient thought generally, and 140–9 on the North Sea in particular. Also Evans 2005. Sections of the *Germania* in which the ocean is actively hostile to Roman activity: 2.1; 34.2; 40.3; 44.2.
[33] Romm 1992: 146–7.
[34] *Contra* O'Gorman 1993: 138, who argues that, since Tacitus presents the 'inmensus … adversus' (*Ger.* 2.1) sea as such a formidable barrier, Germania itself is tied more firmly to Europe and the known world.
[35] Romm (1992: 140–9) employs the *Germania*, *Annals*, and the fragmentary Albinovanus Pedo, in whose work Germanicus' storm-tossed troops can only wonder (16), 'quo ferimur?' Also lines 22–3: 'sacras violamus aquas divumque quietas turbamus sedes?' On the poetic tropes associated with setting out into the ocean, Thomas 2009: 67–8.
[36] In describing the coast Tacitus asserts: 'Hanc oram novissimi maris tunc primum Romana classis circumvecta insulam esse Britanniam adfirmavit, ac simul incognitas ad id tempus insulas, quas Orcadas vocant, invenit domuitque' (*Agr.* 10.4).

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of the Roman fleet, which is an agent of knowledge, the 'invading force … expos[ing] … the occluded native'.[37] Agricola 'explored the harbours with his fleet … waging war simultaneously by land and by sea': there is no place, not even *ultima Thule*, so remote that it is unreachable by Roman forces, and Oceanus is *victus*.[38] Similarly, Calgacus is made to represent the sea as under Rome's dominion.[39] In the *Agricola*, then, Tacitus consistently stresses the extent to which Rome controls and defines the spaces it encounters.[40]

In the *Annals,* too, Romans who enter into Germanic seas master them. The violent, liminal qualities of the northern ocean are not discounted, but here these qualities serve to highlight Rome's implacable will, the inevitability of her imperial destiny. The storm that assails Germanicus' army at *Ann.* 1.70 is terrible, as is the wreck of his fleet in the North Sea at 2.23–4. In the aftermath those men who do return speak of strange beasts, the existence of which appears to challenge any claim to intellectual mastery over these regions. The Tacitean account is bleak:

> In the same way that Oceanus is wilder than any other sea, the Germanic skies the most malevolent, so this bizarre, colossal disaster surpassed all others — surrounded as they were by either inimical coastlines or by waters so vast, so deep, that they are believed to be the last sea, with no far shore.[41]

And yet, it is vital to note the consequences of this catastrophe for Germanicus' campaigns. Certainly the loss of the fleet is a disaster, and Germanicus' despairing response unbecoming of a general and a prince. But whatever Tacitus' judgement on the man may be, Oceanus ultimately provides an opportunity for the character of both the general and troops to be honed, and proven true.[42] The Marsi despair:

> They proclaimed that it was as if the Romans could not be defeated, that no disaster could subdue them — these men whose fleet had been destroyed, whose arms had been lost, whose bodies, man and horse, had been strewn along the shores, yet who had rushed back in with the same courage, with equal aggression, and as if their numbers were in fact increased![43]

It would seem that, rather than Oceanus being a force consistently opposed to the Roman voyager, our authors worked with a choice of traditions: one in which Homeric tropes are employed to condemn the lost seafarer as the 'cosmic nemesis' Oceanus thwarts all his efforts;[44] and a second, in which the sea is an aid to Roman conquest, a spur to Roman courage and not, as often in the *Germania*, a wholly hostile and immovable object. Thus, while Tacitus' employment of the ocean as the northern limit of Germania is not an unusual or unpredictable choice of border, it must be remembered that his depiction

[37] Evans 1999: 272.
[38] Thule: *Agr.* 10.4, 38.4. Oceanus: *Agr.* 25.1: '… portus clase exploravit … cum simul terra, simul mari bellum impelleretur, ac saepe isdem castris pedes equesque et nauticus miles mixti copiis et laetitia sua quisque facta, suos casus attollerent, ac modo silvarum ac montium profunda, modo tempestatum ac fluctuum adversa, hinc terra et hostis, hinc victus Oceanus militari iactantia compararentur.' On geography and conquest in the *Agricola*, Evans 1999: 265–317.
[39] *Agr.* 30.1: 'ne mare quidem securum inminente nobis classe Romana.'
[40] As at *Agr.* 10.4: 'Orcades vocant.'
[41] *Ann.* 2.24. Compare the use of *novissimum mare* here to that in *Agr.* 10.4 (see n. 36), where the strangeness of the ocean only enhances the quality of Agricola's endeavour. There Roman progress is limited by unambitious orders on Domitian's part: 'Dispecta est et Thule, quia hactenus iussum et hiems adpetebat.'
[42] *Ann.* 2.25: The tragedy 'Caesarem ad coercendum erexit … Eo promptior Caesar pergit introrsus, populatur, excindit non ausum congredi hostem aut, sicubi restiterat, statim pulsum nec umquam magis, ut ex captivis cognitum est, paventem'.
[43] *Ann.* 2.25.
[44] Romm 1992: 144. On the evocation of the *Odyssey* by Albinovanus Pedo, Romm 1992: 143.

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of that shore as aversive, unknown and unknowable is neither common to his entire corpus, nor representative of the Roman presence in the region in the first century C.E.[45]

In his description of Germania's borders, then, Tacitus employs geography in two related strategies: by not acknowledging a Germania of any sort to the west of the Rhine or the south of the Danube, he constructs an entity which is spatially exclusive of the provinces created by Domitian. In addition, the treatment of the north-eastern border and of the Ocean employs paradoxography, aporia and hostility to highlight the degree to which this land is isolated and unknowable. Germania is established, subtly yet resolutely, as separate from the *imperium Romanum*, and as a region in which claims of completed conquest have no place.

III THE TACITURN INTERIOR

In his opening chapter, then, Tacitus pushes the concept of Germania eastward, relocating it in the realm of the unknown and unknowable. In his account of the region's internal landscape, Tacitus continues in this vein, rejecting the norms of descriptive geography in order to construct a perverse and hermetic world entirely separate from that of Rome. Right from the outset the Germanic environment thwarts not only its inhabitants, but its readers too — those who would engage with it are alternately refused entrance, sustenance, and orientation.

The landscape, first explicitly judged at 2.2, is immediately presented in a starkly negative light, as deformed (*informis*), wild (*aspera*) and wretched (*tristis*).[46] These descriptors appear in a passage that questions the origins of the Germanic peoples:

> The Germani I would consider to be autochthonous, hardly mixed at all with immigrants or allies from other peoples. For originally those seeking to migrate travelled not by land, but by sea, and that vast, distant, and even hostile ocean was but rarely approached by ships from our world. And who, I ask — leaving aside the dangers of that rough and foreign sea — would leave behind Asia, Africa, Italy to seek out Germania, with its misshapen landscape and harsh climate, wretched to live in or look on, unless it were his homeland?[47]

In arguing for the autochthony of the Germani Tacitus establishes their homeland as insular, enclosed; accessing it in the first place is an almost insurmountable task.[48] Any

[45] It is worth noting that the northern coast was not, in practice, impassable. Even in the *Germania*, which goes to great lengths to present the ocean as obstructive, Tacitus cannot help but acknowledge that travellers bound for Germany used marine and not terrestrial paths (*Ger.* 2.1). In the *Annals* the advantages of using the navy for transport are openly acknowledged. Germanicus, preparing for what would be his last campaign in 16 C.E., and considering that his troops have been exhausted by long marches, knows 'si mare intretur, promptam ipsis possessionem et hostibus ignotam, simul bellum maturius incipi legionesque et commeatus pariter vehi; integrum equitem equosque per ora et alveos fluminum media in Germania fore' (*Ann.* 2.5). At *Ann.* 11.18 waterways also provide access into Germania for Corbulo, who, by bringing his main force up the channel of the Rhine, and more besides through the Rhine delta and the canals constructed in the area by Roman troops, demonstrated the continued control Rome exerted over the northern coastline. Here the ocean is the key to Roman success. Arminius also sees the ocean as, if not a Roman ally, then a passive means of their passage: 'classem quippe et avia Oceani quaesita ne quis venientibus occurreret, ne pulsos premeret' (*Ann.* 2.5).

[46] Also *Ger.* 4.3: the Germani 'frigora atque inediam caelo solove adsueverunt'.

[47] *Ger.* 2.1–2: 'Ipsos Germanos indigenas crediderim minimeque aliarum gentium adventibus et hospitiis mixtos, quia nec terra olim sed classibus advehebantur qui mutare sedes quaerebant, et inmensus ultra utque sic dixerim adversus Oceanus raris ab orbe nostro navibus aditur. Quis porro, praeter periculum horridi et ignoti maris, Asia aut Africa aut Italia relicta Germaniam peteret, informem terris, asperam caelo, tristem cultu aspectuque nisi si patria sit?'

[48] While Tacitus will later acknowledge the movements of populations back and forth across the Rhine and Danube, such comments are constantly qualified in an attempt to restrict Germanic identity to those who are free and transrhenane. See discussion at n. 15 above. Lund (1986: 66ff.) points out that Tacitus' desire to

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Roman penetration of Germania is emphatically rejected. Tacitus insists, in a complete denial of contemporary terrestrial access-ways, that to reach this land an individual must take ship and travel beyond the world's edge. He does not allow for the possibility of migration into Germania from Gaul, Rhaetia, Noricum, Pannonia, Dacia, Sarmatia — any of its neighbours. By removing all of the lands with which Germania is contiguous from the passage, and emphasizing cultured southerners as the only true oikists, Germania is established at the far end of a geographic continuum: distanced as far as possible from the civilized Mediterranean by the hostile sea, and particularly by the absence of Gallia, there is a vast gulf between it and lands worth inhabiting. Germania is isolated at the ends of the earth, contiguous with nothing except Oceanus.[49]

Ch. 5 serves as a sweeping condemnation of the Germanic landscape:

> Although the look of the place does vary a little, on the whole it is either spiked with forests or polluted by bogs. The region facing Gallia is soggier, that facing Noricum and Pannonia windier. It is sufficiently fertile, but unable to support fruit-bearing trees. It is rich in flocks and herds, but these are largely undersized. Even the cattle lack their natural beauty and noble aspect. They value only quantity, and the cattle are their most pleasing, their only 'treasures'. The gods have denied them silver or gold — whether in kindness or cruelty I cannot say.[50]

After a glancing acknowledgement that a region as extensive as Germania encompasses a great variety of environments, Tacitus returns to supposedly universal characteristics, all of them negative. What little internal differentiation it does possess is discussed only insofar as it furthers negative comparison with external (Roman) spaces — the provinces of Gallia, Noricum and Pannonia. Germania is united in its unpleasantness, the categories of environmental analysis reduced to hollow slurs.[51] Strabo's perception of the region is very different, and serves as an informative comparison. He allows that the Galli and Germani have environmental as well as cultural and ethnic ties:

> These peoples, separated by the river Rhine, live in adjoining regions, which are almost the same (although Germania is further northward), if the southern regions are compared to the southern, and the northern to the northern.[52]

The contrast between the mountainous south and the lowlands of the north is surely a most basic feature of Germanic geography, acknowledged and employed by Strabo, but absent in Tacitus' later, presumably better informed, ethnography. The *Germania*'s geography is more exclusive and forbidding, laden with far more judgement than that of Strabo.

The passages above also introduce a recurring conflict in the *Germania*, between unilaterally bleak condemnation, and the opportunities presented by the more precise

establish the Germani as an 'original', untouched population, as being geographically rather than ethnically defined, runs expressly counter to Seneca's account.

[49] Further statements about Germanic autochthony occur immediately after this passage at *Ger.* 2.3, where 'Tuistonem deum terra editum', and at 4.1, where Tacitus argues against the worship of Hercules and Ulysses having reached here. On the adoption of Greco-Roman mythic figures by the Germani (*contra* Tacitus), Roymans 2009; Woolf 2011: 8–31, 38–44, 104–5; Gruen 2011: 223ff. The evocation of the heroes is problematic: Tacitus does not exclude them from his narrative, but refutes the account of his sources. By rejecting any connection between native storytelling and Mediterranean master narratives, Tacitus runs counter to standard ethnographic practice, and rejects any commonality with the Germani. See Woolf 2011: 27–8.

[50] *Ger.* 5.1–3: 'Terra etsi aliquanto specie differt, in universum tamen aut silvis horrida aut paludibus foeda, umidior qua Gallias, ventosior qua Noricum ac Pannoniam adspicit; satis ferax, frugiferarum arborum inpatiens, pecorum fecunda, sed plerumque improcera. Ne armentis quidem suus honor aut gloria frontis: numero gaudent, easque solae et gratissimae opes sunt. Argentum et aurum propitiine an irati di negaverint dubito.'

[51] Timpe 1992: 261.

[52] Strabo 4.4.2.

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understanding of the landscape Tacitus does in fact possess. Although in this passage the phrase *satis ferax* may indicate the land's ability to produce grain, the alternative translation, 'sufficiently fertile', casts a restrictive shadow over nature's bounty. The preceding comment at 4.3 that the inhabitants commonly go hungry also undermines it. The impression is of a restrictive, threatening environment, which strangles growth, and makes the people misguided in their husbandry, reduced to valuing quantity over quality. However, outside of this introduction, there seems no lack of land, and 'fertile soil is plentiful'.[53] Similarly, despite here denying the presence of *frugiferae arbores* Tacitus later acknowledges exactly that, and the essential rôle such trees played in religious rituals.[54] And the metals that seemingly have no place at 5.3 reappear in a mine mentioned at 43.2.[55] Each of these pieces of contradictory information serves Tacitus' purpose at their respective places in the text: having mines is not a credit to the Cotini, who use their produce to pay tribute to the Romans, not to make weapons, and thus deny their Germanic identity.[56] These small contradictions are not, however, sufficient to overcome the main impression of Germania as a hostile, obstinate environment.

For the most part, Germania's topography is constructed via a few recurring features: forests, swamps, and sacred groves. With the exception of the Hercynian forest, none of these features is located specifically within the landscape, creating an impression of a region without comprehensible internal structure. The swamps that pollute the land at 5.1 recur elsewhere in the text; the land of the Chatti is later described as relatively less afflicted by the widespread bogs that comprise the territories of other Germanic tribes.[57] These swamps, and the dark trees that surround them, are also conduits for judgement and execution, used to hang or to drown and entomb traitors and cowards.[58] Nobody loves a bog, and avoidance of swampy vapours is strictly advised by Vitruvius and Varro — but in the *Germania* they are presented not as environmental hazards to be worked around or managed, but as features which render the landscape *foeda*, contributing to the impression of a corrupted and impenetrable landscape.[59] For Pomponius Mela, too, the Germanic landscape is 'obstructed (*inpedita*) by many rivers, roughened (*aspera*) by many mountains, and for the most part roadless (*invia*) because of forests and swamps'.[60] And yet his account lacks the pessimistic moral tenor of the Tacitean account, and the difficulties of the landscape do not prevent Mela from immediately employing no less than sixteen names of swamps, mountains, forests and rivers to shape his readers' vision of the environment.[61] That these strange names are 'barely able to be shaped by Roman mouths' does not deter his recording them; Mela appeals to the power of listed geographical toponyms even when engaged with the most difficult environments.[62]

The sacred groves, which serve as a critical site for Germanic political, military and religious practices, may be the one persistently present environmental feature in the

[53] *Ger.* 26.2: 'superest ager.'
[54] *Ger.* 10.1.
[55] *Ann.* 11.20 also mentions a mine in Germania.
[56] *Ger.* 43.2.
[57] *Ger.* 30.1: '… non ita effusis ac palustribus locis, ut ceterae civitates, in quas Germania patescit.'
[58] *Ger.* 12.1: 'Proditores et transfugas arboribus suspendunt, ignavos et imbelles et corpore infames caeno ac palude … mergunt.'
[59] Vitr. 1.4.1, cf. Varro, *Rust.* 1.12.2.
[60] Pompon. 3.24.
[61] Pompon. 3.24–5.
[62] Pompon. 2.25. Although the 'wilds' of Germania no doubt contrasted greatly with the contemporaneous Italian landscape, it must be remembered that this was not an untouched wilderness. Jäger (1992) addresses human influence on the environment, and Carroll (2001: 17) points out that virgin forest would have been exception, rather than rule.

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Germania.[63] They are not, however, securely attached to topography. Roads do not connect such sites to a comprehensible network, and Romans do not understand the ways in which such sites might be located or accessed within the trackless wilds of the forest. While the groves do serve as geographical focal points, they open up before the reader with no warning, much as they would have before the Roman armies who reported their presence, and disappear from view just as abruptly. The groves are never placed with any degree of precision within the landscape; the sudden and fleeting sense of secure placement vanishes as the text moves on, and the reader is left without any means to retrace her steps.

Germania's *silvae horridae* remain unexplored, undefined, and — with the exception of the Hercynian forest — unnamed. The omission of the Teutoburg, notorious site of the *clades Variana*, is particularly striking — this and a *silva Caesia* are named by Tacitus in the *Annals* without hesitation. Tacitus does tell us that the territory of the Chatti is coterminous with the Hercynian forest; this, however, is only helpful if one knows the limits of that forest, which were notoriously incomprehensible.[64] In contrast, Caesar, who admits to having little mastery over Germanic geography, approaches his ignorance very differently:[65]

> The breadth of the Hercynian forest … is a journey of nine days to a swift traveller — it cannot be defined in any other way, nor do they know to measure such journeys. It begins at the borders of the Helvetii, the Nemetes and the Rauraci and extends, in a straight line along the river Danube, to the borders of the Dacii and Anartes. From here it bends leftwards, through lands not on the river, and, because of its great size, touches on the borders of many tribes. Nor is there anyone in Germania who says that he has reached the edge of that forest, even after a journey of sixty days, or who has learned the location in which it begins.[66]

This passage illustrates many of the common features of ancient geographic texts: though Caesar cannot give the breadth of the forest in miles, such a determination must be made in the best available terms — here, the number of days' journey. Ignorance is no reason not to proceed in a reasonable and methodical manner, or to avoid absolutes ('neque quisquam est huius Germaniae …'). Tacitus refuses to make use of such tactics, declining to structure Germania's internal spaces, maintaining an image of the environment as recalcitrant and oblique.

Caesar's approach to the Hercynian problem also demonstrates other common and crucial strategies for explicating regional geographies in Greco-Roman writings, strategies which are the focus of Sections V and VI below, and which Tacitus consistently avoids. Caesar is, firstly, willing to use rivers (here the Danube) to construct an image of the interior of a space, and to locate tribes securely along riverbanks.[67] He also uses terms such as *recta* and *sinistrorsus* to orient the eye of the reader, and expects to use measurements along roads (*mensuras itinerum*) to define space — both signs of what is now referred to as hodological spatial perception.[68] These strategies for

[63] *Ger.* 7.3; 9.2; 10.2; 39.1; 43.3.

[64] *Silva Caesia*: *Ann.* 1.50; 1.60. Hercynian forest: *Ger.* 30.1. Compare Caes., *B Gall.* 6.25 discussed below, and Pompon. 3.24. Also Rives 1999: 232. The Hercynian forest appears one other time, in reference to the ancient home of the Helvetii at 28.2. As will be discussed below, the reference provides obsolete information about the tribe's ancestral homeland, and thus does not shed light on the contemporary environment.

[65] On Caesar's approach to the Germanic environment, Krebs 2006.

[66] Caes., *B Gall.* 6.25.

[67] Tacitus does describe certain tribes as inhabiting the bank of the Rhine, but these peoples are often of questionable ethnicity (as at 28.4 — see n. 15 above), and his willingness to provide geographic detail about the western limits of Germania has been addressed in Section II. The treatment of rivers which serve as borders is distinctly different from that of rivers in the interior, and the tribes identified with them.

[68] See n. 71 below.

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organizing space in the mind are sensible and commonplace in ancient texts. Their absence from the *Germania* signals a distinct departure on the part of Tacitus from the norms of geographic literature, and from the contemporary understanding of the transrhenane lands.

IV LINEAR LANDSCAPES AND GERMANIA'S INTERNAL GEOGRAPHY: RIVERS

Any modern publication of the *Germania* would feel incomplete without a map somewhere in the front matter, preferably with labels locating the many tribes described. There is, however, no reason to believe that the tract was accompanied by any such thing in its original form. Given this absence, what strategies does Tacitus employ to communicate the structure of the Germanic interior to his audience? In this and the following section the rôle of first rivers and later itineraries is examined, with continued attention to textual strategies employed (or rejected) by Tacitus in the *Germania*, in comparison to other ancient authors and to his own approach to regional geography in his other writings.[69]

Studies of ancient spatial perception have demonstrated that, when considering regional geographies, Greeks and Romans often conceived of space in a highly linear fashion, frequently preferring this approach to two-dimensional images, and were unlikely to employ the sort of bird's-eye thinking encouraged by the development of scale maps in the seventeenth century.[70] This has come to be known as 'hodological' spatial perception: an understanding of space based on network, the intersections of roads, rivers and coastlines, and grounded in the manner in which space is actually experienced and perceived — by the linear movement of the human body along a path.[71] The Peutinger Map is an excellent example of hodological spatial thought made manifest: mountain ranges, rivers, coastlines and roads, all linear features, construct the *orbis terrarum*, taking precedence over scale or the accurate relative positioning of landmasses.[72] Hodological thinking is broadly evident in ancient narratives, such as Caesar's account of the Gallic environment. Riggsby has argued that:

> Caesar conceived of strategic space directly before himself, essentially along a line of sight, in the sense of a movement that carried the army from one point to another … Space is not felt as a continuous surface but as a network of lines.[73]

The rôle played by rivers in constructing such networks is easily demonstrated by Caesar: in his introduction to the *Bellum Gallicum*, the Garonne, Marne and Seine are used to rationalize Gallia's internal space. They separate tribes from one another, and provide internal structure to the region.[74] Both Strabo and Pliny apply this same approach to Germania. Strabo uses the Elbe and Rhine to configure the environment: the latter serves as the western border, and the former runs parallel to it, through the very centre

[69] On the rôle of rivers in ethnography, Jones 2005: 37–47.
[70] For overviews of the literature on ancient mapping and spatial perception, see the edited volumes by Adams and Lawrence 2001; Talbert and Brodersen 2004; and Talbert 2012. On the development of scale mapping and its importance to modern governments, see, with references, Sundwall 1996: 621.
[71] Janni 1984; Bekker-Nielsen 1988; Brodersen 1995: 44–65; Whittaker 2002: 99–103.
[72] The map has recently been made accessible by Talbert 2010, with an excellent online interface at http://www.cambridge.org/us/talbert/index.html
[73] Riggsby 2006: 24. On hodological thought in other authors, see below, n. 88.
[74] Caes., *B Gall.* 1.1: 'Gallos ab Aquitanis Garumna flumen, a Belgis Matrona et Sequana dividit.' Despite the similarities between the introductions of the *B Gall.* and the *Germania* (see the discussion of *omnis* above), there is an important distinction between Caesar's use of rivers as a means of organizing *internal* space and Tacitus' usage of the Rhine and the Danube to set *external* boundaries.

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of Germania, dividing the whole in two.[75] The Augustan campaigns allowed for a basic level of familiarity with the Germanic rivers, even if not much more than the names was available. Pomponius Mela is unapologetic about his uncertainties concerning Germania, but still knows enough to propose the Vistula as Germania's north-eastern limit, and to write that:

> The rivers Danube and Rhine flow out into the territory of other peoples, the Main and the Lippe flow out into the Rhine, the Ems, the Weser and the Elbe (the most famous) into the Ocean.[76]

Pliny lists no less than seven major Germanic rivers, utilizing a strategy common to Latin authors: impressing knowledge of and power over an environment through a deluge of toponyms.[77] Rivers thus elucidate topography, assist in the explication of internal Germanic space, and serve as strong conceptual allies to any author; including Tacitus himself. In his historical works, the same rivers featured above are used to provide a spatial framework for narrative, as at *Ann.* 2.9, where the Romans are separated from the Cherusci by the Weser. They are used to locate tribes, as at *Ann.* 2.63, where the Marcomanni who had followed the overthrown Maroboduus and Catualda were settled 'beyond the Danube, between the Morava and the Váh'. Indeed, Tacitus' knowledge of the rivers Eder, Ems, Váh, Elbe, Lippe, Morava, Meuse, Waal, and Weser is clearly demonstrated in the *Annals* and *Histories*.[78]

Tacitus' use of rivers in the *Germania* should be read against this backdrop. In a striking break from contemporary geographical knowledge and the writing of the same, in seeming defiance of the expectations engendered by our understanding of environmental determinism or hodological spatial perception, Tacitus almost entirely excludes rivers from his account. Other than the Rhine and Danube, whose function as external borders has been addressed above, reference is made to rivers on only two occasions. In the first instance the Helvetii and Boii are described as having historically 'occupied the area between the Hercynian forest, and the rivers Rhine and Main'.[79] This is the only instance of rivers being used to locate a tribe in the text, and demonstrates how clear and useful such a strategy could be. It is worth noting, however, that the Helvetii had famously migrated from the area at the end of the second century B.C.E.; Tacitus is not here elucidating contemporary geography, and at the end of 28.2 points out that there are new inhabitants, but declines to name them.[80] Also of interest is Tacitus' identification of the Helvetii and Boii as Gallic tribes. It seems possible that Tacitus is deliberately exploiting Caesar's precedent of constructing Germania as trackless and blank, and Gallia as a secured, describable, Romanized space.[81] Given that these tribes are not Germanic but Gallic, they may be permitted an ancestral location across the Rhine — as long as this rare geographical information does not assist any understanding of contemporary Germania. That the Helvetian lands on the Swiss plateau had been incorporated by Domitian into the new province of Germania Superior makes Tacitus' identification of the Helvetii as Gauls particularly pointed.

[75] Strabo 1.2.1; 7.1.3. Rivers provide an essential linear framework for understanding space in Strabo, as also in 7.1.3: ἐπὶ ταυτὰ δὲ τῷ Ἀμασίᾳ φέρονται Βίσουργίς τε καὶ Λουπίας ποταμός, διέχων Ῥήνου περὶ ἑξακοσίους σταδίους, ῥέων διὰ Βρουκτέρων τῶν ἐλαττόνων.
[76] Pompon. 3.24.
[77] Pliny, *HN* 4.100.
[78] See *Ann.* 1.56; 1.60; 2.6; 2.8; 2.9; 2.14; 2.16; 2.19; 2.23; 2.63; 4.44; 11.18; 11.12; and *Hist.* 4.28.
[79] *Ger.* 28.2: 'igitur inter Hercyniam silvam Rhenumque et Moenum amnes Helvetii, ulteriora Boii, Gallica utraque gens, tenuere.'
[80] *Ger.* 28.2: 'quamvis mutatis cultoribus.' On the Helvetii, Rives 1999: 231–2.
[81] Krebs 2006; Riggsby 2006: 61–2.

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The second and only remaining fluvial reference is to the Elbe. Its one mention in the *Germania* indicates again the potential usefulness of rivers in locating a people in a landscape: 'the headwaters of the Elbe are in the territory of the Hermunduri.'[82] This river is repeatedly used by Tacitus himself in the *Annals* to define the north-eastern border of Germania.[83] Quite against this expectation, in the monograph the Elbe's identity and function are not merely contested, but are almost erased; once a river located squarely in *terra cognita*, so well known as to be *notum*, the Elbe is now merely a rumour ('flumen inclutum et notum olim, nunc tantum auditur').[84] Authority is undone, denied, the Elbe removed to the realm of *fama*. Rivers familiar to contemporary authors, to Tacitus, to his readers, are removed from the *Germania*. The framework they might provide for our understanding falls to the side. By employing such strategies Tacitus engages in a deliberate unravelling of Roman knowledge, and of imperial narratives.

V LINEAR LANDSCAPES AND GERMANIA'S INTERNAL GEOGRAPHY: ITINERARIES

The courses of natural environmental features such as rivers and mountain ranges can be used to encourage understanding of regional geography.[85] In addition, a reader may build up a conception of a space based on manmade linear constructs such as roads or narratives. In the second half of the text (chs 28–46), Tacitus leads his reader on a journey through the Germanic environment, describing *singulae gentes* one by one.[86] The order in which he addresses them is not based on their political power or history of engagement with Rome, but on virtual journeys: the narrative voice moves through the landscape, establishing the location of each tribe with reference to the last. Movement from one discrete position to another is, as discussed above, the building block of hodological Greco-Roman spatial perception, and is the foundation of their most essential geographic tools: periploi and itineraries.

Itineraries, in their most basic form, are lists of stopping points, known as *mansiones*, along a route and of the distances between them.[87] They are closely related to periploi, records of distances and sailing times between ports along a coastline, which guided ancient sailors in the absence of marine charts. On land any village, town or city could substitute for a port. Equipped with a sequential list of the names of towns and cities, and of the distances between them, a traveller could find her way from one end of the Empire to the other, simply by asking which road led in the direction of her next listed destination. This manner of hodological thought has been identified as a structuring principle in many ancient texts, including the second half of the *Germania*.[88]

[82] *Ger.* 41.2. On the inaccuracy of this statement, Lund 1991: 1939–40: 'Entweder wohnten die Hermunduren im Jahre 98 n. Chr. Nicht mehr in der Nähe der Elbquelle, oder aber er hat, wie es vor kurzem wieder angenommen wurde, Elbe und Saale verwechselt.'

[83] *Ann.* 1.59; 2.14. See also the discussion of the north-eastern border in Section II.

[84] *Ger.* 41.2.

[85] Also excluded from the *Germania* is any attempt to use the Alps or Sudenten mountains as explanatory landscape features, discussed briefly by Timpe 1992: 270. Cf. Pompon 2.66: 'Alpes ipsae ab his litoribus [of Italy] longe lateque diffusae, primo ad septentrionem magno gradu excurrunt, deinde ubi Germaniam adtigerunt, verso impetu in orientem abeunt, diremptisque populis immanibus, usque in Thraciam penetrant.'

[86] *Ger.* 27.3.

[87] Brodersen 2001; Salway 2001; Salway 2012: 204–10.

[88] Strabo: Dueck 2000: 40–3; Pliny, *NH*: Woolf 2011: 11; Apollonius: Dueck and Brodersen 2012: 26; Pausanias: Elsner 2001: 20. Woolf (2011: 11) notes that Pliny's selection of the periplus as an organizing schema should be considered a conscious one, given that not all of Pliny's sources made similar choices. Salway (2012: 200–4) details other approaches used in antiquity to structure intrinsically geographical texts, including alphabetical or numerical order and political hierarchy.

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Tacitus indicates most clearly that he has travel-inspired sequencing like this in mind at 41.1: 'In the same way that [my narrative has been] following the Rhine, I shall now follow the course of the Danube.'[89] In addition to progressions along these two rivers, there is also a third conceptual journey, beginning at 35.1, where once the reader has reached the mouth of the Rhine, she turns her mind's eye east, and follows the oceanic coast through the territories of the Chauci and Chatti.[90] Immediately striking is the absence of the essential features of any itinerary: place names and distances. There is almost no reference to settlements that might serve as *mansiones*. Only two are mentioned in the text: the first, Asciburgium, is named not in association with any itinerary, or with its foundation by Drusus I, or with inhabitation by any particular tribe, but rather with its apparent foundation by Ulysses.[91] As was the case with the homeland of the Helvetii above, toponyms may be included where they shed no light on the contemporary environment. Even the Ubian settlement at Cologne, which served as capital of the province of Germania Inferior, appears only indirectly.[92] Tacitus is adamant: 'None of the Germanic peoples dwell in cities — they will not even allow their houses to touch one another.'[93] Even settlements less substantive than cities are elided, and there is no use of the term *oppidum* in the *Germania*.[94]

In stark contrast, Tacitus' historical works repeatedly acknowledge such things. Mogontiacum and Colonia Agrippinensium, the capitals of the two provinces, are acknowledged.[95] Here the Ubii may inhabit an *oppidum*, the Chatti have Mattium as a *genti caput*, Maroboduus a *regiam castellumque*.[96] Here Domitian's provinces, Superior and Inferior, are named and placed in Germanic space without difficulty, as they never are in the ethnography.[97] It is only the *Germania* that insists on the absence of any form of urbanism, in spite of its own reliance on structural principles that necessitate the description of discrete points in a landscape.[98]

In place of traditional *mansiones*, then, the itineraries in the *Germania* rely on the tribes themselves as 'destinations', features of the environment — particularly when the account leaves the course of the rivers, which it does more often than not. One people is placed in relation to the next by the use of terms such as *ultra*, *proximi*, *iuxta*, *tergo*, *fronte*, *in latere*, *cotermina*, *deinde*, *retro* or *trans*.[99] By omitting the intervening descriptions of these tribes,

[89] 'Ut quo modo paulo ante Rhenum, sic nunc Danuvium sequar.'

[90] Rives (1999: 245, 295) notes the problematic nature of the Tacitean itineraries. Roads, the most common linear structure used as a basis for itineraries, are absent from Germanic space. Tacitus does acknowledge the construction of a *limes* (meaning military road: Isaac 1998: 126–7) in the *agri decumates*, but this can hardly be said to provide structure to unproblematically Germanic space (see n. 15 above).

[91] *Ger.* 3.3. On the adoption of mythological figures like Odysseus into native narratives, and their rôle in cultural exchange between Romans and barbarians, see n. 49 above.

[92] *Ger.* 28.4: '… quamquam Romana colonia esse meruerint …' The name Colonia Agrippinensium is omitted. The settlement was on the western bank of the Rhine, and even if clearly identified and located could not be said to lend structure to Germania's interior.

[93] *Ger.* 16.1.

[94] This runs decidedly counter to the Roman tendency to exaggerate, rather than understate, the scale of urbanism in the territories they encounter. Compare Pompey (Plut., *Pomp.* 45), who claimed to have captured a thousand strongholds and almost nine hundred cities during his campaigns in the East, or Pomponius Mela (3.28–9), who postpones the disappearance of urbanism until his narrative crosses the Vistula and takes up the Sarmatian tribes.

[95] Mogontiacum: *Hist.* 4.24; 4.25; 4.33; 4.37; 4.59; 4.61; 4.62; 4.70; 4.71. Colonia Agrippinensium: *Hist.* 1.56; 1.57; 4.20; 4.25; 4.55; 4.56; 4.64.

[96] *Ann.* 1.36; 1.56; 2.62.

[97] *Ann.* 3.41; 4.73; 6.30; 11.18.

[98] The text's rejection of settlement is also extended into the divine realm. At 9.3 Tacitus asserts: 'ceterum nec cohibere parietibus deos neque in ullam humani oris speciem adsimulare ex magnitudine caelestium arbitrantur: lucos ac nemora consecrant deorumque nominibus appellant secretum illud, quod sola reverential vident.' However in the *Annals* Germanicus, entering the territory of the Marsi, destroys a *templum Tanfanae* (*Ann.* 1.51).

[99] *Ger.* 30.1; 32.1; 33.1; 34.1; 35.1; 36.1; 36.2; 40.2; 42.1; 43.1; 44.1; 45.2.

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one can see more easily how these tribes are established in relation not to the landscape, but to each other:

> Next to (*promixi*) the Chatti on the Rhine … dwell the Usipii and the Tencteri … the Bruxteri were once found beside (*iuxta*) the Tencteri; but now it is said that the Chamavi and Angrivarii entered their territory … The Dulgubnii, Chasuarii, and lesser-known tribes confine the Angrivarii and Chamavii at their backs (*a tergo*), and the Frisii at their fronts (*a fronte*).[100]

The use of terms such as these is common to Indo-European languages, where spatial relationships are primarily egocentric and anthropomorphic — relative rather than absolute. Relative spatial perception, explored notably along with alternative systems of spatial perception by the psycholinguist Stephen C. Levinson, is a system of spatial understanding based on the planes of the human body: the location of an object is established by its position in relation to the viewer, rather than by its absolute position in space.[101]

Although the use of these terms is a completely normal way to establish spatial relations in Latin text,[102] their success depends on the security of the objects used as reference points — the spatial *relata*.[103] Stating that object A is 'on the left of' or 'next to' an object B (the *relatum*) only serves to locate A if one first knows where B is. If useful triangulation is to be established at all, spatially relative language must also clearly establish the position of the one who views the objects. Object A may appear to be on the left of an object B from one position, but this may not be true for a second person viewing them from a position different from that of the first.

Tacitus' account does not clearly establish the location of *relata*, or of the viewer. His itineraries drift further and further away from securely located toponyms. Even in the abridged version of chs 32–4 above, with all the geographical sections placed in close proximity, the reader struggles to follow their placement. These tribes possess planes, as if of the body (*frons*, *tergum*), but no absolute orientation. It is as if a group of personified tribes stood with human bodies on the right bank of the Rhine, packed together and jostling for position, yet existing only in relation to each other. Moreover, terms such as *frons* and *tergum* can only communicate spatial relations efficiently if the viewer/narrator/reader is herself securely grounded in space. Tacitus' narrative turns us about on ourselves: if we are in fact progressing in a north-westerly directly down the Rhine, is the *frons* of any object we encounter to the north-west, or to the east, as we turn our gaze toward the Germanic interior? Knowing that the Cherusci could be found *in latere* of the Chauci and Chatti is useful only if the location of the latter two tribes is known, and known in relation to the viewer. Spatially relative language can be used with much more precision than is demonstrated here; the 'failure' of the text to communicate is not the result of a poverty of spatial language, but of Tacitus' refusal to provide a supporting structure which would render it functional. In the absence of precisely located *relata*, the itinerary structure is hobbled.[104] Throughout the text, despite the underlying principle of the itinerary, orientation is a fluid and uneasy thing.

[100] *Ger.* 32–4. 'Proximi Chattis … Rhenum … Usipi ac Tencteri colunt … Iuxta Tencteros Bructeri olim occurrebant: nunc Chamavos et Angrivarios immigrasse narratur … Angrivarios et Chamavos a tergo Dulgubnii et Chasuarii claudunt aliaeque gentes haud perinde memoratae, a fronte Frisii excipiunt.'

[101] Levinson 2003: 10–14 and *passim*.

[102] Sundwall (1996: 633, 640) identifies the use of such language in Ammianus Marcellinus' geographical digressions.

[103] Sundwall 1996: 640–1. In relative spatial cognition, objects are positioned in relation to another object, whose location is already established. The first object is known as the figure (the object to be located) and the object with respect to which the figure is to be located is known as the *relatum* or ground. In the *Germania*, each tribe is introduced as a figure in relation to a previously mentioned *relatum* — sometimes the bank of a river, often a previously-mentioned tribe. That figure/tribe then becomes the *relatum* for the next tribe to be described.

[104] Only twice does Tacitus use a spatially relative term with a geographic rather than ethnic *relatum*. At 43.3

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Tacitus' relative spatial terminology provides precious little information about the *situs* of the Germanic tribes.

It is little wonder that these sections have proved confusing and problematic for scholars.[105] The absence of distances and discrete points — the fundamental requirements for itineraries and periploi — is remarkable. On these journeys the tribes are presented with reference only to each other, and without appeal to networks created by rivers (there are none), cardinal directions (which appear only once),[106] mountain ranges (also once),[107] or even forests. The *Germania* is the only Tacitean text that insists on an absence of notable structures or settlements in the region. By using itineraries as a structural principle, Tacitus draws the reader into the environment, but then leaves her without guidance, in a landscape wiped clean of topography, empty of everything except a series of radically strange peoples.

VI ROMAN AGENCY IN GERMANIA

Tacitus' depiction of the Germanic environment raises the question: what effect does such a space, which resists penetration and has little internal structure, have on Roman agents? It must first be observed that such agents are almost entirely absent from the text. In comparison with other geographic and ethnographic writings, which are framed by broader historical narrative or include elements of history within them, the *Germania* leaves the past largely to the side. Given the scale of campaigning on the Germanic frontier in the first century C.E., and the entwining of history and ethnography in other geographical writings, these absences are very likely deliberate.

Tacitus addresses Roman action across the Rhine almost exclusively in ch. 37, which divides the generalizing overview of the Germani from the itinerary-based description of individual tribes. The digression contains an extraordinarily succinct summary of Rome's Germanic wars, in terms entirely unfavourable to the Empire. For 210 years the 'conquest' of Germania has continued to unfold: 'tam diu Germania vincitur'.[108] Tacitus' insistence on the present tense and the ongoing and incomplete nature of conquest is underscored by his list of conquered, captured and slaughtered Roman generals: Cn. Papirius Carbo, L. Cassius Longinus, M. Aurelius Scaurus, Q. Servilius Caepio, Cn. Mallius Maximus, and, of course, P. Quinctilius Varus. The first five of these commanders all encountered the Cimbri between 113 and 105 B.C.E.; for Tacitus to place such emphasis on their misfortunes two hundred years earlier is somewhat

'dirimit enim scinditque Suebiam continuum montium iugum, ultra quod plurimae gentes agunt', and at 45.2 he writes 'ergo iam dextro Suebici maris litore Aestiorum gestes adluuntur.'

[105] Timpe 1992: 273–5.

[106] No tribe is located using cardinal directions, which appear only twice in the text as a whole: the course of the Rhine is described as turning west (*in occidentem*) at 1.2, and the only appearance of cardinal direction in the second half of the text is at 35.1, to reorient the reader at the end of the Rhine itinerary: 'hactenus in occidentem Germaniam novimus; in septentrionem ingenti flexu recedit.' This passage demonstrates the usefulness of such language in orienting the reader, and yet this is the only place where it appears. Compare Caes., *B Gall.* 1.1.7, where the Belgae 'spectant in septentrionem et orientem solem', and Aquitania 'spectat inter occasum solis et septentriones', or Pomponius Mela's description of the orientation of the Alps (see n. 85 above), or Tacitus' own account of Britain at *Agr.* 10.1: 'Britannia … spatio ac caelo in orientem Germaniae, in occidentem Hispaniae obtenditur, Gallis in meridiem etiam inspicitur; septentrionalia eius, nullis contra terris, vasto atque aperto mari pulsantur.'

[107] *Ger.* 43.3. Mountains appear equally briefly in the first half of the text: the Rhaetian Alps are the source of the Rhine, and Mt Abnoba that of the Danube at 1.2. These peaks do locate the sources of these rivers with some accuracy, but Tacitus appears to take no issue with establishing the western and southern frontiers of Germania securely in space, so long as they are exclusive of the Domitianic provinces.

[108] *Ger.* 37.3.

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disingenuous, and in no way representative of the contemporary situation.[109] The laudable campaigns of Julius Caesar, Drusus, Nero and Germanicus, who 'did not strike without themselves taking harm', are also undermined.[110] The Germani here are not newly incorporated citizens of the Empire, nor even *victi* or *capti*; they are explicitly and pointedly characterized by their *libertas*.[111]

Tacitus' attack continues: the campaigns of Tiberius, Germanicus and Corbulo are ignored, those of Caligula dismissed as farce.[112] Domitian's recent campaigns are mockeries, parodies of legitimate conquest, the Germanic tribes 'triumphed over rather than conquered'.[113] Germania maintains its borders in the face of Rome's most deliberate efforts. Even as explorers they fail: Tacitus presents Drusus I, venturing into the same northern seas, as daring but decidedly thwarted: 'But Oceanus rejected exploration of himself or of Hercules. Afterward, no one tried again …'[114] The subsequent naval campaigns of Tiberius and Germanicus (described in the *Annals*) are elided and certainly not presented, as Suetonius has them, as acts of unqualified achievement and proper Roman expansion.[115]

And yet in other texts, including Tacitus' own histories, these same commanders' actions are described in terms of conquest, and although confronted with hostile environments, they prevail. On campaign in the *Annals*, Germanicus is regularly shown as superior to the challenges presented by the landscape. Choosing between two paths at 1.50, he takes the unknown and unexplored option, thereby escaping the notice of Marsian lookouts on the other. His audacity is rewarded, and he lays waste to 50 miles of countryside with sword and flame.[116] The general is similarly unfazed by his alien surroundings at 2.14. About to engage the enemy, securely located within the landscape on a plain named Idistavisus by the Visurgis river, Germanicus addresses his troops: Roman soldiers are more than capable, not only when they fight on level fields but also in forests and narrow passes, if *ratio* be with them.[117] This is the Roman commander we are accustomed to seeing in our texts, one whose recourse to science and reason equips him to face any situation. That he wins the battle bears out the point. Finally, at 2.19–20, Germanicus displays absolute understanding of his own and his enemy's position within the tactical space before him. Tacitus spends several lines describing the relative locations of the river, forest, plain and earthworks, and the positioning of the enemy infantry and cavalry within the space. The description alone attributes to Germanicus a flattering certainty of his surroundings, but Tacitus becomes more explicit: 'None of these things were unknown to Caesar: he knew plans and positions of the enemy, whether obvious or concealed, and turned them against

[109] Moreover, the Cimbri were in the late second century and down to the Augustan period considered a Gallic tribe rather than a Germanic one. See Rives 1999: 271–3 on the problem of their identity.
[110] *Ger.* 37.5: '… nec impune … perculerunt.'
[111] Tacitus is specific about the source of Germanic strength: 'Non Samni, non Poeni, non Hispaniae Galliaeve, ne Parthi quidem saepius admonuere: quippe regno Arsacis acrior est Germanorum libertas' (*Ger.* 37.4). Rives 1999: 276: 'In [characterizing the Germani by their *libertas*] he draws on both ethnographic and political commonplaces … The Germani … were above all free: Tacitus repeatedly characterizes them as intolerant of any restraint … their devotion to freedom is excessive, and not balanced by any discipline. This balance the Romans had achieved, but the Germani, with a few exceptions … had not.' Tacitus also characterizes the Germani as *liberi* in the *Agricola*, relating that the Britons stirred themselves up for rebellion by remembering 'Germanias excussisse iugum: et flumine, non Oceano defendi' (*Agr.* 15.3). See also Gruen 2011: 169–72.
[112] *Ger.* 37.5: 'mox ingentes Gai Caesaris minae in ludibrium versae.'
[113] *Ger.* 37.6: '[Germani] proximis temporibus triumphati magis quam victi sunt.'
[114] *Ger.* 34.3. *Herculem* here is the pillars of Hercules, relocated by Tacitus from Gibraltar to the entrance to the Baltic Sea, and indicating the shifting of the ends of the known world.
[115] *Ann.* 2.8, 2.23–4; Vell. Pat. 2.106.3; Suet., *Claud.* 1.2. See also Rives 1999: 263.
[116] *Ann.* 1.50–1. Nowhere in the *Germania* are any actions or environmental features described using *milia*.
[117] The geographic descriptors appear at 2.16.1.

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themselves.'[118] Here the general's eye is not blinded by a hostile environment. Instead he penetrates every forest with a sort of tactical omniscience, his gaze moving without impediment across all the pieces on the board. It is only in the *Germania* that Roman action is consistently thwarted, that obstacles presented by the Germanic environment are insurmountable.

VII CONCLUSION

In the *Germania*, then, the transrhenane environment consistently evades and confounds our gaze. Tacitus has deliberately detached Germania from the norms of geographic writing. Descriptive features common to ancient geography are absent or insufficient, and to the extent that the landscape is described, it is stark and unwelcoming. Roman agency is denied, both in terms of the reader's ability to comprehend Germanic space, and of the general's capacity for conquest. Though information about the nature of its inhabitants abounds, the land itself is *terra incognita*.

I am here casting the implications of these many geographic irregularities in strong terms. Indeed, when the absences in the landscape are piled up upon each other, they are unquestionably striking. It is highly unlikely that this consistent trend throughout the text — the manipulation of borders, the absence of internal structure, the damning or eliding of natural features — is accidental. It must be kept in mind, though, that as one reads the text, as its geographic elements are dispersed through and submersed by description of the customs and culture of the Germanic people, the effect of this subversive geography is far more subtle. Its effect is not such that the distancing of Germania from Roman power and perception would be foremost in the mind of the reader. Rather, a persistent, pervasive sense of displacement is established.

To what end? The *Germania* is a text which has long confused readers, who remain perplexed that a work which so clearly displays the marks of such a gifted writer and rhetorician as Tacitus seems so conspicuously to lack a suitably sophisticated *raison d'être*. In the absence of a conventional prologue or other clearly programmatic statements scholars have reached no agreement as to the 'purpose' of the monograph. It has been positioned and repositioned as an act of pure ethnographic research, as a moral treatise, a historical excursus, or as a political pamphlet advocating for, or against, further Roman action across the Rhine.[119] It would be a substantial overreach to assert that an examination of only the geographical aspects of the text could resolve this problem. I do, however, see two ways in which an understanding of the text's approach to the Germanic landscape supports a broader understanding of the work as a whole.

The first involves the familiar question of Tacitus' vexed relationship with Domitian: much maligned in the Tacitean corpus, yet under whom the author unquestionably found favour. The *Germania*'s presentation of a *terra incognita* stands in sharp contrast to Domitian's own narrative about Rome's relationship with the region; the treatment of the western border, discussed above, is the most overt challenge to the norms of contemporary geographic knowledge. When Domitian attained the Principate in 81 C.E. — without an obvious claim to the military accomplishments that had played such an integral part in the self-presentation of his father, Vespasian, and brother, Titus — he embraced the renewed Flavian focus on the Rhinelands.[120] Expeditions

[118] *Ann.* 2.20.1: 'Nihil ex his Caesari incognitum: consilia, locos, prompta, occulta noverat astusque hostium in perniciem ipsis vertebat.'
[119] For an overview see Timpe 1989. More recently, Krebs 2005.
[120] On Vespasian's actions on the Rhine front see Schönberger 1969: 155–8; see also n. 17.

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against the Chatti in 83 C.E. and into Dacia against the Germanic Marcomanni and Quadi in 89 C.E. led to two triumphs and an ovation for the Princeps.[121] Although the evidence for the extent of these campaigns is unreliable and sparse, the authenticity of their success doubtful,[122] the 'conquest' of Germania played a significant rôle in Domitian's public image. Germanic provinces — Inferior and Superior — were now established for the first time. Domitian took the name *Germanicus* in 83 C.E.,[123] renamed the month of September the same,[124] and issued a series of coins bearing the legend GERMANIA CAPTA, which depicted Pax burning piles of weapons, or captives seated at the foot of tropaia.[125] Frieze A of the monumental Cancelleria reliefs, from an unknown major monument in the city of Rome, originally depicted Domitian (who now wears Nerva's face) setting out for one of these campaigns, exhorted by Mars, Minerva and Roma.

Germania, then, was the foundation of Domitian's claim to military glory. By the end of the first century C.E. 'Germania' could be understood as a conquered place — and Domitian had a vested interest in its being perceived as such. We can imagine that works such as Statius' lost *de Bello Germanico* represented the emperor as furthering Rome's destiny, rendering more absolute its hold on the *orbis terrarum*. Germania had been pacified, provinces created, the inhabitants of the eastern shore of the Rhine considered — along with other liminal peoples — to be subservient to the Empire, even if they were not, in practice administered by Roman officials.[126] That Domitian's *Germaniae* were in fact located on the western shore, in lands long considered Gallic, must have seemed an easily elided technicality. The emperor had appropriated the toponym for his own purposes. Germania had been declared *capta*; whatever lay without, whatever its nature, must be other.

Right from its first lines, which assert the existence of a cohesive Germania beyond the Rhine, Tacitus' text undermines this geographical orthodoxy. The land is constructed as inviolate, the existence of provinces called *Germaniae* dismissed, any successful Roman action removed. In stark contrast to the problematic but surmountable environments that appear in the *Annales* and *Agricola*, the landscape of the *Germania* is opaque — its borders problematic, its internal geography chaotic and obtuse. The transrhenane lands certainly presented a substantial challenge to the Empire; yet insurmountable odds are not often presented as justification for inaction, let alone ignorance, in the writings of the Roman élite. Tacitus' Germania is distanced, impenetrable and deliberately blank, united in its sullen refusal to acknowledge Roman action and agency. This is a subtle but resolute rejection of the contemporary imperial narrative, an unwriting of empire. Tacitus deploys the rhetorical power of geography as a weapon against the Domitianic narrative of a pacified Germania. Writing within two years of that emperor's assassination, Tacitus subtly participates in Domitian's *damnatio memoriae*.

At the conclusion of his campaigns in 16 C.E. Germanicus had a tropaion erected. There is no evidence that it was anywhere near as permanent a mark on the landscape as that erected by Augustus at La Turbie, or by legionaries at Adamklissi, but it was substantial enough to bear the inscription: 'Having conquered the nations between the Rhine and the Elbe, the army of Tiberius Caesar dedicated this monument to Mars, to Jupiter, and

[121] On the evidence for the Domitianic campaigns and related propaganda, Nesselhauf 1952: 236–41; Schönberger 1969: 158–64; Jones 1992: 128–31, 135–8, 150–5.
[122] For the view that the fortification of the *limes* dates to Trajan's rule, rather than that of Vespasian or Domitian, see Sommer 1999.
[123] Inscriptional and numismatic evidence given by Kneissl 1969: 186–8.
[124] Suet., *Dom.* 13.3.
[125] *RIC* II 252, 278, 322, 341. See also Rüger 2000: 499.
[126] Compare for example the depiction in Augustan art of Parthia as subordinated — despite contemporary political realities, Rose 2005.

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to Augustus.'[127] Such tropaia have been read by Hölscher as expressing permanent dominion over a landscape.[128] Through them military victories, which are limited in time and space, are transformed into political power. Symbolic manifestations of a region's conquest, they fix and perpetuate conceptually the victor's superiority and dominance, visible across vast distances and through time, evoking a 'universal and almost abstract imperialism'.[129] The sacral nature of the monument, signified by its consecration to Mars, Jupiter and the recently deceased Augustus, increased the power of its presence. Through it Roman deities were inserted into the heart of the Germanic landscape.[130]

The *Germania* stands in severe contrast to the certainties of such imperial proclamations, and might be read as a sort of anti-tropaion. Tacitus' monument, rather than appropriating the Germanic landscape for its readers, evokes a persistent sense of dislocation, undermining assertions of completed conquest and destabilizing whatever might have seemed certain about this contested landscape. There are no trophies, no triumphs, no captives in this version of events, only a suggestive confusion, standing in quiet, insistent opposition to the certainties of the Domitianic narrative.[131]

If the nature of the Germanic environment supports Tacitus' condemnation of Domitian, it also supports a broader concern: the possibility and nature of liberty under the rule of the emperors. I would argue that by separating Germania from the Empire, by erasing Roman conquest, and further, Roman knowledge, Tacitus creates a productive void. It is clear that one of his primary concerns in the *Germania*, and also elsewhere in the Tacitean corpus, is the possibility of independence from (and within) the Empire. *Libertas*, while not an unqualified or unproblematic attribute, is an essential feature of the Germanic tribes.[132] Tacitus' presentation is not a simplistic one, setting the free and independent tribesmen against oppressed and morally compromised Roman citizens, a virtuous and free 'Other' opposed to an enslaved 'Self'.[133] As is so often the case in his writings, the independence of the Germani is an ambivalent virtue, qualified and problematized by its intractable coincidence with barbarism. But however characteristically ambiguous Tacitus' conclusions about the nature of Germanic liberty are, it is undoubtedly central to his characterization of the region's inhabitants.

Though Germanic relations with the culture and inhabitants of the Empire were doubtless convoluted, the land itself is quite clearly presented as external to the Empire. Germania is consistently excluded from the *imperium Romanum*, extracted from imperial control and imperial knowledge. It seems that this physical independence of the Germani from the Empire, their existence outside of the hierarchical networks of patronage and dependence that permeated imperial society, creates a textual space for the examination of Germanic *libertas*. Only outside of the borders of the Empire can the virtues and perils of personal and political freedom play out unrestricted. Geographic distance is therefore not sufficient for liberty, but may be, the text ominously suggests,

[127] *Ann.* 2.22.1.
[128] Hölscher 2006: 33–4.
[129] Hölscher 2006: 33.
[130] The tropaion was not the only permanent mark made by Roman commanders in Germania. Repeated reference is made in the *Annals* to earthworks, canals, camps and forts constructed by successive Roman armies. Their ability to reshape the landscape, despite its intractable qualities, is the grandest statement of Roman mastery. See *Ann.* 1.50; 1.56; 2.8; 2.10; 11.18; 11.20.
[131] I see the geographic elements of the text as displaying the same 'techniques of indirection and suggestion' identified by Sailor (2008: 23): '… you give your readership or audience enough direction for them to be able to draw a particular conclusion, but you preserve "deniability" by not actually articulating the conclusion yourself and so unload responsibility for the criticism onto the reader who wishes to find it there. This tactic is useful whenever you are operating at the margins of publically acceptable discourse.'
[132] *Ger.* 37.4.
[133] On *libertas* in the *Germania* see, with bibliography, O'Gorman 1993; Krebs 2005.

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necessary for the possibility of liberty to exist. A Germania depicted as incorporated into the Empire, into established schemas of imperial knowledge would have been subject to the same restrictions or uncertainties concerning independence as were found within the Empire. In contrast, the curious absences of the Germanic landscape support and allow for real questions to be raised about the nature and possibility of independence beyond the frontiers.

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