Classical Quarterly **55.2** 572–581 (2005) *Printed in Great Britain*
doi:10.1093/cq/bmi051

MARTIUS MACER'S RAID AND ITS CONSEQUENCES: TACITUS, *HISTORIES* 2.23

Between Caecina's withdrawal from Placentia and his preparations for what became the battle of Ad Castores, Tacitus sets an incursion across the Po launched by Martius Macer, Othonian commander of 2,000 gladiators positioned opposite Cremona, the Vitellians' headquarters. The few scholars who talk of this raid tend to overstate its importance. Tacitus' giving it space has persuaded them, it seems, that the raid had military value. But examination of the larger context in which Tacitus places this sortie will show that for him what counted was its aftermath. The raid was a pinprick, which failed even to contribute significantly to Caecina's decision to fight at Ad Castores. This may be one reason why Tacitus is vague about its timing and purpose. But there is another: he dwells on the effects of breaking off the raid, because this is what exacerbated the lack of trust between the Othonian troops and their generals, and prompted the emperor to make his brother, L. Salvius Otho Titianus, commander-in-chief of his armies. Tacitus' purpose is to emphasize the soldiery's escalating doubts about their generals' loyalty to Otho, and the steps the emperor took in response.[1] And this has larger implications, because failure to recognize where the emphasis falls has led to highly misleading conclusions about the coherence of Tacitus' account, its reliability vis-à-vis Plutarch's version of events, and Tacitus' portrayal of Otho's character and conduct during the campaign.

[1] Spurinna comperto itinere hostium defensam Placentiam, quaeque acta et quid Caecina pararet, Annium Gallum per litteras docet. Gallus legionem primam in auxilium Placentiae ducebat, diffisus paucitati cohortium, ne longius obsidium et vim Germanici exercitus parum tolerarent. [2] ubi pulsum Caecinam pergere Cremonam accepit, aegre coercitam legionem et pugnandi ardore usque ad seditionem progressam Bedriaci sistit. inter Veronam Cremonamque situs est vicus, duabus iam Romanis cladibus notus infaustusque. [3] isdem diebus a Martio Macro haud procul Cremona prospere pugnatum; namque promptus animi Martius transvectos navibus gladiatores in adversam Padi ripam repente effudit. turbata ibi Vitellianorum auxilia, et ceteris Cremonam fugientibus caesi qui restiterant. sed repressus vincentium impetus, ne novis subsidiis firmati hostes fortunam proelii mutarent. [4] suspectum id Othonianis fuit, omnia ducum facta prave aestimantibus. certatim, ut quisque animo ignavus, procax ore, Annium Gallum et Suetonium Paulinum et Marium Celsum—nam eos quoque Otho praefecerat—variis criminibus incessebant. [5] acerrima seditionum ac discordiae incitamenta, interfectores Galbae, scelere et metu vecordes, miscere cuncta, modo palam turbidis vocibus, modo occultis ad Othonem litteris; qui, humillimo cuique credulus, bonos metuens trepidabat, rebus prosperis incertus et inter adversa melior. igitur Titianum fratrem accitum bello praeposuit.

[1] F. Ritter, 'Bemerkungen zu Tacitus', *Philologus* 21 (1864), 650–3, still one of the most useful discussions. This is cited hereafter by author's name and page number only, as also are G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' Histories I and II* (Oxford, 1979); J. Gerstenecker, *Der Krieg des Otho und Vitellius in Italien im J. 69* (Munich, 1882); H. Heubner, *P. Cornelius Tacitus, Die Historien, Zweites Buch* (Heidelberg, 1968); F. Klingner, 'Die Geschichte Kaiser Othos bei Tacitus', *Berichte d. Sächs. Akad. d. Wiss. zu Leipzig, phil.-hist. Klasse* 92/1 (1940), 3–27 = id., *Studien zur griechischen und römischen Literatur* (Zürich and Stuttgart, 1964), 605–24; and A. Passerini, 'Le due battaglie presso Bedriacum', *Studi di antichità classica offerti a Emanuele Ciaceri* (Genoa, Rome, Naples, and Citta di Castello, 1940), 178–248.

Classical Quarterly 55.2 © The Classical Association 2005; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

To start with the raid (§ 3), Macer may not have relished leading a *deforme … auxilium … sed per civilia arma etiam severis ducibus usurpatum* (*Hist*. 2.11.2), but it seems reasonable to conclude that he was a man of some military experience—and perhaps of some seniority, since Otho planned to make him a consul for the last two months of 69.[2] It seems reasonable to assume also that Macer was given his assignment when the gladiators set out from Rome, as part of the advance force dispatched to the north under Annius Gallus, and that he took up position on the southern bank of the Po as soon as he reached the area. What it is *not* reasonable to assume is that, once installed, he made a series of commando-style raids, even though Henderson beguiled his readers with visions of 'a small but active and annoying body … who made stinging raids over the river—a little hornets' nest which it was hard to reach'.[3] Tacitus reports only the one raid, and the surprise Macer achieved hardly suggests that the Vitellians had suffered his attentions previously. Since both sides had boats in plenty,[4] it makes better sense to regard Macer's task as to deter nuisance raids like those Caecina's auxiliaries had made south across the Po at the start of the campaign (*Hist*. 2.17.2) and, perhaps, to guard Othonian communications along the line of the river, between Vestricius Spurinna in Placentia and Annius Gallus further east (cf. §§ 1–2).[5]

If this is so, we need not assume that Macer's undertaking a raid of his own had or needed the blessing of any superiors, that it was part of any larger tactical plan, or that it took into account the overall military situation. Neither Tacitus nor Plutarch even hints that Otho's generals formulated, let alone put into effect, coherent plans before the council of war at Bedriacum. In the opening stages of the campaign, for all practical purposes, Caecina held the initiative, while his opponents scrambled desperately to counter his moves, and when they achieved success (for example, when Annius Gallus encamped at Bedriacum), did so as much by luck as by judgement.[6] So if Macer wrested the initiative from Caecina on this one occasion, it was thanks to his own boldness (*promptus animi*).[7] And this bears on the timing of the trip. The problem lies not so much in *isdem diebus*, one of Tacitus' vaguest chronological formulas as well as one of his favourites,[8] as in the difficulty of determining just how many of the events recorded prior to our paragraph took place 'during these same days'. We can pick out two breaks in the narrative. The more natural one is where

[2] See *Hist*. 2.71.2 with G. B. Townend, 'The consuls of A.D. 69/70', *AJPh* 83 (1962), 113ff. Older editions identify Macer with the Martius Macer whose career is recorded on *ILS* 969. Since he was active under Tiberius and Claudius (cf. *PIR*^{2} M 343; Chilver [n. 1], 188), our Macer is probably his son (cf. *CIL* XI 1837; A. Stein, *Die Legaten von Moesien* [Budapest, 1940], 23–4; *PIR*^{2} M 344).

[3] B. W. Henderson, *Civil War and Rebellion in the Roman Empire* (London, 1908), 84–5; cf. P. A. L. Greenhalgh, *The Year of the Four Emperors* (London and New York, 1975), 89.

[4] Caecina had boats to build a pontoon bridge (*Hist*. 2.34.1); the Othonians deployed fireships (Plutarch, *Otho* 10.3) and had vessels to convey their men to an island in the Po (*Hist*. 2.35.1).

[5] Cf. Ritter (n. 1), 651; Gerstenecker (n. 1), 14. A. Momigliano, 'Vitellio', *SIFC* 9 (1931), 117–87 went further, suggesting (137) that Macer's task was to frustrate attempts to cross the Po opposite Cremona and establish a bridgehead on the south bank (cf. R. Hanslik. 'Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Otho und Vitellius bis zur Schlacht von Bedriacum nach Tacitus', *WS* 84 [1961], 114; Heubner [n. 1], 83). As yet, Caecina had not the strength for such operations (cf. Passerini [n. 1], 197 n. 44; Chilver [n. 1], 189).

[6] Cf. L. Valmaggi, *Cornelio Tacito: il libro secondo delle Storie* (Turin, 1897), 43.

[7] Cf. Ritter (n. 1), 651.

[8] Tacitus uses *isdem diebus* in eight other passages in the *Histories* (2.58.1; 3.62.1 and 76.1; 4.3.1, 12.1, 19.1, 45.2, and 80.1).

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Tacitus has Spurinna send Annius Gallus the news that Caecina had broken off his attack on Placentia and Gallus halts at Bedriacum (§§ 1–2). As we shall see, there is a thematic link between Gallus' halting his troops and Macer's checking his gladiators. But there is also the break at the start of Caecina's assault on Placentia (21.1). This gives us three possible time-frames for the raid: (a) while Caecina was attacking Placentia; (b) while he was returning to Cremona with his tail between his legs (22.3: *ne inrisus ac vanus isdem castris adsideret*); or (c) after he returned to Cremona and before he began preparing the ambush at Ad Castores.

The first possibility was advanced by Henderson, and he placed no great weight on the suggestion.[9] It would be easy to suppose that Macer decided to relieve the pressure on Placentia by distracting the attackers and, with luck, inducing them to pull back to their own base. But this is neither an obvious nor a necessary way of reading the Latin. The second and third possibilities, that the raid was undertaken as Caecina made his way back from Placentia or after his return to Cremona, are best discussed together, since the trigger for and the aim of the raid would then have been much the same. Macer and his gladiators, elated by the failure of the assault on Placentia, would have been eager both to retaliate for the uproar Caecina had created south of the Po, and to increase his discomfiture by spreading alarm and despondency along the northern bank of the river. Though scholars seem to prefer the earlier time-frame,[10] the main reason offered in support is the claim that it would have been suicidal for Macer to mount his raid when the Vitellian general was ensconced in Cremona.[11] This is absurd. The Vitellian force encountered by the raiders cannot have been the one and only unit of auxiliaries Caecina left behind to guard Cremona when he marched off to Placentia. Otherwise Macer would not have withdrawn before reinforcements could appear (*ne novis subsidiis firmati hostes fortunam proelii mutarent*).[12] Even if Macer took with him every last one of his 2,000 gladiators,[13] there was bound to be a counter-attack by an enemy who could put more men into the field. So Macer could not expect to achieve more than he did in fact: to catch one batch of Vitellian auxiliaries off guard, to kill those who resisted, to put the rest to flight, and—once the alarm was raised—to withdraw.[14] And such a hit-and-run raid could have been carried out easily after Caecina returned to Cremona, 'during the same days' as Gallus was encamping at Bedriacum.[15]

For our present purposes there is another, more important matter to discuss, a difficulty arising from Ritter's attempt to answer the question of who called off the raid. As he recognized, the clause *repressus vincentium impetus* (§ 3) must refer to the gladiators. They are the only Othonian contingent in the field 'victorious' at this stage, and the *impetus* repressed is their pursuit of the fleeing Vitellians all the way to Cremona.[16] Ritter contended nonetheless that *repressus*, the reading of the *deteriores*,

[9] Henderson (n. 3), 338. Passerini (n. 1), 197 also allows for this possibility.

[10] Passerini (n. 1), 197; K. Wellesley, *The Long Year: A.D. 69* (London and Boulder, Co, 1975), 64; Heubner (n. 1), 83; Chilver (n. 1), 188.

[11] Passerini (n. 1), 197 n. 44; Chilver (n. 1), 188.

[12] Heubner (n. 1), 83 finds significant Tacitus' saying nothing about Caecina. But Macer's concern (and Tacitus' too) was the number of reinforcements that could make the counter-attack, not the identity of their commander.

[13] The tendency to overstate the raid's importance may owe something to the assumption that all 2,000 gladiators took part: cf. E. G. Hardy, *Studies in Roman History, Second Series* (London, 1909), 180; Passerini (n. 1), 197; Hanslik (n. 5), 118–19; Wellesley (n. 10), 64.

[14] Cf. Ritter (n. 1), 651–2; Passerini (n. 1), 197 n. 44.

[15] Cf. Hardy (n. 13), 180; Hanslik (n. 5), 118.

[16] We hear no more of Spurinna and his force in Placentia until *Hist*. 2.36.2.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

makes no sense. In his view, Macer could not have checked the attack, since the troops aired no complaints against him. Their anger was directed against Annius Gallus, Suetonius Paulinus, and Marius Celsus, the generals in Bedriacum (§ 4). But they could not have halted the raid either, since they were physically too far away to give the order. His solution was to abandon *repressus* and emend the Mediceus' *reprehensis* to *reprehensus*: the three generals censured Macer's taking the initiative, and brought the anger of the troops down on their own heads.[17] This persuaded nobody. The only person who could have halted the raid was Macer,[18] and the troops did not think him blameless. That is proved not only by *suspectum id Othonianis fuit*, but also by the savagery with which they turned on the man after the failure of the attack on Caecina's pontoon bridge (35.2–36.1). Their fury was out of all proportion to his responsibility for that setback, unless they already held a grudge against him for calling off his own raid earlier.

Unhappily, Ritter's emendation seems, initially, to have caused nothing but confusion and, later, to have induced editors to throw out the baby with the bathwater.[19] By and large, they rejected or ignored his answer to this question and his far more sensible interpretation of the linkage Tacitus creates between the raid and its aftermath. What was lost in the process was any awareness that the question in need of an answer is why Tacitus writes *repressus vincentium impetus*. Two explanations are possible. First, this resorting to the passive voice allows for the fourfold omission of auxiliary verbs to which Wolff adverted (*pugnatum, turbata, caesi, repressus*).[20] Stylistically, this may well be Tacitus' way of describing the raid as speedily as the raiders carried it out. Secondly, and more significant by far, what else is demonstrated by *suspectum id Othonianis fuit* is Tacitus' wish to move the scene back to Bedriacum. Just as the *vincentes* are the gladiators alone, so the *Othoniani* are the troops encamped at Bedriacum alone.[21] Removing Macer and his gladiators from the story as rapidly as possible and shifting the scene back to Bedriacum, in other words, permits Tacitus to focus on the important segment of his narrative: the growth of the tensions between the troops and the generals Otho had set over them. For, as Ritter saw,[22] it was this tension that induced Otho to appoint his brother Titianus commander-in-chief of his forces.

[17] Ritter (n. 1), 651–2. We can build nothing on the fact that Tacitus shuns the verb elsewhere, and that *reprehensio* is hapax (*Hist*. 1.49.3).

[18] So, rightly, Valmaggi (n. 6), 43; P. Fabia, *Les sources de Tacite dans les Histoires et les Annales* (Paris, 1893), 60 n. 1; H. Goelzer, *Oeuvres de Tacite: Histoires, Livres I–II* (Paris, 1920), 213; Passerini (n. 1), 197; Klingner 4 = 606; H. Drexler, 'Zur Geschichte Kaiser Othos bei Tacitus und Plutarch', *Klio* 37 (1958), 169; Heubner (n. 1), 83.

[19] There were attempts early on to salvage something from the wreckage. So Gerstenecker (n. 1), 26 and 66 n. 52 theorized that one of the three generals must have participated in the raid (cf. W. Heraeus, *Cornelii Taciti Historiae, Buch 1–2* [Leipzig 1899^{6}], 154; Hardy (n. 13), 180; F. G. Moore, *The Histories of Tacitus, Books I and II* [New York, 1910], 194). E. Wolff, *Cornelii Taciti Historiae, Buch I und II* (Berlin, 1886), 171 suggested that the troops at Bedriacum were angry that their generals neither assisted in nor followed up Macer's success. And Carl Heraeus, *Cornelii Taciti Historiarum Libri Buch I & II* (Leipzig, 1872^{2}), 144 tried to include the gladiators within the *Othoniani* of § 4, and so to produce another explanation for the latter's anger (cf. W. A. Spooner, *Cornelii Taciti Historiarum Libri* [London, 1891], 214).

[20] Wolff (n. 19) 170; cf. Goelzer (n. 18), 213.

[21] Cf. Drexler (n. 18), 169. With his low opinion of gladiators, Tacitus cleaves to his characterization of Macer's contingent as a *deforme auxilium* (11.2) and never calls them *Othoniani*. That appellation he reserves for the free-born, praetorians, legionaries and auxiliaries.

[22] Ritter (n. 1), 652–3, rightly quoted at length by W. Heraeus (n. 19), 155.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Before we can pursue that matter, however, we must deal with a major complication. Tacitus' account of the aftermath of the raid has been caught up in a larger issue, the overall reliability of his version of events vis-à-vis that in Plutarch's *Otho*. For their narratives of this war, both writers undoubtedly followed the so-called common source.[23] But in the matter of Otho's decision to bring up Titianus, one of them has undoubtedly rearranged the material drawn from that source. Tacitus sets the decision after Macer's raid and, as we shall see, makes it a consequence of the uproar triggered by its abandonment (§§ 4–5). But Plutarch (*Otho* 7.4–7) asserts that Paulinus' caution at Ad Castores brought about Titianus' appointment. Since that caution allowed Caecina to escape destruction, it was taken as a clear sign of treachery by most of the Othonian soldiery. Otho disagreed, or so says Plutarch. He did not believe the troops, but nor did he want to seem to disbelieve them (*οὐχ οὕτως ἐπίστευεν αὐτοῖς, ὡς ἐβούλετο μὴ δοκεῖν ἀπιστεῖν*). So he sent to the armies his brother Titianus and Proculus, prefect of the guard, and, instead of firing Paulinus and Celsus, kept them on as advisers.[24]

This discrepancy has elicited numerous theories from scholars determined to prove that Plutarch's account is the more intelligible and reliable, above all in the matter of Paulinus' supersession. Hence there have been sustained attacks on Tacitus' veracity, taking one or other of two forms. Some scholars have devoted themselves to arguing that, since Plutarch's narrative makes better sense, Tacitus' version of events—no matter what it says—can be set aside without more ado. Others have found fault with Tacitus' text, alleging oddities or illogicalities in his train of thought, and using these to reject or modify such details as cannot be fitted into the framework Putarch furnishes. Our primary concern is this latter category, of course, since these views have never been subjected to critical scrutiny.[25] However, it will be as well first to consider the former group.

In this first category we can set Fabia's arbitrary claim that, since Macer's raid was unimportant, it cannot have had important consequences, and Tacitus is guilty of negligence.[26] Then there is Ammann's theory that, since the victory at Ad Castores was Otho's greatest success, isolating it from the wrangling caused by Macer's raid gives the battle its rightful prominence.[27] This ignores the point that Tacitus had still to report the charges made against Paulinus after the victory was won (26.2). Hence Tacitus had no reason to shift Titianus' appointment, if such he did, when the success at Ad Castores was already tarnished by unseemly bickering. Similarly, we can observe, as did Heubner in his original discussion of the topic, that Tacitus achieves powerful irony by setting Paulinus' supersession at the end of Chapter 23 (*igitur . . . praeposuit*) and by opening Chapter 24, on Ad Castores, with *interea Paulini et Celsi ductu res egregie gestae*.[28] Yet Tacitus could have achieved the same effect by placing the supersession after Ad Castores, since he refuses to

[23] On the common source, see e.g. R. H. Martin, *Tacitus* (London, 1981), 189–96.

[24] Plutarch's failure to name Gallus is not significant. He took no part in Ad Castores, perhaps because already disabled by a fall from his horse which preceded the council at Bedriacum (*Hist*. 2.33.1).

[25] See below, n. 39.

[26] Fabia (n. 18), 59–60 and 280; cf. Goelzer (n. 18), 214; H. Le Bonniec and J. Hellegouarc'h, *Tacite, Histoires, Livre II & III* (Paris, 1989), 172 n. 13.

[27] P. Ammann, *Der künstlerische Aufbau von Tacitus, Historien I 12–II 51 (Kaiser Otho)* (Zürich, 1931), 91.

[28] H. Heubner, *Studien zur Darstellungskunst des Tacitus (Hist. I, 12–II, 51)* (Diss., Würzburg, 1935), 26. He also claimed that attaching the supersession to the uproar over Macer's raid creates the impression that it was senseless as well.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concede that Paulinus made mistakes during the battle. The arguments with which he defends the general are disingenuous in the extreme,[29] but he clearly shares the views of those who approved of Paulinus' conduct (*apud paucos ea ducis ratio probata, in volgus adverso rumore fuit*).[30] Finally, there is Drexler's appeal to *Quellenkritik*, to contend that, whereas Plutarch followed the common source virtually word for word, Tacitus conflated that account with material drawn from Paulinus' memoirs (there is no evidence for such memoirs), and shifted Otho's decision away from Ad Castores, seemingly out of ineptitude and bias in Paulinus' favour.[31]

As a general proposition, the idea that Tacitus would have played fast and loose with the facts looks more persuasive than do claims that Plutarch engaged in such practices. In this instance, however, it is impossible to argue plausibly that Plutarch is repeating the common source, since his narrative raises a serious chronological problem. The events with which we are concerned all took place in the first half of April, and it is generally agreed that Ad Castores was fought five or six days before the council of war at which Titianus and Proculus pressed for giving battle.[32] Since Otho had left Titianus in charge of Rome (*Hist*. 1.90.3), and since nothing suggests that he had moved in the meantime,[33] five or six days would only leave enough time for a messenger to travel the 350 miles from Brixellum to Rome and for Titianus to make the journey in the opposite direction if both parties travelled at breakneck speed.[34] This is a point of which the common source must have been aware, even if Plutarch is not. We have to set Otho's decision where Tacitus places it, after Macer's raid and before Ad Castores. That alone allows the messenger and Titianus to make their journeys at a realistic pace. Not that Plutarch was careless, or misunderstood the common source.[35] Biographers too are entitled to abridge material they consider irrelevant. Since Plutarch omits almost all the events we are discussing, it is simplest—and fairest to him—to conclude that he chose off his own bat to attach Paulinus' demotion, an event he could not ignore, to the battle of Ad Castores, the next important episode he related and an episode to which it could be attached anyway, thanks to the furore over the general's conduct.[36]

[29] The dispute centred on the proposition that Paulinus could have destroyed Caecina's 'entire' army. In Plutarch, this denotes the force in the field with Caecina (*Otho* 7.4). In Tacitus (26.2), it becomes the men in the field and those in camp at Cremona, miles behind the lines.

[30] Drexler (n. 18), 173; cf. Klingner (n. 1), 6 n. 5 = 607 n. 1.

[31] Drexler (n. 18), 169–71. Only forcing the meaning of *ferebat* at *Hist*. 2.26.2 can justify claims that Paulinus wrote memoirs on this campaign. Paulinus 'kept on asserting' his own view in the disputes after the battle.

[32] See Hanslik (n. 5), 118–20; C. L. Murison, *Galba, Otho and Vitellius: careers and controversies* (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York, 1993), 91–5.

[33] As Plutarch says only that Otho 'sent Titianus and Proculus to the armies', and as the latter was at Brixellum with Otho (*Hist*. 1.87.2), the biographer perhaps thought Titianus was there too. In any event, we can argue that Tacitus specifies just Titianus because he knew that only Titianus had to make the journey (Gerstenecker [n. 1], 67 n. 54; cf. Ritter [n. 1], 653). It is not significant that Titianus missed meetings of the Arval Brethren in Rome on March 14 and April 30. The one meeting took place too early, the other too late to affect the argument (cf. Wellesley [n. 10], 62–3).

[34] Hanslik (n. 5), 119–20; cf. Gerstenecker (n. 1), 26 and 67 n. 54; Chilver (n. 1), 189; Murison (n. 32), 110 n. 43.

[35] Thus Chilver (n. 1), 189.

[36] Gerstenecker (n. 1), 26 suggested that the prime consideration for Plutarch could have been the moment when Titianus arrived. Similarly, Goelzer (n. 18), 214, Klingner (n. 1), 7 = 608 and Chilver (n. 1), 189 allow that *interea* (24.1) may indicate the time-lapse between Otho's decision and Titianus' arrival.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Otho's decision to appoint a new commander-in-chief, then, preceded Ad Castores, and Tacitus is a better guide to the sequence of events. In the eyes of those determined to champion his reliability as a historian, this appears to have settled the matter. Either they take no account of what Tacitus says about the circumstances in which and the reasons for which Otho made the change (§ 5)[37] or, like Hardy, they combine Tacitus' explanation with Plutarch's, and describe Otho as 'bewildered by the constant complaints of his soldiers, and not himself wholly trustful of his generals'.[38] Or they accept—in whole or part—the views of Klingner and Heubner, both of whom have maintained that serious difficulties in Tacitus' narrative prove that his account is to be rejected, save where it can be brought into agreement with Plutarch's. For Otho was paralysed by his own fears, helpless in the hands of his troops, and unable (*not* unwilling) to consider the rational arguments of their betters, Paulinus, Celsus, and Gallus.[39]

As Klingner argues the case, everything rests on the contention that the bulk of § 5 (*acerrima seditionum . . . inter adversa melior*) does not represent a sequence of actions leading to a result, Otho's appointing Titianus his commander-in-chief. Instead, it is a situation report, to which Otho's decision is only loosely attached. The tenses of the verbs, the historic infinitive *miscere* and the imperfect *trepidabat*, prove 'daß ein Zustand, ein fortwährendes Treiben, nicht eigentlich ein Fortschritt der Handlung gemeint ist. Erst am Ende läßt Tacitus daraus eine Handlung hervorspringen: *igitur Titianum fratrem accitum bello praeposuit*'.[40] With the historic infinitive alone, Klingner can do little. Even if *miscere* stood for an imperfect indicative,[41] it would be impossible to establish that it denotes a permanent state rather than continuous action. On *trepidabat* Klingner places heavier emphasis, but without allowing sufficiently for the fact that Tacitus explains its bearing by attaching to it *rebus prosperis incertus et inter adversa melior*.[42] Another of the relative judgements with which Tacitus often befuddles his readers, this does not mean that Otho was incapable of making a decision when things were going well, only that it took him longer than it would have done *inter adversa*. The verb indicates solely that Otho took longer to make up his mind (*trepidabat*) than he did to act on his decision (*praeposuit*).

Once it is recognized that Tacitus is describing a process rather than a state, much of Klingner's case falls to the ground. Only by isolating most of § 5 from its context can we argue that Macer's raid and the attendant uproar had no relation to the appointment of Titianus, that the charges aired against the three generals in Bedriacum are never stated, that the troops' behaviour in §§4–5 is merely illustration (*nur ein Beispiel für das Verhalten der Soldaten zu ihren Anführern überhaupt*), and that Otho's decision to appoint Titianus sprang from helplessness in face of this mindless agitation.[43] To all this, admittedly, it may be objected that my explanation takes

[37] Among those who accept Tacitus' version of events without comment are Wellesley (n. 10), 68–9 and Greenhalgh (n. 3), 92.

[38] Hardy (n. 13), 180–1. As we shall see, Tacitus' Otho does *not* trust his generals.

[39] Klingner (n. 1), 4–10 = 606–11; Heubner (n. 1), 83–6. Chilver (n. 1), 189, by declaring Otho helpless, accepts more of this interpretation than he may have realized. Le Bonniec and Hellegouarc'h (n. 26), 172 n. 13 sit on the fence.

[40] Klingner (n. 1), 7 = 608. Save in matters of detail (see below), Heubner (n. 1), 84ff. follows the lines of Klingner's discussion closely.

[41] See R. Kühner and C. Stegmann, *Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache* (Hanover 1912[2]), 2.1.135.

[42] Heubner (n. 1), 99 recognizes this linkage but, as we shall see, overstates its force.

[43] Klingner (n. 1), 7–8 = 608–9.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

insufficient account of two points Heubner stresses particularly, the meaning of *trepidabat* and of *incertus* in the clause *rebus prosperis incertus et inter adversa melior*. The adjective Heubner renders *unsicher, ohne innere Festigkeit*, the verb *war in ängstlicher Unruhe* after Sontheimer.[44] Two passages from *Histories* 3 indicate that such an interpretation is neither inevitable nor even plausible in context. First, Tacitus uses *incertus* to denote momentary uncertainty when he talks of the Flavian generals outside Cremona: *haesere victores, incertis ducibus quid iuberent* (26.1). He spells out the alternatives facing the commanders (§§ 2–3), then he reports that Antonius Primus reached a decision and gave the necessary orders (27.1: *Antonius . . . iussit*). Secondly, *trepidare* may indicate a panic attack, but it may as readily betoken passing hesitation. So Vitellius ponders killing Iunius Blaesus but, caught between fear and crime, he wavers—briefly: *trepidanti inter scelus metumque, ne dilata Blaesi mors maturam perniciem, palam iussa atrocem invidiam ferret, placuit veneno grassari* (39.1).[45] Neither *incertus* nor *trepidabat* requires the conclusion that Tacitus thought Otho so paralysed by fear as to be incapable of reaching a decision.

This is not to detract from the brilliance of Klingner's discussion of the ways in which Tacitus emphasizes the interlinkage between Otho and his troops.[46] Emperor and men are bound together by complicity in the murder of Galba, complicity in which the three generals—like all the other senators, those brought up to Brixellum and those left in Rome—have no share. So Otho's generals lack the compelling reasons to fight to the bitter end that drive their emperor and the soldiery as a whole, not just the *interfectores Galbae, scelere et metu vecordes*, even if these latter were *acerrima seditionum ac discordiae incitamenta*. It may perhaps be remarked that, in a symbiotic relationship like that between Otho and his men, it could be unwise to single out one partner and to harp on at his weaknesses alone. On the other hand, we can add another dimension to this picture. The army Otho assembled was a heterogeneous collection of praetorian cohorts, legionaries (the ex-marines of I Adiutrix), and auxiliaries. Though they had marched north in one body (*Hist*. 2.11.2), at no point so far had they drilled together or fought together. Similarly, they knew no more about the generals whom Otho put in charge than the generals knew about them. There is hardly a better recipe for the breakdown of discipline and trust inside an army.[47] And trust, or the lack of it, is the thread that runs through this entire segment of the narrative.[48]

Tacitus states that the troops at Bedriacum were already looking askance at their generals' actions (§ 4: *omnia ducum facta prave aestimantibus*). This picks up the thread from §§ 1–2. Gallus had been hastening to Spurinna's aid when he heard the news that Caecina had broken off the assault on Placentia. Hence he halted at Bedriacum, an action of which his men disapproved so much that they mutinied:

[44] Heubner (n. 1), 99. Klingner takes a similar tack, but places less emphasis on the exact meaning of the words.

[45] Compare the problem with *trepidum* at *Hist*. 1.27.2, to which I have drawn attention elsewhere (*Eranos* 92 [1994], 98 n. 27).

[46] Klingner (n. 1), 9–10 = 610–11; cf. Heubner (n. 1), 85–6.

[47] Cf. William Surtees, *Twenty-five Years in the Rifle Brigade* (reprint, London, 1996), 5. It is worth noting that, according to Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.22.3), the two commanders who deserted Spurinna despite his successful defence of Placentia did so because they were familiar with Caecina and service on the Rhine.

[48] Rhiannon Ash, *Ordering Anarchy. Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories* (London, 1999), 33 recognizes the problem but misstates it, talking of the troops' 'deep hatred of their officers'.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

aegre coercitam legionem et pugnandi ardore usque ad seditionem progressam Bedriaci sistit. Obviously, they wanted to press on to Cremona. No less obviously, Gallus managed to persuade his troops that there was reason to encamp at Bedriacum, but he did not convince them. Nor were they suspicious only of him.When Paulinus and Celsus turned up (conveyed obliquely by *nam eos quoque Otho praefecerat*), they must have approved of Gallus' action, and so have aroused the troops' doubts about them too (cf. Plutarch, *Otho* 5.5–6). The situation only worsened when Macer called off his raid. Although the generals at Bedriacum were responsible neither for the raid nor for its abandonment, the troops, *prave aestimantes*, began (or kept on) making charges against them (*variis criminibus incessebant*). As well they might, if we exploit a detail at which Chilver hinted without developing it. They interpreted Macer's conduct as a sign that Gallus' halting at Bedriacum, endorsed by Paulinus and Celsus, was not an isolated incident, but part of a larger pattern.[49] In the eyes of the soldiery, as had been demonstrated by the mutiny against Spurinna at the start of the campaign (18.2), a general who refused to give the troops their heads was automatically a traitor. Spurinna had regained the trust of his men by acceding to their wishes for a time (19.2), just as Celsus would apparently redeem himself at Ad Castores (nothing is said of his being a target for the recriminations voiced after the battle). In the interim, however, Macer, Gallus, Paulinus, and Celsus alike looked reluctant to seize the advantages that came their way.

As Tacitus tells the story, the troops' suspicions were unjustified (*prave aestimantibus*), but the uproar reached a critical stage after Macer's raid. He may overstate the influence of the *interfectores Galbae* on their comrades (*acerrima . . . incitamenta*) and the extent of their own fears (*scelere et metu vecordes*), but the chaos they generated (*miscere cuncta*) was bound to affect Otho. This Tacitus addresses in the clause *qui, humillimo cuique credulus, bonos metuens trepidabat*. This is Tacitus' variation on Plutarch's saying that Otho did not credit the troops' complaints against Paulinus after Ad Castores, but veiled his disbelief. Tacitus not only sets the comment in a different context, he also reverses the polarities. Otho, he says, believed his troops and feared or (perhaps better) doubted his generals (*metuens*). Nor need we question the accuracy of this assertion for the period in which Tacitus sets it. He has already implied that Otho was suspicious of the motives and loyalty of the generals in his report that the emperor put his greatest trust in Proculus (*Hist*. 1.87.2: *sed plurima fides Licinio Proculo praetorii praefecto*). These suspicions will not have abated thereafter if, as seems all too likely, Proculus spent his time at Brixellum *auctoritatem Paulini, vigorem Celsi, maturitatem Galli, ut cuique erat, criminando*.

Hence the dilemma implicit in these disturbances. Though Otho so far had no more to show for it than the defence of Placentia and a pin-prick raid across the Po, he was winning the war (one reason why Tacitus describes him as *rebus prosperis incertus*). At the same time, however, the troops' increasing distrust of his generals rendered doubtful the prospects for building on these successes. Even had Paulinus, Celsus, and Gallus each been a military genius, there was little chance that the situation would improve, so long as the soldiery continued to suspect their motives, question their loyalties, and dispute their orders. Brought to a head by Gallus' halting at Bedriacum and Macer's checking his gladiators, the problem could be solved only by appointing a commander whose devotion to Otho was unquestioned and unquestionable. Only one man fitted the bill, the emperor's brother Titianus, and whatever

[49] Chilver (n. 1), 189.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press

we think of Paulinus' skills, he was a more capable commander than Titianus.[50] Small wonder that Otho hesitated (*trepidabat*). To appoint Titianus commander-in-chief and relegate Paulinus, Celsus, and Gallus to the role of advisers was not the best course of action, but it looked better than allowing the situation to continue deteriorating. So Otho at last made his decision (*igitur . . . praeposuit*).

Even though Klingner made this episode the launching pad for a full-scale assault on the reliability of the Tacitean portrait of Otho, this is not the place to weigh the overall merits of Tacitus' account, or of Plutarch's. From this point of view, it is enough that one major prop for arguments designed to force Tacitus' Otho into a Plutarchean mould has been demolished. For the rest, it is worth emphasizing that not only is Tacitus' narrative of Macer's raid and its aftermath a unity, but also in this chapter his Otho lives up to the characterization long since accorded to him programmatically: *non erat Othonis mollis et corpori similis animus* (*Hist*. 1.22.1).[51] As Tacitus tells the story, Otho sacrificed expertise and finesse in battle when he made Titianus commander-in-chief. But he did so knowingly, to reassure his troops and to refocus their energies on the real enemy, the Vitellians. Aware that he was taking a gamble, he hesitated awhile, but ultimately he made his decision. Nor need that decision have been as ill-judged as it has sometimes been made to appear. The generals Titianus superseded had not shown expertise or finesse save in avoiding risks, whereas the troops' *ardor pugnandi* remained unimpaired. Once the latter were given a commander in whose loyalty they had full confidence, they could be pointed at last in the right direction. And since that *ardor pugnandi* might well compensate for their new commander's lack of skill, they stood a real chance of defeating the Vitellians once for all. As they very nearly did, badly led though they were at Ad Castores and again at Bedriacum.

The University of Texas at Austin GWYN MORGAN
mgm@mail.utexas.edu

[50] Cf. Ritter (n. 1), 652; Goelzer (n. 18), 213; Moore (n. 19), 195.

[51] The comment comes from the common source, but Plutarch buries it in his account of Otho's being rushed to the praetorian camp (*Galb*. 25.2) and so devalues it, while Suetonius uses it only to explain the suicide (*Otho* 12.1).

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/bmi051 Published online by Cambridge University Press