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Abstract: Focusing on the Asian earthquake of 17 CE, this article argues that Tiberius took on a more active role in his response to the disaster than he was portrayed as doing in Tacitus' *Annals*. Tacitus' portrayal of these events was influenced by his own political experience under Trajan and Hadrian and did not fully take into account Tiberius' efforts to rebuild. However, a consideration of evidence from outside the *Annals* reveals that Tiberius' actions served as an opportunity to assert his own power in two interconnected ways. As he maneuvered against the political threat of Germanicus, he became known as the new "founder" of twelve cities and he established himself as a worthy successor to Augustus.

Keywords: Asian Earthquake of 17 CE, Tacitus, Tiberius, *Annals*, Roman Empire, Germanicus, Trajan, Hadrian, Asia Minor, Natural Disaster

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## Tacitus, Tiberius, and the CE17 Earthquake in the Roman Province of Asia

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The CE17 earthquake in the Roman province of Asia was one of the largest and most destructive natural disasters to hit the Roman Empire during the first century CE. However, until recently, the potential of Tacitus' description of this earthquake to enlighten scholarship as to the vast extent of its destructiveness, the character of Tiberius, and the methods Tacitus employed in writing – methods that can help historians pinpoint the time of the composition of his *Annals* – have been largely passed over. Now, through cross-examination with ancient writers like Strabo and Cassius Dio, and the archaeological record, largely preserved through inscriptions, we are better able to appreciate the bigger pictures of Asia, Tiberius, and the Roman Empire. An examination of this natural catastrophe and its aftermath will prove that Tacitus was heavily influenced by events in CE15 in his description of the CE17 earthquake. In addition, this paper will argue that the earthquake and Tiberius' response to it were more significant than is often appreciated.

*DETERMINING THE DATE FOR TACITUS' ANNALS  
THROUGH THE 17 EARTHQUAKE*

According to Tacitus:

Eodem anno duodecim celebres Asiae urbes conlapsae nocturno motu terrae, quo improvisior graviorque pestis fuit. neque solitum in tali casu effugium subveniebat in aperta prorumpendi, quia diductis terris hauriebantur. sedisse inmensos montis, visa in arduo quae plana fuerint, effulsisse inter ruinam ignis memorant. asperrima in Sardianos lues plurimum in eosdem misericordiae traxit. Tac. *Ann.* 2.47

In the same year [17] twelve famous cities in the province of Asia were overwhelmed by an earthquake. Its occurrence at night increased the surprise and destruction. Open ground – the usual place for refuge on such occasions [i.e. earthquakes] – afforded no escape, because the earth parted and swallowed the fugitives. There are stories of big mountains subsiding, of flat ground rising high in the air, of conflagrations bursting out among the debris. Sardis suffered worst and attracted most sympathy.

The methods Tacitus employed in finding evidence for the 17 earthquake are bound up with his composition of the *Annals*. Until the mid-20th century, modern historians argued that Tacitus published the *Annals* under Trajan in 116. But the methods Tacitus used to compose the *Annals* and over what period of time, were both deemed unknowable and therefore largely not discussed. In 1957, Mendell simply wrote that:

The *Annals* were probably “published” in 116, the last of the works of Tacitus to appear.<sup>1</sup>

He provided no further explanation of this statement.

This common viewpoint was dismantled one year later, when Syme published his two-volume work on Tacitus, in which Syme argued that the *Annals* were not written under Trajan, but under his successor, Hadrian.<sup>2</sup> Syme believed that this explained why the *Annals* were so negative towards Tiberius’ military policy of non-aggression along the frontiers, a veiled criticism of Hadrian’s policy to halt all wars of Roman conquest. The *Annals* had many descriptions of battles between Roman and Parthian armies in the Julio-Claudian period. Surely, Syme posited, Tacitus

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1 Mendell (1957, p. 225).

2 Syme (1958, pp. 746-782).

would never have devoted so much time and space to these wars during the last years of Trajan's reign, when Trajan's Parthian War, begun in 115, proved to be a spectacular failure, only ending with his death in 117. Syme's answer to this was a resounding 'Of course not.' Tacitus might, however, have included his accounts of those wars as rhetorical exercises, to encourage Hadrian both to forget about his Tiberius-like non-aggression policy, and to emulate other Roman generals in the *Annals*, like Corbulo. This, in turn, might encourage Hadrian to launch a new war of conquest against the Parthians – one more fitting to Rome's military reputation.<sup>3</sup>

Later, Syme revised this theory and hypothesised that, based on *Annals* 2.61 – at the time of writing the Roman Empire extended to the 'Red Sea' or rather, the 'Persian Gulf' – Tacitus' account of Tiberius' principate had to have been completed in 116. But later books, especially those that deal with Nero, must have been written later on, with Hadrian in mind.<sup>4</sup> Even later, Syme altered this idea as well, arguing that since Suetonius' and Cassius Dio's portrayals of Tiberius were so similar to Tacitus', that his portrayal of Tiberius' reign must have been historical, and not a diatribe against either Trajan or Hadrian at all.<sup>5</sup>

Today, historians generally agree that Syme's second argument, that Tacitus began composing under Trajan and finished under Hadrian, is probably the more accurate appraisal.<sup>6</sup> However, the period of research that Tacitus employed stretched back much further than Trajan's principate. According to Suetonius, Domitian modelled himself on Tiberius' personal notes and memoirs, which, Syme argued, was reflected in the similar characteristics between the two emperors' principates.<sup>7</sup> Drawing inspiration from Suetonius and Syme, Martin plausibly suggested that by the time of the assassination of Domitian in 96, Tacitus had already learned the lessons of imperial concealment and intrigue so prominent throughout Tacitus' Tiberian books.<sup>8</sup> Then Bowersock demonstrated that Tacitus' accounts of events in Asia Minor under Tiberius were heavily influenced by his proconsulship there in 112/3, and by political events over the course of several decades leading up to and including 112/3. Thus, Tacitus must have composed parts of the Tiberian *Annals* whilst in Asia Minor and other locations, beginning after the completion of the *Histories* in 109 up

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3 Syme (1958, pp. 746–782).

4 Syme (1970, p. 129).

5 Syme (1974, pp. 481–496).

6 Sailor (2008, p. 256); Mellor (2011, p. 20); Benario (2012, pp. 101–104); Pagán (2017, p. 9).

7 Suet. *Dom.* 20; Syme (1958, p. 422).

8 Martin (1981, p. 31).

to 113/4, using personal notes dating back to the Flavian era.<sup>9</sup>

The length of time Tacitus patiently took to write the *Annals* did not detract from his efforts to compose a cohesive work and was instead helpful. As O’Gorman points out, Tacitus’ description of events from Tiberius’ accession to the death of Nero appears to constitute beginning and end points of historical concepts that reflect Tacitus’ impressions, feelings, and thoughts that in the main transcend purely Trajanic or Hadrianic story-telling.<sup>10</sup> For, as Ash reminds us, Tacitus was no mere court historian intent upon condemning past rulers. But rather, the *Annals* as a whole set forth a gradual decline under the Julio-Claudians that prequel the civil wars that open the *Histories*. In this regard, Tacitus followed Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, and Josephus, each of whom composed preludes to the wars each wished to narrate.<sup>11</sup> Thus, as Gowing notes, the *Annals* were neither purely promotion nor condemnation of Trajan and Hadrian, but rather showed historical rigour and vigour.<sup>12</sup> As a result, as Woodman puts it, far from being courtly affirmation, the *Annals* contained interactions with Trajan that were not exclusively positive or negative, but were nuanced, and engaged and expanded upon Trajan’s ‘Restored Coinage’ of 112; these depicted the emperors that Trajan considered ‘good’ – Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius. Thus, the Tiberius of Tacitus had two sides: one positive, the other stern, corrupted, and at times scandalous.<sup>13</sup>

Tacitus’ portrayal of the 17 earthquake and Tiberius’ response can help to pinpoint when Tacitus wrote this section of the *Annals*, as well as Tiberius’ character as a ruler. Crucially, Tacitus’ account closely resembled Cassius Dio’s description of the large and destructive earthquake that hit Syrian Antioch in 115. By cross-referencing Tacitus’ description of the 17 earthquake with Dio’s, it becomes abundantly clear that Tacitus drew much of his inspiration from this contemporary event when composing this part of the *Annals* in 115. The close similarities are set forth in Table 1. Through general comparison and by cross-referencing both columns, one is able to determine that Tacitus lifted the destructive conditions faced during his contemporary earthquake in Antioch in 115 and foisted them upon the cataclysm of 17 in Asia Minor. First, both events were vast and extremely destructive to the urban centres where they occurred. In addition, he used contemporary events to describe a

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9 Bowersock (1993, pp. 3-10).

10 O’Gorman (2000, pp. 126-127).

11 Ash (2006, p. 79).

12 Gowing, (2009, pp. 17-30, esp. 26).

13 Woodman (2010, pp. 31-43, esp. 42). On the ‘Restored Coinage’, see Mattingly (1926, pp. 232-278).

similar event from a century before, in order to stimulate a dramatic response in his audience. They, like Tacitus, knew something about the earthquake of 115, but little about the 17 Asia Minor disaster.

TABLE 1

Parallels Between the Earthquake of CE17 in Tac. *Ann.* 2.47 and the Earthquake of CE115 in Dio 68.24.1–25.6

Tac. <i>Ann.</i> 2.47	Dio 68.24.1–25.6
(graviorque) the people were surprised	(ἀμηχάνοις) the people were in dire straits (25. 2)
(solitum) on open ground.	(ἐκτὸς τῶν οἰκιῶν) on open ground outside the houses
(hauriebantur) people were swallowed	(ἐπόνησαν) people were snatched up (24. 4)
(sedisse inmensos montis) big Mountains subsiding	(ὄρη τε ἄλλα ὑφίζησε) mountains collapsing
(visa in arduo quae plana fuerint) flat ground raising.	(ἔπειτα βρασμὸς ἐπὶ βιαιότατος ἐπεγένετο) buildings leap high into the sky (24.3)
(eosdem misericordiae traxit) most sympathy to Sardis.	(ἔδυστύχησεν) most unfortunate of all was Antioch went (24.1)

Even though Dio wrote these words a century after Tacitus, the latter clearly borrowed from 115 and not the reverse – no description of the earthquake of 17 exists in the manuscripts and epitomes of Dio’s history. By 115, Tacitus clearly had no source material for the earthquake of 17; it simply no longer existed. No other descriptions of the 17 earthquake exist in Tacitus or Dio. Given that no other detailed descriptions of earthquakes remain in the ancient sources before Tacitus, he had to improvise. He simply drew upon “stories” of “big mountains subsiding, of flat ground rising high into the air, of conflagrations bursting out among the debris.”<sup>14</sup> Clearly, Tacitus learned some information about the 17 earthquake from conversations with locals while *proconsul*, but he framed his presentation of that earthquake in much the

14 Tac. *Ann.* 2.47.

same way as Dio set forth the 115 earthquake, since Tacitus had run out of sources for the Asian earthquake.<sup>15</sup>

This paucity of sources can be accounted for. After the 17 earthquake, the emperor Tiberius rebuilt Asia Minor almost from the ground up, changing the urban landscape forever. In addition, nearly one century had passed since this disaster and few eye-witnesses were alive, certainly none that could bear witness to traces of earthquake damage, which Tiberius' extensive reconstructive work had removed throughout the entire province. Thus, Tacitus had to look elsewhere for information on the effects of such an earthquake. When the earthquake in Syrian Antioch occurred in 115, Tacitus found a ready mine of information to underpin his narrative of events in Asia Minor in 17. Tacitus acted in much the same way while describing Rome's defensive network under Tiberius in the eastern provinces (*Annals* 4.5), by emphasising cooperation with its Iberian and Albanian allies. For, Iberia and Albania had only become close allies to Rome under the Flavian dynasty, and especially in the summer of 114, when Trajan, at the summit at Elegeia in Armenia, installed a new king over Albania and received formal submission from the Iberians. Thus, just as with Tacitus' portrayal of Rome's eastern policy, so too in the case of Tacitus' portrayal of events in Asia Minor in 17 – the historian considered and pondered events that took place prior to the Flavian period and set them forth for public consumption using materials from Trajan's principate in his *Annals* in 115.<sup>16</sup>

Trajan's Parthian War eventually proved a dismal failure, but up until 116 his campaign had actually progressed well. According to Dio, Trajan led his armies into Mesopotamia and then, in 116, after taking the Parthian capital Ctesiphon, the *princeps* marched on to Messene to survey the Persian Gulf.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the early twentieth century, many historians doubted Dio. However, those doubts were questioned when a Trajanic milestone dated to 115/6 was discovered near Singara in northern-central Mesopotamia<sup>18</sup> and the ruins of a triumphal arch dated to 116 were found at Dura-Europos on the mid-Euphrates with a Latin inscription bearing the name of Trajan.<sup>19</sup> These discoveries confirmed that Trajan had begun to turn the region into a Roman province, just as Dio recorded.<sup>20</sup> The *Annals* appear to have been

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15 See Table 1; Tac. *Ann.* 2.47.

16 Martin and Woodman (1989, p. 102); Bosworth (1977, p. 227 with n. 41).

17 Dio. 68.26-29.

18 *AE* 1927.161; Oates (1968, pp. 71-72).

19 Hopkins (1979, p. 68).

20 Millar (1993, p. 101); Bennett (1997, p. 196, n. 67).

composed with Trajan's successes up to that precise point fresh in Tacitus' mind. There were no less than thirteen occasions on which Tacitus turned to Parthian affairs. These followed no strict history and their purpose appears to have been to help his audience imagine the fighting conditions Trajan might have encountered in the East.<sup>21</sup>

Next, we turn to Tacitus' statement that, at the time of his work's finishing touches, the Roman Empire extended to the 'Red Sea' – what we would today call the Persian Gulf. This suggests that Tacitus published the *Annals* in 116, since after Trajan withdrew in 117 from that area, the Roman Empire no longer extended to the Persian Gulf.<sup>22</sup> The Romans considered the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean all parts of the 'Red Sea'.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, Pliny the Elder, a source that Tacitus relied heavily upon when writing the *Annals* and the *Histories*, revealed that the Persian Gulf was more often than not referred to as the Red Sea by the mid-first century CE:<sup>24</sup>

Persae Rubrum mare semper accoluere, propter quod is sinus Persicus vocatur. regio ibi maritima Ceribobus; qua vero ipsa subit ad Medos ... ad Persepolim, caput regni, dirutam ab Alexandro. Pl. *NH* 6.115

The Persians have always lived on the shore of the Red Sea, which is the reason why it is called the Persian Gulf ... Finally they [Tigris and Euphrates] flow across Babylonia up to the Red Sea [the modern-day Persian Gulf].

Gawlikowski's theory that after Trajan's death, Messene, a state roughly equivalent in size and location to modern-day Kuwait, remained a vassal state under Rome<sup>25</sup> is contradicted by the fact that immediately after Trajan's death, Hadrian evacuated all Roman forces from Messene, Babylonia, and Mesopotamia.

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21 See Tac. *Ann.* 2.1-4, 50-60; 6.14, 31-37, 41-44; 11.8-10; 12.10-14, 44-51; 13.6-9, 34-41; 14.23-26; 15.1-18, 24-31; Ash (1999, pp. 114-135); Woodman (2010, p. 41).

22 Tac. *Ann.* 2.61.

23 Liv. 36.17.15; 42.52.14; 45.9.3-6; Strab. 17.1.25; 11.13.9; 17.1.6; Pl. *NH.* 2.56; 2.173; 2.183; 6.106; 6.124; Stat. *Theb.* 4.387-389; Plut. *Crassus* 2.

24 On Tacitus' use of Pliny as an historical source, see Tac. *Ann.* 1.69; 13.20; 15.53; *Hist.* 3.28; Gowing (2009, pp. 17, 27).

25 Gawlikowski (1994, pp. 27-33).

To quote the *Historia Augusta*:

quare omnia trans Euphraten ac Tigrim reliquit exemplo. *HA, Hadrian* 5. 3

He [Hadrian] therefore gave up everything beyond the Euphrates and Tigris.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, whilst many Romans could have traded throughout the markets in Messene after Trajan's death, Messene was at that time neither a Roman province nor part of the Roman Empire. Therefore, Tacitus' designation of the frontier as the area we now call the Persian Gulf must have been written and published prior to Trajan's death and at the height of his military successes in the East in 116.

Taken together, the evidence clearly shows that Tacitus wrote his stylised portrait of the 17 earthquake in Asia Minor in light of events in 115, most notably the Syrian earthquake, and published it the following year, together with the rest of his *Annals*. Sailor suggests that Tacitus used Tiberius as a rhetorical device to enhance Hadrian's positive qualities after Trajan's death,<sup>27</sup> and the same formula may be applied no less simply to Trajan, or any emperor. Indeed, it appears more likely that Tacitus highlighted Tiberius' lacklustre non-aggression policy as a sharp contrast to Trajan's militarism, animated by the realism of the Romano-Parthian conflicts in the *Annals*. In any event, by 117 Trajan had died and his Parthian War ended as a failure. Later historians, including Cassius Dio, made little use of Tacitus' Tiberian books. Most likely, the ultimate failure of the Parthian War – the successes of which up to 116 those books commemorate – became the catalyst for the *Annals*' own demise.<sup>28</sup> However, there would be nothing unhistorical or misplaced about Tacitus' description of Tiberius' response to the 17 earthquake, as the following section will demonstrate.

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26 On the brevity of time it might have taken for Hadrian to make this decision, see Birley (1997, p. 78).

27 Sailor (2008, p. 256).

28 Mellor (2011, pp. 126-127).

## TIBERIUS' RESPONSE TO THE 17 EARTHQUAKE

According to Tacitus, in 17, when Asia was hit by the especially destructive earthquake:

nam centies sestertium pollicitus Caesar, et quantum aerario aut fisco pendebant in quinquennium remisit. Magnetes a Sipylo proximi damno ac remedio habiti. Temnios, Philadelphenos, Aegeatas, Apollonidenses, quique Mosteni aut Macedones Hyrcani vocantur, et Hierocaesariam, Myrinam, Cymen, Tmolium levari idem in tempus tributis mittique ex senatu placuit, qui praesentia spectaret refoveretque. delectus est M. Ateius e praetoriis, ne consulari obtinente Asiam aemulatio inter pares et ex eo impedimentum oreretur. Tac. *Ann.* 2.47

Tiberius promised it [Sardis] ten million sesterces and remitted all taxation by the Treasury or its imperially controlled branches for five years. Magnesia-by-Sipylos came next, in damage and compensation. Exemptions from direct taxation were also authorised for Temnus, Philadelphia, Aegeae, Apollonis, Mostene (the Macedonian Hyrcanians), Hierocaesarea, Myrina, Cyme, and Tmolus. It was decided to send a senatorial inspector to rehabilitate the sufferers. The choice fell on an ex-praetor, Marcus Aletius. The governor of Asia was a former consul, so the embarrassments of rivalry between equals was avoided.

Two important factors in this passage, hitherto passed over by historians, illustrate the intensity and extent of this earthquake. Firstly, Tacitus stated “twelve famous cities” of Asia were “overwhelmed” by the earthquake of 17.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, the historian then listed the names of only eleven cities that Tiberius “also”<sup>30</sup> exempted from direct taxation as a result of the same earthquake damage that affected the first twelve. These two facts tell us much about the scale of this natural disaster, for just this evidence strongly suggests that twenty-three major cities in Asia were severely damaged by it all at once. As for the twelve unlisted famous cities, Strabo, writing at the time, listed these, otherwise known as the *koinon* or the commonwealth of cities: Ephesus, Miletus, Myus, Lebedus, Colophon, Priene, Teos, Erythrae, Phocaea, Clazomenae,

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29 Tac. *Ann.* 2.47.

30 Tac. *Ann.* 2.47.

and the island *poleis* of Chios and Samos.<sup>31</sup> These twelve cities, Strabo informed us, were located along the busy maritime coastline of Lydia and northwest Caria in the province of Asia.<sup>32</sup> Notably, Tacitus' additional eleven cities listed by name were all located further inland from the coast and were situated in circular fashion around Sardis. By listing the additional eleven in full, Tacitus indicated that these eleven cities suffered most out of all Asian cities. Furthermore, since they were all centred around Sardis and Tacitus stated that "Sardis suffered worst," Sardis was probably located near the epicentre of the earthquake. Strabo supported this scenario, stating that "many of its [Sardis'] buildings" were "lost" through this earthquake.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Strabo believed that popularity of the cult of Poseidon around Sardis, Philadelphia, Apameia, and Magnesia was due to the frequency of earthquakes in the area.<sup>34</sup>

Epigraphic evidence shows that other cities and towns also sustained damage as a result of this catastrophic seismic event. An honorific inscription found at Puteoli, dated to 30, commemorates a list of fourteen cities in Asia affected by this earthquake that Tiberius restored. The inscription includes the eleven cities Tacitus listed, and Ephesus, one of the *koinon* cities, and also Cibyra and Hyrcania – two additional cities that did not appear in Strabo's or Tacitus' lists.<sup>35</sup> Murray suggested that these cities dishonourably added themselves to inscriptions on public monuments to gain greater fame and sympathy.<sup>36</sup> However, he erroneously assumed that only Tacitus' list of eleven were affected. Given the geographical extent of this earthquake based on the addition of the *koinon*, it is highly probable that not only these two cities, but even others, sustained much damage from this earthquake, and that help was given to them by the emperor Tiberius. Indeed, evidence exists that the village of Choriani, near Hierocaesarea,<sup>37</sup> and the village of Gök Kaya, near Sardis, were also damaged by this earthquake and generously rebuilt under Tiberius' orders, as well.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, we have evidence of 25 cities sustaining earthquake damage throughout the province of Asia in 17, as well as several other towns; these were the only attested ones we have evidence for today, so there may well have been many more. Indeed, not surprisingly, Tacitus passed over mention of other cities, towns, and locations in

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31 Strab. 14.1.3-4.

32 Strab. 8.7.1.

33 Strab. 13.4.8.

34 Strab. 12.8.18.

35 *ILS* I 156 = *CIL* X 1624; Murray (2005, p. 153).

36 Murray (2005, p. 155).

37 *IGRP* 4. 1304 = *KP* 1.113; Tac. *Ann.* 2.47; 3.62; Broughton (1934, p. 216).

38 *IGRP* 4. 1348 = *KP* 1.13, nos. 22-24; Tac. *Ann.* 1.73; Broughton (1934, p. 216).

Asia affected by this earthquake. In the same way, his brief reference to the Campanian earthquake of 62 mentions only that certain buildings in Pompeii sustained damage as a result.<sup>39</sup> Of course, this is partly correct: modern scholarship provides consistent testimony that many signs at Pompeii, even today, point to prolonged repairs to buildings and other structures damaged by the earthquake in 62.<sup>40</sup> However, Tacitus omitted that many other cities in Campania were also damaged by the 62 earthquake, including Naples, Herculaneum, Nuceria, and numerous other cities and towns throughout Campania, as Seneca recorded soon after its occurrence. An inscription in Herculaneum commemorating Vespasian's restoration of the temple of the Mother of the Gods "that had fallen down through earthquake" – corroborates the extent of earthquake damage to public buildings in that city in 62.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, it is in keeping with Tacitus' style that he should not have recorded every Asian city damaged by the 17 earthquake. There may have been too many to record in full in a work such as Tacitus' *Annals* in any case. Perhaps this accounts for why Velleius Paterculus provided neither a tally of the number of cities damaged by the earthquake, nor the number that Tiberius restored. Hence his simple remark in collective, but general, terms:

Restitute urbes Asiae, vindicatae ab iniuriis magistratum provinciae.

Vell. Pat. 2.126.4

The cities of Asia have been restored, the provinces have been freed from the oppression of their magistrates.

Tacitus clearly believed that the praises of those like Velleius for Tiberius to be "fictitious," "for fear of the consequences" during his principate, whereas after Tiberius died other accounts of his rule were "influenced by still raging animosities."<sup>42</sup> However, the scale of the natural disaster that was the earthquake of 17, and the scale of Tiberius' response to the plights of so many cities, towns, and villages throughout Asia, without doubt warranted genuine and sincere admiration on Velleius' part.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 15.22.

<sup>40</sup> Laurence (1994, pp. 4, 35); Wallace-Hadrill (1994, pp. 98, 122-123); Cooley and Cooley (2004, plates 3.1 and 3.2); Butterworth and Laurence (2005, pp. 156-162, 174-176, 180-182, 188, 205); Ling (2005, pp. 88-95).

<sup>41</sup> Sen. *NQ.* 6.1.1-3; *CIL* X.1406 = MN inv. 3708; Butterworth and Laurence (2005, pp. 156-157).

<sup>42</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.1.

<sup>43</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.1; Syme (1958, pp. 367-368).

TABLE 2

All Attested Cities Damaged by the 17 Earthquake

Strabo 14.1.3-4	Tac. <i>Ann.</i> 2.47	<i>ILS</i> I 156 = <i>CIL</i> X 1624
<i>Ephesus</i>	Sardis	Sardis
<i>Miletus</i>	Magnesia-by-Sipylos	Magnesia-by-Sipylos
<i>Myus</i>	Temnus	Temnus
<i>Lebedus</i>	Philadelphia	Philadelphia
<i>Colophon</i>	Aegeae	Aegeae
<i>Priene</i>	Apollonis	Apollonis
<i>Teos</i>	Mostene	Mostene
<i>Erythrae</i>	Hierocaesarea	Hierocaesarea
<i>Phocaea</i>	Myrina	Myrina
<i>Clazomenae</i>	Cyme	Cyme
<i>Chios</i>	Tmolus	Tmolus
<i>Samos</i>		<i>Ephesus</i> <b>Cibyra</b> <b>Hyrcania</b>

Key:

Plain – Feature in Tac. *Ann.* 2.47*Italics* – Feature in Strabo 14.1.3-4**Bold** – Feature in neither Tac. *Ann.* 2.47 nor Strabo 14.1.3-4

However, Velleius' sincere endorsement for Tiberius was not shared by all Romans at the time. Suetonius, drawing upon senatorial sources contemporary to Tiberius, whose memoirs made Suetonius himself believe that Tiberius was "close-fisted to the point of miserliness"<sup>44</sup> with regard to disaster aid, painted a very different picture, no doubt heavily influenced by those senators, who all appeared hostile to that

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44 Suet. *Tib.* 46.

emperor.<sup>45</sup> But even Suetonius, using such senatorial sources, had to admit praise for Tiberius's response to the 17 earthquake, however briefly:

Ne provincias quidem liberalitate ulla sublevavit, excepta Asia, disiectis  
terrae motu civitatibus. Suet. *Tib.* 48

The only free money grant any province got from him [Tiberius] was when an earthquake destroyed some cities in Asia Minor.

Tiberius rebuilt the central cities of Lydia in Asia on a lavish and vast scale. Archaeologists working at Sardis have unearthed traces of Tiberius' post-earthquake rebuilding of the ancient city, and the scale and extravagance of the gymnasium alone that Tiberius had built there after the 17 earthquake, illustrates the importance these cities wielded in Tiberius' vision for the province following this earthquake.<sup>46</sup> Archaeologists have also found the street network Tiberius had built through Sardis post-17, and the new water supply installed there at the same time. Furthermore, earthquake resistant building methods were also experimented with in Asia Minor at this time, as well.<sup>47</sup>

However, although many of Rome's senators might have seen sense in rebuilding Asia, most begrudged Tiberius' personal oversight of that enterprise. Not only had Tiberius intervened in a senatorial province, effectively robbing senators of the chance to make their personal mark in Asia, but Tiberius did so on a grand scale. Channelling senatorial sources hostile enough to Tiberius to omit that emperor's building programs in Asia,<sup>48</sup> Suetonius observes:

Princeps neque opera ulla magnifica fecit – nam et quae sola susceperat,  
Augusti templum restitutionemque Pompeiani theatri, imperfecta post tot  
annos reliquit. Suet. *Tib.* 47

No magnificent public works marked his [Tiberius'] reign: his only two undertakings, the erection of Augustus' Temple and the restoration of Pompey's Theatre, still remained uncompleted at the end of all those years.

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45 Suet. *Tib.* 46.

46 Hanfmann (1975, p. 42); Murray (2005, p. 153).

47 Hanfmann (1983, pp. 141-144); Herrmann (1995, p. 29); Meier (2012, p. 19).

48 Wallace-Hadrill (1983, pp. 63-64).

One reason for Tiberius' enthusiasm in rebuilding Asia was his renowned philhellenism.<sup>49</sup> Greek culture had heavily influenced Tiberius ever since his youth, and Rutledge argues that such philhellenism affected his response to this earthquake.<sup>50</sup> However, Tiberius' primary motivation for rebuilding Lydia and the wider Asian region from the ground up was still that of political exhibitionism.<sup>51</sup> Tiberius had contended for power with Rome's senators since succeeding Augustus. According to Tacitus, the succession had not unfolded smoothly. There was talk in Rome of impending civil war, and rumours among Romans that Agrippa Postumus or Germanicus, who controlled the eight Rhine legions and who would flout and show contempt for Tiberius' imperial policy by illegally touring Egypt, were themselves considered potential successors by Augustus. That one or the other might have made a worthy emperor further added to instability.<sup>52</sup> Such expressions of internal dissent were not constrained to the lower levels of society either. Upon his accession, only after Tiberius had secured the allegiance of the consuls and the Praetorian Guard in Rome, and control of the corn supply in Egypt, thus gaining an unassailable strategic power-base throughout the empire, did he finally receive the promise of allegiance by the Senate.<sup>53</sup> Then, in order to maintain control and public order, Tiberius punished the senators who had offended him Gaius, Asinius Gallus and Lucius Arruntius.<sup>54</sup> But such harshness served only to aggravate civil unrest, which in turn, only aggravated the emperor. As a result, in 16 Tiberius embarked upon the first of his notorious years-long string of treason trials, and condemned Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus to death for looking into astrological predictions concerning Tiberius' future and presumably, the conditions surrounding his death. As a sign of internal submission, sincere or contrived, Rome's senators expressed their support for the *princeps* by declaring holidays of public thanksgiving for his escape from possible assassination.<sup>55</sup>

Tiberius' harshness then gave rise to an attempted coup when, on the island of Planasia, a slave named Clemens disguised himself as the deceased Agrippa Postumus and made for Rome. There he intended to make a bid for the principate, and a number of senators, equites, and some members of Tiberius' own palatial court ad-

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49 Suet. *Tib.* 70-71.

50 Rutledge (2008, pp. 454-455, 467).

51 Levick (1996, p. 648).

52 Tac. *Ann.* 1.1-6.

53 Tac. *Ann.* 1.6-7.

54 Tac. *Ann.* 1.11-13.

55 Tac. *Ann.* 2.26-31.

vised and funded him in order to rid themselves of Tiberius. However, upon learning of these plots, Tiberius had his guards capture Clemens and bring him secretly to the palace, whereupon the *princeps* had him executed.<sup>56</sup>

Eventually discerning that such an aggressive policy was not serving his own interests well, Tiberius embarked upon a different course. In order to regain popularity in Rome, in early 17 Tiberius decreed a triumph for Germanicus through the city. Although Germanicus' war against the Germans had not yet been brought to a completion, Tiberius decreed it terminated,<sup>57</sup> believing that more could be achieved in Germany through diplomacy rather than war.<sup>58</sup> But, once the triumph was over and public concord restored, Tiberius immediately commissioned Germanicus and Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso to the eastern provinces.<sup>59</sup>

Debate still rages as to Tiberius' motives for deploying Germanicus and Piso to the East together. Tacitus stated that Piso was commissioned by the emperor to be Germanicus' adviser in order to undermine the prince at every turn. In contrast, some modern historians argue that the purpose of Germanicus' commission to the East was to monitor Piso, who had opposed Tiberius openly on several occasions and had been given Syria as a province to secure the support of the Senate.<sup>60</sup> No doubt, such considerations had a part to play in the final decision, but clearly, Tiberius' prime intention was to remove these two powerful figures from Rome.<sup>61</sup> By removing Piso, who had shown open dissent, and Rome's darling Germanicus – grandson of the *triumvir* Marc Antony, the political rival of Tiberius' own imperial predecessor – with the lure of a glorious commission in the eastern provinces, Tiberius made an emphatic statement to Rome's senators that he would not be trifled with any longer. Loyalty would secure them glorious provincial commissions, but disloyalty would result some of their most famous members, such as Piso, enduring the public disgrace and humiliation of taking orders from such a young and inexperienced imperial commander as Germanicus, whose *imperium* depended entirely upon Tiberius.<sup>62</sup>

At that point Tiberius announced he would rebuild the twelve cities of Asia. Seen in its historical and political contexts, therefore, the timing of this announce-

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56 Tac. *Ann.* 2.38-40.

57 Tac. *Ann.* 2.40.

58 Tac. *Ann.* 2.24-26.

59 Tac. *Ann.* 2.42-44.

60 Beesley (1924, pp. 125-126); Rapke (1982, pp. 62-64); Drogula (2015, pp. 123-124, 130, 141, 146, 150).

61 Tac. *Ann.* 2.42-44.

62 See Drogula (2015, pp. 123-124, 130, 141, 146, 150).

ment made this rebuilding endeavour an external response by the emperor not only to the destructiveness of the earthquake in Asia, but a fresh public display of his own power through magnanimous imperial benevolence. These actions were clearly intended to remind senators that Tiberius alone had the power to intervene in any part of the empire, even the senatorial province of Asia itself, if so ever, and whenever, he might wish.<sup>63</sup> Thus, as Levick notes, Tiberius needed desperately to cement his “reputation” and “serviceability to the state” in the eyes of his provincial subjects after Augustus’ death, and thereby reinforce his claim “to merit as the highest authority in the whole Roman world.” By responding to the 17 earthquake as he did on such a grand scale, Tiberius effectively achieved that end.<sup>64</sup> Up until this point, Tiberius’ own legitimacy as rightful emperor rested largely upon Augustus’ own dynastic accomplishments, military achievements, and fame. Tiberius would not have touched the Rome that Augustus rebuilt and had effectively re-founded, but he would nevertheless have attempted to equal or even surpass Augustus in other ways and by other means. He would have rebuilt and effectively re-founded not just one city in Italy, but many cities of Asia on a massive scale similar to Augustus’ architectural achievements in Rome itself.<sup>65</sup>

Tiberius’ dutifulness to Asia garnered the *princeps* much popular approval throughout the empire. Two inscriptions that once adorned honorary monuments dedicated to Tiberius – the one from Puteoli, dated to 30, and another from Mostene, one of the cities effected by this earthquake itself, dated to 31/2. Indeed, these two inscriptions also reveal a deep level of collaboration between some fourteen cities of Asia of the *koinon*, including Ephesus, in their collective efforts to coordinate public honours for the *princeps*.<sup>66</sup>

The inscription from Mostene in Asia also honour Tiberius as “founder of the twelve cities simultaneously.” Notably, Mostene was not actually one of the twelve *koinon* cities, demonstrating the deep connections between all of the cities mentioned in the inscription and the *koinon* cities together, simply in order to make this particular honour on this particular inscription at all possible.<sup>67</sup>

Three other inscriptions, virtually identical to the above examples, have also been discovered in two other cities effected by the 17 earthquake: one in Latin has

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63 Tac. *Ann.* 2.41-47.

64 Levick (1976, pp. 87, 89).

65 Tac. *Ann.* 1.77; 4.37; Woodman and Martin (1996, section *Ann.* 3.56.3); Levick, (1976, pp. 82-83).

66 *ILS* I.156 = *CIL* 10.1624.

67 *ILS* II<sup>2</sup>.8785.

been found in Aegae,<sup>68</sup> and another two Greek inscriptions have been found in Cibyra.<sup>69</sup> Sardis, Mostene, Hycania, and probably also Cyeme, assumed the title ‘Caesarea,’ while Philadelphia adopted the new name, ‘Neocaesarea.’<sup>70</sup> An inscription from the village of Choriani, near Hierocaesarea, commemorated the dedication of an altar to Rome and Augustus, of whose cult Tiberius was chief priest. It was set up there around the same time that the above inscriptions were dedicated.<sup>71</sup> At this time as well, at Gök Kaya, near Sardis, another inscription shows that a sacred society called the Caesariastae was also formed in honour of Augustus, with Tiberius as its supreme earthly leader.<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSION

For Tacitus, writing in 115, the 17 earthquake portended the gradual decline in the Julio-Claudian dynasty – a decline that would slowly contribute to the civil wars of 69. These wars, in turn, caused Rome’s fortunes to plummet to their lowest ebb, only to be rescued, in time, by the Flavians and Nerva, and then restored to new heights by Trajan in 116, to whose greatness the *Annals* were dedicated. However, in 17 Tiberius simply made the best out of one of the most destructive earthquakes to ever hit Asia through his political strategy and intervention. The detailed memory of the event faded for several reasons. Firstly, there were no Tacitean historians at hand to record them, and even Velleius recorded very few details. Secondly, Asia was rebuilt on such a complete and grand scale that official memory began again there from the time of the province’s re-foundation under Tiberius, its new ‘founder.’ Tacitus’ brevity regarding the rebuilding of this important province served to not undermine Trajan’s less grand rebuilding of Antioch in 115. But he sacrificed a discussion of the possible ramifications that Tiberius’ grand intervention in a senatorial province had in Germanicus’ downfall a few years later after his own intervention in Tiberius’ imperial province of Egypt.

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68 *CIL* 3,7096.

69 *IGR* 4,914, 915.

70 Magic (1950, p. 500); Murray (2005, p. 153).

71 *IGRP* 4,1304 = *KP* 1,113; Tac. *Ann.* 2,47; 3,62; Broughton (1934, p. 216).

72 *IGRP* 4,1348 = *KP* 1,13, nos. 22–24; Tac. *Ann.* 1,73; Broughton (1934, p. 216).

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## What's in a Name? Semantic In/ stability in the Ancient World and in Today's Global Classroom

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If the ability to name is a mark of the divine, confusing names is surely human. From the image of the tower of Babel to the Dao that can't be named<sup>1</sup> to current arguments about the “true” definition of patriotism, semantic instability, when words shift meanings and mean different things to different people and even to the same person at different times,<sup>2</sup> is part of the human condition. When semantic shift occurs, our socio-political realities concurrently change. Effects range from a descent into anarchic disorder and meaninglessness to simple neutral change to evolution and even “progress”<sup>3</sup> in regards to individual development and understanding of

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1 “The Way is hidden and without name.” (*Daodejing of Laozi* 41, tr. Ivanhoe). Cf. *DJ* 1, 32, 37.

2 As Hobbes noted, “The names of such things as affect us, that is, which please and displease us, because all men be not alike affected with the same thing, nor the same man at all times, are in the common discourses of men, of *inconstant* signification. For seeing all names are imposed to signify our conceptions; and all our affections are but conceptions; when we conceive the same things differently we can hardly avoid different naming of them.” *Lev.* 4.17.

3 The post-enlightenment notion of ‘progress towards perfection’ in regards to naming has admittedly a social Darwinist flavor compared to random evolution, and thinkers voice very different notions of what constitutes ‘progress.’ For example, a Confucian seeks to restore the meanings of names to what they meant under the Zhou dynasty, a Platonist to make names match the Forms to which they refer as much as possible, and a Ciceronian promulgates a political vocabulary of an idealized republic that never really existed.