

By KENNETH WELLESLEY

(Plate I)

39, 2 promoueri ad quartum a Bedriaco castra placuit, adeo imperite ut quamquam uerno tempore anni et tot circum annibus penuria aquae fatigarentur. ibi de proelio dubitatum, Othone per litteras flagitante ut maturarent, militibus ut imperator pugnae adesset poscentibus; plerique copias trans Padum agentes acciri postulabant. nec proinde diiudicari potest, quid optimum factu fuerit, quam pessimum fuisse quod factum est: 40 non ut ad pugnam sed ad bellandum profecti confluentes Padi et †Aduae† fluminum, sedecim inde milium spatio distantes, petebant.

It was too optimistic, or too modest, of Giovanni Forni to declare, in a recent study of matters connected with Bedriacum and the two battles of Cremona in A.D. 69: 'Dopo che acuti ingegni di studiosi illustri hanno raccolto a manelle il grano nel campo della tradizione relativa alle due battaglie di Bedriaco, non resta che la spigolatura di sviste e di osservazioni sfuggite.'¹ In fact the labourers have been few, and their harvest meagre.² Others have undoubtedly been deterred by the all too obvious tares in Tacitus' *Histories*. Of these the ugliest patch is that presented by, and associated with, the passage quoted. Upon the textual crux hinges our understanding of a number of inter-related problems to which no satisfying answers have as yet been found, and an attempt is now made to deal with these *seriatim*. Indeed, so much depends on the single word †Aduae† that Syme was fully justified in describing it as 'the most notorious crux in the whole of Tacitus'.³ Unless we know the goal of the Othonian advance, we cannot reconstruct or evaluate the strategy that selected it; nor can we judge the meaning of Otho's great renunciation or the validity of Tacitus' praise of it. The various hypotheses of Mommsen, Henderson and Hardy have evoked serious objection, and Syme concluded his *Tacitus*, Appendix 30 ('The Strategy of Otho') with the declaration, 'The puzzle remains.' Ten years later Heubner comes to the same despairing conclusion.⁴

I. THE SITE OF BEDRIACUM (FIG. I)

The least of our troubles is the localization of the village of Bedriacum, near which the main Othonian army encamped in April, 69, and from which it marched westwards to the fatal encounter near Cremona. Mommsen put Bedriacum at Calvatone, and this must be the truth or an approximation to it. The ancient evidence is as follows:

- (a) *TH* II, 23, 2: inter Veronam Cremonamque situs est uicus, duabus iam Romanis cladibus notus infaustusque.
 (b) *TH* II, 39, 2: promoueri ad quartum a Bedriaco castra placuit'; 40 'confluentes . . . sedecim inde milium spatio distantes; (hostis) uix quattuor milia passuum progressus . . .

¹ 'Bedriacensia', *RCCM* 7 (1965), 467.

² P. Fabia, *Les Sources de Tacite* . . . (Paris, 1893); P. Fabia, 'La concentration des Othoniens sur le Pô', *REA* 43 (1941), 192-215; J. Gerstenecker, *Der Krieg des Otho und Vitellius in Italien im Jahre 69* (Progr. München 1882); R. Hanslik, 'Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Otho und Vitellius bis zur Schlacht von Bedriacum nach Tacitus', *WS* 74 (1961), 113-25; E. G. Hardy, ed. Plutarch's Lives of Galba and Otho (London, 1890); E. G. Hardy, *Studies in Roman History, Second Series* (London, 1909), 158-202; E. G. Hardy, 'Tacitus as a Military Historian in the "Histories"', *JPh* 31 (1910), 123-52; B. W. Henderson, *Civil War and Rebellion in the Roman Empire*, A.D. 69-70 (London 1908); H. Heubner, *P. Cornelius Tacitus: Die Historien: Kommentar* . . . Band II: Zweites Buch (Heidelberg, 1968); E. Koestermann, 'Die erste Schlacht bei Betriacum', 69 n. Chr., *RCCM* 3 (1961), 16-29;

A. Momigliano, 'Vitellio', *SIFC* 9 (1931), 117-61; Th. Mommsen, 'Die zwei Schlachten von Betriacum', *H* 5 (1871), 161-73 = *GS* IV, 354-65; G. Niccolini, 'La prima battaglia di Bedriaco e la foce dell'Adda', *Rend. Accad. Lincei* 15 (1906), 278 ff.; A. Passerini, 'Le due battaglie presso Betriacum' in *Studi . . . offerti a E. Ciaceri* (Genova, etc., 1940), 178-249 (= 1-71 of offprint); P. Paul, 'Kaiser Marcus Salvius Otho', *RhM* 57 (1902), 76-136; M. Puhl, *De Othone et Vitellio imperatoribus quaestiones* (Diss. Halle, 1883); K. Wellesley, 'Suggestio Falsi in Tacitus', *RhM* 103 (1960), 272-88.

³ *Tacitus* 163 (and cf. 164).

⁴ 149: 'Der Bericht des Tacitus über die Schlacht von Bedriacum gehört, obwohl der Parallelbericht Plutarchs (Otho II, 1 ff.) vorliegt, zu den schwierigsten und anscheinend unlösbaren Problemen der Tacitusphilologie.'

- (c) Schol. Juv. II, 99: Othonis et Vitellii bellum scripsit Cornelius <Tacitus>, scripsit et Pompeius Planta, qui ait Bebriacum uicum esse a Cremona uicesimo lapide.
- (d) id. II, 106: Bebriacos campos inter Hostiliam et Cremonam.
- (e) Plut. O 8: ὁ δὲ Ὀθων παραγενόμενος εἰς Βητριακὸν εἰς τὸ στρατόπεδον (ἔστι δὲ πολίχνη πλήσιον Κρεμώνης τὸ Βητριακόν) ἐβουλεύετο περὶ τῆς μάχης . . . 11 προήγαγεν αὐτοὺς ὁ Πρόκλος ἐκ τοῦ Βητριακοῦ καὶ κατεστρατοπέδευσεν ἀπὸ πεντήκοντα σταδίων . . . τῇ δὲ ὕστεραίᾳ βουλόμενον προάγειν ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμίους ὁδὸν οὐκ ἐλάττονα σταδίων ἑκατὸν οἱ περὶ τὸν Παυλίνον οὐκ εἶων . . .
- (f) Tabula Peutingeriana: Cremona—(river)—xxii (river)—Be—(river)—loriaco—(river)—Mantua—xl—Hostilia.

Thus, Bedriacum is described as a village 20 or 22 mp east of Cremona on the way to Verona or Mantua. Tacitus' narrative makes it clear that the Othonian advance followed the Via Postumia,⁵ and the course of this between Verona and Cremona is sure, as a good modern map (e.g. the Italian military 1:100,000 map, sheets 61 'Cremona' and 62 'Mantova') shows. The twentieth milestone, reckoning from the centre of Cremona, must have stood a little NW. of the hamlet of S. Lorenzo Guazzone, and the twenty-second half-a-mile SW. of Calvatone, near the turning to Tornata. Archaeological finds point to some sort of Roman construction (probably a villa) a little east of Calvatone at Ponte S. Andrea.⁶ As this is 23.5 mp from Cremona, it can scarcely be used to support a localization of Bedriacum here. General strategical probability would suggest a site for the camp at Bedriacum just off the Via Postumia and west of the modern village of Tornata, which lies on a *cardo* of the Cremonese centuriation and was certainly inhabited in Roman times. Access to this camp-site might well have been gained by side-tracks leaving the Via Postumia at various points such as to render the discrepancy between Tacitus' figure of *ca.* 20 mp and Plutarch's of *ca.* 22 mp readily intelligible. Moreover, a position west of Tornata would enjoy the advantage of lying near an alternative approach on the south, the *decumanus* of the grid represented to-day by the straight road or path which, in an ESE. direction, passes through Recórfano and beside Cascina Tedesca, and which in its westward course met the Via Postumia one mile west of Breda Guazzone, not far from the modern church of S. Pietro in Mendicate, 14.5 mp from Cremona.^{6a}

The indication 'Cremona-Mantua' presents a slight difficulty. There is no evidence on the ground of a direct road connecting these two cities. A traveller leaving the former and bound for the latter would almost certainly have followed the Via Postumia to a point beyond its crossing of that formidable obstacle, the River Oglio, 1 km south of Mósio.⁷ Thereafter he would branch off before Gazoldo degli Ippóliti by the shortest line between the high-road and Mantua. An alternative route is presented by the prolongation of the Recórfano *decumanus* to Gazzuolo on the Oglio, where the road from Rome to Mantua probably crossed the river. The possibilities are limited by the course of the Oglio and the desirability of avoiding the supposition that more than the minimum number of bridges existed where so many had to be maintained. That a third bridge spanned the Oglio between Mósio and Gazzuolo is most unlikely on this reckoning.⁸ In any case, the description of Bedriacum as lying between Cremona and Verona/Mantua and at 20/22 mp from the former is fully intelligible on the hypothesis that the Othonians encamped just W. of Tornata. The last-named must, therefore, be regarded as the successor to Bedriacum, with Calvatone as a conceivable, but less attractive, alternative. The chances of discovering the exact site by air-photography are slight, and this has never been attempted.

Given this localization, the marching-camp four miles away towards Cremona will have

⁵ H II, 42, 2; 43, 1; III, 21, 2; 24, 1; 27, 2.

⁶ C. P. Alberini, 'Municipium Cremona,' *Bollettino Storico Cremonese* 19 (1954) 47 ff.; and plan opp. 32.

^{6a} Much of this grid is most helpfully (and for the first time) overprinted in red on a reproduction of the 1:100,000 military map of the Cremona area, forming Appendix no. 3 to G. Pontiroli, 'Cremona e il suo territorio in età romana', *Atti del Centro Studi e*

Documentazione sull' Italia Romana I (1967-8), 165-211.

⁷ There is no bridge nowadays.

⁸ It may also be noted that the straight stretch of Roman road running southwards from Bozzolo and passing near Rivarolo would, if projected northwards from Bozzolo, meet the Via Postumia at its crossing of the Oglio.

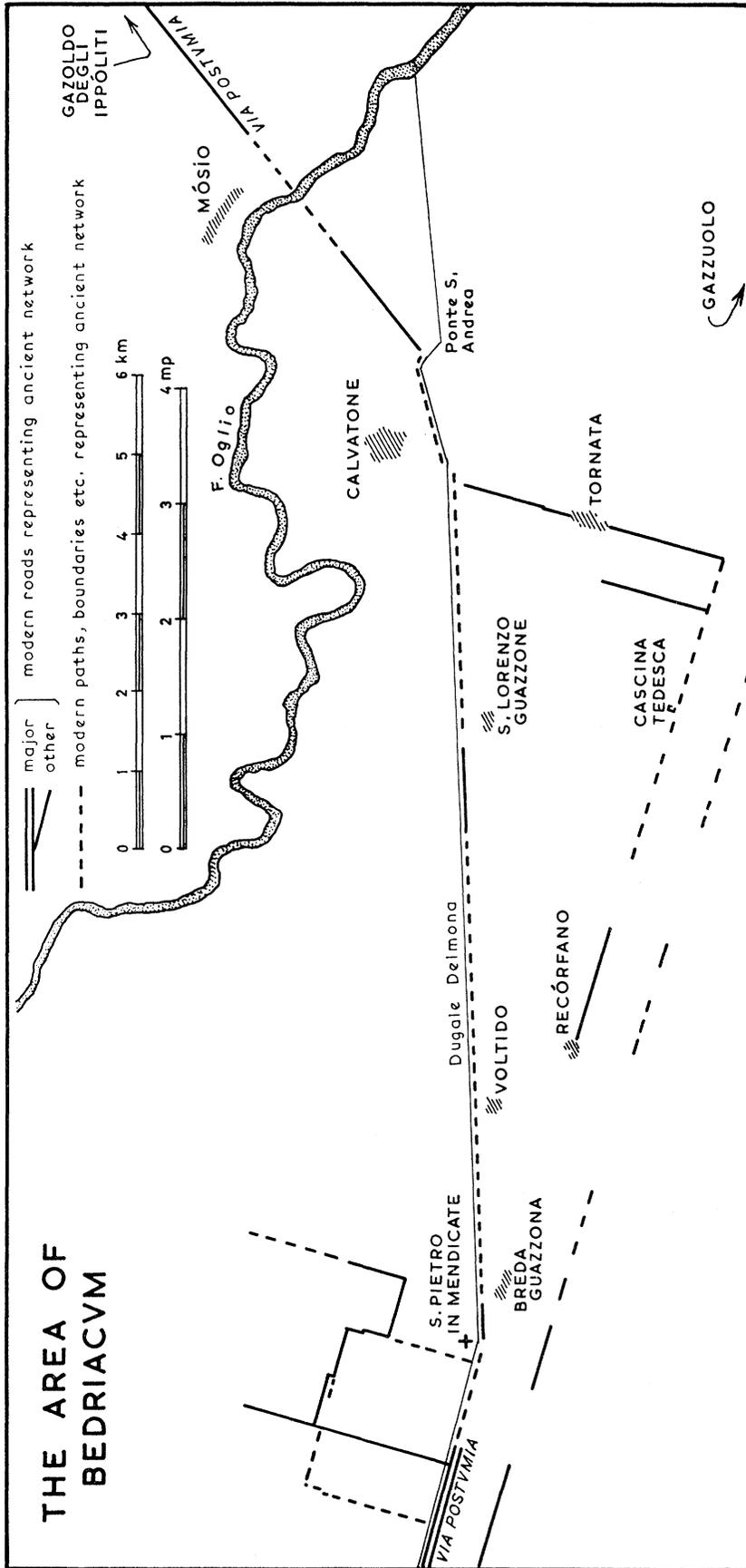


FIG. 1. THE AREA OF BEDRIACVM
 Drawn by Mrs. M. Goodwin from a sketch-map by the author

lain near Voltido in the angle between the Via Postumia and the Recórfano *decumanus*, where—with perverse ingenuity—it would just have been possible for Titianus and Proculus to entrench camp away from the Delmona and the numerous watercourses that then seamed (and still seam) the flat and fruitful ground—‘*adeo imperite ut quamquam uerno tempore anni et tot circum annibus penuria aquae fatigaretur*’ (*H* II, 39, 2).

2. THE VITELLIAN CAMP AT CREMONA (FIG. 2)

If Tacitus’ references to the site of the Othonian camps are not generous, those which he makes to the camp of their enemies are even more elusive. The Vitellian seizure of Cremona is not even mentioned, though oblique references to it are suspected at 17,2 ‘*capta Pannoniorum cohors apud Cremonam*’ and 22,3 ‘(Caecina) *traiecto rursus Pado Cremonam petere intendit*’. The junction of the forces of Valens and Caecina is not localized by the brief sentences at 30, 1 ‘*rapido agmine Caecinae iunguntur (milites Valentis)*’ and 31, 2 ‘*coniunctis Caecinae et Valentis copiis . . .*’; and in the description of the preceding engagement *ad Castores* a material fact—the site of Caecina’s camp—is left completely unexplained. Indeed it is not until we have read on to Book III that we are in any position to say more than that the Vitellian camp lay between Cremona and the little shrine *ad Castores* some 12 mp east of it.⁹ In October, the Vitellians, now defending Italy against the invasion of Antonius Primus, re-occupied the camp they had constructed as invaders in the previous March: III, 26, 1 ‘(Flauiani) *ut Cremonam uenere, nouum immensumque opus occurrit. Othoniano bello Germanicus miles moenibus Cremonensium castra sua, castris uallum circumiecerat, eaque munimenta rursus auxerat . . .*’ In Book II the construction and fortification of the Vitellian camp had been passed over in the narrative, clearly because Tacitus hastily presumed that the matter had no direct bearing on the course of events in April: now, in October, when he must describe in detail its capture by the Flavians, more information is vouchsafed. The camp is said to lie ‘near’ the walls of Cremona, and from III, 29, 2, where the expulsion of the Vitellians from it is described (‘*trepidis iam Vitellianis seque e uallo praecipitantibus . . . completur caede quantum inter castra murosque fuit*’), it appears that there is a clear space between the camp and the walls. Greater precision is indeed attainable if the account at 27,2 is correctly interpreted. The Flavian forces attack the camp on three sides, described in turn as ‘*proxima Bedriacensi uiae*’, ‘*dexterioa ualli*’ and ‘*Brixiana porta*’. The only position for the camp which will satisfy the requirements of Tacitus’ description is one lying between the Via Postumia (= Via Bedriacensis) which enters Cremona on the E., and the Via Brixiana leading from Cremona NE. Many commentators (notably Wolff-Andresen) are in serious confusion here because they assume that, as at Novaesium, the Cremonese camp straddled the Via Postumia, and believe that, since *proxima Bedriacensi uiae* describes the E. flank of the camp, and since its gate towards Brixia must be on the north, the third assault was necessarily directed to the south side. They are thus compelled to inform us that *dexterioa*—we should have expected *sinistra*—is to be understood (suddenly!) from the standpoint of the defenders. But it is by no means necessary to resort to a device which supposes a strange switch of outlook on the historian’s part, and is rendered most unlikely by his observance of normal practice at III, 82, 3, where *pars sinistra urbis* (Romae) indicates the area of the Sallustian Gardens as seen from the north. Not all Roman camps straddled main roads. A position such that a short approach-road at an angle with the Via Postumia on its north led to the SE. gate of the camp explains at once *proxima Bedriacensi uiae* and *dexterioa ualli*. In the eyes of troops coming from Bedriacum, both the sides referred to lie to the right of the Via Postumia, but the NE. wall of the camp is even more to the right than its SE. face. We may therefore conclude, even on the basis of Tacitus’ scanty information, that the Vitellian camp lay a short distance from the city on its NE. side in the angle between the Via Postumia and the Via Brixiana.

This conclusion is confirmed by the finding (in 1887) of the metal facing of the legionary chest of Legio IIII Macedonica at a point (indicated in fig. 2) 50 m outside the Porta

⁹ Hanslik (115) was misled by Tacitus’ vagueness into suggesting that Caecina’s camp was moved up

to the scene of *ad Castores*.

Venezia on the road to Brixia.¹⁰ It looks as if, in October 69, the bearer of the chest attempted to escape from the northern gate of the camp, but was caught in the interval between it and the city, the chest being thrown away after its contents had been looted. The axis of the camp is thereby established as being approximately on the NW.-SE. branch-road, the Via Cavo Cerca, which links the two highroads, and beside or astride the Naviglio Civico (Cavo Cerca).

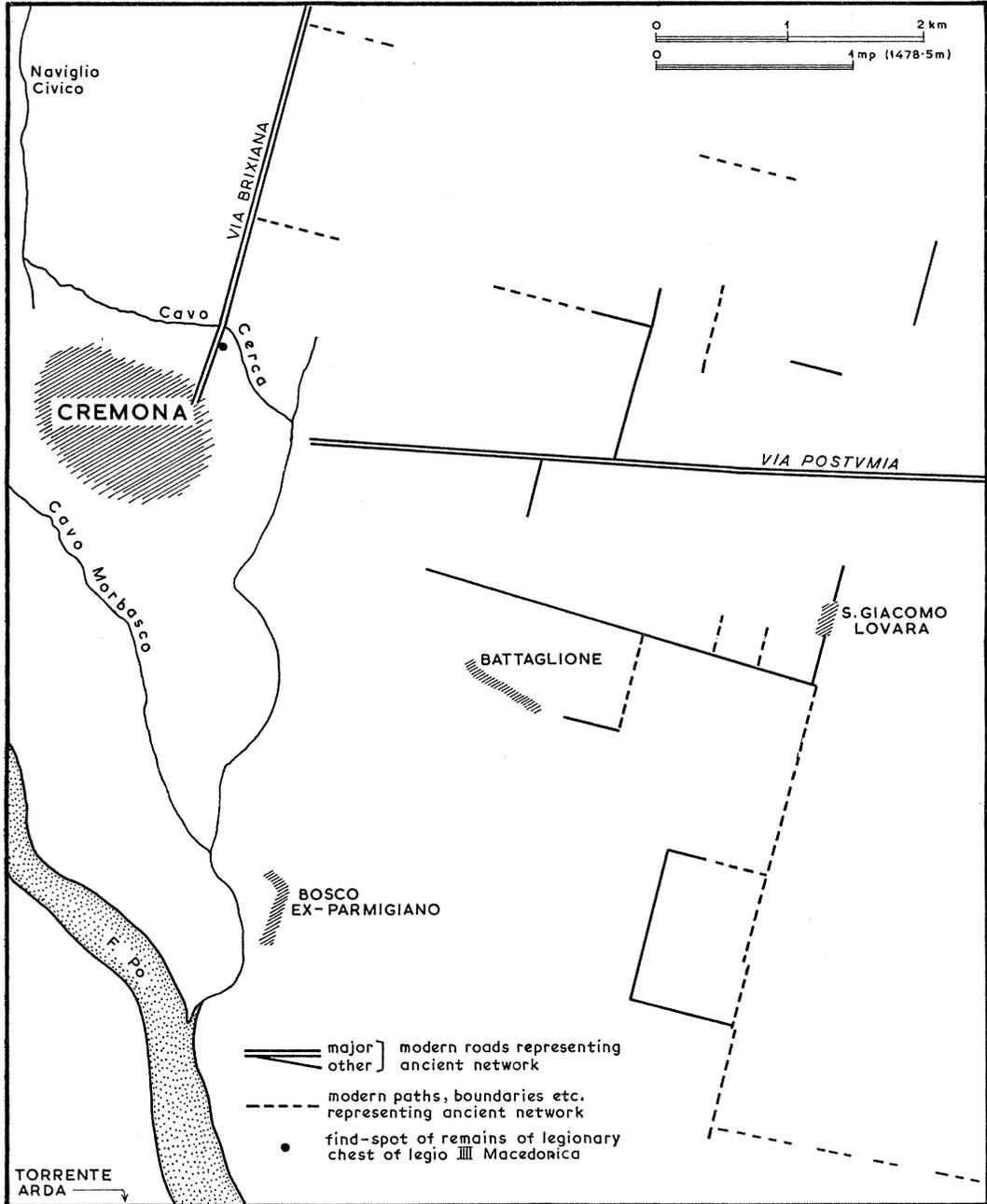


FIG. 2. THE EASTERN APPROACHES TO CREMONA
 Drawn by Mrs. M. Goodwin from a sketch-map by the author

¹⁰ F. Barnabei, ' Frammenti di una cassa militare della Legione IV Macædonica scoperti in Cremona ', *Not. d. Scavi* 1887, 209-21 with Tav. IV (cf. Fig. 1 in

Pontirolì's article cited in n. 6a). They are now in the museum at Cremona.

3. CAECINA'S BRIDGE (FIG. 2)

This, too, cannot have been far distant from Cremona. The necessity for its construction arose from the demolition of the bridge by which the Via Postumia crossed the Po to the SW. of Cremona on its way to Placentia. The demolition is not alluded to by Tacitus, but it is implicit in the Othonian defence of the River Po and it may well be regarded as one of the acts of Spurrina in his preparations to hold the Placentia area. By October, of course, communications had been restored, and the Hostilia legions entered Cremona from the south without difficulty or delay.¹¹ But in March–April, the immobility of the Vitellians at Cremona, and the posting of Othonian forces on the south bank of the river between Ticinum and Placentia, at Placentia, near Cremona and at Brixellum, make quite obvious the general intention of Otho to resist the Vitellian advance at the river. The building of the pontoon-bridge by Caecina is described in some detail by Tacitus, and additional information concerning the attacks to which it was subjected is provided by Plutarch. There are three arguments for its proximity to Cremona, apart from that of convenience of access from the Vitellian camp:

(a) The bridge was built *aduersus obpositam gladiatorum manum* (34, 1) and we know that these Othonian gladiators were *haud procul Cremona* (23, 3).

(b) Caecina's fast ride on horseback from the bridge to the camp (κατὰ σπουδὴν ἀπολιπὼν τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὸν πόταμον, κτλ. Plut. O 11) took as long as did the issue of arms to three legions already warned to be in a state of readiness for battle (34, 1; 41, 2). The troops will have been well drilled in such operations. The time necessary may perhaps be estimated as some 10–15 minutes, and the distance of Caecina's ride is unlikely therefore to have much exceeded three miles.¹²

(c) Commonsense would surely dictate the placing of the bridge upstream from any confluence east of Cremona in order to save the labour of constructing a second bridge across the tributary. If we could localize this confluence, which on the figures supplied by Tacitus cannot have been far from Cremona and certainly not to the west of it, we could also localize the bridge-building. A further confirmation of the proximity of the bridge to Cremona may in due course be derived from the site of the confluence.

It follows from the above considerations that the Vitellian camp and bridge were close to the city. The battle was fought not more than four miles (40) from the Vitellian camp adjacent to Cremona. Since Tacitus' description of the fight makes it clear that some of the Othonian troops had already turned off the Via Postumia towards the Po at the moment of contact with the enemy,¹³ it seems obvious that the Othonian objective was the River Po near Cremona, that is, Caecina's bridge. The objective is, however, given by Tacitus as the confluence of the Po and a named tributary. The discussion of this name must however be postponed for the moment.

4. THE DISTANCES MENTIONED BY TACITUS AND PLUTARCH

For the Othonian advance both Tacitus and Plutarch provide us with detailed mileages which have never been satisfactorily explained. Their presence—unusual in the Roman historian—has introduced one more element of confusion into the general imbroglio. Perhaps it is desirable to protest at the start against the reckless tampering with figures found in Henderson and elsewhere. That the calculations of Plutarch and Tacitus do not exactly tally is a strong argument for their authenticity; and the extent of disagreement will in any case turn out to be trifling and explicable. In this conflict, however, we may be disposed to give a slight preference to the Roman historian who had no need to translate

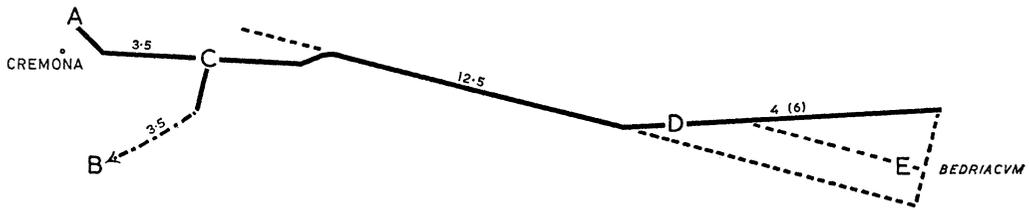
¹¹ *H* III, 21, 1.

¹² This estimate, which I put forward in *RhM* 103 (1960), 279, has been questioned by Heubner 131 f.: 'Diese Rechnung scheint mir daran zu krankten, dass . . . Wellesley die Strecke, die der an Caecina gesandte Bote zurückzulegen hatte, nicht berücksichtigt hat.' Not so: there were several *exploratores* (II, 41, 1), and it is incredible that on hearing of the Othonian advance, which they in any case expected,

it should not have occurred to two of these, on arriving at the division of ways leading to the camp and the bridge, to separate and so announce the tidings to Caecina and Valens at approximately the same time. It therefore remains plausible to argue that Caecina will have begun his ride at the same moment as the arms began to be issued.

¹³ II, 43, 1; cf. 70, 3 'deflectere uia, spatium certaminum recognoscere'.

the *milia passuum* of his sources into stades, and whose information was to be scrutinized by readers better informed on Italian geography than were Plutarch's. Let us therefore take Tacitus' figures first. From the camp at Bedriacum, Titianus and Proculus advance their forces 4 mp westward towards Cremona, and at this point they are 16 mp from their objective, the confluence. Since an objective 20 mp from Bedriacum along the Via Postumia towards Cremona would lie either in the centre of the city or two miles east of it, well away from the Po, the Othonians must at some point have turned off the Via Postumia towards the confluence. According to Suetonius Paulinus, as recorded by Tacitus, the point of greatest danger, that is of maximum proximity to the enemy camp, was less than four miles from that camp.¹⁴ Plutarch adds the information that the advance towards the enemy from the marching-camp, that is, along the Via Postumia and before any diversion from it, amounted to not less than 100 stades = $12\frac{1}{2}$ mp.¹⁵ These figures, applied to the road-pattern and the information of the Tabula Peutingeriana, compel us to imagine the following picture:



where

- A = the Vitellian camp
- B = the confluence
- C = the nearest approach of the Othonians to A
- D = the Othonian marching-camp
- E = the Othonian camp at Bedriacum.

The only discrepant figure is provided by Plutarch when he reckons the Othonians' first-day march as 50 stades, rather more than 6 mp, against Tacitus' 4 mp. Two explanations are conceivable. The difference of 2 mp may reflect the difference between the 20 and 22 mp said to separate Bedriacum and Cremona. As the fact that the Roman highway was undoubtedly marked by milestones virtually eliminates the possibility of error in the recollection of participants, it is natural to think of the existence of different routes (see above, p. 29). Alternatively, the discrepancy may be due to Plutarch's having used a text in which 'IV' was written as, or mistaken for, 'VI'. A rounding-up tendency would then produce '50' stades.

5. THE CONFLUENCE NEAR CREMONA

These reflexions point relentlessly to the existence of a confluence some three miles SE. of Cremona. This was broadly the conclusion to which Hardy came in 1890 when editing Plutarch's *Galba* and *Otho* (p. CIII): 'The spot selected for the next encampment (of the Othonians) was on the Po, at its confluence with a small stream and about four miles from Cremona'; and in the commentary (p. 254) he repeats the remark about 'a small stream from the north' and adds a very perceptive note: 'I think it quite possible that Aduae in Tacitus is either, as Nipperdey suggests, a gloss or a misreading for some other and less familiar name.' Unfortunately Hardy was unable to consult large-scale maps or visit Cremona to see whether any such confluence exists, and when Henderson twenty years later made merry at the expense of this 'small stream from the north' (*Civil War and Rebellion* 343), he renounced the idea in *Studies in Roman History, Second Series* (1909), 189 and more

¹⁴ II, 40.

¹⁵ *Otho* II.

explicitly in *ŷP* 31 (1910), 138. Meanwhile¹⁶ Valmaggi had revived an old suggestion,¹⁷ and proposed to read *Ardae* for *Aduae*, positing an allusion to the Torrente Arda which joins the Po below Cremona, flowing in from the SW. This form now appeared, unobelized, in the texts of Fisher (*OCT*, 1911), whence it spread to Koestermann's Teubner editions of 1961 and 1969 (though his edition of 1950 still retained *Aduae* as an inheritance from Halm-Andresen) and to that of Till (1963).¹⁸ Giarratano however, in his excellent text of 1939, had remained faithful to the traditional *Aduae*. Indeed, the difficulty of regarding a southern tributary of the Po as an objective for troops marching north of it is quite insuperable. By the time Stevenson came to write the relevant page in the *Cambridge Ancient History* (x [1934], 823) he found it prudent to pass over the whole problem, and there is not even an appendix which copes with this capital difficulty of historical interpretation.

But the debate about names can wait. What we desire to know is whether the confluence of the Po and Hardy's 'small stream from the north' exists in nature as well as in imagination at the position which the narratives of Tacitus and Plutarch suggest. A study of the Cremona sheet of the Italian 1:25,000 military map—or a visit—will supply the answer. Just over 3 mp SSE., in a bee-line from the centre of Cremona, near the village of Bosco ex-Parmigiano a stream carries the combined waters of the Cavo Morbasco and the Naviglio Civico into the Po. It is today a quiet spot, the resort of the local fishermen (Plate I, 1 and 2). In the Po, at this point and elsewhere, irregular and transitory 'islands' or sand-banks form and vanish in the great river—a phenomenon which makes it dangerous to attempt any localization (as Hanslik does) on the basis of Tacitus' *insula amne medio* (35, 1). But that bridge-building should at this very point have taken advantage of some such island in April, 69 is well within the bounds of plausibility. Let us therefore place Caecina and his bridging engineers a little to the west of the confluence and almost directly south of Cremona. By the modern road, the distance to the presumed site of the Vitellian camp is 4.5 mp, and to the point at which the Othonians seem likely to have turned left on the Via Postumia (if we take this to mean that they used the lane leading to S. Giacomo Lovara, slightly less than 3.5 mp from the camp) nearly 5 mp. It was probably not much less than this by the then existing centuriation *limites*, one of which is followed by the village street of S. Giacomo Lovara. We must however remember that the Othonian plan will have envisaged an encampment short, though within striking distance, of the confluence/bridge, so that the figure of 3.5 mp suggested above as implied in the narratives of Tacitus and Plutarch comes very close to the truth. Some spot between Bosco ex-Parmigiano and Battaglione (a possibly significant name¹⁹) may have been in the mind of the Othonian commanders.

But did this confluence exist in antiquity? Did a river, now represented by the Naviglio Civico, then flow through or around Cremona? It is true that Pliny the Elder makes no mention of any northern affluent between the Addua and the Ollius in *NH* III, 118 f. But this catalogue is not exhaustive, and it confines itself to the major rivers. Tacitus explains the prosperity of Cremona as being partly due to its enjoying the advantage of convenient rivers (III, 34, 1 'opportunitate fluminum'). One of these is obviously the Po itself, but the other(s) cannot, despite the commentators,²⁰ be the Addua and Ollius, respectively at least seven and twelve miles distant from the city at their nearest approach. The Tabula Peutingeriana (supra, p. 29) has the indication of a river immediately east of Cremona in a position that corresponds with the transit of the Naviglio under the Via Postumia three-quarters of a mile east of the presumed line of the ancient walls of Cremona, beyond which a suburb extended even in 69 (III, 30, 2); and since the map is clearly based on itineraries and road-books it would not be surprising if the four rivers marked in the Tabula between Cremona and Mantua were the Cremonese tributary and the Delmona west of Bedriacum, with the Ollius and Mincius east of it. If this is a valid assumption, the marking of a river just east of Cremona could well be significant of the existence of the Cremonese tributary in

¹⁶ *AAT* 31 (1896), 920 ff.

¹⁷ Passerini cites Dragoni, *Sulla Storia ecclesiastica cremonese, etc.*, Cremona, 1858, 23.

¹⁸ Hardy himself preferred *Adrae*.

¹⁹ D. Olivieri, *Dizionario toponomastico di Lombardia*, s.v.

²⁰ So Heraeus, Wolff-Andresen, La Magna. W. C. Summers (ed. 1904) more egregiously suggested the Adige! Costa (ed. 1938) speaks of 'Il Po, l'Adda, l'Oglio ed altri minori e canali e rivi'.

antiquity. The earliest modern map of the area known to me, a small leathern map probably of the fourteenth century, now in the museum at Treviso, indicates the Cremonese river as a broad watercourse flowing through the city, and to all appearances as prominent as its neighbours, the Adda and Oglio. The question, when this river was canalized and adapted to supply the moat outside the medieval walls, and when it lost its earlier name (if it had one) and became merely what it is to-day, the 'Town Canal', can only be settled, if at all, by reference to early Cremonese charters. But the essential probability that a river flowed through or by Cremona in antiquity—and at no great distance from it—cannot reasonably be gainsaid.

6. THE TEXT OF *HISTORIES* II, 40, 1

non ut ad pugnam sed ad bellandum profecti confluentes Padi et Aduae fluminum sedecim inde milium spatio distantes petebant

adue	MIaBHolL24	Adduae	Puteolanus
abdue	Y01Y02	Ardae	Valmaggi
agde	UII	Adrae	Hardy
agile	Yo3III		

Upon our attitude to this textual crux much depends, and it is necessary to discuss the possibilities more fully than is customary. The *prima facie* problem is that Othonian troops 4 miles west of the Bedriacum camp, and hence about 16 or 18 miles east of Cremona, cannot be said to be 16 miles away from the confluence of the Addua and Po 7 miles west of the city. In sense and palaeographically, the suspect word in the phrase is *Aduae*.²¹ According as we retain or emend this, a number of consequences present themselves, most of them unattractive.

If we retain *Aduae* (*Adduae*), there are six possible approaches:

(a) Gerstenecker proposed to take *distantes* as nominative referring to the subject of *petebant*, not as accusative agreeing with *confluentes*. We should then have to suppose that the objections of Paulinus and Celsus were made at a point on the Via Postumia 9 (16–7) miles from Cremona, in the the course of the second day's march from Bedriacum. But (i) the syntactical eccentricity whereby *distantes* is divorced from *confluentes* is improbable in the last degree; (ii) there is no real sense-break at the beginning of ch. 40, and the discussion(s) described in 39, 2 and 40 will be most naturally understood by the reader of Tacitus as having taken place while the army was still at the marching-camp 4 miles from Bedriacum on D day (and possibly D-1, in the evening);²² (iii) Plutarch (*O* 11) clearly places the resistance of Paulinus and his supporters to the dangerous advance of 16 miles at the 4-mile marching-camp, and concludes his account of the discussion with the words ἐκείνοι μὲν οὖν ἄραντες ἐχώρου = *confluentes* . . . *petebant*.

(b) The doctrine of Mommsen was that the Othonians aimed, as a preliminary to a complete encirclement of the enemy, at cutting a supposed supply-route of the Vitellians from Brixia. This they could do by marching 12 miles along the Via Postumia from their second camp and then, at a point less than 4 miles from Cremona, turning off NW. for a further four miles until they reached, and cut, the Brixia road. They would eventually have resumed their march in a great semi-circle around Cremona and made for their final destination, the confluence of the Po and the Addua. The weaknesses of this ingenious reconstruction have been fully ventilated. They are: (i) Tacitus must be supposed to have confused the intermediate and final objectives of the march by a very careless misreading of his detailed source(s); but the attribution of such an error would only be tolerable if he could be shown beyond dispute to have committed similar blunders elsewhere, and this cannot be done; (ii) Vitellian supplies did not come from Brixia, which there is no evidence that they controlled at this stage, but from the Regio Transpadana to the west and north-west of Cremona, which they certainly did; and (iii) the Othonians could gain no advantage by occupying the confluence of the Addua and Po rather than the western approaches to Cremona.

²¹ My pupil Mr. C. Hamilton pointed out to me in 1970 that in M *adue* is preceded by the *adue* of *aduellandum* (*bellandum*). The prior appearance of this

group of letters (standing in M immediately above the river-name) may have helped to generate corruption.

²² See below, p. 49 f.

(c) Henderson, keeping the confluence of the Po and Addua, but emending *quartum* at 39,2 to *quartum decimum*, supposed a march closely skirting Cremona on the north and designed to bring the Othonian army to the west of Cremona as part of a grandiose strategical envelopment of the Vitellians, the eastern jaw of the pincers being provided by the Danubian legions flowing in to Bedriacum. Hardy had no difficulty in demolishing this revised version of Mommsen. The main arguments against it are: (i) to save a dubious word by 'emending' another not obviously dubious is poor method; (ii) Tacitus' *quartum* is supported by Plutarch's 'fifty stades', and the discrepancy between 4 and 6.25 mp can be explained on the lines already suggested; (iii) Henderson's route of 30 mp from Bedriacum to the Addua mouth allows him only a very slight detour to the north of Cremona (an extra 1, or, at most, 3 mp), and nobody can seriously believe in the theory that Caecina and Valens would have complacently allowed a numerically weak and psychologically uncertain army to march so closely around their positions. To these objections we may add the inappropriateness, on this hypothesis, of Paulinus' estimate that the Othonian route would bring them to within less than *four* miles of the Vitellian camp.

(d) F. G. Moore (*TAPA* 1909, LXIV-v) replaced *sedecim* (xvi) by xxv, thus achieving 29 mp, which = 22 + 7. Apart from the arbitrary rewriting of the text, this would involve an Othonian march approaching even more closely to the centre of Cremona than Henderson's theory demands, and is on every ground to be rejected.

(e) The geographical fact that the River Adda flows into the Po seven miles west of Cremona is highly inconvenient. To alter geography for the sake of preserving the transmitted text of *H* II, 40, 1 may seem daring; but scholars have not been wanting to attempt it. Their arguments may be read with interest—and incredulity. A study of the land contours as given in the 1:25,000 maps does nothing to help belief.²³

(f) The final solution, if we retain *Aduae*, is to declare that Tacitus was hopelessly confused and careless. This is the policy to which Syme was reduced, remarking—some-what surprisingly on his view of a Gallic origin for the historian—'Perhaps he was never familiar with the topography of Transpadane Italy'.²⁴ If this is true, we are uncomfortably confronted with (i) the numerical details which the historian has thought it worth while to give us, but which a man as uninterested and ill-informed as Syme's Tacitus would surely have omitted; and (ii) the remarkable ignorance, as it seems, not only of Tacitus, but of those who, before or after publication, must have read the *Histories* with attention—his friend and critic Pliny the Younger from Comum, and such well-informed participants in the events of 69 as the veteran Vestricius Spurinna with his fund of reminiscence. No parallel for such ignorance of the geography of Italy can be found in Tacitus.²⁵

The dispassionate observer is not likely to find any of the above solutions acceptable. If, then, emendation of *Aduae* is inevitable, the following possibilities should be weighed:

(a) Nipperdey bracketed *Padi et Aduae* as an intrusive gloss. Such glosses are certainly present in the text of M, most palpably at *H* II 28, 2 where the suspicious words *samitas sustentaculum columen* were found by Meiser (in 1884) and by C. Heraeus (in 1885) in Placidus. *Confluentes* may be used without a qualifying genitive. But this solution (which I adopted in my translation) is convenient rather than convincing. To speak of a 'confluence 16 miles away' seems to combine precision and imprecision in an implausible fashion, and it will be prudent to reserve this as a last resort if all else fails.

(b) Valmaggi's *Ardae* (or Hardy's *Adrae*: the metathesis was posited on grounds of palaeographic probability) has been mentioned above. The Torrente Arda now enters the Po 8 mp south of Cremona, flowing from the south-west, though it is possible that the confluence may have been a little nearer to Cremona in the past.²⁶ Attractive as this solution

²³ Against the theory of a change in the course of the Adda see Passerini 43, n. 104. The relevant 1:25,000 maps are 60 I SE. (Grumello Cremonese), 60 II NE. (Monticelli d' Ongina) and 61 III NW. (Cremona). Note particularly: (i) the 'high' ground (50 m) at Spinadesco between the lower course of the Adda (banks 47-39 m) and Cremona (ca. 46 m); and (ii) the course of the Cavo Morbasco.

²⁴ *Tacitus* 679. This view was attacked by Koestermann.

²⁵ I have tried to balance the good and the bad qualities of our author as a military historian in ch. IV of *Tacitus*, ed. T. A. Dorey (London, 1969).

²⁶ There is an Arda Morta NE. of the village of Soarza.

of our troubles is,²⁷ it ought to be rejected, for the Othonians north of the Po cannot have as the objective of the second day's march a confluence on the south bank of the river.

(c) No other conjecture has, so far as I know, been offered. The MS evidence, not hitherto fully known, must be inspected. M and Group Ia, our 'best' manuscripts, concur in presenting *adue* or *abdue*, the additional letter of the latter reflecting the alternative spelling *Addua*. U and II (including L) show *agde*, of which III's *agile* seems to be a misreading. If *Aduae* is rejected, our starting-point ought to be the apparently independent *agde*, for even if we believe that U is influenced by M, this spelling cannot be a distortion of M's clear and superficially intelligible reading. Two explanations remain:

1. Tacitus did in fact provide the correct name of the Cremonese river, a name supplanted for centuries by the description *Naviglio Civico* and not now attested. A search through early Cremonese documents might conceivably yield it. Olivieri²⁸ speaks of 'Addella' as the name of a canal referred to in Cremonese papers, and some form like *Adula* may have existed as a diminutive for the smaller sister of the Adua. It is to be noted that Strabo (4, 3, 3) wrongly causes the Adua to rise from Mount Adula (St. Gotthard massif), a confusion less reprehensible if he knew of a River Adula, assumed that this was an alternative name of the Adua and connected the better-known river wrongly with the homonymous mountain. But all this is highly conjectural and beyond proof or debate.²⁹

2. It seems likely, in view of the silence of the geographers, that the name of Cremona's comparatively insignificant river was not generally known outside the immediate vicinity. Tacitus therefore, failing to discover it from his source(s) or by enquiry, may have contented himself with an allusion to the confluence of the Po 'and one of its tributaries'. Pliny the Elder's word for 'tributary' in his catalogue of the Po waters is *incola*.³⁰ The word does not occur in Tacitus in this sense. For this our author employed—once, and once only, in the extant portions of his works—the form *accola*.³¹ This will suit *H II*, 40 also, the process of corruption being *accolae/acole/acde/agde*. Ignorance of the special meaning of *accola* or mistrust of the corrupted forms of it at various stages in the transmission generated the interpolated *adue* of M and Ia.³² I now read therefore, in preference to bracketing, *confluentes Padi et accolae fluminum*, 'the confluence of the River Po and one of its tributaries'.³³ Once the Po and the distance has been specified, further information was unnecessary.

7. THE BRIDGE AS THE OTHONIAN OBJECTIVE

We have now reached a point in our argument at which it may be claimed to be probable that Tacitus intends to tell us at *H II*, 40 that the goal of the Othonians' second-day march was the mouth of the Cavo Morbasco, and that the bridge under construction by Caecina lay slightly upstream of the confluence, at a distance of 3 mp in a bee-line from the centre of Cremona (slightly more from the Vitellian camp). To these distances we must add perhaps half-a-mile in calculating the mileage by road. What was the purpose of the advance—and of the bridge-building?

Plutarch (*O 10*), having recounted Otho's retirement to Brixillum after the council of war, describes in some detail the attempt of the Othonians on the south bank to destroy the bridge under construction by Caecina: συνέβη δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις καὶ περὶ τὸν Ἡριδανὸν ἀγῶνα γενέσθαι, τοῦ μὲν Κεκίνα ζευγνύντος τὴν διάβασιν, τῶν δὲ Ὀθωνῶν εἰργόντων καὶ προσμαχομένων, κτλ. The corresponding passage in Tacitus (*II*, 34–5)

²⁷ Koestermann's defence (27) of *Adra* is noteworthy: 'Da es ostwärts Cremona heute in diesem Raum keine Zuflüsse von nennenswerter Bedeutung zum Po gibt, . . . musste Tacitus notgedrungen einen der zahlreichen Flussläufe, die vom Süden her dem Po zustreben, zur Ortsbestimmung wählen.' But if the sources of Tacitus and Plutarch were ignorant of any northern confluence near Cremona, why not say that the Othonians were aiming at the area of the bridge? But of course a historian sufficiently well informed to know of the insignificant Arda will also have been sufficiently well informed to know of what is now called the *Naviglio Civico*; and he will have referred to the latter, not the former.

²⁸ *Dizionario* . . . 46.

²⁹ There are few Latin river-names relating to Italy and ending in *-ula* or *-ella*. I have found only Albula, Angitula, Bersula, Entella and Himella.

³⁰ *NH III*, 131.

³¹ *A I* 79, 3 'Tiberim . . . *accolis fluviiis orbatum*'. In this adjectival sense the word is rare.

³² *Padi et Aduae* could have been prompted by Polybius *II*, 32 or Strabo *IV*, 192, etc.

³³ In 1970 my pupil Mr. C. J. Cressey suggested *aculae*, even nearer to *agde*; but *fluminum* is incompatible with it; and *accola* often has the form *accula* with the glossaries.

omits some of Plutarch's details while loitering over the technical measures designed to prevent the distortion of the bridge by the rising level of the Po, and introduces—or appears to introduce—the suggestion that the whole undertaking was not a serious enterprise of war, but largely a mere exercise designed to keep the troops busy while they waited for the Othonians to make a false move: 34, 1 ' quieti intentique Caecina ac Valens quando hostis imprudentia rueret, quod loco sapientiae est, alienam stultitiam opperiebantur, inchoato ponte transitum Padi simulantes aduersus oppositam gladiatorum manum, ac ne ipsorum miles segne otium tereret '. The motive attributed, a desire to threaten Otho's gladiators opposite, and to prevent slackness among their own troops, is hard to believe. The former (only later reinforced) were only 2,000 in number, and could be left to wear themselves out (as they did) in attempts to cross the river in the face of the more skilled Batavians, while the bridge-building was a considerable engineering feat (as Tacitus' own narrative implies), making far heavier demands on men and materials than could be justified for a mere training-exercise carried out 20 miles from an enemy army. Furthermore the words in Plutarch's narrative (*O* 10) that correspond to *transitum Padi simulantes* are ζευγνύντος τὴν διόβωσιν, and suspicion attaches to *simulantes*, a term whose interpretation, if not impossible (cf. *RhM* 103, 1960, 280 f.), is certainly speculative. 'Pretence' is not what is naturally suggested by the accounts of either Tacitus or Plutarch. I propose therefore to read *transitum Padi simul <copul>antes* to provide an exact verbal parallel with Plutarch by means of a word often used by Pliny the Elder, one of Tacitus' principal sources. The expression *transitum copulare* will be a variant for the more usual *pontem iungere*. The sudden introduction of the notion of a 'pretended' crossing on the part of the Vitellians need no longer impose upon the reader a bewilderment which adds a further question-mark to any reconstruction of this campaign.

Whatever the motives of Caecina, his bridge was clearly the target aimed at by Otho's generals. If Tacitus has failed to state this in so many words, and has indicated the goal of the second day's march without adding for our information that the incompleting bridge lay a little upstream of the confluence and hence perhaps a mile from the proposed site of the Othonian encampment, there is nothing to surprise us in this. Brief narration will omit the inessential;³⁴ and sometimes the essential—at any rate in Tacitus—will be merely hinted at, though the well-informed reader to whom the historian addresses himself might have been expected to put two and two together. But given the known circumstances of April, 69, a pedantic fullness of exposition was unnecessary. The Othonians never managed to build their second marching-camp; still less did they prevent the bridge-building. The battle was fought and lost on the way, and the relative topography of the proposed Othonian camp, the confluence and the Vitellian bridge had scarcely any impact upon the course of events. What did matter—and this Tacitus has stated through Paulinus—was the dangerous proximity to the Vitellian camp of the chosen route.

But if we condone Tacitus' brevity in this particular, we cannot be so indulgent towards another silence of our author which jeopardizes the credibility of his picture of a soldier-emperor who threw away a battle in a fit of depression and renounced an empire still within his grasp by an act of unexpected altruism. Before we can understand the significance and value of this act, we need to know many things which Tacitus, while hastening on to the drama and pathos of the suicide, has failed to tell us. The two most serious omissions in *Histories* II are a statement of Otho's own strategy as put forward at the Bedriacum council-of-war and an appreciation of the military position on 15 April after the First Battle of Cremona had been lost. These omissions have perplexed every reader of this book and have called forth a mass of speculation; they must tell heavily against Tacitus' competence as a military historian.

His version of the Othonian council-of-war at Bedriacum is remarkable. By the time we reach it (II, 32–3), we have gathered that heavy reinforcements have been summoned to North Italy by Otho from Pannonia, Dalmatia and Moesia, and that meantime his policy, now that the Alps have been crossed by the enemy with unexpected ease despite the earliness of the season, is to contain them on the line of the Po. Despite the loss of Cremona (not explicitly mentioned by Tacitus), the placing of Othonian forces at Placentia, opposite

³⁴ Cicero, *De Inuentione* 1, 28 (among others).

Cremona, at Brixellum and at Bedriacum (the last commanding the road to Verona and Aquileia), makes it clear that Otho meant to stand and fight in North Italy. The main question to be settled at the council is, when and where is battle to be joined? Caecina and Valens are waiting at Cremona. Vitellius, with minor forces, is far away on the Rhine. The initiative appears to lie with Otho.

The issue at stake is clearly stated (II, 31, 2): are the Othonians to fight at once or postpone a decision? The choice is still open. Tacitus begins his account by recording at considerable length the arguments for delay as presented by Suetonius Paulinus and seconded by Marius Celsus and Annius Gallus. The arguments are sound, and events are to prove them so. The reader now expects that the case for immediate action will be put into the mouth of Titianus, Proculus or Otho. No such contrasting speech is offered. All we are told is that Otho is set upon an immediate decision and is backed in this attitude by the toadying Titianus and Proculus, who 'imperitia properantes . . . in adulationem concesserant'. The impression conveyed to the reader is that Otho was the victim of an irrational and overpowering impulse, unable to bear the thought of delay, infatuated and driven mysteriously to his doom. So later (40), 'rem in discrimen mitti iubebat, aeger mora et spei impatiens'. It is difficult to believe that any council-of-war could have been conducted on such theatrical lines. So far, Otho has acted sensibly, if cautiously. The initial supposition that the Vitellians would find it impossible to cross the Alps before the snow melted in April was not unreasonable, even if falsified by events on this occasion by an early spring. The movement order sent to the Balkan legions was bringing them steadily towards North Italy. Even the diversionary attack on Liguria, admittedly bungled in the execution, was not ill-conceived and in no way weakened the main Othonian concentration. It is often forgotten that Otho had governed Lusitania for ten years, and had stood by Galba at a time when the latter had himself almost despaired. The plot against Galba, however reprehensible, had been carried through with daring and success. For Tacitus' strange silence on the arguments for immediate action a number of reasons could be imagined—at the worst a deliberate manipulation of the story for dramatic purposes: more probably, lack of evidence combined with lack of curiosity.³⁵ After April, 69 it was in no one's interest to defend the actions and policies of Otho (though the suicide was in due course to be exploited as a paradox), and Suetonius Paulinus, whose memoirs Tacitus appears to have used, would be in no way anxious to represent as rational a strategy he had opposed. Indeed, in his humiliating obeisance to Vitellius at Lyon, he must necessarily have based his claim to credit for sabotaging the Othonian attack upon an allegation that he believed this attack to be not only untimely but prejudicial to the welfare of Rome. In a controversial passage of polemical tone, Tacitus asserts that Paulinus can never have believed that a reconciliation was possible between the opposing armies without a decision by armed conflict. This view attributed to Paulinus—but rendered implausible by various incidents recorded by Tacitus himself³⁶—may well have been originally advanced by the defeated general as an excuse both for serving and for betraying (as he claimed) an emperor in whom he had lost faith. If, as seems likely, a character so devious wrote memoirs to justify himself, he will have passed over in silence the arguments in favour of immediate action and contented himself, as does Tacitus, with the allegation that Otho's mind was unhinged. Only by condemning Otho could Suetonius justify himself.

But arguments for immediate action must certainly have been ventilated at Bedriacum. Since the only move made by the enemy was the building of the bridge near Cremona, since the area of the bridge was the area in which the Othonians hoped to set up their advance-camp and since finally the build-up of the Othonian forces to a position of numerical superiority was proceeding, it is obvious that it was the danger of a Vitellian crossing of the Po at Cremona that was believed by Otho to override all other considerations. Apart from the threat of this crossing, circumstances invited delay. But if once Caecina completed his

³⁵ Koestermann's view that Tacitus did not explain Proculus' plan 'wegen seiner offenbaren Torheit' is scarcely convincing. The variety of reasons offered by Plutarch (O 8-9) shows that no clear account was available of Otho's motives for speed.

³⁶ For instance, the mysterious visit of the two Othonian praetorian tribunes—very probably, as

Passerini suggests, from Flavius Sabinus' force on the south bank opposite—paid to Caecina on the morning of 14 April (41, 1). The *aliquod honestum consilium* could have been an armistice and the remission to the senate of the choice of an emperor, as opposed to the *inhonestum consilium* of going over to Vitellius.



1. THE CONFLUENCE OF THE PO AND THE CAVO MORBASCO
2. THE CAVO MORBASCO: VIEW LOOKING NORTHWARDS FROM THE CONFLUENCE (see p. 35)

Photographs by the author. Copyright reserved

bridge, the Vitellians would be in a position to maintain a holding force in Cremona, march rapidly south with the bulk of their forces, block the Appennine passes, occupy Rome, and command the prestige and resources that its possession conferred. For Otho it was important to prevent a headlong rush to Rome. As his forces from the Balkans arrived and the balance of advantage swung more and more in his favour, it became increasingly urgent to keep the Vitellians stationary until the moment of the kill arrived. This is the main reason why Otho was *pronus ad decertandum* (less tendentiously Tacitus might have written *certandum*), why he sent urgent letters and couriers to his commanders, and why he himself retained a sizeable force at Brixellum in order to head off any Vitellian troops who despite everything might succeed in crossing the Po and making down the Via Aemilia. That the advance of the main Othonian army against the bridge took place according to a pre-arranged timetable is clear from the fact that the attack by the gladiators—unsuccessful, as it happened—delivered on 14 April across the Po to distract the Batavians synchronized with this advance.

8. THE ARRIVAL OF THE BALKAN LEGIONS

Any appreciation of the strategical situation facing Otho during the period of 10–15 April involves some attempt to answer a vexed question which is posed by the inadequacy of Tacitus' narrative.³⁷ What progress had the Balkan legions made on their march from their respective stations towards Bedriacum? Were they so near as to lend colour to Henderson's theory of encirclement, or so distant as to put it (as many believe) completely out of court?³⁸ Discussion of this problem is hampered by paucity of data; but in fact enough are available to provide a rather clearer picture than has so far emerged. We know the location of the legions concerned (except that of XIII), and the distances that separated these places from Bedriacum and Rome. The plentiful evidence of Roman speeds of travel by various means suggests that it is reasonable to assume a speed of legionary march of 15 mp daily over many consecutive days; and for the movement of mounted couriers carrying urgent official dispatches 100 mp daily will not be far wrong. Luckily some check upon these assumptions is possible; and if they turn out to be justified, it should be feasible to deduce the progress of the legions as a whole.

Now the vexillation of XIII was present at Bedriacum by 4 April, for it took part in the engagement *ad Castores* on the following day.³⁹ Tacitus has informed us that the vexillations preceded the main legionary parties *modicis interuallis*. The dispatch of a portion of each legion shortly before the departure of the main body implies what is inherently probable—that Otho's orders as issued from Rome stressed the need for the utmost speed. It may well have been possible for the legates to send off vexillations of 2,000 men apiece at 48 hours' notice. But the main parties cannot have moved so quickly. They will have required several days for mobilization, however urgent the situation. Auxiliaries had to be drafted in to the garrison-towns to replace the departing legionaries. Outlying parties of troops engaged on building or reconnaissance had to be recalled. Supplies for a long march must be organized. The minimum time requisite for these purposes is likely to have been six days.⁴⁰ Let us disregard the advance-parties and concentrate upon the main legionary bodies. So far as XIII is concerned, it must have arrived at Bedriacum about 7 April or shortly thereafter. We know that it was present in full strength at the First Battle of Cremona on 14 April. The distance of its H.Q., Poetovio, from Bedriacum—352 mp—presupposes a march of 24 days,

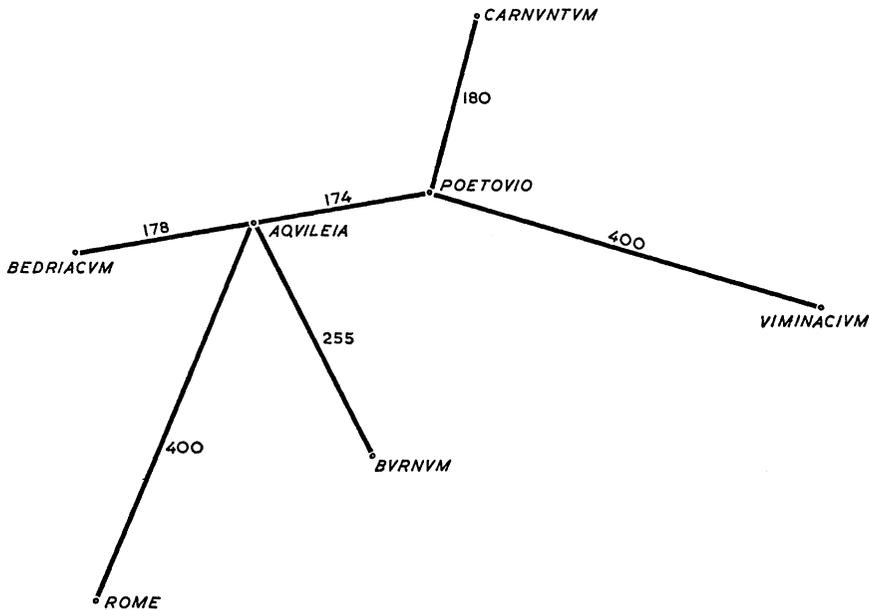
³⁷ Hardy, *JP* 145: 'It was the unaccountable slowness of the Danube army which deranged the sound defence strategy of the Senatorial generals.'

³⁸ Henderson's reconstruction of the Othonian plan made much of an alleged pincers-movement whereby the Vitellians were to be caught between a western and an eastern Othonian force. It is a weakness of this and similar theories that the exact whereabouts of the approaching Balkan legions is not stated (and perhaps was not clearly known) by Tacitus. It was therefore easy for Henderson's critics to dismiss his doctrine by pointing to the certain absence of the Moesian legions from North Italy and the element of doubt surrounding the position of the others.

³⁹ I adopt this date for *ad Castores* from F. Koester, *Der Marsch der Invasionsarmee des Fabius Valens . . .*, (Diss. Münster 1927), 18; and cf. L. Holzapfel, *Klio* 13 (1913), 289 ff.

⁴⁰ If the behaviour of XIII and its vexillations is typical, we can claim that the main parties cannot have arrived later than 14 less 5 = 9 days after their vexillations; and on the other hand the dispatch of the legions in two parties would hardly have any point if less than 2 or 3 days intervened. On this reckoning the range within which the interval must fall is 3–9 days. Bearing in mind the adjective *modicis* (*interuallis*), I find 4 days or thereabouts a probable estimate.

and consequently a departure from Poetovio about 14 March. The movement-order therefore arrived on 8 March, and left Rome, 574 mp away, on 3 March. A similar order will have been sent at the same time over the 974 mp to VII Claudia at Viminacium, arriving there, after 10 days, on 12 March. This legion should have been set in motion on 18 March, and it should, on our calculations, have traversed the 574 mp to Aquileia in 38 days, arriving there on 24 April. Since this situation accords with the information given us by Tacitus and Suetonius,⁴¹ we may with some confidence proceed to apply the same style of calculation to the movements of the other legions chiefly involved. The following picture emerges:



Movement-Order from Rome	Formation	Base	Distance from Rome	Arrival of M.-O.	Start	Arrival	
						Aquileia (distances travelled)	Bedriacum (distances travelled)
3 March	XIII	Poetovio	574	8 March	14 March	26 March (174)	7 April (352)
„	XI	Burnum	655	9 March	?15 March	?2 April (255)	?13 April (433)
„	XIII	?	?679	9 March	15 March	3 April	15 April (?467)
„	VII Gem.	Carnuntum	759	10 March	16 March	8 April (354)	(20 April) (530)
„	VII Cl.	Viminacium	974	12 March	18 March	24 April (574)	—

Some of these dates invite comment. Those assigned to the movement of XIII have been extrapolated from an arrival-date at Bedriacum which must be late enough to prevent its presence at the First Battle of Cremona, but early enough to enable Suetonius Paulinus to say at the council-of-war on 10-12 April: ⁴² 'paucis diebus quartam decimam legionem . . . adfore' (II, 32, 2) and to render credible the *atrox mendacium* spread at Bononia

⁴¹ *H II*, 85, 1; Suet., *Vesp.* 6, 2.

⁴² No date is given by Tacitus for the Othonian council-of-war, but it must have taken place after the arrival of Otho, Titianus and Proculus, and

before 13 April. If Otho left Rome on 15 March and travelled at an average speed of 15 mp daily, he would have reached Bedriacum (390 mp away) on 9 April. Possible dates are therefore 10, 11 and 12 April.

on 15 or 16 April by the designing freedman Coenus, 'adfirmans superuentu quartae decimae legionis, iunctis a Brixello uiribus, caesos uictores' (54, 1). The fictitious story of a reversal of fortune would have gained enormously in credibility if it was believed that XIII was not far from Bedriacum on the day of battle. If, then, this legion arrived on 15 April, just too late to be of use, the defeated Othonians, including XIII itself, may well have tortured themselves later with the bitter-sweet thought that the issue of the encounter might have been different if this seasoned formation had only arrived two days earlier.⁴³ Herein perhaps lies the true explanation of a mysterious criticism with which Tacitus rounds off his characterization of XIII at 11, 1: 'sed quo plus uirium ac roboris, e fiducia tarditas inerat.' Without necessarily accepting Tacitus' allegation of excessive confidence, we can understand that an arrival too late by such a narrow margin may have prompted the historian's complaint of *tarditas*.⁴⁴ The location of XIII before its move to North Italy in March-April has been much debated, though the matter is of minor importance. Opinion hesitates between Dalmatia and Pannonia. If we think that the legion lay at a spot east of Poetovio at such a distance from Bedriacum that a message leaving Rome on 3 March would cause the formation to reach Bedriacum soon after the battle, about 15 April, then the eight days' time-lag in comparison with the arrival of XIII suggests an additional distance to be covered of 105 mp (7 days at 15 mp; one day at 105 mp). Carodunum on the Drave or Siscia on the Save are possible sites on this assumption. Those who prefer a station in Dalmatia should remember that this is likely to have been Tilurium (Gardun), fifty miles south-east of Burnum, and should be prepared to explain why a legion which, on this hypothesis, overtook XI on the same road should be singled out for an accusation of *tarditas*.

But there are other matters of more moment. The ambitious commander of VII Galbiana, Antonius Primus, played no direct part in the Cremona campaign, despite a series of offers by letter sent to Otho.⁴⁵ The table explains why. The vital battle was fought before he arrived, and probably before even the vexillation of his legion had reached Bedriacum.

The behaviour of XI from Burnum is a little puzzling. All that Tacitus in fact allows us to say is that it was in North Italy probably before mid-April, certainly before mid-May (II, 67, 2). There is no allusion to its having taken part in the First Battle of Cremona on 14 April, so that the logically acceptable date of 13 April provided by the table may be too optimistic. The slowness of XI can be readily explained on the analogy of its dilatory arrival in the theatre of war in the autumn: III, 50, 1-2, 'profligato iam bello . . . undecima legio sese adiunxerat, initio cunctata'. The governor of the province of Dalmatia at that time, M. Pompeius Silvanus, was 'socors bello et dies rerum uerbis terens' (ibid.), and no great show of vigour was to be expected. It will be safest therefore to give XI another week for its relatively short journey, and to conclude that it arrived in Aquileia about 9 April, and took no part in the battle.⁴⁶

⁴³ For the resentment of the Othonians cf. II, 44; 66, 1; 86, 1; III, 24, 1 (reading *cur irati*).

⁴⁴ The difficulties inherent in this sentence are discussed by Heubner 52 f. I have dealt with some aspects in *RhM* 103 (1960), 272-4.

⁴⁵ II, 86, 2.

⁴⁶ On the governors of Dalmatia at the time see J. J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (London 1969), 84 and 444. The chronological context of II, 66, 1 *angebatur Vitellium* is after the emperor's departure from Lyon on or about 25 April, and some time before his arrival at Cremona on 23 May. One of his dispositions was to order XIII to build amphitheatres at Cremona and Bononia, an operation that will surely have taken some weeks, but which, so far as Cremona was concerned, was finished before 23 May. Unless Tacitus has transposed the sequence of events, Vitellius' anxiety, based on the arrival of the message from Italy, must have arisen soon after his leaving Lyon. It seems therefore probable that all the legions specifically mentioned by Tacitus, I, XIII, XIII, VII (Galbiana, presumably) and XI, were in Italy, and at different places in Italy, by about 20

April. It will be noted from our table that the one legion among those with which we are closely concerned which had not arrived in Italy by this date was VII Claudia, which seems not to figure in Tacitus' list either. For the location of these legions on 15 April see below, p. 50. (The remnants of I were at Bedriacum.) After the capitulation no formation is likely to have moved until Vitellius' order dispersed them. There are slight hints of the surrender of the scattered Balkan legions at II, 49, 4 ('alisque in castris' and 52, 1 'posito ubique bello'). At 67, 2 'undecima ac septima suis hibernis redditae', Tacitus has unfortunately failed to avoid serious ambiguity because he has not qualified *septima* by *Galbiana*. It is clear from the table that this is indeed the legion meant, and the only excuse one can offer for Tacitus' lapse is that the *legio Claudia* is first mentioned specifically at II, 85. Thereafter the two legions are nearly always carefully distinguished. But since Tacitus is so shortly to tell us that VII Claudia advanced to Aquileia (admittedly a few days later), the omission here is careless.

The table assumes that the movement-order sent from Rome about 3 March was dispatched to the legions of Moesia as well as those of Pannonia and Dalmatia. Such would seem to be the obvious course for Otho to pursue if a force markedly superior to anything that Vitellius could muster was to be assembled as soon as possible in North Italy. But the key-passage of Tacitus (*H* II, 11, 1) merely says ‘laeta interim Othoni principia belli, motis ad imperium eius e Dalmatia Pannoniaque exercitibus. fuere quattuor legiones, e quibus bina milia praemissa’ (there follows a reference to VII Galbiana, XI, XIII and XIII, the garrison of these two provinces). Any participation by the Moesian legions in this movement can only be inferred, so far as Tacitus is concerned, from inexplicit allusions introduced quite casually in other connexions (II, 46, 3 ‘praemissi e Moesia’; 85, 1 ‘adcelerata interim Vespasiani coepta Illyrici exercitus studio transgressi in partes. tertia legio exemplum ceteris Moesiae legionibus praebuit . . . Aquileiam progressae . . . hostiliter egerant . . .’), but Suetonius, who is well informed, puts the matter quite clearly: *Vesp.* 6, 2 ‘Moesiaci exercitus bina e tribus legionibus missa auxilio Othoni . . . Aquileiam usque perseuerauerunt’. It is therefore beyond question that an identical movement-order was sent by Otho to all seven legions in the Balkans, and the uncertainty of Tacitus’ narrative probably reflects some vagueness in his own mind or in the narrative of the source(s) which he employed. But clarity here was a matter of moment for the understanding of the whole campaign of spring 69, and this is a decided weakness in *Histories* II.⁴⁷

A question arises concerning the identity of the *praemissi e Moesia* of II, 46, 3 present at Brixellum on 15 April. According to our table the vexillation of the nearest Moesian legion, VII Claudia, is unlikely to have reached Aquileia until 20 April, and the same story is told by Tacitus and Suetonius.⁴⁸ The only conclusion that can be drawn is that these *praemissi* are a force, perhaps mounted, sent off from the lower Danube well in advance of the legionaries to assure Otho that the latter were on the way from their distant H.Q.’s. Assuming for a mounted force a normal speed of 25 mp, we may consider that the distance between Viminacium and Bedriacum—752 mp—could have been covered in 30 days. This, counting from 15 March, would mean an arrival at Bedriacum by 13 April, two days before the date of the appeal they brought to Otho in Tacitus’ narrative. After the defeat on 14 April, they could have ridden post-haste to Brixellum in an attempt to reassure Otho, as the historian says they did, on 15 April. One of the two units of cavalry that scored an initial success for the Othonians was a Moesian regiment—not that Tacitus has bothered to tell us this in his description of the battle, for we must wait until the next book for this information (II, 41, 2 ‘equites’ = III, 2, 4 ‘duae tunc Pannonicae ac Moesicae alae perrupere hostem’). This secretive allusion could, but need not, be taken as confirmation of the arrival of some Moesian cavalry by 13 April at latest: in any event it does not conflict with the date suggested by Tacitus, Suetonius and our table for the arrival of the infantry of VII Claudia.

The troops from Moesia brought with them to Brixellum an encouraging message, formulated by Tacitus in language which has caused great difficulty: ‘*praemissi e Moesia* . . . legiones Aquileiam ingressas nuntiabant, ut nemo dubitet potuisse renouari bellum atrox lugubre incertum uictis et uictoribus.’ The natural understanding of this is that the news was that *Moesian* legionaries had entered Aquileia by the time the *praemissi* left it; but it is clear from our table, as well as from our sources, that this cannot have been so. Now *praemissi* arriving at Brixellum on 15 April must, if they continued to travel at 25 mp daily, have left Aquileia, 180 mp away, on 9 April. A glance at the table shows that the legion that entered Aquileia on the previous day was VII Gemina from Carnuntum. Misleading us by a rhetorical plural and the absence of any qualification Tacitus has written *legiones* for *legionem septimam Galbiana*.

A remarkable feature of our calculation is the late date—3 March—on which Otho

⁴⁷ Stevenson (*CAH* x, 820) suggested that the Moesian legions were detained by the invasion of Moesia by 9,000 cavalry of the Rhoxolani. But this invasion had been repulsed at latest by early February: *H* I, 79, esp. §5; III, 24, 2; *AF*, under 1 March (‘ob laurum positam’).

⁴⁸ Five days before, on 15 April, when the *praemissi*

spoke to Otho, it was in the neighbourhood of Emona, so that the remark attributed to them by Plutarch (*O* 15, ἀπαγγέλλουσι τὴν ἐκ Μυσίας ἡμῶν δύναμιν . . . ἤδη καταβαίνουσαν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἄδρια) is slightly optimistic, even if taken to apply to the vexillation of VII Claudia.

seems to have issued from Rome his movement-order to the Danube legions.⁴⁹ Some explanation for this lateness is forthcoming if we recollect the lapse of time necessary for the news of Otho's accession to be conveyed to the distant legions, for the oath of loyalty to be administered, and for news of this to return to Rome. The speed of these communications seems not to have been of the highest. At some time in late January or early February the Helvetii were still unaware⁵⁰ that Galba was dead, though an urgent message should have reached Aventicum and Vindonissa in a week, i.e. by 22 January. It will be well, therefore, to assume only the normal courier speed of 50 mp daily, especially as very long journeys indeed are involved in the double trips. In a context (I, 76, 1) which appears to be that of February, Tacitus refers to the messages of loyalty arriving from the Balkans: 'primus Othoni fiduciarum addidit ex Illyrico nuntius, iurasse in eum Dalmatiae ac Pannoniae et Moesiae legiones.' As the crow flies it is 765 mp from Novae to Rome, and even if we posit a sea-passage across the Adriatic (not necessarily a time-saver in winter) we must add at least one-third for the real distance by the shortest practicable route. A journey of 2,000 mp at the rate of 50 mp daily requires at least 40 days. News that the further Moesian legions (III Gallica at Oescus and VIII Augusta at Novae) had rallied to Otho cannot have reached him before 24 February, and more probably did so decidedly later. A similar interval of waiting is implied in the correspondence carried on at some length between Otho and Antonius Primus: II, 86, 1 (Antonius) 'praepositus a Galba septimae legioni'—we are as previously left to make the easy guess that this is *septima Galbiana*, despite *septima Claudiana* a little before at 85 1—'scriptitasse Othoni credebatur, ducem se partibus offerens; a quo neglectus in nullo Othoniani belli usu fuit'. This Delphic sentence has caused a good deal of trouble to the commentators, and the story that Antonius was slighted by Otho is probably baseless. The Tacitean context here is markedly anti-Antonian, and the historian has seized upon an allegation in some gossip-monger or pamphleteer in an attempt to show that Antonius was an ambitious and thwarted man. Otho for his part could have had no possible inducement to offend commanders upon whom he depended for his reinforcements. Antonius took no part in the campaign, not because Otho rejected his advances, but because the movement-order came too late to enable him to get from Poetovio to Bedriacum by 14 April.

There is therefore, after all, nothing inconsistent with our information in the dispatch of the movement-order so late as 3 March. If Caecina had been less daring and determined, if the Alpine passes had remained blocked by snow until April, as they usually are, an order sent in early March might still have allowed a heavy concentration of Othonian troops in the Po valley, ready and waiting to greet the Vitellians as they struggled down from the Great St. Bernard and the Mont Genève.⁵¹

9. OTHO'S PLANS AND THEIR EXECUTION

The issue of the movement-order on 3 March also fits in well enough with the well-attested fact that the emperor left Rome on 14 or 15 March⁵² with the last of the troops available in the capital.⁵³ He had been preceded by Suetonius Paulinus and Marius Celsus, and these in their turn by Annius Gallus and Vestricius Spurinna. Furthermore the diversionary force destined for Narbonese Gaul had also been dispatched.

The sequence and dating of these events must be painfully reconstructed, for the chapter of the *Historiae* that deals so unsatisfactorily with the approach of the Balkan legions

⁴⁹ Heubner underestimates Otho's difficulties when he concludes (53): 'Es kann doch keine Frage sein, dass Otho und seine militärischen Berater sich über die Entfernungen der Standorte und die für den Marsch von dort nach Oberitalien, wo man Widerstand zu leisten beabsichtigte, benötigten Zeiträume im klaren waren und der Marschbefehl an die vier Legionen schon längst vor der Schlacht ergangen war.' This was Heubner's answer to my introductory remark (272) that the legions were (in a general sense) summoned 'shortly before the First Battle'.

⁵⁰ I, 67, 1.

⁵¹ Judging retrospectively, Hardy was probably not

far wrong, though he made no detailed calculation, in stating (127) that 'Otho began to move a month and a half too late'. True: but a move at the end of January was not a political possibility. It is noteworthy that Tacitus explicitly denies that Otho was slow to move: I, 85, 1; 87; 89, 3; II, 11, 2-3.

⁵² I, 90, 1; *AFÄ* 'pr. id. Mart. uota nu(n)cupata pro s[al]ute et reditu [Vitellii] Germanici imp.' The inscription was carved after Otho's death, and Vitellius' name gauchely inserted.

⁵³ Some few units (*cohortes urbanae*?) were left behind: 55, 1 'quod erat in urbe militum'.

is equally brief, indeed misleading, with regard to the movements from Rome. Otho's plans and their upshot fall into five successive phases:

(a) *The Period of Waiting*

The full extent of the Rhine movement and the claim of Vitellius to the principate only became general knowledge in Rome after the death of Galba, who, in the last days of his life, had managed to hush the matter up. It may be doubted whether the realities of the situation were completely known to Otho before 15 January, since it is apparent from Tacitus' account that the misgivings of Galba and his decision to pass Otho over as his heir in favour of Piso Licinianus will have entailed Otho's exclusion from the inner council of state. After Otho became emperor, the threat will have become painfully clear. Whether a compromise solution ought to be attempted and whether a head-on collision should be faced depended on the extent to which Otho was recognized by the legions other than those commanded by Vitellius.⁵⁴ The time-factor, which rendered the reactions of Africa, Egypt and the East of minor importance, correspondingly emphasized the key role of the Danubian, and above all the Pannonian, legions. The formation nearest to Italy were the Vitellian XXI Rapax at Vindonissa in Upper Germany and the Othonian—as it proved—XIII at Poetovio in Pannonia. But in January–February XXI had a Helvetian war on its hands, and was separated from Italy by the winter snows of the Pennine Alps. Between XIII and Aquileia lay less than 200 miles by an easy access; and strung out beyond XIII lay VII Gemina, XIII and XI, to say nothing of the distant garrison of Moesia, VII Claudia, III and VIII. Until Otho was assured of the support of all these, or at least of the Pannonian legions, he had no prospects of winning a war against the Rhine armies. His first action will therefore have been to appeal to the Balkan troops for recognition. That recognition was forthcoming, but from Poetovio the news cannot have reached Rome before 7 February, from Carnuntum before 14 February, from Viminacium before 22 February. From the lower Danube messengers will only have arrived in early March. It is against this background of initial suspense and growing confidence that we must set the diplomatic exchanges of Vitellius and Otho, who progressed from conciliatory gestures to fusillades of vilification, 'neuter falso.'

By the end of February, even by its middle, Otho had no longer any need to pretend. The ultimate prospects in terms of military strength were by no means poor, and in due course—hardly before March—he will have received the gratifying information that Vespasian and Mucianus had already caused their troops to swear allegiance. But the key decision was that of the Pannonian legions. It is not surprising that in January emissaries were on their way from the Rhineland to the Pannonian legions to appeal for their support. As it happened, these officers and their symbolic *dextrae* never reached their destination. By an odd turn of fortune, they were arrested and detained by the Helvetian militia, whose countrymen were to pay for this tactless intervention in Rome's civil wars by suffering in February a furious onslaught from the indignant Caecina and the infuriated XXI Rapax. But even if the deputation had arrived in Carnuntum or Poetovio, it is doubtful whether the appeal for support would have evoked a favourable response. Jealousy between the armies of the Rhine and the Danube⁵⁵ inflamed by the ambitious partizanship of the commander of VII Galbiana, Antonius Primus, would in any case have swung them behind Otho—a usurper indeed, but promptly recognized by the senate. Thanks to the arrest effected by the Helvetians, it is possible that another, admittedly minor, motive that prompted the Pannonians to accept Otho rather than Vitellius was similar to that which caused the Orient so to act: 'non partium studio, sed erat grande momentum in nomine urbis ac praetexto senatus, et occupauerat animos prior auditus.'

In this period of waiting we may place the arrival of Othonian agents in the Rhineland and of Vitellian agents in Rome. The interval was filled by Otho with the discharge of civil business. The new emperor showed himself on the whole to be a judicious and tactful, even a vigorous ruler: 'dissimulata luxuria et cuncta ad decorem imperii composita.' But preparations for the likely conflict went quietly on. On the one hand, Tacitus claims that Otho fulfilled the duties of his office as if there were not a cloud in the sky; but on the other he soon remarks on the clatter of arms, the visage of war, the rise in the cost of living and

⁵⁴ I, 76, 1–2.

⁵⁵ II, 60, 1; 74, 1; Suet., *Vesp.* 6.

all the signs of grim things to come. As Vitellius and Otho grew ever more confident and blustering, war was approaching Italy. By the latter part of February Gallus and Spurrinna had been sent off to secure the line of the Po, for they seem to have been in position, the former in the Mantua area, the latter at Placentia, by the middle of March. By this time the Regio Transpadana had been occupied by the auxiliary forces of Caecina, though the legions were still descending from the Great St. Bernard. Otho had not expected such a speedy advance. The passes are normally blocked until the snow melts in April; but on this occasion warm weather must have come early, and in any case Caecina showed great skill—a skill for which Tacitus accords no word of recognition—in getting heavy forces up and down the steep inclines of the Roman road over the pass without notable difficulty or delay. It was in the mistaken belief that the mountains were still impassable to Valens and Caecina that Otho sent off, apparently in late February, a small naval force to stage a diversionary attack on the province of Narbonese Gaul, which had declared for Vitellius.⁵⁶ This was successful in detaching a contingent of Valens' force; but the conflict was ineffectual, and the two sides poorly led. This was a side issue that had no perceptible effect upon the conduct of the war, though if better led and stronger the expedition might have achieved something. At least the strategy that prompted it was not ill-judged.

(b) *The Quickening of the Pace*

Towards the end of February or at the very beginning of March, two events conspired to add greater urgency to Otho's measures. It had by now become clear beyond a doubt that both Pannonia and Moesia were ready to accept and champion him. By early March the first messengers from Judaea and Syria could also have arrived with pleasant tidings. On the other hand, it was clear that Caecina was now preparing to bring his legions over the Alps, despite the season, and that these had been preceded by auxiliaries sent to reinforce a turnout unit in the Regio Transpadana and to hold this area for the reception of the invading legions. It was true that Valens had not yet crossed the Mt. Genève,⁵⁷ but the establishment of strong Vitellian forces in north-west Italy was a serious thing. The conflict was going to come a month earlier than Otho had anticipated.

On 3 March, urgent orders were sent to all the Balkan legions, requiring their commanders to get some proportion of their forces on the road immediately and to follow as soon as possible with their main parties. The cavalry was to precede, and travelling at a speed considerably greater than that of infantry might fill any developing gap as a temporary measure. Even the distant Moesian legions were set in motion, now that the Sarmatian invasion had been dealt with. Though this had been repulsed in the main by Legio III, all the legionary commanders, and *a fortiori* the governor of the province, were awarded generous recognition when, late in February, the laurelled letters came to Rome. Upon this success Otho plumed himself. It was a welcome fillip to his prestige; and its rapid achievement had the additional advantage of making it safe to withdraw the legions forthwith for action in North Italy. At the same time, Suetonius Paulinus and Marius Celsus, already designated⁵⁸ as commanders-in-chief, were sent off to the north (apparently without troops)

⁵⁶ At I, 87 ('Poeninae Cottiaeque Alpes et ceteri Galliarum aditus Vitellianis exercitibus claudbantur'), *exercitibus* is usually taken as an instrumental ablative. But a dative is possible and indeed yields better sense since (a) not all the Gallic passes were shut by Caecina and Valens; (b) a motive for an attack on Gaul is provided not by a Vitellian occupation of the passes but by a belief that North Italy was still safe from invasion because the passes were blocked by snow; thus troops could be spared to prevent a Vitellian advance along the coast of Liguria and/or to stage a possible attack on Gallia Narbonensis. To divert these troops when North Italy was imminently threatened by invasion would have been a very eccentric plan of campaign.

⁵⁷ F. Koester, o.c. (cf. n. 39), brings Valens to Briançon on 20 March, to Turin on 30 March.

⁵⁸ I, 87, 2 'destinati' (date imprecise). There is no mention of them, as we feel there should be, at II,

II, 2. Heubner (55) holds that they left Rome with Otho. It is more likely that they preceded him without troops, since only 20 days separate 15 March and 3 April (allowing a short interval before *ad Castores*), and this would imply a march of 18 mp daily over 20 consecutive days—too high a rate. Furthermore the troops murmured against them at the time of Macer's successful crossing of the Po (II, 23, 2) apparently at the end of March; and there must be time for Otho, informed of the troops' grievances while marching north, to summon Titianus from Rome. The latter arrives at Bedriacum in time for the council-of-war. At II, 23, 5 I take *accitum* as happening in late March, and *praeposuit* as operative about 10 April. It seems to follow that Paulinus left Rome about 10 March without troops (hence the omission of his name at II, 11) and made a quick journey of 7–8 days on horseback, arriving in the north in the latter half of March.

and arrived to assume command in the Bedriacum-Cremona area about mid-March. Otho himself left Rome on 14 or 15 March, taking with him a number of prominent senators as hostages for the behaviour of their colleagues. Soon after leaving Rome, he received complaints that Suetonius Paulinus, Annius Gallus and Marius Celsus—who must therefore all have been present and in command around Bedriacum by mid-March—were failing to show sufficient offensive spirit. Otho's answer to this was to bring up from Rome, where he had just left him, his brother Salvius Titianus. As the latter was clearly not in command in the north when *ad Castores* was fought, he may only have managed to catch up with Otho and arrive at Brixellum and Bedriacum in his company.⁵⁹ Since the council-of-war at Bedriacum, held about 10 April, at which they were present must have been held shortly after the arrival, Otho had, since 15 March, taken some 23 days to cover the 390 miles involved at the speed of 15–16 miles daily, which is what we should expect.

(c) *The Situation on 10 April*

The time-table proposed above shows that on 10 April the disposition of the advancing Othonian legions (I omit XI as a doubtful element) was as follows:

XIII	Bedriacum
XVIII	Ateste
VII Gem.	Concordia
VII Cl.	Near Iovia (35 mp east of Poetovio)

Within ten days two, or, if we count XI, three, legions could be expected to arrive at Bedriacum. The advantage of waiting must have been quite obvious not only to cautious commanders like Suetonius Paulinus, but to any commonsense observer. They are clearly set out by Tacitus. What were the objections to delay? Despite the silence of Tacitus,⁶⁰ it is fair to suppose that they were at least equally weighty. Admittedly it was not to be feared after the *ad Castores* fiasco that the Vitellians would march out from their camp and risk an onslaught on the Othonians entrenched at Bedriacum; and had such a threat been thought to exist, the proper course would have been to remain within the camp and thus neutralize the enemy's advantage in superior numbers. Even after a considerable part of the Othonian army had been routed at Cremona, the victorious Vitellians approached Bedriacum with some misgivings. This, then, was not a reason for action immediately. What was to be feared on 10 April was that Caecina would shortly complete his bridge⁶¹ and permit the Vitellians to cross the Po and head for Rome, bypassing both Bedriacum and Brixellum. It was essential at all costs to keep the enemy north of the Po until the Othonian build-up had given them numerical and strategical superiority. This was the overriding reason for

⁵⁹ Tacitus introduces his mention of Otho's decision to replace the high command after describing Macer's reluctance to allow his troops to advance far from the Po opposite Cremona. It is a reasonable guess that it was the loss of Cremona to Caecina (not mentioned by Tacitus, and surely played down by his source Paulinus) that decided Otho that a more vigorous policy was required than the cautious veteran was inclined to pursue. This would explain the awkward transition at ch. 23, 3–5 from the restraint of Macer to the replacement of Paulinus and Celsus as joint commanders-in-chief. Macer himself remained in command of his own force until after the bridge-building began (36), i.e. until very shortly before the First Battle of Cremona. The loss of this important town following immediately upon the successful defence of Placentia will have been attributed to Paulinus and/or Gallus, the latter of whom stopped at Bedriacum while on his way to relieve Placentia, and manifestly failed to occupy Cremona before Caecina did so. There is a strange suppression of this unfortunate loss at 32, 2 ('obiaceret flumen Padum, tutas uiris murisque urbes, e quibus nullam hosti cessorum Placentiae defensione exploratum'). One can imagine Otho's retort.

⁶⁰ Plutarch's account (O 8–9) appears to be mere speculation: cf. esp. 8 και Πρόκλιος μὲν ἔδοκει και Τιτιανὸς

τῶν στρατευμάτων ὄντων προθύμων και προσφάτου τῆς νίκης διαγωνίσασθαι . . .

⁶¹ Hardy (CP 130) holds that 'the bridge-building was a reply to Otho's plan for advance, not vice versa'. It is true that at a first glance both Tacitus and Plutarch seem to put the bridge-construction after the Othonian council-of-war. But Tacitus' imperfects at 34 (*opperiebantur, dirigebantur, claudbat*) and his *inchoato* are temporally imprecise, as is Plutarch's συνέβη δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις και περί τὸν Ἡριδανὸν ἀγῶνα γενέσθαι, τοῦ μὲν Καίκινα ζευγνύοντος τῆς διάβασιν κτλ. It is more probable that Caecina embarked on his bridge-building immediately after the check *ad Castores* (i.e. about 7 or 8 April) in order to neutralize discontent. In any case the council-of-war cannot be pushed back to a date sufficiently early to allow time for the building of the bridge and the associated fighting after it. The gladiatorial force opposite the bridge will have reported its construction to Otho, who immediately gave orders for the Placentia reinforcement to move eastwards to their assistance (36, 2). Caecina for his part brought in the Batavian contingent of Valens' army to display its amphibious skills and protect the engineers. The structure was still incomplete by 14 April, no doubt owing to the fire it had suffered—described by Plutarch but passed over by Tacitus.

prompt action; there may have been other subsidiary ones that can be read out of Tacitus' or Plutarch's narrative: pressure from the troops for action, a desire by the generals to strike while morale was high after the success *ad Castores*, the not quite unreal possibility (alluded to by both Tacitus and Plutarch) of a deal between Caecina and Valens on the one hand, and, on the other, Suetonius Paulinus, the praetorian tribunes and perhaps Verginius Rufus, still *capax imperii* despite his repeated renunciations.⁶² The best method of slowing up the bridge-building would be to place an advance-camp a little to its east while maintaining reserves in Bedriacum. Meanwhile Otho proposed to hold Brixellum as a central H.Q. enjoying good communications by river, from which, as the situation developed, he could direct XIII, VII Gemina, XI and VII Claudia to such positions—Verona, Placentia, Parma, Mutina—as would permit the complete boxing-in of Cremona. His Brixellum force would also be available to head off any Vitellian element that succeeded, despite everything, in reaching the Via Aemilia. Detailed arrangements for the advance were left to the Othonian commanders, but 14 April was fixed as the date for the arrival near the confluence and the construction of the camp designed to threaten the bridge; and orders were sent to Placentia that Spurrinna should bring up some of his forces to reinforce the gladiators,⁶³ now to be commanded by Flavius Sabinus.⁶⁴ This strengthened body would deliver a diversionary attack upon Caecina on the afternoon of that day.

(d) *The Advance towards Cremona*

After a day or so's rest, a substantial portion of the Bedriacum army was set in motion westwards. On 13 April it advanced four miles only and established a marching-camp near the modern village of Voltido. The reasons for the shortness of this day's march have not been much explored.⁶⁵ The intention seems to have been firstly to secure the maximum degree of surprise by halting overnight at a point likely to be outside the range of the Vitellian reconnaissance (and that this belief was well founded is clear from the fact that news of the advance reached Caecina and Valens only on the morning of the following day when the Othonians were much nearer Cremona), and secondly to reduce the next day's march to the normal distance of some 16 mp. This mileage, if an early start were made after the long rest at Voltido, could be covered by noon so as to allow time for entrenching camp well before nightfall. In the event the armies made contact about mid-day.⁶⁶

At the marching-camp an argument broke out between the commanders. It appears to have begun on the evening of 13 April and to have been resumed early on the following day, when it was terminated by a final demand for speed sent overnight by Otho.⁶⁷ Tacitus

⁶² For possible fears of treachery on the Othonian side, cf. 37, 1; 41, 1; 42, 1; 44, 1.

⁶³ Koestermann (28 n.) rightly points to the importance of the fact that the testimony of Spurrinna, present with his forces opposite the bridge on 14 April (Flavius Sabinus commanding the combined army of praetorians and gladiators) may well have been available to Tacitus. One may add that the failure of the Othonian attack over the river on that day, described more fully in Plutarch than in Tacitus, may have been played down by the latter out of the same respect for Spurrinna as prompted the somewhat inflated account of his successful defence of Placentia. The praetorians denounced by Plutarch (*O* 12) can only be the troops commanded by Spurrinna and it may have been their *tribuni* who were attempting negotiations with Caecina on the morning of 14 April (cf. Passerini 53 and L. Krauss, *De Vitarum Imperatoris Othonis fide quaestiones* (Progr. Zweibrücken 1880), 48).

⁶⁴ Not of course Vespasian's elder brother, as Hanslik (121) states: at 36, 2 Tacitus inserts *consulem designatum* to prevent this misconception.

⁶⁵ Nagl's view (PW 1 A, 2, 2051) that 'Die Schwierigkeit des Geländes bedingt die Unterbrechung des Marsches und Errichtung eines Lagers am 4. Meilenstein' is pure phantasy, for the ground is flat and without obstacles except for the R. Delmona crossed by a bridge (III, 17, 1) near the marching-

camp. Hanslik (121), without providing a reason, points out rightly that the form of the sentence at II, 39, 2 'promoueri ad quartum a Bedriaco placuit' deutes darauf hin, dass von vornherein gar nicht geplant war, weiter vorzurücken'.

⁶⁶ II, 44, 1 'multo adhuc die'.

⁶⁷ Syme (*Tacitus* 678) thinks that in Tacitus there were two debates, one at the marching-camp and one *en route* from it. I prefer to believe, with Heubner, that Tacitus has merely re-arranged his material, as we find it in Plutarch, so as to bring the epigram about Otho ('aeger mora et spei impatiens') into a more prominent position. There was, no doubt, a debate that spread over the two days. Heubner (151) suggests that the ablative absolute *Celso et Paulino abnuentibus* . . . hints at a prolongation of the discussion during the march, in which these generals continued to press for the avoidance of undue proximity to the enemy. In Plutarch the ἀντιλογία precedes the arrival of the Numidian, and thereafter ἀραντες ἐχώρουν. The 'tableau' sentence including the imperfect *petebant*, whose temporal context is not clear, should probably be taken closely with the preceding *quod factum est*, as in the quotation at the head of this paper. Heubner is also probably justified in saying that 'Die Formulierung ist . . . absichtlich . . . unbestimmt', i.e. that Tacitus himself was not clear about the duration of the deliberations.

conceives the debate as hingeing on the desirability or otherwise of waiting until Otho appeared in person with his troops.⁶⁸ This is unlikely, for the issue had been ventilated and settled at the council-of-war in Bedriacum, and Tacitus himself says ‘*ibi de proelio dubitatum*’, ‘doubts arose as to (the chances of) a battle (developing during the march).’ This possibility depended partly on the route to be followed, and the precise criticism attributed to Paulinus and others at this point is that they disapproved of allowing tired and heavily-laden troops to risk an approach to within four miles of the enemy camp. The choice lay between following the Via Postumia to a road-junction perilously close to Cremona, thus enjoying a better road-surface for the vehicles, and the abandonment of the high road at an earlier point (perhaps already at the marching-camp) in order to approach more stealthily along one of the numerous *limites*, rutted or muddy tracks far inferior to the well-drained and well-metalled *chaussée*. The objection to the latter course was glaring. The Po valley was notorious for humidity,⁶⁹ and if the Alpine snows had melted early, as there is reason to think, the side-roads will have been in poor shape. If speed was of the essence, then the Via Postumia must be used up to the last possible moment, that is, up to the turn rather less than four miles from the Vitellian camp. Titianus and Proculus, spurred by Otho’s last message, decided on the quicker, but more perilous, route. They decided, in other words, to maintain their original order of march and their original choice of the Via Postumia, ‘*non ut ad pugnam sed ad bellandum profecti*.’⁷⁰ The danger-point—the junction of the Via Postumia and the branch road—would be protected by a bold cavalry assault upon the Vitellian camp itself. The gamble might have succeeded. But Caecina and Valens got wind of the approach, in time, but only just in time, to deploy their troops before the whole Othonian army had cleared the dangerous turn. At first the issue was in doubt, and the Vitellian victory was by no means decisive. Large numbers of the defeated troops found their way back to Bedriacum. The main error of the Othonian commanders was their failure to make adequate precautions for a possible, indeed probable, contingency: that they would be attacked *en route*. By mixing up the baggage with marching troops upon the single, narrow Via Postumia instead of confining the use of the road to the vehicles, they made difficult a quick deployment into battle-formation. They had set out as if for a strategical move, with all their *impedimenta*. What they got was a battle. The gamble had failed.

(e) *The Situation on 15 April*

On the day following the First Battle of Cremona the advancing legions were thus placed:⁷¹

XIII	Bedriacum
VII Gem.	Ateste
VII Cl.	near Celeia
XI	probably between Aquileia and Bedriacum

Even before the bad news arrived at Brixillum, Otho had made up his mind on the possibilities and consequences of victory and defeat. If the forward camp were established without check or defeat, nothing could prevent the collapse of the Vitellian bid for Italy. The chances were that when the envelopment became obvious, Caecina—if not Valens—would throw in his hand, make terms and profit by a timely change of allegiance. No tug-of-war of Roman versus Roman need occur. If, however, the news were bad, Otho would be faced with a situation as precarious as ever it had been. The appearance of XIII (4,000 extra troops of quality) would barely compensate for battle-losses and lowered morale.

⁶⁸ Passerini 40: ‘L’avanzata di 4 miglia era stata evidentemente un mezzo dilatorio’.

⁶⁹ Virg., *Cat.* 10, 12 ‘*lutosa Gallia*’; 15 f. ‘*tua . . . in uoragine/tua in palude*’; 17 ‘*per orbitosa milia*’ (of the Mantua-Cremona-Brixia area). Cf. the desire of Antonius Primus to get away from the north Italian plain in October–November of this same year (III, 50, 1 ‘*propinqua hieme et umentibus Pado campis*’).

⁷⁰ Syme (*Tacitus* 678) acutely remarks of this phrase: ‘That indication of strategic plan is not false where it stands—but ought it not to have been placed

where it properly belongs, namely as the reason for the march out from Bedriacum the day before?’ In Tacitus, statements are made where they are most effective, not where they are most desirable logically. The question—*impediti* or *expediti*?—becomes crucial only on 14 April.

⁷¹ H. Dessau, *Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit* II, 331–2: ‘Der Zuzug aus dem Osten, auf den er [Otho] wohl rechnen konnte, war zwar auf dem Marsche, aber in grossen Abständen und noch weit entfernt.’ He does not attempt any calculations.

VII Gemina was not far away, and if time were allowed its arrival would help to redress the numerical imbalance. But time would not be allowed. Caecina would complete his bridge and proceed southwards, sealing off Brixellum and occupying the lower crossing at Hostilia. When finally VII Claudia—and at long last III and VIII—came up against the Po barrier, the leading Vitellians would be very far to the south. A long and costly pursuit could give no guarantee of success in the end. In view of the pertinacious devotion of his troops, however, and the apparent possibility of plucking victory from defeat, renunciation was a hard decision to maintain. Otho's firmness of purpose was not broken by the entreaties of his praetorians, and he took the only way out which to a Roman was honourable and in an emperor patriotic. Power was worth a *coup d'état*: it was not worth the prolongation of a civil war.⁷²

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⁷² As Sherwin-White (*JRS*, XLIX, 1959, 145) aptly says, 'Otho gave up before his Waterloo.'