

## A LITERARY READING OF TACITUS ANNALS 4.68–70: THE SLAYING OF TITIUS SABINUS

The downfall of Titius Sabinus occurred toward the close of AD 27. Like others before him, Sabinus was attacked primarily for his partiality to the *domus Germanici*<sup>1</sup>). Tacitus' account of the incident at Ann. 4.68–70 is very distinctive. "No single case is so unsatisfactory as a factual record", declares one scholar, "but no episode in Tacitus is more effective emotionally"<sup>2</sup>). For the purpose of the present study, this emotional effect is the paramount concern; only brief notices need to be given here to the factual record<sup>3</sup>).

### 1. The Downfall

Tacitus begins his account with several details (Ann. 4.68.1): Sabinus was an *inlustris eques*; he was imprisoned *ob amicitiam Germanici*<sup>4</sup>); and after Germanicus' death Sabinus continued both publicly and privately to honor the prince's wife and children, even when he became the last of Germanicus' former friends to associate with them and when to do so meant incurring the offense

---

1) Others similarly attacked for sympathies with the family of Germanicus Caesar: C. Silius Aulus Caecina Largus and his wife Sosia Galla in AD 24 (cf. Tac. Ann. 4.18–20; Vell. 2.130); Claudia Pulchra in AD 26 (cf. Ann. 4.52; Suet. Tib. 53; Dio 59.19); and perhaps also Claudia's son Quintilius Varus in AD 27 (cf. Ann. 4.66).

2) B. Walker, *The 'Annals' of Tacitus: A Study in the Writing of History* (Manchester 1952) 105.

3) Information on this case is frustratingly meagre and imperfect. The elder Pliny had referred to Sabinus' case in passing (NH 8.61.145), but he had mistakenly placed it after the case of Germanicus' son Nero, a case which did not occur until late in AD 29 or early in 30. Beyond this, Pliny supplied little additional detail. Cassius Dio (58.1) is the other main source for the incident, and his account, resembling both Pliny's and Tacitus' in certain particulars, is equally sketchy and flawed from a factual standpoint. Despite its deficiencies, Tacitus' is the fullest narrative on the incident, and so it should be used (albeit with some caution) as the standard for the case. For a study of the sources on this case and an evaluation of the attempts by modern scholars to reconstruct the historical record, see my article *Studies on Tacitus, Annals 4*, diss. Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y. 1988.

4) Cf. Ann. 4.18.1: *amicitia Germanici pernicioso utriusque*, that is, to both Gaius Silius and Titius Sabinus.

of *iniqui*. The narrative continues (Ann. 4.68.2): Sabinus' accusers were four men of praetorian rank; of these the principal prosecutor was a L. Lucianus Latiaris<sup>5</sup>); since they were motivated out of *cupido consulatus*, which could be obliged by Sejanus alone, these men resolved to make Sabinus the offering to win Sejanus' favor. Latiaris then gained Sabinus' confidences by feigning both respect for Germanicus and sympathy for Agrippina, and in this way virtually entrapped Sabinus, who had begun to feel enough at ease to utter impassioned statements against Sejanus and Tiberius. After this *fallax amicitia* (cf. Ann. 4.33.3) had been cultivated, the conspirators arranged for three senators to eavesdrop on a conversation between Sabinus and Latiaris in which the latter would again tempt the former into speaking unguardedly against the regime. These senators put themselves in a rather undignified position by hiding in a crawl-space *tectum inter et laquearia* and by pressing their ears to chinks and interstices (Ann. 4.69.1). Latiaris succeeded in baiting Sabinus and lured him into making incriminating statements within earshot of the eavesdroppers (Ann. 4.69.2). The trap was instantly sprung. The indictment and incarceration of Sabinus took place at once<sup>6</sup>), and the conspirators at once informed Tiberius of the case forthwith (Ann. 4.69.3).

Before we take up the conclusion which Tacitus relates for the incident, a few brief observations might be made on the emotional effects already noted. Tacitus presents the event so as to show the entrapment as an injustice, thus creating sympathy for Sabinus: the historian commences his narration of the incident by characterizing it as heinous (*foedus*), and before being told anything else about the matter readers learn that Sabinus was dragged off to prison; the sole reason given for this treatment is Sabinus' friendship with Germanicus (although *amicitia* was hardly a punishable offense in itself – especially when the friendship was with a man who had been dead for more than eight years!); for his continued loyalty to Germanicus' widow and children, Sabinus is commended by the historian as *apud bonos laudatus et gravis iniquis* (Ann. 4.68.1)<sup>7</sup>). Sabinus' behavior is contrasted at once

5) On the confusion over this man's name, cf. R. Syme, *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (Oxford 1970) 70 (= JRS 39 [1949] 13).

6) Ann. 4.69.3: *properata inde accusatio*; cf. Dio 58.1.3: αὐθημερόν.

7) This phrase of Tacitus' seems to argue against taking *amicitia* with any of its political connotations (on which see P. A. Brunt's standard article, *Amicitia* in the late Roman Republic, PCPhS 11 [1965] 1–20). For the Tacitean notion that virtue is distasteful or irksome to the wicked, see Ann. 4.33.4.

with the disgraceful conduct of those who truckle to Sejanus: *neque Seiani voluntas nisi scelere quaerebatur* (Ann. 4.68.2). Tacitus justifies Sabinus' credulity with a pithy epigram: *sunt molles in calamitate mortalium animi* (Ann. 4.68.3). The generalization serves to direct readers' sympathies to Sabinus, making Sabinus' behavior seem common and intelligible to all.

Hard on this comes a masterful Tacitean sentence: *audentius iam onerat Seianum, saevitiam superbiam spes eius* (Ann. 4.68.3). This bold use of the verb *onerare* is altogether unprecedented in Tacitus or in Latin generally, and the asyndesmic alliteration<sup>8</sup>) which follows it vividly conveys Sabinus' exasperation with Sejanus' stewardship over Roman politics<sup>9</sup>). Tacitus' psychological insight again animates the narrative so as to affect readers' objectivity when he adds the comment that the private conversations of Sabinus and Latiaris, because they touched on forbidden topics, created in the former's mind the false security of sincere intimacy: *iique sermones, tamquam vetita miscuissent, speciem artae amicitiae fecere* (Ann. 4.68.4). The position in which the eavesdropping senators placed themselves also earned Tacitus' opprobrium: *senatores haud minus turpi latebra quam detestanda fraude sese abstrudunt* (Ann. 4.69.1). The historian even allows a tone of sarcasm to intrude when he adds an aside adverting to the multitude of ills plaguing the state: *...instantia, quorum adfatim copia, ...cumulat*. Finally, still another generalizing *sententia* invites readers to look upon Sabinus' situation sympathetically: *quanto maesta, ubi semel prorupere, difficilius reticentur* (Ann. 4.69.2).

Completing the dramatic preparation for the denouement of the incident, occurring in 4.70, is the final subchapter of 4.69. Here Tacitus exaggerates certain features of the narrative in a fashion artistically exciting but historically implausible: he states that at no other time was Rome more fearful and alarmed, that men were wary even of those closest to them, that basic human contacts were avoided, and that even mute and inanimate things were viewed

8) Erich Koestermann, in his *Annals* commentary (Heidelberg 1963-68), calls the phrase "eine treffende Zusammenstellung" (vol. 2, p. 202).

9) For Sejanus' mastery of the institution of *delatio*, see part V.2, 'Sejanus and the *lex maiestatis*', pp. 113-124, of R. A. Bauman, *Impietas in Principem. A Study of Treason against the Roman Emperor with Special Reference to the First Century A.D.* (Munich 1974), who states (p. 119) that "Sejanus was the first to detect the full potential of the remarkable instrument created by the legislation of A.D. 6 and 8, and he exploited it systematically and logically".

with distrust. Tacitus' very wording contributes to the overall mood; one scholar, commenting on the number of abstract nouns and passive verbs in this passage, writes that "they have the effect of generalising the emotion; it seems not only that men are afraid, but that the whole scene is a manifestation of fear"<sup>10</sup>).

And yet this fear is but a part of the entire incident's overwhelming horror. It is Tiberius' reaction which fulfills the scene's darkest potential, and adds an element of religious dread and foreboding to an already terror-stricken setting. Chapter 70, Tiberius' reaction and the repercussions therefrom are as follows:

(1) *sed Caesar sollemnia incipientis anni kalendis Ianuariis epistula precatus vertit in Sabinum, corruptos quosdam libertorum et petitem se arguens, ultionemque haud obscure poscebat. nec mora quin decerneretur; et trahebatur damnatus, quantum obducta veste et adstrictis faucibus niti poterat, clamitans sic inchoari annum, has Seiano victimas cadere.* (2) *quo intendisset oculos, quo verba acciderent, fuga vastitas, deseri itinera fora. et quidam regrediebantur ostentabantque se rursus id ipsum paventes quod timuissent.* (3) *quem enim diem vacuum poena ubi inter sacra et vota, quo tempore verbis etiam profanis abstinere mos esset, vincla et laqueus inducantur? non imprudentem Tiberium tantam invidiam adisse: quaesitum meditatumque, ne quid impedire credatur quo minus novi magistratus, quo modo delubra et altaria, sic carcerem recludant.*

An immediate impression needs to be noted here. Tiberius' charges against Sabinus are very different in nature from Tacitus' previous explanation, the rather vague *ob amicitiam Germanici*. Tacitus' account at this point appears to be unconcerned with expounding unambiguous facts. Although the historical truth of the case against Sabinus may not be fully recoverable, but this much is clear: Tacitus thoroughly subordinated the historicity of this incident to its drama. Our author sets the stage for the next act of this drama by establishing its scene: the date is the *Kalendae Ianuariae* and the setting is the *sollemnia incipientis anni*.

Brief mention should be made of what Tacitus sacrifices in order to stage the drama. The historian virtually ignores Sabinus' predicament from a legal standpoint; indeed, not only is the precise charge against Sabinus left unspecified, but whether or not he was actually tried remains debatable. The episode to this point has represented Sejanus as a villain, but his involvement has been slight

10) B. Walker (see note 2, above) 191.

and indirect: to borrow a Tacitean phrase, he has been ominously conspicuous by his absence<sup>11</sup>). Another absent villain emerges in chapter 70 of Tacitus' account. Tiberius' impact on the legal case against Sabinus is described only in terms of the outcome, that Sabinus was summarily executed<sup>12</sup>). In fine, without detailing their precise roles in the legal case to any great extent, Tacitus holds Sejanus and Tiberius up to criticism for the tragic conclusion to the episode. Tacitus' criticism, as we shall see, is levelled primarily for religious reasons, not necessarily because the Sabinus incident represents such an exceptional legal matter. Apparently what prompted Tacitus to comment on the foulness (cf. *foedum*, 4.68.1) of the incident was not its injustice so much as its irreligion<sup>13</sup>).

## 2. *Janus and the Kalendae Ianuariae*

One of the more important holy days in the Roman year was the *Kalendae Ianuariae*, a day sacred to the god Janus<sup>14</sup>). The sanctity of the day was popularly believed to have been instituted by the king Numa Pompilius<sup>15</sup>), who was said to have added Janus' eponymic month to the calendar and to have dedicated on

11) Sejanus is named twice in 68.2, once in 68.3, and once in 70.1.

12) The emperor is named in 68.3 and 70.3, and he is referred to as *Caesar* in 69.3 and 70.1.

13) While Walker (note 2, above) 41, is quite right in asserting that the waxing ambition of Sejanus is the primary theme of Ann. 4, there is a second theme recurring throughout the book of almost equal importance: the eclipse of traditional Roman religion during the reign of Tiberius by the emperor-cult. H. Y. McCulloch, Jr., in an article (The Case of Titius Sabinus, CW 74 [1980–81] 219–220; see also the typographical corrections in CW 75 [1981] 122) and in his book (Narrative Cause in the Annals of Tacitus [Königstein 1984] 52), stresses that Sabinus and Latiaris are a doublet for Tiberius and Sejanus; this is a very suggestive idea, but it does not go as far as the present interpretation in explaining the effect and significance of Sabinus in Tacitus' narrative.

14) For the *Kalendae Ianuariae* in general, cf. A. Müller, Die Neujahrsfeier im römischen Kaiserreich, *Philologus* 68 (1909) 464–487; and M. P. Nilsson, Studien zur Vorgeschichte des Weihnachtsfestes – *Kalendae Ianuariae*, ARW 19 (1917–19) 50–94.

15) In fact, the first of January was not originally the Romans' New Year's Day; the assignment of the year's beginning to the month of January is probably datable to the decemvirate of 451–450 BC (cf. Michael York, *The Roman Festival Calendar of Numa Pompilius* [New York 1986] 20–21); the *Fasti* of Fulvius Nobilior (circa 189 BC) is the earliest attestation of January 1 being the start of the year. Hence the designation of *Kalendae Ianuariae* as a *dies fastus*. By the era of Tiberius, traditions about Numan foundations were universally accepted, and despite the day's official status as *fastus* it had long since become a holiday *de facto*. In general, see Agnes Michels, *The Calendar of the Roman Republic* (Princeton 1967).

the northeast side of the Forum Romanum the god's first temple at Rome<sup>16</sup>). On this *aedicula* was found the celebrated πολέμου πύλη, the *index pacis bellique*; within it was housed a very archaic bronze statue of the god described by the elder Pliny (NH 34.33). The god's major *aedes*, however, was built in the Forum Holitorium by C. Duilius after the battle at Mylae in 260 BC. The *rex sacrorum* presided over the rites of Janus since the god had no special *flamen*; he was regarded as a very important deity, nevertheless, and his name was always invoked first in prayers and sacrifices (cf. Cic. ND 2.27.67; Macro. 1.9). His rites on 1 January consisted of bloodless offerings of cakes (called *ianualia*), grains or meal of barley, wine and incense<sup>17</sup>); on that day gifts (called *strenae*) of honey-cakes, figs, dates, honey, and coins of copper or gold were exchanged with family and friends<sup>18</sup>); people greeted each other on the streets with blessings, and every thought, utterance and action on this day were expected to be kindly and good *auspicandi causa*<sup>19</sup>); finally, the *rex sacrorum*, accompanied by other priests and the newly-installed magistrates, marched in processions around the city to inaugurate the new year by ceremonially opening all religious sites and buildings (cf. Ovid Fast. 1.70). These observances reflect a ritual scruple salient in nearly all Roman religious practices: as Ovid put it, *omina principii inesse solent*<sup>20</sup>). The portentous importance of beginnings comes especially to the fore on the first day of a new year when any given action was considered to be a general omen for how the remainder of the year would unfold.

The role which Janus and the *Kalendae Ianuariae* played in the Empire prior to AD 28 makes a brief but necessary digression. The prayers contained in Tiberius' letter were probably comparable to the formal *vota pro salute rei publicae* which priests and

16) Livy 1.19.2; Varro LL 5.34.165; Ovid Fast. 1.43; Pliny NH 34.33; Plut. Numa 20. Another tradition puts the temple's foundation within the reign of Romulus; cf. Macro. 1.9.17–18; Serv. ad Aen. 1.291.

17) Cf. Ovid Fast. 1.75, 128, 172; Lydus De mens. 4.2; Festus s.v. *ianual*.

18) Cf. Ovid Fast. 1.185–186, 189–240; Pliny NH 23.3, 13; Martial 8.33 and 13.27; Plut. Quaest. Rom. 41; Macro. 1.7.21–22; Lydus De mens. 4.2. For *strenae*, cf. Suet. Aug. 57.1; Calig. 42; Auson. Ep. 11.4; Symm. Rel. 15; August. Serm. 198.2; Festus s.v. *strena*; several of these passages illustrate how the exchange of *strenae* was important, for different reasons, to certain emperors. Cf. Suet. Tib. 34.2 for a good example of Tiberius' disregard for New Year's Day observances – the emperor appears to have been annoyed by the exchange of *strenae* and attempted to restrict it.

19) Cf. Ovid Fast. 1.169; Colum. 11.2; Sen. Epist. 87.3.

20) Fast. 1.178; cf. Pliny NH 36.5; Gell. 5.12.

new consuls performed on the first day of the year, a traditional observance appropriated by the Caesars Julius and Augustus for the ruler-cult<sup>21</sup>). Augustus in particular favored the god Janus and incorporated his cult into the Augustan religious 'revival'. The emperor appears to have dedicated a silver statue of Janus together with other statues of Romana Salus, Concordia and Pax in 11 BC, and each year on 30 March these four deities were venerated together<sup>22</sup>). Augustus also initiated the restoration of the god's temple in the Forum Holitorium, though he did not survive to see the completion and rededication that Tiberius performed in AD 17<sup>23</sup>); Augustus also dedicated to this temple a Greek statue believed to be of Janus and to have been crafted by either Scopas or Praxiteles (Pliny NH 36.28). Finally, in 30 or 29 BC after his victory at Actium and his defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, Augustus closed the Gates of War on the shrine of Janus in the Forum Romanum (cf. Livy 1.19.3; Hor. Odes 4.15.9); since the period of Numa this achievement had taken place only once before, in 235 at the end of the First Punic War (cf. Varro LL 5.34.165; Livy 1.19.3); Augustus accomplished the same feat two more times in his reign (cf. Res gest. 2.42–46; Suet. Aug. 22). The god Janus was thus a marked component in the Augustan architectural restoration, in the 'renaissance' of some of the more obscure Italic cults under Augustus, and in the propaganda of the Pax Augusta<sup>24</sup>).

### 3. Tacitus on 1 January 28

The reason for the preceding section, with all its antiquarian detail, will now become clear. Compared with Augustus, who had been an active religious innovator, Tiberius usually presented himself as quite conservative in matters of state religion. Although his religious conservatism in most cases can be shown to be motivated more from personal or political considerations than from any theological scruple, this fact does not diminish the import of Tacitus' Sabinus episode as an example of Tiberius' disregard for a veneration thought to be one of Rome's oldest. It could be taken as

21) Cf. Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford 1971) 217–220.

22) Cf. Ovid *Fast.* 3.881–882; Dio 54.35.2; CIL 1<sup>2</sup>, p. 320.

23) *Ann.* 2.49.1; cf. also *Fast. Amit.* for 18 October.

24) In general, see R. Syme, *Problems about Janus*, *AJP* 100 (1979) 188–212. See also G. B. Townend, *Tacitus, Suetonius and the Temple of Janus*, *Hermes* 108 (1980) 233–242; R. Turcan, *Janus à l'époque impériale*, in *A.N.R.W.* 11.17.1 (1981) 374–402; and L. A. Holland, *Janus and the Bridge* (Rome 1961).

sacrilege to condemn a man on a day when, as Ovid wrote, *dicenda sunt bona verba*; the poet further enjoined *lite vacent aures insanaeque protinus absint / iurgia; differ opus, livida lingua, tuum!* (Fast. 1.72–74). By Tacitus' account, the popular reaction to the outcome of Tiberius' epistle does indeed reflect religious outrage: *quem enim diem vacuum poena, ubi inter sacra et vota, quo tempore verbis etiam profanis abstinere mos esset, vincla et laqueus inducantur? . . . novi magistratus, quo modo delubra et altaria, sic carcerem recludent* (Ann. 4.70.3)<sup>25</sup>. The public response here differs markedly from that noted in 69.3. With *oratio obliqua* Tacitus gives speech to bystanders' outrage rather than merely presenting it in description. He further differentiates the two scenes by indicating how in the previous one fear produced silence, whereas in the later scene the silence of fear is explicitly rejected.

Tacitus sets up another more subtle contrast to heighten the horror and grimness of the entire scene. This contrast was visible in chapters 68 and 69, but is especially important in chapter 70. In the former chapters the openness of Sabinus is set over and against the secrecy, deception and concealment of the conspirators. Sabinus freely accompanied Agrippina and her family in public (68.1: *comes in publico*); he exposed himself to Latiaris and openly sought his friendship (68.3–4); he was found in public when Latiaris finally lured him into the trap (69.2: *reperit in publico*); and he revealed his sorrows without restraint (69.2: *eadem ille et diutius, quanto maesta, ubi semel prorupere, difficilius reticentur*). The conspirators for their part contrived an elaborate deception (68.2: *strueret dolum*); Latiaris as head of the conspiracy presented Sabinus with only the semblance of friendship (68.4: *speciem artae amicitiae*); for the final ensnaring of Sabinus they preserved the appearance that Latiaris and Sabinus were alone (69.1: *solitudinis facies*); and in a *detestanda fraus* the senators hid within a crawl-space (69.1). Even the populace is affected by this tension between concealment and exposure: they began to eschew public intercourse and to take cover from even their friends (69.3: *tegens adversum proximos; congressus conloquia, notae ignotaeque aures vitari*).

Chapter 70 tells how on the *Kalendae Ianuariae*, a day when *delubra et altaria* are thrown open, when people greet one another

25) It is possible that Tacitus exaggerates the holiness of the *Kalendae Ianuariae* (see note 15, above); if so, it may have been to heighten the drama of the scene.

in friendly exchange, and when a throng of priests and magistrates celebrates the rites of a sky-god whose multiple faces connote exposure, the emperor demanded revenge not at all obscurely (70.1: *ultionem haud obscure poscebat*) and a man was hauled off at once to execution with his head concealed and his throat in a noose (70.1: *obducta veste et adstrictis faucibus*). Tacitus makes the populace recoil again from fear – religious dread this time – and hide themselves from sight (70.2: *fuga vastitas, deserere itinera fora*) until a few braver souls begin to return and present themselves, realizing that their greatest fear was in their having been afraid (70.2: *et quidam regrediebantur ostentabantque se rursus, id ipsum paventes, quod timuissent*). These same people then reportedly bemoaned both the opening of the prison on this holy day (70.3: *sic carcerem recludant*) and Tiberius' patent disregard (*tanta invidia*) for public religious sentiment, his attitude allegedly being planned and deliberate (70.3: *quaesitum meditatumque*). Thus ends the Tacitean contrast between concealment and exposure. Sabinus, the figure for whom Tacitus consistently attempts to win readers' sympathy, is at one pole, and those whom the author regards as blameworthy are at the other pole. Interestingly, the populace occupies a position somewhat analogous to that of the reader: at first they react to the incident only with unfocused horror, that is, they are roughly medial in the contrast; eventually, however, they become indignant at the religious infraction and even reproach the perpetrators, thus approaching the openness of Sabinus. The populace's evolving role is just one indication of progress in the entire unfolding drama.

Without a doubt, Sabinus makes one of the most vivid and dramatic victims in Tacitus. The circumstances of the case were perfect for exercising the historian's tendency to moralize: Sabinus was the prey of ambitious *delatores*, of an unscrupulous Sejanus, and of a suspicious Tiberius; he was also the possessor of such virtues as friendship, loyalty and candor in an epoch of *mores corrupti* (cf. Ann. 4.17.1). As previously remarked, it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty the degree to which Sabinus' innocence and victimization were the creation of Tacitus. But there can be no mistake that, whatever the historical truth was, the annalist delineates each detail with a mind toward representing the knight as a sorry victim of the régime<sup>26</sup>). This victimization is even

---

26) It will be noted for example that Sabinus suffers the action of the verb *trahere* in each of the three chapters of the episode (68.1: *tracto in carcerem* ...

made explicit by Sabinus himself who is reported to have exclaimed *sic inchoari annum, has Seiano victimas cadere* (70.1).

To my knowledge scholarship has neglected the full force and irony of this statement. It has not been recognized that Sabinus is here making a very grim pun on the names of Janus and Sejanus<sup>27</sup>). The proper offerings to Janus on New Year's Day, it will be remembered, were bloodless. Moreover, there was a potent religious prescription that since sacrifice was the culmination of ritual and the confirmation of its efficacy, the victim must come willingly to the sacrifice<sup>28</sup>). These transgressions of ritual fastidium reinforce the point that the new year was being inaugurated very inauspiciously<sup>29</sup>). Since the *se-* (or *sed-*) prefix means 'apart from' or 'without', the sense of the pun is that with the sacrifice of Sabinus the year was being entered into without Janus and his divine favor. The pathos of the scene is increased by the trajectory of the word *has* from its noun *victimās* and also by the use of the plural. Sabinus' self-reference in the plural suggests that the victimization which he suffers is shared by all who in turn react with outrage at his treatment. Finally the embedding of the word *Seiano* between *has* and *victimās* places the name in higher relief, making the effect of the pun all the more striking. The ill omen which the improper sacrifice represented carried political as well as religious significance. That is the point of Sabinus' pun. With it he acknowledged who really lay behind his downfall, and with it he was essentially posing a question: What was to become of Rome if her emperor or ministers had to be duly propitiated before her patron gods? This is an emotional question, indeed, and one Tacitus prompts his readers to consider, using every device in his artistic store.

Subchapter 70.4 closes the Sabinus episode in an interesting manner. Tiberius is said to have sent another letter, this one of thanks because a *homo infensus rei publicae* had been executed<sup>30</sup>). Behind this we should probably see a defense for the previous

*Sabino*; 69.2: *Latiaris ... Sabinum ... domum et in cubiculum trahit*; 70.1: *traheretur damnatus*).

27) Quint. 6.3.53–57 is the *locus classicus* for the rhetorical practice of punning on personal names.

28) Cf. Livy 21.63.13; Lucan 7.165–167; Festus 286 L.; Serv. ad Aen. 9.624.

29) For another example of an execution on the *Kalendae Ianuariae*, cf. Plut. Marius 45. For other Tacitean examples of inauspicious inaugurations, cf. Ann. 1.6.1; 4.36.1; 13.1.1.

30) It should be noted that Tacitus is silent on the parties to whom the letter was specifically addressed and to whom the emperor was grateful.

letter which had denounced Sabinus on New Year's Day: the earlier epistle contained the emperor's *vota pro salute rei publicae*, and as an enemy of the state Sabinus constituted a threat to the *salus rei publicae*. Thus Tiberius thought himself both justified in the condemnation and therefore exonerated from any charge of impiety. Tacitus states that the emperor adjoined to this later letter the claim that he feared for his life and suspected other conspiracies against him (70.4: *adiecto trepidam sibi vitam, suspectas inimicorum insidias*). Here again is found Tacitean testimony for Tiberius' habitual insecurity and suspiciousness<sup>31</sup>). The unnamed parties causing the emperor's fears were universally understood to be Nero and Agrippina, but Tacitus' account provides little to indicate that these fears were warranted. Behavior by Germanicus' widow and son which earned Tiberius' displeasure is invariably portrayed by Tacitus as somehow prompted by Sejanus (cf. Ann. 4.54.1; 4.59.3; 4.67.4). Nero and Agrippina share this sort of Tacitean portrayal with the hapless Sabinus.

#### 4. The Episode within Annals 4

It remains to situate the Sabinus episode more securely within the narrative of *Annals* 4. In chapter 33 of the book Tacitus had remarked that the material of his history consisted of merciless commands (*saeva iussa*), incessant indictments (*continuae accusationes*), false friendships (*fallaces amicitiae*) and the destruction of innocent people (*perniciis innocentium*). Each of these appears to be exemplified within the chapters of the Sabinus incident. Soon after these chapters, at 4.74.2, Tacitus would relate how statues of Tiberius and Sejanus were enshrined at a locus of sacrifice, namely, the altars of *Clementia* and *Amicitia*. The grim irony of this is unmistakable upon consideration of the 'sacrifice' of Sabinus at the hands of a very *unfriendly* Sejanus and a very *unmerciful* Tiberius. Finally, what made Sabinus' last utterance – the dark pun on the names of the god Janus and the minister

---

For the expression *infensus rei publicae*, cf. Ann. 6.24.1 where it is used again by Tiberius of Germanicus' son Drusus.

31) It is not idle to note that these are traits which Tacitus viewed as being highly susceptible to influence of Sejanus. Cf. the claim at Ann. 4.67.3, immediately preceding the Sabinus episode: *manebat quippe suspicionum et credendi temeritas, quam Sejanus augere etiam in urbe suetus acrius turbabat non iam occultis adversum Agrippinam et Neronem insidiis*. For Sejanus' ability to manipulate the emperor, despite the latter's distance from activities at Rome, cf. 4.71.3.

Sejanus – so poignant was the time-honored conviction that Rome enjoyed her world-wide supremacy through the favor of her gods. This conviction much informed the Roman conception of history and is articulated in various ways by most Roman historians. It is found in Tacitus' *Annals*, at the opening of the very same book which narrates the provincial deification of Tiberius, the consecration of altars of Friendship and Clemency for Sejanus and Tiberius, and the execution of Titius Sabinus. *Annals* 4 opens with the striking claim that, through Sejanus' disastrous powers over Tiberius, the gods – who had once been so supportive – now had turned against the Roman state in anger: [*Sejanus*] *Tiberium variis artibus devinxit ... non tam sollertia ... quam deum ira in rem Romanam* (4.1.2).

Twice in this paper we have commended Bessie Walker's astute insights on the Sabinus episode. She is now quoted again, but this time because her views on a particular point reflect a prevalent misunderstanding. "Tacitus was obviously inadequately informed of the facts", she writes, concluding that this case "has been imaginatively reconstructed on the pattern of events which Tacitus has himself seen"<sup>32</sup>). This conclusion seems too daring and unwarranted. In the first place, it should be pointed out that Tacitus relates more "facts" than either Pliny or Dio, our two other sources for the incident<sup>33</sup>), and the "facts" which scholars have sought for in vain in this case (the legal charge against Sabinus and evidence of a trial) are not to be found in any source. It is possible that these "facts" never existed<sup>34</sup>). Or, more reasonably, Tacitus knew more about this case than he relates in his account, but his interest in the destruction of Sabinus was more religious and political than judicial.

Up to this point the Tacitean narrative has told of Tiberius' retirement to Capry, of Sejanus' hostility toward the family of Germanicus, and of the minister's waxing power and audacity. Because of his own distance from Rome the emperor could not oversee every aspect of life in the Urbs, nor could he monitor the ambitions of each one of his creatures. It is no small wonder that Tiberius managed to control as much as he did from his island-retreat. But, according to Tacitus, government suffered nevertheless from the machinations of Sejanus, and traditional religion,

32) B. Walker (see note 2, above) 216.

33) Cf. note 3, above.

34) McCulloch's remarks in the introduction to his book (see note 13, above), pp. 1–12, are very useful in this regard.

already seriously imperiled by the imperial cult, suffered further from the emperor's neglect and abuses. If we take these to be the primary concerns of Tacitus in the Sabinus incident, concerns evident throughout the fourth book of the *Annals*, there is little need either to speculate on imaginative reconstructions or to be unduly dissatisfied over the factual record. Thus without attempting either to vindicate Tacitus or denounce him for whitewashing certain important historical facts, we find the most productive means for understanding the Sabinus episode to come from looking within the broader contexts of the Tacitean narrative and of Roman religion.

Kalamazoo (Michigan)

Peter L. Corrigan

## THE MIDDLE PLATONIC RECEPTION OF ARISTOTELIAN SCIENCE<sup>\*)</sup>

The history of Platonism exhibits a continuous tension in its relationship with Aristotelianism. Plotinus' rejection of Aristotle's categories, for instance, is followed by Porphyry's 'rehabilitation'. Perhaps the 'middle-Platonic' tradition best exemplifies this tendency, for it is the first clear attempt to provide a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle – a theme which will continue to evolve long beyond the Greek era in Islamic, Byzantine and medieval philosophy. While middle-Platonic philosophers, such as Apuleius reject the influence of Aristotle, Albinus in his *Didaskalikos* finds a central

---

<sup>\*)</sup> I wish to thank A.P.D. Mourelatos for his extensive help with an early version of this study and the American Council of Learned Societies for a Fellowship for Recent Recipients of the Ph.D. for a study of the post-Aristotelian analysis of induction. My work is continually indebted to John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, Ithaca (NY) 1977. For the text of the *Didaskalikos* I use P. Louis, ed., *Epitomé*, Budé, Paris 1945, and all references are to the chapter, section and line division in that edition.