

POINTED ALLUSIONS

Maecenas and Sallustius in the *Annals* of Tacitus

Tacitus is without doubt a master of innuendo and stylistic sleight-of-hand when it comes to denigrating the nature of the principate and the character of individual emperors in the *Annals*.¹

1) For this aspect of Tacitus' approach to his material and further bibliography see D. Sullivan, Innuendo and the "Weighted Alternative" in Tacitus, *CJ* 71 (1976) 312–26; J. Vogt, Tacitus und die Unparteilichkeit des Historikers, in: V. Pöschl (Hrsg.), Tacitus (Darmstadt 1969) 39–59; I. Ryberg, Tacitus' Art of Innuendo, *TAPhA* 73 (1942) 383–404. For an example of Tacitus' use of a single word to taint the reader's view of the principate, see I. Cogitore, La *potentia* chez Tacite: accusation indirecte du Principat, in: Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé (1991) 158–71. Other important works are B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus* (Manchester 1952); R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford 1958), especially I, sections V and VI (253–464). For a recent examination of Tacitean employment of *sententiae* to color his presentation, see P. Sinclair, *Tacitus the Sententious Historian* (University Park, Pennsylvania 1995).

His facts accord with those found elsewhere, and where differences arise his account is often proved correct.² Yet his skillful blending of non-factual material serves to raise doubts in the reader's mind almost imperceptively. Walker identified four narrative techniques employed by Tacitus for the introduction of non-factual material, the last of which, called "allusiveness," is the main concern of this paper.³ According to Walker, Tacitean "allusiveness" occurs when "an event or person is not described directly, or not only directly, but in connection with another set of circumstances, or persons, or ideas, which make us see the immediate subject in a new light."⁴ Hence, when an unsavory incident or character is discussed in connection with an emperor or imperial practice, the questionable qualities of the former are meant to reflect poorly on the latter. Among other things this technique allows Tacitus to cast doubt and suspicion on the principate and individual emperors throughout his narrative.

Two notable instances of Tacitean allusiveness involve Maecenas, one directly, the other indirectly. It should be noted that the information Tacitus relates about Maecenas is either supported in the works of other ancient authors or credible enough based on what little is known about Maecenas' life. In public and official capacity Maecenas was a loyal and able adviser; privately he indulged himself to extremes.⁵ As in the case of all prose authors except Seneca, Tacitus does not find Maecenas personally objectionable.⁶ On the other hand, Seneca's exaggerated attacks on Maecenas' loose living and extravagance are memorable,⁷ and

2) K. von Fritz, *Tacitus, Agricola, Domitian, and the Problem of the Principate*, CPh 52 (1957) 73–97. For a comparison of the presentation of material on Tiberius in Tacitus, Dio, and Suetonius, see F. Klingner, *Tacitus über Augustus und Tiberius*, SBAW 7 (1953) 1–45.

3) Walker 33–77, esp. 66–77.

4) Walker 66–67.

5) This brief description is based on Velleius Paterculus 2.88.2 (see n. 19 below). For Maecenas' service to Augustus, see Plin. HN 37.10; Plut. Ant. 35; App. BCiv. 4.52; 5.51; 5.92; 5.99; Dio 49.13; 51.3; 54.30; 55.7.

6) Seneca is the first, and with two exceptions confined to subsequent Latin poetry (Mart. 10.73.4; Juv. 1.66; 12.37–38), the only ancient author to criticize Maecenas for extravagance. See my discussion in 'Maecenas in Seneca and Other Post-Augustan Authors', in: Shannon N. Byrne and Edmund P. Cueva (eds.), *Veritatis Amicitiaeque Causa. Essays in Honor of Anna Lydia Motto and John R. Clark* (Wauconda, Illinois 1999) 21–44.

7) The depth of Seneca's disdain for Maecenas is illustrated in Ep. 114.6, where, after quoting samples of Maecenas' prose, Seneca launches into tirade of personal criticism against Augustus' minister: *Non statim cum haec legeris hoc tibi occurret, hunc esse qui solutis tunicis in urbe semper incesserit (nam etiam cum*

Tacitus could expect his readers to be familiar with lurid Senecan imagery of Maecenas' life. Tacitus takes advantage of Maecenas' notoriety and presents information concerning Maecenas in such a way that surrounding characters and institutions become ambiguous or distasteful.

The rendering of Maecenas' name at Ann. 6.11.2 as 'Cilnius Maecenas' is a prime example of Tacitus' manipulation of fact to create an unfavorable impression that negatively affects the actual subject at hand. This is the only instance in ancient texts that Maecenas' name appears in the form of two *nomina*, 'Cilnius Maecenas,' which is certainly not the designation by which he was known. Maecenas' full name as found in literary texts and inscriptions consists of the *praenomen* Gaius and the *nomen* Maecenas.⁸

Although his official name derives from his father's *gens*, Maecenas is also thought to have been related to the Etruscan Cilnian *gens*. Both clans are found at the city Arretium, which is known to have been an early supporter of Octavian's efforts, presumably due to Maecenas' influence.⁹ Aside from the designation in Tacitus, support for a Cilnian connection is found in one other source, a letter from Augustus to Maecenas in which the latter is hailed as *Cilniorum smaragde* amid a series of addresses that cleverly highlight the geographical and political influence of the pow-

absentis Caesaris partibus fungeretur, signum a discincto petebatur); hunc esse qui (in) tribunali, in rostris, in omni publico coetu sic apparuerit ut pallio velaretur caput exclusis utrimque auribus, non aliter quam in mimo fugitivi divitis solent; hunc esse cui tunc maxime civilibus bellis strepentibus et sollicita urbe et armata comitatus hic fuerit in publico, spadones duo, magis tamen viri quam ipse; hunc esse qui uxorem milliens duxit, cum unam habuerit? See also Prov. 9–11; Ep. 19.9; 101.10–14; 114.4–5,7–8,21. Seneca's exaggerated attacks are largely responsible for our image of Maecenas today.

8) See, for example, CIL VI 21771 = ILS II 7848: *leibertorum et leibertar(um) | C. Maecenatis L.f. Pom(ptina tribu) | . . .*; and IG II/III² 4133: ὁ δ[ῆ]μος | Γάϊου Μαικίηναν | Λευκίου υἱόν. For more inscriptions bearing the *nomen* Maecenas, see A. Stein, C. Maecenas, RE XXVII (1928) 207–208, and M. Hammond, An Unpublished Latin Funerary Inscription of Persons Connected with Maecenas, HSCPh 84 (1980) 263–77. Literary sources include Tac. Ann. 14.53.3; Vell. Pat. 2.88.2; Dio 49.16.2 and Porphyrio on Hor. Od. 1.20.5. Based on the appearance of 'Cilnius Maecenas' in Tacitus the designation 'Gaius Cilnius Maecenas' occasionally appears in scholarly texts, as though Maecenas were a *cognomen*. The name 'Maecenas,' however, appears among *nomina* in Varro (LL 8.84), and on official inscriptions that list only one's *nomen* in connection with tribal affiliation. If Maecenas had a *cognomen* it does not survive.

9) See App. BCiv. 3.42.174 and R. Syme, The Roman Revolution (Oxford 1939) 125.

erful Cilnian *gens*.¹⁰ Whereas the Maecenates were relatively unknown, the Cilnii were long famous for power and wealth, so much so that they provoked their less fortunate neighbors to rebel in the fourth century, and Rome had to step in to negotiate peace in the region.¹¹ In view of the obscurity of the Maecenas *gens*, references to Maecenas' royal Etruscan ancestry in Augustan poets are thought to derive from these Cilnian ancestors.¹² The additional *nomen* Cilnius in Tacitus is likely that of his mother's *gens*, which some speculate Maecenas unofficially attached to his name according to Etruscan custom.¹³

And yet Maecenas did not have to employ the name Cilnius at all for Tacitus to find the designation useful. The context in which 'Cilnius Maecenas' occurs is a digression on the origins of the *praefectura urbis*. After discussing the early origins of the office, Tacitus relates that Maecenas was Augustus' first appointee: *ceterum Augustus bellis civilibus Cilnium Maecenatem equestris ordinis cunctis apud Romam atque Italiam praeposuit* (Ann. 6.11.2). Syme has already observed that Tacitus begins his list of past *praefecti* with Maecenas in order to emphasize the dubious origins of the office: it came to be the prerogative of senators, but was first held unofficially by an *eques*.¹⁴ Tacitus was either aware

10) *Vale mi ebum Medulliae, ebur ex Etruria, lasar Arretinum, adamas Supernas, Tiberinum margaritum, Cilniorum smaragde, iaspi Igwinorum, berulle Porsenae, carbunculum Hadriae*, Ἴνα συντέμω πάντα, μάλαγμα moecharum; Macrobian. Sat. 2.4.12). For the geographical and political significance of the address, see A. Maggiani, *Cilnium genus*. La documentazione epigrafica etrusca, Studi Etruschi 54 (1896) 171–96.

11) Livy 10.3.2: *Etruriam rebellare ab Arretinorum seditionibus motu orto nuntiabatur, ubi Cilnium genus praepotens divitiarum invidia pelli armis coeptum*; 10.5.13: *habeo auctores sine ullo memorabili proelio pacatam ab dictatore Etruriam esse seditionibus tantum Arretinorum compositis et Cilnio genere cum plebe in gratiam reducto*.

12) Hor. Od. 1.1.1: *Maecenas atavis edite regibus*; Od. 3.29.1: *Tyrrhena regum progenies*; Prop. 3.9.1: *Maecenas, eques Etrusco de sanguine regum*.

13) E. Bormann, Progr. Univ. Marbg. (1883) iii–v, first suggested that Maecenas' connections to the Cilnii of Arretium were on his mother's side, and his observation has gained wide acceptance. See, for example, C. Nicolet, *L'Ordre équestre à l'époque républicaine (312–43 B.C.) II* (Paris 1966–74) 932; Stein 208; V. Gardthausen, *Augustus und seine Zeit II 2* (Leipzig 1896) 763; J. Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne chez les Étrusques* (Paris 1961) 108; W. V. Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* (Oxford 1971) 320 and n. 5. For the Etruscan custom of using the mother's name, see Heurgon 96–97.

14) Syme, Tacitus I 432: "An excursus on the *praefectura urbis*, by introducing the name of Maecenas (who held no office), undermines and discredits the Republican and constitutional precedents which (it may be presumed) had been claimed to justify the innovation."

of Maecenas' Cilnian family tie on his mother's side, or he had seen Augustus' letter and lifted the *nomen* Cilnius from it.¹⁵ Either way the extra *nomen* draws further attention to the untraditional origins of the imperial office and raises serious questions regarding Augustus' choice for his proxy. An *eques* as *praefectus urbi* was unconventional, even more so an *eques* with two patently non-Roman *nomina*, one of which denoted vast foreign power and made the present period all the more inglorious in light of Rome's glorious past: once Rome oversaw the affairs of the Cilnii in Arretium, now a Cilnius was overseeing Rome.¹⁶ The reader is left to wonder about Augustus' motives for bestowing such authority on a man of Maecenas' rank, foreign connections, and tastes.¹⁷ Such presentation is indicative of Tacitus' approach to the history of the principate in general, and of his treatment of Maecenas in particular.

Another example of Tacitus' manipulation of fact is the disparaging portrait of Tiberius found in the obituary of Sallustius Crispus. Sallustius, according to Tacitus, imitated Maecenas by retaining knighthood despite his influence with the emperor, which granted him power over senators, and by feigning indolence and a luxurious lifestyle to conceal an energetic mind (Ann. 3.30.2f.):

atque ille (sc. Sallustius Crispus) quamquam prompto ad capessendos honores aditu, Maecenatem aemulatus sine dignitate senatoria multos triumphalium consulariumque potentia anteit, diversus a veterum instituto per cultum et munditias copiaque et

15) C. Simpson, 'Two Small Thoughts on "Cilnius Maecenas"', *Latomus* 55 (1996) 396.

16) The mention of Maecenas also falls in between references to the prefecture appointees of kings and Augustus' need for such an office to coerce slaves and citizens. Maecenas' connections to Etruscan kings made famous by poets perhaps added to the sense of autocratic tendencies of the principate. Dio apparently made use of Maecenas' ties to Etruscan kings in Book 52, where Maecenas and Agrippa debate over the type of government Augustus should establish: Agrippa advocates a return to the Republic, and Maecenas, whose advice Augustus prefers, advocates monarchy.

17) According to Simpson 396, Tacitus erroneously assumed that Maecenas had suppressed his *nomen* Cilnius, just as M. Agrippa is known to have suppressed his *nomen* Vipsanius. In other words, Tacitus assumed that Cilnius was a *nomen*, Maecenas a *cognomen*. Similarly, P. White, *Maecenas' Retirement*, CPh 86 (1991) 134, cites Tac. Ann. 6.11.2 to show that Tacitus occasionally errs when dealing with Augustan source material. It is more likely, however, that Tacitus knew that Maecenas' matrilineal *nomen* along side the patrilineal *nomen* would seem out of place, just as the whole incident of Maecenas' extraordinary power was out of place.

a(d)fluentia luxu propior. suberat tamen vigor animi ingentibus negotiis par, eo acrior, quo somnum et inertiam magis ostentabat.

According to Tacitus, Sallustius was second only to Maecenas while the latter was alive, then took first place as sharer of such imperial secrets as the murder of Agrippa Postumus (*igitur incolumi Maecenate proximus, mox praecipuus cui secreta imperatorum inniterentur et interficiendi Postumi Agrippae conscius, . . .*; Ann. 3.30.3). In fact each time Tacitus mentions Sallustius Crispus he does so in order to stress the covert nature of Tiberius' principate, which depended on men like Sallustius to dispose of potential rivals.¹⁸ For this reason it is significant that Tacitus' description of Sallustius echoes that of Maecenas in Velleius Paterculus.¹⁹ Both Sallustius in Tacitus and Maecenas in Velleius conceal a capability for swift action behind a disguise of sluggish indifference and both prefer to wallow in an undignified luxury. Most striking is their ability to remove threats. When Tacitus compares Sallustius to Maecenas he reminds the reader that Sallustius was useful in the removal of Agrippa Postumus. The reader would not likely forget that Velleius' sole reference to Maecenas centered on his suppression of the conspiracy of the younger Lepidus, which he handled quickly while pretending to be at ease.²⁰ At the same time Tacitus relates that Sallustius and Maecenas suffered a similar decline in imperial favor. Each came to enjoy only the appearance and not the reality of friendship with their respective emperors, because *potentia* is rarely lasting and satiety eventually overtakes either the givers or the receivers of imperial benefits (*idque et Maecenati acciderat, fato potentiae raro sempiternae, an satias capit aut illos, cum omnia tribuerunt, aut hos, cum iam nihil reliquum est quod cupiant*; Ann. 3.30.4). Tiberius and Sallustius are the main targets of Tacitus' subtle criticism, but mention of Maecenas adds to the

18) Ann. 1.6.3; 2.40.1f. Sallustius not only disposed of Agrippa Postumus, but also the imposter Clemens. For a full discussion of Tacitus' use of Sallustius Crispus to emphasize the secret operations of the princeps, see D. Kehoe, Tacitus and Sallustius Crispus, CJ 80 (1985) 247–54.

19) Vell. Pat. 2.88.2–3: *Erat tunc urbis custodiis praepositus C. Maecenas equestri, sed splendido genere natus, vir, ubi res vigiliam exigeret, sane exsomis, providens atque agendi sciens, simul vero aliquid ex negotio remitti posset, otio ac molliiis paene ultra feminam fluens, non minus Agrippa Caesari carus, sed minus honoratus – quippe vixit angusti clavi plene contentus –, nec minora consequi potuit, sed non tam concupivit. Hic speculatus est per summam quietem ac dissimulationem praecipitis consilia iuvenis et mira celeritate nullaque cum perturbatione aut rerum aut hominum oppresso Lepido inmane novi ac resurrecturi belli civilis restinxit initium.*

20) Syme, Tacitus I 37², n. 5.

overall effect. The secrecy surrounding the activities of imperial ministers, which Tacitus attributes first to Maecenas,²¹ is intended to cast suspicion on the entire nature of the principate.²²

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21) The focus of this paper does not allow for a discussion on how exactly Maecenas came to serve as a model for ambitious knights who opted for real but secret power over meaningless public senatorial offices. Suffice it to say that I disagree with the idea that Maecenas was aware of the fact that in the new government knights acquired “real power, interesting power, inside power” by remaining knights and therefore appearing politically safe to the princeps, as defined by R. Lyne, *Horace* (New Haven 1995) 134–35. The elevation to the equestrian order of Agrippa and Salvidienus Rufus, which allowed them to embark on the senatorial *cursus honorum*, occurred in the 40s. Maecenas’ decision to remain a knight, whatever its cause, apparently occurred very early in Octavian’s career, long before the processes of the principate could have been envisioned.

22) As Sinclair 8–10 observes, the eventual loss of friendship between princeps and minister applies not only to Augustus and Maecenas, Tiberius and Sallustius, but also to Tiberius and Seianus, Gaius and Macro.