

PISO IN SYRIA

At Gnaeus Piso, quo celerius consilia inciperet, postquam Syriam ac legiones attigit, largitione et ambitu infimos militum iuvabat. cum veteres centuriones, severos tribunos demovisset, locaque eorum clientibus suis attribuisset, desidiam in castris, licentiam in urbibus, lascivientes per agros sinebat. nec Plancina, uxor Pisonis, se gerebat ut feminam decebat, sed exercitio equitum intererat, et in Agrippinam, in Germanicum contumelias iaciebat. nota haec Germanico, sed praeverti ad Armenios instantior cura fuit.

at Cn. Piso, quo inciperet consilia celerius,
But Gnaeus Piso, in order to embark on his plans more quickly,

postquam attigit Syriam ac legiones,
after he had reached Syria and the legions,

iuvabat infimos militum
was winning the favour of the most disreputable of the soldiers

largitione et ambitu.
through bribery and canvassing.

cum demovisset veteres centuriones, severos tribunos,
when he had removed the older centurions <and> the stricter tribunes,

-que attribuisset loca eorum clientibus suis
and had assigned their posts to his own dependants

sinebat desidiam in castris, licentiam in urbibus,
he was allowing idleness in the camp, unruliness in the cities,

milites lascivientes per agros.
<and> soldiers who were running riot through the countryside.

nec Plancina, uxor Pisonis, se gerebat ut decebat feminam,
Nor did Plancina, Piso's wife, conduct herself as befitted a lady,

sed intererat exercitio equitum et contumelias iaciebat
but she attended the training of the cavalry and made insulting remarks

in Agrippinam, in Germanicum. haec nota erant Germanico,
about Agrippina and about Germanicus. These things were known to Germanicus,

sed cura praeverti ad Armenios fuit instantior.
but his concern to attend to the Armenians was more pressing.

NOTES + QUESTIONS

Background Notes from Chris Burnand (*Greece and Rome: Texts and Contexts*)

Following Germanicus' triumph over the Germans in 17 AD, Tiberius undertook to share the consulship with him the following year. Germanicus wished to return to Germany and continue his campaigning. However, in the light of problems in the East, most notably with Armenia and Parthia, Germanicus was given **an extraordinary command** in Syria and the East in which he had greater power (*maius imperium*) than the other various governors in the East.

Gnaeus Piso: was an ex-consul, the son of a prominent republican. He was elected governor of Syria at the same time as Germanicus, apparently believing that his role was to curb Germanicus' intentions. Syria had four legions and was the key military province in the East.

In late 1980s in southern Spain various bronze fragments of a senatorial decree concerning the condemnation of Piso were discovered. As a result, the complete decree has been pieced together. The document invites direct comparison with Tacitus' own narrative of the same events.

1. *at Cn. Piso, quo celerius consilia inciperet: What consilia was Piso trying to begin more quickly?*

According to Tacitus, Piso was trying to undermine Germanicus' power within the province (and more generally) by winning over the support of the army.

2. *largitione... sinebat: What actions is Piso described as taking and why?*

- assisting the most disreputable of the soldiers (*infirmos militum*) with bribery and canvassing (*largitione et ambitu*)
- removing the older (*veteres*) centurions and stricter (*severos*) tribunes from power and assigning their posts to his own dependants (*clientibus suis*)
- allowing idleness (*desidiam*) in the camp, hooliganism (*licentiam*) in the cities and soldiers running riot (*lascivientes*) in the countryside.

Why? He wanted to win the support the soldiers' support so that he would be able to dictate what happened in the province (e.g. by reversing Germanicus' orders while he was traveling in Egypt). In a section of this chapter not in your assigned text, Tacitus tells us that he became known as 'father of the legions' on account of his corruption. He also says that some of the soldiers acquiesced in the behaviour of Piso and Plancina because of a rumour that this was not against Tiberius' wishes (probably *litotes*).

3. Do you think Tacitus approves of these actions? Explain your answer referring closely to the Latin.

No. Tacitus' **choice of words** indicates clear disapproval—Piso was deliberately going after the basest of the soldiers (*infirmos militum*). The superlative stresses their moral

bankruptcy. The use of the word *severos* to describe the older centurions suggests that these tribunes had the kind of *gravitas* (moral weightiness) which was considered a virtue in the Roman Republic. These men are summarily dismissed in order to make way for others who have no qualifications other than their loyalty to Piso.

Tacitus uses a tricolon to emphasize the chaos which Piso allowed to ensue in order to further his plans: the pejorative abstract nouns *desidiam* (idleness) and *licentiam* (licentiousness/ hooliganism) catch the ear with their equal numbers of syllables and rhyming endings (assonance). The third part of the tricolon (*lascivientes milites* – soldiers running riot) varies the syntax (*variatio*) by using a participle – this portrays the soldiers' actions as a consequence of the ill-conceived policies adopted by Piso.

4. *nec Plancina...iaciebat*:

a) To what extent do Plancina's actions suggest that she was complicit in Piso's plans?

Tacitus alleges that Plancina did not behave in a manner suitable for a woman (*nec...se gerebat ut feminam decebat*), but attended exercises of the cavalry (*sed exercitio equitum intererat*). This suggests that her social interactions with the soldiers were at odds with the propriety expected of a Roman *matrona*. The context implies that her breach of social protocol is part of Piso's strategy of winning over the soldiers. Plancina's 'unwomanly' involvement in this plan also involves insulting Agrippina and Germanicus (*in Agrippinam, in Germanicum contumelias iaciebat*) in the presence of the soldiers.

b) What stylistic features do you notice in this sentence and how do they contribute to the persuasiveness of Tacitus' narrative.

Tacitus uses a tricolon of main verbs to describe Plancina's inappropriate behaviour – *nec se gerebat...sed intererat...et iaciebat*. All of these contrast strongly with the verb used in the comparative clause *ut femina decebat*. Plancina's presence among the soldiers suggests a lack of shame, as does the emotive verb *iaciebat*, used to describe Plancina's 'hurling' of insults against Agrippina and Germanicus. The symmetrical prepositional phrases *in Agrippinam, in Germanicum*, each with equal numbers of syllables, lend dignity to the legitimately governing pair whose behaviour is so different from that of their adversaries.

5. *nota...fuit*: Why did Germanicus not take action against Piso and Plancina?

Germanicus is represented as being aware of the problems but rising above them; focusing on his more fundamental concern – to quell an uprising in neighbouring Armenia: 'an important buffer state between territory belonging to Rome and that of the hostile Parthians' (Waterfield booklet). Germanicus defused the uprising by supporting the people's choice of king and relieving problems in the provinces of Cappadocia and Commagene.

THE DEATH OF GERMANICUS

saevam vim morbi augebat persuasio veneni a Pisone accepti; et reperiabantur solo ac parietibus erutae humanorum corporum reliquiae, carmina et devotiones et nomen Germanici plumbeis tabulis insculptum, cineres semusti ac tabo obliti aliaque malefica quibus creditur animas numinibus infernis sacrari. simul missi a Pisone incusabantur quod valetudinis adversae signa expectarent. haec Germanico haud minus ira quam per metum accepta sunt. componit epistulam qua amicitiam ei renuntiabat.

persuasio veneni accepti a Pisone

The belief that he had been poisoned by Piso (lit. of poison received from Piso)

augebat
aggravated

saevam vim
the savage force

morbi.
of his illness.

ac reperiabantur

And discoveries were being made:

erutae reliquiae
dug-up remains

humanorum corporum,
of human bodies,

solo ac parietibus;
in the floor and the walls;

carmina et devotiones
poems and curses

et nomen Germanici
and Germanicus' name

insculptum plumbeis tabulis;
inscribed on lead tablets;

cineres semiusti
ashes that were half-burnt

ac obliti tabo,
and smeared with rotten flesh,

aliaque malefica
and other evil objects

quibus
by which

creditur
it is believed <that>

animas
souls

sacrari
are consecrated

numinibus infernis
to the spirits of the dead.

simul
At the same time,

missi a Pisone
men sent by Piso

incusabantur
were being accused

quod expectarent
of waiting for

signa adversae valetudinis.
signs of poor health.

haec accepta sunt Germanico
These were received by Germanicus

haud minus ira quam per metum.
not less in a spirit of anger than in fear.

componit epistulam qua
He composed a letter in which

renuntiabat amicitiam ei.
he renounced Piso's friendship.

NOTES + QUESTIONS

1. What happened between Germanicus' arrival in Syria and the onset of his illness?

In *Annals* 2.57, Tacitus says that Piso was asked to lead a detachment of legions into Armenia and did not obey. When Germanicus and Piso met at the winter quarters of the tenth legion in Cyrrus (north-east of Antioch), an altercation developed and they parted on hostile terms. From this time, Tacitus tells us, they avoided being seen together in public and when they did so, the mood was one of open animosity. At a banquet held by the King of the Nabateans, gold crowns of great weight were presented to Caesar and Agrippina and light ones to Piso and the rest. Piso rejected his (light) crown and commented that this feast was being given for the son of the Roman princeps, not that of a Parthian king. When publicly offered the crown by Antony in 44 BC, Caesar had refused. If true, the anecdote suggests that Piso was implying that Germanicus is taking on the trappings of kingship, detested from the time kings were expelled from Rome at the beginning of the Republic. Piso may also have been insinuating that Germanicus was competing with Tiberius for the rule of Rome.

Burnand: The relationship between Piso and Germanicus deteriorated still further when Germanicus agreed to a request from the Parthian king that Vonones be removed from Syria. This man had been currying favour with Piso by making lavish gifts to Piso.

Germanicus may have made Tiberius angry by travelling to Egypt, ostensibly to alleviate a famine, but in fact on a kind of royal tour involving sight-seeing in Greek clothing which emulated the famous general of old, Publius Scipio. **Burnand:** Augustus had forbidden senators entry to Egypt because of the threat which potentially represented, being an important provider of grain for Rome. Augustus wanted to ensure that no one could use food shortages to exert pressure on Italy by occupying Egypt.

2. *saevam...accepti*: how does the word order here differ from what might be expected? What is the effect of these changes?

The expected word order (SOV) is displaced in order to place emphasis on the direct object *saevam vim*, which is positioned first, although it is the direct object of the verb *augebat*. *Saevus-a-um* is already emphatic and has the effect of personifying the force of the illness, suggesting that a human or supernatural agent was behind it.

3. *et reperiabantur...sacrari*:

a) What objects were being found? What were they supposed to accomplish and how?

- dug up remains of human bodies
- incantations and curses and the name of Germanicus inscribed on lead tablets
- half-burned ashes smeared with human flesh
- other evil objects

Tacitus says (using the impersonal passive to distance himself from this irrational superstition) 'it is believed that by these objects souls are consecrated to the spirits of the dead.' They were also doubtless intended to frighten Germanicus and worsen his illness.

b) How does Tacitus, through his style of writing, create a gruesome and macabre atmosphere here?

- The passive verb *reperiebantur*—‘there were being found’, with no expressed agent, creates an impression of uncertainty and anonymity; we do not even know if the people finding the objects—members of Germanicus’ household—have been bribed to conspire against him.
- The long list of grotesque objects, described with vivid detail (e.g. *cineres semusti ac tabo obliti* – half-burned ashes smeared with human flesh) suggests a sustained campaign of instilling fear.
- the ‘increasing’ tricolon *carmina et devotiones et nomen Germanici plumbeis tabulis insculptum* (incantations and curses and the name of Germanicus inscribed on lead tablets) suggests again a proliferation of evil objects but also has a quasi-incantatory effect—3 types of objects involving spells, with assonance in *plumbeis tabulis*.

4. *simul... exspectarent*:

a) What accusation was made against these emissaries?

They were accused of waiting for signs of deterioration in Germanicus’ health.

b) Who was making the accusation?

Presumably the accusation was being made by member’s of Germanicus’ household or his circle of friends; those aware of the ‘black magic’ being practised against him.

5. *haec...amicitiam*: How did Germanicus react to the unsettling signs around him?

Tacitus describes Germanicus as reacting with anger and fear in equal quantities:

haec haud minus ira quam per metum accepta sunt.

Tacitus varies the syntax (*variatio*), using the ablative of *ira* but a prepositional phrase *per metum*. This and the fact that the fear is placed second, seems to give precedence to *metum*, even though Tacitus says that Germanicus’ anger was as strong.

(Eduqas notes—online): Tacitus says that Germanicus composed a letter in which he renounced Piso’s friendship. Burnand: *amicitia* was the formal diplomatic relationship between officials serving in the same province. Since Germanicus was Piso’s superior, by renouncing this relationship, he was effectively dismissing Piso from office.

Burnand: The decree of the Senate regarding the prosecution of Cnaeus Piso Senior uses exactly the same wording as Tacitus uses here (‘he renounced his *amicitia*’). In the full version of Tacitus’ account, he also writes: ‘most sources add that Piso was ordered to leave the province.’ In the *Senatus Consultum*, Piso is accused of having left of his own accord—a breach of law regarding provincial governors.

DEATH OF GERMANICUS (2)

Germanicus paulisper se credidit convalescere; deinde fessum fiebat corpus. ubi finis aderat, adstantes amicos ita adloquitur: 'erit vobis occasio querendi apud senatum atque invocandi leges. decet amicos non prosequi defunctum ignavo questu, sed quae voluerit meminisse, quae mandaverit exsequi. vindicabitis vos, si me potius quam fortunam meam diligebatis.' amici, dextram morientis amplectentes, iuraverunt se vitam ante quam ultionem amissuros esse.

Paulisper Germanicus credidit se convalescere;
For a short time, Germanicus believed that he was getting better;

Deinde corpus fiebat fessum.
Then his body became weak.

Ubi finis aderat, adloquitur amicos adstantes ita:
When the end was at hand he addressed his friends, who were standing by, thus:

Erit vobis occasio querendi et invocandi leges apud senatum.
'You will have an opportunity to plead your case and invoke the laws in the senate.

Decet amicos non prosequi defunctum ignavo questu
It is appropriate for friends not to escort a dead man with pointless lamentation

sed meminisse quae voluerit; exsequi quae mandaverit.
but to remember what he wanted; to carry out his instructions.

Vindicabitis vos si diligebatis me potius quam fortunam meam.'
you will have your vengeance if you cherish me rather than my fortune.'

Amici, amplectentes dextram morientis, iuraverunt
His friends, clasping the right hand of the dying man, swore

se amissuros esse vitam ante quam ultionem.
that they would give up life before revenge.

NOTES + QUESTIONS

1. Why is the first sentence of this paragraph effective in leading the reader's emotions along with the fortunes of Germanicus?

The sentence (heavily adapted!) is divided into two parts, each marked by a temporal adverb (*paulisper...deinde*) and with alliteration in both halves (*credidit convallescere...fessum fiebat*). There is an interesting difference in rhythm between the two halves of the sentence: the first part, marking the period of hopefulness is longer and the liquid consonants at the end of *convallescere* create a light and fluid rhythm, suggesting continuation. In the second part the syllables are heavier; *fessum* and *corpus* (also the *-ebat* of *fiebat*) would all be scanned long in Latin. This matches the graver subject matter. The vocabulary is also more clipped (the words have shorter numbers of syllables and end with consonants). The reader is thus caught up in the mournful atmosphere which precedes the final moments of Germanicus' life (*ubi finis erat*)—pure Tacitus—and shares the emotions experienced by the audience of Germanicus' friends as he utters his last words.

2. Is it likely that Tacitus is representing what Germanicus actually said?

It is not impossible that Tacitus should have had access to reports about the final words uttered by such a popular man. However, it was customary in ancient historiography to compose the kind of words someone might have said (as the Greek historian Thucydides puts it) to create a more vivid portrait or narrative. Subsequent writers did not consider it necessary to say explicitly that they were doing this.

3. *erit...leges*.

a) What instructions does Germanicus give his friends as he is dying? How does Tacitus use the style to mirror the content of what Germanicus is saying here?

Germanicus says that his friends will have an opportunity to plead a case against his murderers in the senate. He follows this with a lofty generalization about the proper way to honour someone upon their death. This consists in an antithesis (contrast): they should not escort a dead man with pointless lamentation (*prosequi ignavo questu*) but remember what he wanted (*meminisse quae voluerit*) and carry out his instructions (*quae mandaverit exsequi*)—the parallel relative clauses help to delineate the antithesis. The antithesis suggests that the physical ritual of mourning (*prosequi*=escorting the dead body) is much less important than respecting the spirit of the person who has died. The word *exsequi* brings this idea out very well, since it is used both of following a funeral procession and of 'carrying out' instructions.

In a sentence from this chapter which is not part of your assignment, Germanicus says that 'compassion will be on the side of the prosecutors and men will either not believe or not forgive those who invent (*ingere*) wicked instructions (*scelesta mandata*).' On the surface, it sounds as though he is publicly dismissing the rumour of Tiberius' involvement in his death, pinning the blame on Piso alone. However, Virgil also uses the word *tingo* of the act of bringing something into being, as the creator (e.g. the she-wolf

who 'moulds/shapes' the bodies of Romulus and Remus with her tongue (*Aen.* 8.634). This is interesting, because the pun in *exsequi* may point to a Virgilian interpretation for the initiated: Virgil uses this precise pun in the *Aeneid* and it is quite possible that Tacitus (or Germanicus) is alluding to this passage, which, from the imperial perspective, would be a foundational text for the Augustan empire which is now being contested. If so, we could glean a further meaning, since in Virgil, the word is used of Aeneas' final departure from Dido, in obedience to the orders of the gods. He 'carries out' the gods' instructions and this means, effectively presiding over Dido's funeral. The same could be said of Piso and Germanicus, with the 'god' in this case being Tiberius.

b) Why do you think he focuses on the senate and the laws?

According to the characterization in this speech (which seems plausible, given what we know of the subsequent trial of Piso), Germanicus clearly believed that he had been murdered by Piso, on the orders of Tiberius, who saw him as a dangerously popular rival to the throne. The only counterweight to Tiberius' absolute authority as emperor is that of the senate. Tiberius, the adoptive heir of the first Roman emperor Augustus, was only very new to the position and had trodden very carefully with the senate, realizing that this period of his accession was marked by vulnerability because it made Rome into a hereditary monarchy for the first time since the expulsion of kings 500 years earlier. Germanicus seems to be asking his friends to use his death as a way of tipping the balance of power away from Tiberius, by capitalizing on his popularity among senators and the Roman people. Effectively he is inviting them to revolt.

4. *vindicabit is vos...esse*:

How does Tacitus convey the sense of these friends' loyalty to Germanicus?

Germanicus does not doubt that his friends will seek vengeance (*vindicabit is vos...*); the alliteration highlights the point. He refers to their affection (*diligebatis*) and urges them to direct it to 'me rather than my fortune'. This is a slight *zeugma*, since one cannot really cherish someone's (mis-)fortune; one can only cherish the person. Germanicus seems to be reiterating the antithesis made earlier, that they should focus on following his wishes rather than lamenting his demise.

The final words of the paragraph deals with the reaction of Germanicus' friends to his speech, which closely matches his parting words: they embrace his hand (*amplectentes*) and swear an oath that they will seek revenge on his behalf. Their wording makes explicit the danger which this entails: in an answering antithesis, they swear that they will lose their lives rather than revenge. If they believe that Tiberius has murdered Germanicus, they must believe that he could dispense with them just as readily.

DEATH OF GERMANICUS (3)

neque multo post mortuus est, ingenti luctu provinciae et circumiacentium populorum. indoluerunt exterae nationes regesque: tanta fuerat illius comitas in socios, mansuetudo in hostes; propter vultum eloquentiamque venerationem omnium adeptus erat. et erant qui illum magno Alexandro ob formam, aetatem, genus locumque mortis adaequarent; nam affirmaverunt utrumque corpore decore praeditum, genere insigni ortum, vix triginta annos natum periisse.

Neque multo post mortuus est ingenti luctu provinciae
Not long afterwards he died, amid great lamentation of the province

et circumiacentium populorum. Exterae nationes regesque indoluerunt:
and surrounding peoples. Foreign nations and kings mourned:

tanta fuerat comitas in socios, mansuetudo in hostes.
such had been his friendliness towards allies <and> clemency towards enemies.

propter vultum eloquentiamque venerationem omnium adeptus erat.
On account of his good looks and eloquence he had acquired the respect of all.

et erant qui illum adaequarent magno Alexandro
There were even those who compared him with Alexander the Great,

ob formam, aetatem, genus locumque mortis.
on account of his beauty, age, and the manner and place of his death;

nam affirmaverunt utrumque praeditum <esse> corpore decore
for they asserted that each man was endowed with a handsome body,

ortum <esse> genere insigni periisse vix triginta annos natum.
born from a noble stock, and had died aged scarcely thirty years.

NOTES + QUESTIONS

How does Tacitus through the style of his writing lend dignity to his description of Germanicus' death?

- *ingenti luctu provinciae et circumiacientium populorum* 'with huge grief in the province and among the surrounding peoples: The grief at his death is described as *ingenti* – vast. This suggests great intensity but also the number of people affected – not only the province mourned but also the surrounding peoples.
 - The long syllables in *provinciae et circumiacientium populorum* (also in the next sentence – *indoluerunt*) adds solemnity and weightiness, creating a mournful effect. (This is a technique that Virgil likes to use).
 - The description of Germanicus as possessing quintessentially Roman virtues – affability towards friends and clemency towards enemies, emphasized by symmetrical prepositional phrases and asyndeton (*comitas in socios, mansuetudo in hostes*) covers all possibilities, suggesting Germanicus' universal popularity.
 - Both this description and what follows (*propter vultum eloquentiamque venerationem omnium adeptus erat* 'on account of his good looks and eloquence he had earned the respect of all) is suggestive of eulogy. Again, the long syllables of the abstract nouns and here also the m- sounds give added solemnity.
 - The comparison with Alexander the Great elevates Germanicus in a way which perhaps Tacitus is unwilling to endorse. Hence *erant qui adaequarent* 'there were those who compared him...' Alexander the Great, son of a Macedonian king, had conquered most of the known world, creating an empire that extended from Greece to India. Germanicus' victories in Germany were not on a par with this. The aspects of the comparison are, however, quite carefully circumscribed in the 2 tricola that follow:
 - A first tricolon, introduced by *ob* focuses on *formam* (beauty), *aetatem* (age – presumably of death), *genus locumque mortis* (manner and place of death – poisoning in a foreign land).
 - The comparison is continued in a second tricolon, introduced in indirect statement *nam affirmaverunt utrumque...periisse*, which again emphasizes physical beauty but adds nobility as a point of comparison and concludes with pathos with a specification of the age at which each outstanding man ended his life.
 - It is fitting, given Germanicus' popularity, that the people have the final say.
-

MOURNING

at Agrippina, quamquam defessa luctu et corpore aegro, impatiens tamen erat omnium quae ultionem morarentur. ascendit navem cum cineribus Germanici et liberis, miserantibus omnibus quod femina summa nobilitate pulcherrimoque matrimonio, quae venerationem omnium mereret, tunc ferales reliquias sinu ferret, incerta ultionis.

Pisonem interim apud Coum insulam nuntius adsequitur perisse Germanicum. quo gavisus caedit victimas, adit templa. non modo Piso ipse gaudio immoderato se gerit, sed etiam magis insolescit Plancina, quae luctum mortua sorore tum primum in laetum cultum mutavit.

At Agrippina, *But Agrippina,* quamquam defessa luctu *although exhausted with grief* et corpore aegro, *and unwell,*

erat tamen *was, nonetheless,* impatiens omnium *intolerant of all things* quae morarentur ultionem. *which might delay revenge.*

ascendit navem *She embarked a ship* cum cineribus Germanici et liberis *with Germanicus' ashes and her children,*

omnibus miserantibus *with all feeling pity* quod femina *at the fact that a woman* summa nobilitate *of the highest nobility*

pulcherrimoque matrimonio, *who had made an outstanding marriage* quae venerationem omnium mereret *and who had won the respect of all,*

tunc ferret *was then carrying* reliquias ferales *the remains of the dead* sinu, *in her lap,* incerta ultionis. *uncertain of revenge.*

interim nuntius adsequitur Pisonem *Meanwhile a messenger reached Piso* apud Coum insulam *on the island of Cos*

Germanicum periisse. *<with the news that> Germanicus had died.* Gavisus quo, *Having rejoiced at this,*

victimam caedit, templa adit. *he slaughtered victims and attended temples.* Non modo Piso ipse *Not only did Piso himself*

se gerit immoderato gaudio, *behave with excessive joy,* sed Plancina etiam magis insolescit *but Plancina became even more arrogant,*

quae tum primum *who then, for the first time* mortuo sorore *after her sister's death,*

mutavit cultum luctum in <cultum> laetum. *changed from mourning to festive clothes.*

NOTES + QUESTIONS

1. What, according to Tacitus, was Agrippina's condition when she boarded the ship to return to Rome?

Tacitus describes Agrippina as exhausted by grief (*defessa luctu*) and physically unwell (*aegro corpore*).

2. *impatiens tamen erat omnium quae ultionem morarentur.*

What was Agrippina impatient about and why? Does the text give the impression that this sentiment is justified?

Agrippina is 'impatient of all things that might delay revenge.' The text does give the impression that this was justified. On the one hand, the death of Germanicus has been presented as both undeserved and the result of evil machinations, including black magic/psychological manipulation. On the other hand, later in this paragraph, Tacitus says that everyone was feeling pity for Agrippina '*omnibus miserantibus*' and describes them as reflecting on the fact that a woman of the highest nobility who had won the finest marriage and earned the respect of all was carrying funeral remains in her lap, uncertain of revenge. The latter statement is a clear endorsement of the idea that vengeance is appropriate.

3. What is the emotional effect on the reader of the phrase *cum cineribus Germanici et liberis*?

cum + ablative of accompaniment may be used with things as well as people. However, given that the second member of this pair is Agrippina's children, the use of *cum* + ablative of accompaniment followed by ash and then living beings, seems to draw attention to the inanimate status of the former.

4. a) Why is the subjunctive use in the phrase *quod...ferret, incerta ultionis*.

The use of the subjunctive *ferret* is due to the fact that it is introduced by *quod* when this gives the reasoning not of the speaker but of characters in the story—i.e. *omnibus miserantibus*. 'With everyone pitying **the fact that...**' This is so-called factitive *quod*.

b) What does this subjunctive tell us about whose perspective is given here?

This subjunctive makes it clear from *quod* to the end of the paragraph we are hearing the thoughts of *omnibus miserantibus*—i.e. the focalization belongs with them.

c) Why is the subjunctive used in the phrase *quae venerationem omnium mereret*?

The subjunctive in *mereret* goes closely together with the *quae* and is called a 'generic subjunctive'. It indicates that Agrippina belongs to a certain category; that she is 'of the kind to deserve the respect of all'.

d) How does this subjunctive reinforce the positive impression of Agrippina?

It does not merely state *what* Agrippina did, as a relative clause would 'who deserved the admiration of all'. Rather, it describes her as the type of person to deserve the admiration of all. This means it is a judgment on a character as well as her actions.

5. How does Tacitus create a sense of pathos in his description of this journey made by Agrippina?

Agrippina is described as enfeebled by her sufferings *defessa luctu et corpore aegro* ('worn out by grief and physically unwell'); the variation in syntax (*variatio*) keeps our interest, increasing the sense of pathos.

Despite her enfeebled state, Agrippina can think of nothing but revenge (*impatiens erat omnium quae ultionem morarentur*). This gives an impression of a strong and determined woman, eliciting the reader's admiration. It also reinforces the sense of her loyalty to the popular Germanicus.

The combination *cum cineribus Germanici et liberis* 'with the ashes of Germanicus and with her children' seems to highlight, by the ablative of accompaniment and the symmetry, the fact that the first member of this pairing is now mere ash.

miserantibus omnibus 'with everyone feeling pity that...: In the second half of the paragraph we see Agrippina through the eyes of her supporters—apparently everyone except Tiberius and Piso. This perspective focuses on the injustice of Agrippina's fate. Agrippina's attributes are described in a tricolon, with *variatio*—*femina summa nobilitate pulcherrimoque matrimonio, quae venerationem omnium mereret*: 'a woman of the highest nobility, who had made a very fine marriage and won the admiration of all'. This is contrasted with the bleakness of her present situation: *tunc ferales reliquias ferret, incerta ultionis* 'was then carrying the remains of the dead, uncertain of vengeance.'

6. *Pisonem interim*. Why does Tacitus start the sentence in this way? Why is this surprising grammatically?

By placing *Pisonem* long before the verb of which it is the direct object (*adsequitur*—he approached), Tacitus is able to contrast Piso's name with Agrippina's (at the start of the preceding paragraph) as a way of shifting focus onto the perpetrators of Agrippina's sufferings.

7. Through whom is the adjective *inmoderato* focalized?

Since Tacitus was not actually present on the island of Cos, we must assume that he is reporting the impressions of people who saw Piso and Plancina behaving in this way. He may be deriving these from the allegations made in Piso's trial, to which Tacitus seems to have had access. He quotes Tiberius as drawing a distinction between unsavoury behaviour such as Piso and Plancina rejoicing at Germanicus' death and actual criminality—i.e. murder.

8. How does Tacitus convey a sense that the behaviour of Piso and Plancina at the time of Germanicus' death was shocking?

The contrast with the previous paragraph could not be greater. Having roused enormous sympathy for Agrippina and created a poignant picture of her undeserved suffering, Tacitus now shifts to the celebrations of those who have caused her grief. Piso has the audacity to offer sacrificial victims and enter temples, despite having supposedly hastened on Germanicus' death using black magic. The use of the plural *victimae, templa* suggest repeated action, as if there was no limit on Piso's shamelessness. The conjunctions *non modo...sed etiam* increases the sense of outrage—as if what has been told was not enough. Instead we are given a kind of a diptych—the picture of Agrippina and the dead Germanicus is paired with that of Piso and Plancina. The contrast between the two women could not be greater—we are told nothing of Agrippina's actual mourning; this heightens the dignity and pathos of her suffering. Plancina, on the other hand, apparently feels so overjoyed at this suffering that she concludes her familial duty of mourning her dead sister (the implication seems to be she does so too soon) and puts on cheerful clothing *luctum tum primum in laetum cultum mutavit*.

MOURNING CONTINUED

At Romae, postquam fama Germanici valetudinis percrebuit cunctaque, ut ex longinquo, aucta in deterius adferebantur, dolor, ira, questus erumpebant: ideo nimirum Germanicum in extremas terras relegatum esse, ideo Pisoni permissam provinciam. hos vulgi sermones mors Germanici, ubi nuntiata est, adeo incendit ut ante edictum magistratum, ante senatus consultum, sumpto iustitio desererentur fora, clauderentur domus. ubique silentium et gemitus. et quamquam insignibus lugentium non abstinebant, altius animis maerebant.

At Romae, postquam fama Germanici valetudinis percrebuit
But at Rome, after news of Germanicus' illness spread

cunctaque, ut ex longinquo, adferebantur
and all things, as tends to happen from a distance, were being passed on

aucta in deterius, dolor, ira, questus erumpebant : colon = indirect statement
exaggerated for the worse, grief, anger and lamentation burst out.

ideo nimirum Germanicum relegatum esse
It was for this reason doubtless, <people said>, that Germanicus had been banished

in extremas terras, ideo provinciam permissam <esse> Pisoni.
to the ends of the earth, for this reason that the province had been entrusted to Piso.

mors Germanici ubi nuntiata est adeo incendit hos sermones
The death of Germanicus, when it was announced, so inflamed these mutterings

vulgi ut, ante edictum magistratum,
of the people that, before the proclamation of the magistrates,

ante consultum senatus, sumpto iustitio,
before a senatorial decree was passed, with a break taken from legal business,

fora desererentur, domus clauderentur.
the forums were deserted, homes were shut.

ubique <erat> silentium et gemitus.
Everywhere there was silence and lamentation.

Et quamquam non abstinebant insignibus lugentium,
And although <people> did not refrain from the outward signs of mourning,

maerebant altius animis.
they grieved more deeply in their spirits.

NOTES + QUESTIONS

1. *at Romae...erumpebant.*

a) Explain how Tacitus has shifted the focus of his narrative here, both geographically and temporally.

The previous paragraph began with a shift in perspective from Agrippina, who was embarking her ship to return from Syria with Germanicus' ashes, to Piso (*Pisonem interim*), who was in Cos when he received news of Germanicus' death. The geographical focus shifts again here, back to Rome (*at Romae*), where we also move back in time to the rumours which circulated at the time when Germanicus' illness became known. By the end of this paragraph, we have moved forward again to the time when news of Germanicus' death reached Rome.

b) How does Tacitus convey an impression of the exaggerated reports that reached Rome?

fama ('rumour') suggests potentially unreliable information. Tacitus describes how all news (*cuncta*) of Germanicus' death was exaggerated for the worse (*aucta in deterius*), commenting in a gnomic, generalizing parenthesis that this tends to happen when news is being transmitted from far away (*ut ex longinquo*).

c) Why do you think Tacitus points out the exaggerated nature of these reports?

It is somewhat surprising that Tacitus seems to undermine the reports, given that the content of the '*sermones vulgi*' seems to match his own views about what happened to Germanicus. However, he says elsewhere that opinions differed on this subject and when Piso was eventually tried, he was acquitted of the murder charge (but not the accompanying charge of causing the troops to mutiny). Showing critical distance from gossip demonstrates Tacitus' seriousness as an interpreter of evidence about the past, suggesting that his own views were not based on such rumours.

d) How does Tacitus' language suggest the extreme nature of people's reaction to the news?

The tricolon of abstract nouns—*dolor* (grief), *ira* (anger), *questus* (recriminations), in asyndeton, gives a vivid impression of the mixture of the febrile atmosphere at Rome. The verb *erumpebant* (were breaking out) contributes to the impression that people were being governed by impulsive emotions rather than reason and that these emotions had previously been suppressed, perhaps through fear of their possible consequences.

2. *ideo nimirum...provinciam:*

a) Whose perspective are we given here? How is the shift in focalization/perspective made clear by Tacitus' language?

There are clear indications that *ideo ...provinciam* represents the thoughts of the people. The sentence is in indirect statement, immediately following the colon. *dolor, ira, questus*

erumpebant takes the place of an introductory verb. Following this sentence, Tacitus refers to the content of the sentence as *hos vulgi sermones*—these conversations of the populace.

b) How does Tacitus, in this sentence, convey a vivid impression of the indignation people felt at what had happened to Germanicus?

In two parallel clauses, each introduced by *ideo* (for this reason), Tacitus gives a vivid impression of the retrospective logical deductions which Germanicus' death elicited. Intriguingly, the reader is left to fill out the content of *ideo*; Germanicus' illness is the only event to which explicit reference is made: a great deal must be supplied in order to make sense of the conclusions that follow.

ideo nimirum Germanicum in extremas terras relegatum esse: 'it was for this reason that Germanicus had been exiled to the ends of the earth.' The word *relegare* is used for banishment—a punishment regularly used by Roman emperors as a substitute for the death penalty. *nimirum*—renders more vivid the idea of people experiencing a sudden realization of the truth.

ideo Pisoni permissam provinciam: 'it was for this reason that the province had been entrusted to Piso.' The agent of the passive infinitive *permissam esse* is omitted but can hardly be anyone other than Tiberius, since Syria was an imperial province (allotted by the emperor, not the senate).

Tacitus brilliantly shows the populace in the process of drawing the conclusion that Tiberius had virtually exiled Germanicus to Syria and given Piso the province with the express purpose of undermining Germanicus' power and ultimately murdering him.

3. *hos vulgi...maerebant*.

What was the effect of Germanicus' death on the people's mood at Rome? Is Tacitus suggesting that Tiberius' rule was under threat? Explain your answer.

Tacitus says that the death of Germanicus inflamed (*incendit*) the rumours of the people. This, together with the result clause *ita...ut* leads us to expect civil unrest. The idea of opposing the state is continued in the tricolon that follows: *ante...sumpto iustitio*. That expectation is, however, somewhat thwarted by the actual outcome, which is not of violence but of somber mourning. In two parallel clauses, in asyndeton and with assonance (*desererentur* *fora...clauderentur* *domus*), Tacitus describes how the people spontaneously suspended all public business, rather than waiting for a decree from the senate. The impression is reinforced by the brief symmetrical/paradoxical sentence that follows (the verb is omitted): *ubique silentium et gemitus*. 'Everywhere there was silence and lamentation.' Tacitus closes the description of the public mood with an antithesis showing that there was no gap between outward appearance and inner feelings; rather, the public demonstration of grief was unequal to those feelings (*et quamquam...maerebant*). This antithesis is in stark contrast to the gap between appearance and reality which is a hallmark of Tiberius' character in Tacitus' *Annals* and which has caused the grief being experienced by the people of Rome.

AGRIPPINA'S RETURN TO ITALY

navigazione hiberni maris nequaquam intermissa, Agrippina Brundisio appropinquat. interim adventu eius audito multi amici et plurimi milites qui sub Germanico stipendia fecerant ruerunt ad portum.

simulac visa est navis, complentur non solum portus sed etiam moenia ac tecta turba maerentium et rogantium inter se, silentione an voce aliqua egredientem exciperent. navis lente appropinquat, non celeriter ut solet, sed cunctis ad tristitiam compositis. postquam duobus cum liberis feralem urnam tenens, egressa e nave defixit oculos, idem fuit omnium gemitus.

nequaquam intermissa
Having made no break

navigazione
in the voyage

hiberni maris
over (lit. 'of') the wintry sea

Agrippina appropinquat Brundisio. Interim, Agrippina approached Brundisium. Meanwhile, adventu eius audito, once news of her arrival had spread,

multi amici et plurimi milites
many friends and a great many soldiers

qui stipendia fecerant sub Germanico
who had served under Germanicus

ruerunt ad portum.
rushed to the harbour.

simulac navis visa est, non solum portus
As soon as the ship was seen, not only the harbour

sed etiam moenia ac tecta complentur
but also the walls and roofs were filled

turba maerentium
with the crowd of those grieving

et rogantium inter se
and asking themselves

an exciperent egredientem
whether they should receive her as she disembarked

silentione an voce aliqua.
in silence or with words of some kind.

navis lente appropinquat
The ship approached slowly,

non celeriter ut solet,
not with the usual speed,

sed cunctis ad tristitiam compositis.
but with all things arranged for mourning.

postquam defixit oculos egressa e nave cum duobus liberis,
After she lowered her eyes, having disembarked from the ship with her two children,

tenens feralem urnam,
holding the funereal urn,

gemitus omnium fuit idem.
everyone groaned in unison.

1. a) *navigazione... appropinquat*: how does Tacitus convey the sense of urgency in Agrippina's return to Rome?

The assigned text says that there was **no break at all** in Agrippina's journey *navigazione.... nequaquam intermissa* ('with the journey in no way interrupted')

One might expect a journey of this length to be broken up into stages.

navigazione...hiberni maris (journey over the wintry sea). Agrippina is sailing during winter—this was not the sailing season and was potentially dangerous. Agrippina is evidently taking risks in order to hasten her return.

bi) *navigazione...portum*: Where is the temporal geographical focus in these opening two sentences?

The opening sentence describes Agrippina's arrival at Brundisium—a harbour on the heel of Italy, following her swift journey 'over the wintry sea' from Syria.

In the second sentence we are told that many friends and very many soldiers who had served under Germanicus rushed to the harbour (*ruerunt ad portum*). The implication seems to be that they were coming from Rome. Thus we have two groups simultaneously converging at speed on Brundisium.

ii) How has Tacitus skillfully manipulated the different theatres of action in describing Agrippina's return from Syria?

The narrative from the time of Germanicus' death has been artfully constructed. In the diptych of contrasting portraits showing Agrippina and Piso/Plancina, we saw Agrippina with Germanicus' ashes embarking a ship to set sail for Rome, impatient of all things that might delay revenge. In the contrasting portrait, we saw Piso and Plancina rejoicing on Cos, with Plancina discarding the mourning period for her sister. We then shifted to Rome, where we moved back in time to the period when news of Germanicus' illness reached the citizens and they interpreted these events as a conspiracy engineered by Tiberius. They then heard about Germanicus' death and the reader was led to expect civil unrest; in fact, the citizens simply took a period of impromptu mourning, without waiting for instructions from the senate (and indeed Tiberius). Now, as Agrippina's ship arrives in Brundisium, having hastened over the sea despite the wintry weather, Germanicus' supporters hasten from Rome to Brundisium to greet her. The stage is set for her revenge.

2. *interim...portum*: What impression of Germanicus and Agrippina does this sentence convey and how?

The sentence gives an impression of their considerable popularity but also the political power that Germanicus had. Not only did numerous friends make the journey from Rome to Brundisium (which is several hours on the train even today), but also very many soldiers who had served under Germanicus. Their haste is emphasized (*ruerunt*). They seem to act as soon as they hear news of Agrippina's arrival (*adventu eius audito*).

3. a) *simulac...excipere*: How does Tacitus give a vivid impression of the size and mood of the mourning crowds awaiting Agrippina's return?

Tacitus says that not only the harbour (*non modo portus*) but also the walls and roofs (*sed etiam moenia ac tecta*) were filled with the crowd. The people are eager to see the ship arriving; hence their gathering on the roofs. The crowd convenes as soon as they see the ship (*simulac navis visa est*), suggesting their anticipation. They are described with the participles *maerentium* et *rogantium* (those grieving and asking...) the long syllables (equal numbers in each participle) with assonance suggest a mournful atmosphere. We are also given an insight into their conversations, which show sympathy for Agrippina's plight and uncertainty about the most helpful way of receiving her (*rogantium inter se silentione an voce aliqua egredientem excipere*—of those asking one another whether they should greet her in silence or with words of some kind).

b) *navis...compositis*: How and why does Tacitus describe the ship's approach?

Tacitus describes the fleet as approaching slowly (*lente*), not with its usual swiftness (*non celeriter ut solet*) but with everything arranged for mourning (*cunctis ad tristitiam compositis*). This contrasts starkly with the hasty journey over the wintry sea. We see the approach of the ship through the eyes of Germanicus' supporters who are assembled at Brundisium. The solemn sight matches their mood. The description also seems to imply an element of choreography; Agrippina's desire for revenge requires her to capitalize on the wave of sympathy which her plight elicits.

c) *postquam...gemitus*: What actions does this sentence describe and in what order? How does this differ from the order in which they occurred? Does this sequencing contribute to the pathos of the events described?

The actions described are as follows

- holding the urn (*feralem urnam tenens*)
- having disembarked from the ship (*egressa e nave*)
- she lowered her gaze (*defixit oculos*)
- everyone alike groaned (*idem fuit omnium gemitus*)

There is a significant *hyperbaton* (breaking up of words that belong grammatically together) in *postquam...defixit*. In between these words we are given a portrait of Agrippina with her children, holding the funereal urn *cum duobus liberis urnam tenens*. Her disembarkation is dealt with swiftly in a participial phrase—*egressa e nave*. This means that all the audience's attention is concentrated on Agrippina's act of lowering her gaze (for which we have been waiting grammatically since *postquam*). The main clause comes at the very end and describes the emotional outburst inspired by this gesture in the bystanders who previously did not know what would be the best way to greet Agrippina.

8-marker: *simulac...gemitus*:

How does Tacitus, in this passage, convey a vivid impression of Agrippina's arrival at Brundisium? (See points 3a-c above)