

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF LUCULLUS? TACITUS'S CHARACTERISATION OF CORBULO

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INTRODUCTION

Nero's famous commander, Cn. Domitius Corbulo, is generally portrayed in the literary tradition as a charismatic and alluring figure. He was simultaneously both a man with a uniquely personal history and an idealised type, taken up and reshaped to suit the prevailing political demands of a post-Neronian world.¹ In an empire where military *gloria* was in notoriously short supply, fellow generals, such as Suetonius Paulinus, who was popularly perceived as Corbulo's *concertator*, "rival" (*Annals* 14.29.2), naturally wanted to match his achievements, while Nero ultimately saw him as a threat.² The fact that Corbulo had been successful both in Germany to the north and in Armenia to the east shows that his far-flung campaigns symbolically embraced the boundaries of the known Roman world: "Rome was seen as the centre of the world between two poles. . . . The result was a configuration of northern and western barbarians on the one hand and orientals on the other" (Hölscher 2003.10). Corbulo's martial activities saw him, like a colossus, spanning the ethnographical poles of the Roman military sphere (as had Germanicus before him) and magnifying his personal prestige, although the reputation which he gained as a result ultimately cost him his life.³ After Corbulo's

1 Vervaeke 2002.187–93 discusses the Corbulo "myth" in the centuries following his death.

2 The particular rivalry between Corbulo and Caesennius Paetus in Armenia is analysed below.

3 Mattern 1999.169–70 discusses the additional prestige associated with conquests in remote regions.

enforced suicide, he quickly became the focus for idealised representations of his military leadership that increasingly gained momentum under the new Flavian dynasty. How Tacitus responded to this favourable historical tradition in crafting his own more nuanced portrait of Corbulo will be the main focus of this paper.

Modern critical responses to Tacitus's Corbulo certainly have been polarised. Ronald Martin concludes that: "For the most part, Tacitus' narrative of eastern affairs is shaped to produce a sustained panegyric of Corbulo" (1981.180). Less enthusiastic is Bessie Walker, who proposes that "the failure of Corbulo is partly due to the jealousy of Nero, but also to his own low character" (1952.29). Such sharply divergent readings of the same figure are striking, but there is potentially some middle ground. This paper will argue that Tacitus knew that his readers would have certain expectations about Corbulo's presentation in the *Annals*, particularly if they had already embraced the emotive dynamics of the *Agricola* (a biography driven by the destructive relationship between another jealous emperor and his talented general). Yet Tacitus played with these expectations in his narrative, progressively revealing a much harsher edge to the self-serving general than the audience expected to see. Tacitus, through Corbulo, highlights a perpetual tension between the centre and periphery of the imperial power structure that can be traced back even as far as the original campaigns of the republican general Lucullus, in whose ghostly footsteps Corbulo follows.

This paper will also suggest, using comparisons drawn primarily from Plutarch, that Tacitus shows Corbulo replaying significant moments from Lucullus's military career, but not straightforwardly. If Corbulo was playing at being Lucullus, whether in reality or through literary allusion in his memoirs, then Tacitus problematises the association. Lucullus himself is, in any case, a curiously antithetical model, being equally famous for his talents as a general during his extensive campaigns against Mithridates (74–67 B.C.) and for his creatively hedonistic lifestyle in retirement (67–57/6 B.C.) after he was forced to give up his command because of his mutinous soldiers.⁴

From Corbulo's very first appearance in Germany (*Annals* 11.18.1), Tacitus presents him in such a way as to set a historiographical agenda

4 Keaveney 1992 explores Lucullus's career. His reputation as a hedonist lives on around the world today, as is shown by the number of fine wine merchants, luxurious food outlets, and top-notch restaurants named after him.

for subsequent sections in the east, raising fundamental questions about the divergence between image and reality unfolding on the margins of the empire.⁵ As we shall see, Tacitus's ambitious Corbulo is carefully crafted to make readers feel uneasy, but not simply because he is a victim of Nero. In a way that typifies Tacitean historiography and also reflects the larger project of the *Annals*, the nuanced portrait of Corbulo is simultaneously informed by knowledge of republican history and drives contemporary readers to reflect on problems that were still relevant in their own world. Nero may have been wrong to order Corbulo's execution, but that does not mean that the general (or men like him) did not potentially pose a threat, even to a good emperor.

However, before turning to the *Annals* in detail, we should identify three distinct historical and literary factors that quickly helped Corbulo to acquire his exemplary status. These ingredients all shaped the positive images of Corbulo that Tacitus found in his sources. First, there is his dramatic death (Vervaet 2002.188). After a mysterious conspiracy reported only by Suetonius (*Nero* 36.2), but apparently led by Corbulo's son-in-law, Annius Vinicianus, Nero succumbed to the whispering campaign (*secreti sermones*, Tacitus *Histories* 3.6.1) led by one of Corbulo's own soldiers, Arrius Varus.⁶ Indeed, the general's vulnerability in the face of such tactics was already clear as early as 62, when a rumour had spread that the aristocrat Rubellius Plautus had fled to Corbulo (and his armies) for protection (Tacitus *Annals* 14.58.2; Vervaet 2002.147–51). Corbulo survived this gossip, but he was not so lucky after the conspiracy of Vinicianus in 66. Dio is the only extant source to explain what happened in any detail. According to the epitomised version, the emperor courteously invited his general to Greece, but then gave orders for him to be executed. Yet Corbulo, in a gambit calculated to take the initiative from Nero, pre-empted this sentence, dying in a dramatic fashion (Dio 62.17; cf. Ammianus Marcellinus 15.2.5):⁷

καὶ ὃς ἐπειδὴ τάχιστα τὸ προστεταγμένον ἔγνω, ξίφος
τε ἔλαβε, καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἐρρωμένως παίων ἔλεγεν “ἄξιος”.

5 Gilmartin 1973.584–85 emphasises the importance of this theme in the Corbulan narrative.

6 See Cappelletti 1992–93 and Vervaet 2002.161–76 for the conspiracy. For Varus, see Vervaet 2003.451.

7 The suicide took place in late 66 or early 67, but the exact date is uncertain: Griffin 1984.462.

τότε γὰρ δὴ, τότε πρῶτον ἐπίστευσεν ὅτι κακῶς
ἐπεποιήκει καὶ φεισάμενος τοῦ κιθαρωδοῦ καὶ πρὸς
αὐτὸν ἐλθὼν ἄνοπλος.

As soon as he understood the order, he took a sword, and striking himself robustly, said, “Just deserts!” For then indeed, for the first time, he understood that he had acted badly, both in sparing the cithara player [Nero] and in coming to him unarmed.⁸

The epitomised Dio offers only a brief account of the suicide, but Corbulo’s direct speech and belated realisation of his own vulnerability indicate the potential for a more expansive and emotive treatment of the scene. The depiction of a loyal general killing himself to escape the clutches of an ungrateful and unmilitary emperor surely would have gripped the collective imagination of readers, who seemed to enjoy the death scenes of famous people in the form of *exitus* literature.⁹ Beyond the literary realm, Corbulo’s infamous *peripeteia* could also be used to produce a strong response. So only a few years after the suicide, Tacitus makes Mucianus cite Corbulo as a cogent *exemplum* to stir the hesitant Vespasian to enter the civil war: “an excidit trucidatus Corbulo?,” “Has slaughtered Corbulo slipped your mind?” (*Histories* 2.76.3).¹⁰

Corbulo’s dramatic death alone would probably have ensured him posthumous fame, but a second factor is the marriage of Domitian, then the bright young hope of the new Flavian dynasty, and Corbulo’s daughter, Domitia Longina, perhaps as early as 70 (Suetonius *Domitian* 1.3.22).¹¹ Brian Jones (1996.18) sees the marriage as typifying Vespasian’s practice of rehabilitating Nero’s victims, while Barbara Levick suggests (1999.56) that the union was actively intended to attract Corbulo’s prestige, as well as his friends and relatives, to the new dynasty. In practice, the relationship

8 All translations are my own.

9 For the compelling nature of such death scenes, see Pliny *Epistles* 5.5.3, 8.12.4, Tacitus *Annals* 16.16.2 and 4.11.2. See, in general, Pomeroy 1991.

10 Kavanagh 1994 argues that the negative *exemplum* of Corbulo’s fate triggered the rebellion of Vindex. In happier days, Tacitus’s Corbulo is made to cast himself as a positive exemplum of the ideal general: *exemplum omnibus ostendere*, “showing himself as an example to all the soldiers” (*Annals* 13.35.4).

11 See Vinson 1989.431–50, Levick 2002.202 n. 19, Vervaet 2002.188.

between Domitian and his new wife was strained (Newlands 2002.190), but its very existence surely enhanced Corbulo's posthumous reputation just when the historical tradition about him was being shaped.

The third factor was generated by Corbulo himself during his lifetime. Like other generals, Corbulo wrote memoirs of his own campaigns, which both Pliny the Elder (who served under Corbulo in Germany) and Tacitus used as a source (*Annals* 15.16.1; cf. Pliny *Historia Naturalis* 2.180, 5.83, 6.23).¹² There has certainly been much speculation about how far Tacitus used Corbulo's account, and even conjecture about whether particular phrases in the *Annals* derive directly from the general (Koestermann 1967.307–08). However that may be, Corbulo's literary legacy meant that historians were obliged to consult a work written by the general himself, who no doubt cast the best possible light on his own activities. In addition, as Ronald Syme points out, some of Corbulo's legates, specifically Licinius Mucianus and Marius Celsus, were also engaged in literary activity with scope for depicting their general positively.¹³ All three factors—the dramatic death, Corbulo's prominent daughter, and the existence of the memoirs—magnified the general's reputation and thus meant that Tacitus as a historian was faced (as so often) with partisan sources.

GERMANY

Corbulo appears in the *Annals* in six surviving sections, the first of which takes place in Germany.¹⁴ After Sanquinius Maximus, the governor of Lower Germany, dies, Claudius sends out Corbulo, only to discover that one German tribe, the Chauci, has opportunistically revolted, led by an auxiliary deserter called Gannascus.¹⁵ Tacitus's initial characterisation

12 Vervaeke 2002.188. On these memoirs, see Levick's entry in the forthcoming new edition of Peter 1906–14 (repr. 1993). She suggests that they were probably written after 63, that they covered his Armenian campaigns more thoroughly than the German campaign, and that they were probably published posthumously (but before 77). She identifies three fragments: Pliny *HN* 2.180 (Peter F1), Tacitus *Annals* 15.16.1–3 (Peter F2), and Pliny *HN* 5.83 (Peter F3). Koestermann 1967.250 suggests that Tacitus could have used oral traditions about Corbulo.

13 Syme 1958.297. For the subject matter of Mucianus's writings, see Ash forthcoming.

14 For Corbulo in the *Annals*, see 11.16–20 (Germany), 13.6–9, 13.34–41, 14.23–26, 15.1–17, and 15.24–31 (Armenia). Dio 60.30.4–6 covers the campaigns in Germany and 62.19–29 the campaigns in Armenia.

15 Tacitus says that Corbulo arrived in 47, although *PIR*² D142 suggests that he appeared in 46. Malloch 2005 endorses a date of 46 and argues that Tacitus deliberately distorted the chronology to cast Corbulo in a positive light.

of Corbulo strikes a positive chord, since the general confronts the problem swiftly and efficiently (*Annals* 11.18.2):¹⁶

at Corbulo prouinciam ingressus magna cum cura et mox gloria, cui principium illa militia fuit, triremes alueo Rheni, ceteras nauium, ut quaeque habiles, per aestuaria et fossas adegit; luntribusque hostium depressis et exturbato Gannasco, ubi praesentia satis composita sint, legiones operum et laboris ignauas, populationibus laetantes, veterem ad morem reduxit, ne quis agmine decederet nec pugnam nisi iussus iniret.

Yet Corbulo, having entered the province with great diligence and soon with glory to which that campaign was the start, brought up triremes by the channel of the Rhine, as well as other ships, as far as each one was manageable, by estuaries and canals. After sinking the enemy's boats and ejecting Gannascus, when the immediate problems were sufficiently resolved, he restored to the old standard of discipline legions who were slothful when it came to toil and work and who delighted in pillaging. He made sure that nobody left the column nor entered battle unless ordered to do so.

This positive emphasis on Corbulo's diligence and efficiency recalls Agricola's first campaign in Britain, when he similarly attacked the rebels on Anglesey (Mona) by water (*Agricola* 18.4). Certainly, the Chauci are not the most formidable German tribe: Pliny the Elder calls them a *misera gens*, "wretched people," whose bodies are frozen by the north wind (*HN* 16.2–4). Nonetheless, Corbulo addresses the unrest as quickly as possible. Our impression of his adept and capable leadership here is further bolstered if we remember an earlier description of another general operating in the same area. Tacitus records in some detail Germanicus's activities on the Rhine in A.D. 16, when he ambitiously constructs a huge fleet (*Annals* 2.6–8). Yet the process of building the ships is time-consuming, and, in any case, Germanicus undermines the operation by disembarking his forces too

16 The text used is Heubner's 1994 Teubner of the *Annals*.

soon, so that they have to spend several days building bridges. The scale and nature of this description allow us to set a tardy Germanicus against a speedy Corbulo.¹⁷

Corbulo is also presented as being versatile, sending agents to remove the troublemaker Gannascus by trickery (*Annals* 11.19.2). The term used by Tacitus is *dolus*, an ideologically charged word, although not necessarily pejorative (Wheeler 1988.94–95). Yet clearly it was possible for it to reflect negatively on Corbulo, because Tacitus explicitly argues that to trap a treacherous deserter was not dishonourable, although he concedes that Gannascus's murder upset the Chauci and planted the seeds for rebellion. Use of trickery was often perceived as a particularly un-Roman technique. So when a German chieftain offers to kill Arminius by poison, Tacitus's Tiberius replies that: "non fraude neque occultis, sed palam et armatum populum Romanum hostes suos ulcisci," "The Roman people take vengeance on their enemies, not by underhand tricks, but openly and under arms" (*Annals* 2.88.1). Tacitus continues, saying that: "qua gloria aequabat se Tiberius priscis imperatoribus," "By that glorious sentiment, Tiberius was matching himself with the generals of old" (*Annals* 2.88.2).¹⁸ On this analogy, if Corbulo resorts to trickery, then his status as a *priscus imperator* is potentially compromised.

We can also consider here an image from a different work. Statius portrays Corbulo in a poem, probably published before Domitian's assassination, which praises the military exploits of Vettius Bolanus, who had commanded a legion under Corbulo in Armenia (*Tacitus Annals* 15.3.1).¹⁹ Corbulo is shown sharing his worries with this man, concerning "quod tempus amicum | fraudibus, exerto quaenam bona tempora bello," "what time was conducive to trickery, what times were good for open fighting" (*Silvae* 5.2.38–39). So trickery was perceived by an author other than Tacitus to be part of Corbulo's broad military repertoire. Yet Tacitus introduces it to his portrait of the general at an early stage, drawing attention to a trait which

17 I thank Tony Woodman for drawing my attention to *Annals* 2.6–8 in this context. He notes that the passage shares with *Annals* 11.18.2 some items of vocabulary, particularly *alueo* (2.6.4), *Rhenus* (2.6.4), *habiles* (2.6.3), *aestuarium* (2.8.3), and *fossam* (2.8.1).

18 On this ideological tension between trickery and open warfare, see Ash 1999b.129–30. Pelling 1993.84, discussing the early books of the *Annals*, sees absence of guile as linking Germanicus and Piso both to one another and to the republican past. On the wider representation of the republic in imperial culture, see Gowing 2005.

19 On Vettius Bolanus, see Vervaeke 2003.447–50.

(for now) is directed against the enemy, but which will recur subsequently in the narrative in a more disquieting way.

Corbulo's conduct in Germany is also programmatic because Tacitus establishes the general's characteristics as a strict disciplinarian, although he does so in a striking manner (*Annals* 11.18.3):

feruntque militem, quia uallum non accinctus, atque alium, quia pugione tantum accinctus foderet, morte punitos. quae nimia et incertum an falso iacta originem tamen e seueritate ducis traxere; intentumque et magnis delictis inexorabilem scias, cui tantum asperitatis etiam aduersus leuia credebatur.

They say that one soldier was punished by death because he was digging the rampart unarmed, and that another soldier was executed for doing so carrying only a dagger. These stories are exaggerated and perhaps invented, but nevertheless originate from the general's strictness. You should know that a man believed to have been so harsh when faced even with trivial offences was strict and relentless towards serious misdemeanors.

The steep gulf between the relatively trivial nature of the soldiers' offences and the severity of the punishment is clear. In the short term, Corbulo's terror tactics (*is terror*, *Annals* 11.19.1) have the beneficial impact of bolstering his soldiers' valour, but such strictness can backfire, as the fate of the disciplinarian Galba reminds us.²⁰ Corbulo's methods can also be contrasted with the more flexible approach of the ideal general, Agricola, who "paruis peccatis ueniam, magnis seueritatem commodare," "responded indulgently to trivial misdemeanours, but treated serious offences severely" (*Agricola* 19.3). In comparison, the rigorous Corbulo does not mete out discipline to his soldiers on any kind of sliding scale. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as is clear from Tacitus's subsequent reference to Corbulo's instant

20 "laudata olim et militari fama celebrata seueritas eius angebat aspernantes ueterem disciplinam," "His strictness, once praised and extolled in soldiers' estimation, annoyed troops who scorned the old standard of discipline" (*Histories* 1.5.2). Cf. "nocuit antiquus rigor et nimia seueritas, cui iam pares non sumus," "His old-fashioned inflexibility and excessive strictness, to which we are now not equal, did him harm" (*Histories* 1.18.3).

capital punishment of erring soldiers in the east as *usu salubre*, “wholesome in practice” (*Annals* 13.15.4), but the special pleading reminds us that it is potentially dangerous for the commander.²¹

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the passage about Corbulo's disciplinarian tendencies at *Annals* 11.18.3 is the manner of presentation, specifically the narrative technique whereby Tacitus draws attention to the layers of plausible fiction surrounding Corbulo and thus demonstrates his sensitivity towards the particular historiographical problems about this general. Other writers naturally accentuate Corbulo's legendary discipline (Dio 60.30.6), but only Tacitus so overtly raises the question of image versus reality and prompts readers to consider the layers of fiction and evolution of myth. He does so partly to set a historiographical agenda for subsequent sections in the east, the realm of the showman and the charlatan, where perceptions often have more clout than the true state of affairs.²²

The narrative of the campaigns in Germany ends suggestively, with Claudius ordering the Roman forces to withdraw to the west bank of the Rhine, just as Corbulo prepares to go on the offensive. These orders trigger emotive associations for Tacitus's readers, both with Tiberius's earlier recall of Germanicus (*Annals* 2.26) and with Domitian's recall of Agricola from Britain (*Agricola* 40). In particular, Corbulo's frustrated reaction: *beatos quondam duces Romanos*, “How happy Roman generals used to be!” (*Annals* 11.20.1; cf. Dio 60.30.5) pointedly evokes the imperial topos of jealous emperors restraining talented generals and nostalgically recalls the more dashing days of the republic.²³ Of course, in reality, republican commanders often had to face unwelcome constraints and interventions from the centre, but Corbulo is evoking an ideal, even if, as we have seen, his own methods of campaigning do not straightforwardly cohere with idealised images of republican generalship.

21 Woodman 327 in this volume cites a passage of Vegetius which is particularly expressive about the hazards for a general dealing out capital punishment to disobedient soldiers.

22 An analogy can be drawn with Tacitus's Germanicus, whose personality made him so much better suited to operations in the east than in Germany: “Germanicus comes out so much better in Book 2” (Pelling 1993.67). Corbulo, too, flamboyant and tricky, has qualities which suit him for the east (Martin 1990.1553).

23 Corbulo's exclamation may momentarily recall epic, specifically Aeneas's emotional cry during the storm “o terque quaterque beati / quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis / contigit oppetere!,” “O three times and four times happy those who were lucky enough to die before the eyes of their fathers beneath the high walls of Troy!” (*Aen.* 1.94–96). Where Aeneas's potential for displaying heroism has been curtailed by a jealous deity, Juno, Corbulo's prospective valour has been cut short by a vindictive Claudius.

The start of the section about the aptly named puppet prince Italicus and the internal discord amongst the Cherusci (*Annals* 11.16–17) reminds us that Tiberius's earlier unglamorous strategy of leaving the German tribes to self-destruct is actually working, so Corbulo's intervention is needed only as a short-term measure to address a particular problem with the Chauci.²⁴

ARMENIA AND THE EAST

All the remaining sections on Corbulo depict his campaigns during Nero's principate in Armenia, which has once again become the object of Parthian ambitions.²⁵ The senate enthuses about Corbulo's initial appointment as legate of Cappadocia and Galatia, which *uidebatur . . . locus uirtutibus patefactus*, "seemed to have made space for valour" (*Annals* 13.8.1), but problems soon emerge. After arriving, Corbulo quickly makes for Cilicia, "ut <instaret> famae, quae in nouis coeptis ualidissima est," "to follow up his prestige, which is a vital matter in new undertakings" (*Annals* 13.8.3).²⁶ Again, Corbulo at first appears commendably to imitate Agricola, who "non ignarus . . . prout prima cessissent, terrorem ceteris fore," "knew well that according to how the initial efforts went, there would be terror with the rest" (*Agricola* 18.3).²⁷ Unfortunately, however, in this instance, Corbulo's reputation intimidates not the enemy, but a Roman, Ummidius Quadratus, the insecure governor of Syria.²⁸ Quadratus hurries to Aegeae in Cilicia to meet

24 On Claudius's policy in Germany, see Levick 1990.151–55, and on the differences between Tacitus and Dio, see Mehl 1979.220–39.

25 As Levick 1999.163–64 explains: "In the last years of his principate Claudius had allowed Armenia to pass from Roman control, and the Parthian monarch Vologaeses I (51/2–79/80) was able to settle his brother there. Nero . . . appointed Cn. Domitius Corbulo governor of Galatia and Cappadocia combined, with special responsibility for removing the Parthians from Armenia and replacing Tiridates with a Roman nominee." See further Ziegler 1964, Campbell 1993.213–49, and Vervaeke 1999.574–99.

26 See Koestermann 1967.249 on *instaret*, missing from M but supplied by Halm.

27 Cf. Vitellius's general Alienus Caecina, who assaults Placentia "gnarus, ut initia belli prouenissent, famam in cetera fore," "knowing that his future reputation would depend on how the early stages of the fighting had turned out" (Tacitus *Histories* 2.20.2). Unfortunately, Caecina's opening foray is much less successful than Agricola's, and he damages his reputation as a result.

28 Syme 1958.478–79: "Ummidius Quadratus, legate of Syria for nine years, typifies a whole system: easy-going, elderly governors, and an ignoble policy in the east. Tacitus brings out the contrast to the fame and energy of Corbulo, whom the envious Ummidius could not bear to meet and confront in Syria." See Pliny *Epistles* 7.24 for his wily daughter, Ummidia Quadratilla.

Corbulo (*Annals* 13.8.3): “ne, si ad accipiendas copias Syriam intraisset Corbulo, omnium ora in se uerteret, corpore ingens, uerbis magnificis et super experientiam sapientiamque etiam specie inanium ualidis,” “Lest Corbulo, if he entered Syria to receive his forces, should attract everybody’s gaze to him, with his huge body and flamboyant language, and on top of his experience and wisdom, imposing even in displaying trivial characteristics.”

Tacitus allows us to see vividly the imposing figure of Corbulo through the eyes of the worried Quadratus. The location of this description here, rather than when Corbulo first appears in Germany, is suggestive.²⁹ First, it implies that Corbulo was the right man, both physically and in terms of personality, for the east, where people were represented as being impressed by ephemeral and superficial things (cf. *Annals* 15.31).³⁰ Second, it initiates a nexus of details which evoke Lucullus. Plutarch, describing Lucullus in Armenia, says (*Lucullus* 33.3):³¹

οὐδὲ τοῖς δυνατοῖς καὶ ἰσοτίμοις εὐάρμοστος εἶναι
πεφυκώς, ἀλλὰ πάντων καταφρονῶν καὶ μηδενὸς
ἄξιους πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡγούμενος . . . καὶ γὰρ μέγας καὶ
καλὸς καὶ δεινὸς εἰπεῖν καὶ φρόνιμος ὁμαλῶς ἐν ἀγορᾷ
καὶ στρατοπέδῳ δοκεῖ γενέσθαι.

He could not cooperate with powerful men of equal rank, but despised them all and thought them of no value compared with himself . . . he was large and handsome, a cunning speaker and reputed to be equally capable in the forum and on the battlefield.

29 Dio 62.19.2 also places the character sketch at the opening of the Armenian rather than the German narrative. When Corbulo was sent to Armenia in A.D. 54, he was between 53 and 58 years old, having been born between 4 B.C. and A.D. 1 (Syme 1970b.31). The character sketch recalls that of Vitellius’s general, Alienus Caecina (*Histories* 1.53.1, 2.30.2).

30 Gilmartin 1973.584 sees *species* as a crucial theme in the eastern narrative. With Corbulo’s flamboyant language, compare Caesennius Paetus, the general sent out to assist Corbulo, who appears to have been influenced by stereotypical eastern ways when he writes to Nero “litteras quasi confecto bello uerbis magnificis rerum uacuas,” “a letter as if the war were finished, in flamboyant language, but devoid of substance” (*Annals* 15.8.2). For theatricality and display in connection with other generals in Tacitus, see also Pomeroy 176–78 in this volume.

31 Pelling 2002.374 reminds us that Lucullus had exonerated Plutarch’s home town, Chaeronea, after a scandal and that the *Lucullus* was partly “a grateful tribute in recompense.” On the publication date of the *Lucullus*, see Pelling 1979 (= Pelling 2002.1–44).

By itself, the correlation between Lucullus and Corbulo could be coincidental and evocative of a general military type, but as we will see, it is not an isolated instance of a Lucullan undercurrent. In any case, Dio seems to have responded to the evocative language, opening his own character sketch of Corbulo (which again focuses on size and eloquence) by suggesting that the general resembles τοῖς πρώτοις Ῥωμαίων, “the early Romans” (62.19.2).³²

Tacitus’s lack of romanticism about Corbulo is especially clear in the next section (*Annals* 13.34–41; Gilmartin 1973.589–99). The general’s intolerance of slack discipline has already emerged in Germany, but now his ruthlessness reaches new heights. Tacitus describes soldiers pitching tents on frozen ground, losing limbs through frostbite, and dying of cold on sentry duty; the whole miserable catalogue culminates in a Lucanesque anecdote about a soldier whose hands freeze and fall off, still attached to his bundle of firewood (*Annals* 13.35.3): “adnotatusque miles, qui fascem lignorum gestabat, ita praeriguisse manus, ut oneri adhaerentes truncis brachiis deciderent,” “One soldier was observed carrying a bundle of wood, but his hands became so frozen that they fell off, fastened to their burden, leaving his arms truncated.”

The incident, enhanced by a mischievous Tacitean pun, is shocking in itself.³³ It is also disturbingly reminiscent of Curtius Rufus’s description of a gruelling march in freezing weather endured by Alexander the Great and his men, when some soldiers freeze to death as they lean against tree trunks for shelter (8.4.14).³⁴ Tacitus’s vignette has additional impact because the circumstances are so much at odds with usual military practice for accommodating soldiers at this time of year. Commanders usually did not keep their men under canvas (*sub pellibus*) all winter but built semi-permanent camps for the coldest months. Onasander, who wrote a treatise on good generalship under Claudius, suggests that, although a general should normally make his army change camps frequently, the winter months were an exception (*Strategikos* 9.1).³⁵ Indeed, Tacitus’s account of soldiers enduring

32 Corbulo’s huge stature was so well known that he became the archetype of the big man for Juvenal (“Corbulo uix ferret tot uasa ingentia,” 3.251, where the beefy Corbulo is contrasted with a *seruulus*).

33 See *OLD* s.v. *truncus*¹ 2: “amputated” and *OLD* s.v. *truncus*² 2: “trunk of a tree.” On Tacitus’s fondness for paronomasia, see Woodman 1998.218–29.

34 Cf. Xenophon’s account of the army’s harrowing march to Armenia through freezing terrain (*Anabasis* 4.5).

35 On Onasander, see Campell 1987.

the cold would be more appropriate during a real crisis, as at *Annals* 4.56, where a deputation from Smyrna recalls how Sulla's army suffered through a bitter winter during the war with Mithridates of Pontus. Yet Corbulo's men are simply waiting for spring so that they can begin campaigning. There are also further echoes of Lucullus here: he, too, is a strict disciplinarian (Plutarch *Lucullus* 7.1–3), whose men come to resent him because they were forced to spend two successive winters in camp (Plutarch *Lucullus* 33.4).³⁶ Such underlying allusions are also reinforced by overt triggers: so at the start of the section, Tacitus focalises the narrative through Corbulo, who “*dignum magnitudine populi Romani rebatur parta olim a Lucullo Pompeioque recipere*,” “thought that it was worthy of the Roman people's grandeur to recover the territories once conquered by Lucullus and Pompey” (*Annals* 13.34.2).³⁷ Tacitus's Corbulo sees himself (rightly or wrongly) in an agonistic relationship with his republican predecessors, which should prompt readers to weigh up the validity of any posited links between Corbulo and Lucullus.³⁸

Comparison with Frontinus is also revealing about Tacitus's narrative techniques. Three out of five of Corbulo's appearances in the *Strategemata* are in sections illustrating military discipline and its effects, but even so, Frontinus either avoids or tones down the extreme illustrations of Corbulo's *seueritas* highlighted by Tacitus.³⁹ So Frontinus says that (4.1.21; emphasis added): “Domitius Corbulo in Armenia duas ales et tres cohortes, quae ad castellum Initia hostibus cesserant, *extra uallum iussit tendere*,

36 Keaveney 1992.125–26 discusses this “dangerous practice” of keeping troops in tents during the winter. Plutarch attributes the detail about the soldiers being disgruntled at spending two successive winters in camp to Sallust (*Histories* frag. 5.10 Maurenbrecher = 4.70 McGushin). If Sallust's *Histories* had survived intact, it is likely that, in the Corbulan sections, Tacitus would have alluded frequently to the narrative of Lucullus's campaigns narrated there.

37 On focalisation, broadly equivalent to point of view, see Genette 1980.189–98 and Bal 1985.100–15.

38 Wheeler 1996 argues that Tacitus's whole narrative about Corbulo disciplining lax legions is a historiographical topos which does not reflect the reality of the Syrian legions' quality of service in the imperial period, and suggests that it severely skews the chronology of his Armenian campaigns. One reason for evoking this topos was perhaps Tacitus's desire to recall Lucullus through Corbulo. Gilmartin 1973.591 suggests that “this thought of recovering the gains of Lucullus and Pompey seems a personal overstatement of Nero's instructions (*Annals* 13.8.1).”

39 For Corbulo, see Frontinus *Strategemata* 2.9.5, 4.1.21, 4.1.28, 4.2.3, and 4.7.2. Frontinus had himself probably served in Armenia with Corbulo (Levick 1999.158). Not all scholars accept that *Strategemata* 4 was written by Frontinus.

donec adsiduo labore et prosperis excursionibus redimerent ignominiam,” “Domitius Corbulo, while in Armenia, ordered two squadrons and three cohorts, which had yielded to the enemy near the fortress of Initia, to camp outside the rampart until, by continuous hard work and successful raids, they should atone for their disgrace.”

Tacitus’s version is rather different (*Annals* 13.36.3; emphasis added): “quod grauiter Corbulo accepit increpitumque Paccium et praefectos militesque *tendere extra uallum iussit*; inque ea contumelia detenti nec nisi precibus uniuersi exercitus exsoluti sunt,” “Corbulo took the news badly and, after a reprimand, ordered Paccius, his officers, and soldiers to camp outside the rampart; and in that degrading position, they were kept until they were released by the prayers of the whole army.”

Paccius certainly disobeyed orders, so his punishment is justified, but the differences in presentation are still interesting. Where Frontinus’s Corbulo is dispassionate in meting out punishment, Tacitus’s Corbulo responds emotionally (*grauiter* . . . *accepit*) and issues a reprimand (*increpitum*), and where Frontinus refers to the soldiers’ *ignominia* in having yielded to the enemy, Tacitus shifts the focus to their degradation, *contumelia*, in being punished. Although the punishment itself is not that unusual, Tacitus diverges from Frontinus in underscoring the compassionate response from the whole army, which intercedes emotionally on behalf of its humiliated comrades. Perhaps given Corbulo’s track record, the malefactors are lucky not to suffer a more extreme penalty. We can also compare a description in Plutarch of Lucullus punishing some soldiers who flee during an unplanned skirmish with Mithridates’ troops (*Lucullus* 15.7): ἐπανελθὼν δὲ Λούκουλλος ἀτιμίαν τινὰ τοῖς φεύγουσι νενομισμένην προσέβαλε, κελεύσας ἐν χιτῶσιν ἄζώστοις ὀρύξαι δώδεκα ποδῶν τάφρον, ἐφεστώτων καὶ θεωμένων τῶν ἄλλων στρατιωτῶν, “When Lucullus came back, he inflicted the customary disgrace upon the soldiers who had fled, ordering them to dig a twelve foot ditch, working in ungirt tunics while the other men stood by and watched them.”

The business-like Lucullus inflicts punishment without anger, and although part of the soldiers’ humiliation depends on their colleagues watching the disgrace, these onlookers are not moved to intervene, as they do in Tacitus, and thus Plutarch’s manner of presentation is less emotionally intense.

We have already seen how Corbulo in Germany used trickery to get the job done. In Armenia, there seems to be an increasing tension between Corbulo’s status as a disciplinarian, which (at least at an idealised level) recalls a tough, republican style of leadership, and the very nature of

this war. Instead of fighting a pitched battle, Corbulo and his men engage in guerilla tactics, following the example of the enemy (*Annals* 13.37).⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Corbulo plays a tricky negotiating game with Tiridates, King of Armenia, where each man tries to outmanoeuvre the other without success (*Annals* 13.38). Even when Corbulo takes the ancient Armenian capital Artaxata, there is no battle and no set-piece description of a siege or storming of the city (*Annals* 13.41, Dio 62.20.1). So Paetus later complains about Corbulo's achievements, "usurpatas nomine tenus urbium expugnationes dictitans," "repeatedly saying that the storming of cities had been purely nominal" (*Annals* 15.6.4). After the inhabitants of Artaxata surrender, the army simply marches in and burns the city to the ground.

Similarly in the next section (*Annals* 14.23–26; Gilmartin 1973. 599–604), Corbulo uses intimidation, but no military attack, to secure the surrender of Tigranocerta. The absence of techniques appropriate for a republican-style general is striking in itself, but the mismatch between Corbulo's image and the rather sordid military reality that he must confront is accentuated by a central incident from Lucullus's campaigns. On October 6th 69 B.C., Lucullus had fought a glorious pitched battle against Tigranes outside this same city, which was clearly one of the highlights of his military career.⁴¹ Indeed, Plutarch cites Antiochus the philosopher, who said that "the sun had never seen such a great battle" (*Lucullus* 28.8). It may even be that Tacitus's description of the peculiar portent of the absent sun within Artaxata, as the city is ignominiously destroyed by fire, is meant to recall Antiochus's aggrandising assertion—but to point to a contrast (*Annals* 13.41.3). The difference between the overt military glory of Lucullus's battle and the more sordid tactics of Corbulo is further emphasised by another suggestive detail: where Lucullus captures Tigranes' diadem as part of the booty from the battle (Plutarch *Lucullus* 28.6),⁴² Corbulo is simply given the *corona aurea* (*Annals* 14.24.4) by a deputation from Tigranocerta without a battle even having taken place. Yet Tacitus could have narrated the surrender of the city to Corbulo more dramatically. It was not entirely peaceful, as a vivid story from Frontinus shows (2.9.5):

40 Cf. Sallust's Metellus, who adopts guerilla tactics when traditional fighting methods prove problematic (*Jugurtha* 54.5).

41 See Plutarch *Lucullus* 26–28, *Moralia* 203a–b, Appian *Mithridateios* 84–85, Frontinus *Strategemata* 2.1.14, Dio (Xiphilinus) 36.1b.

42 The diadem was later displayed in Lucullus's triumphal procession (Plut. *Lucullus* 36.6).

Domitius Corbulo, cum Tigranocertam obsideret et Armenii pertinaciter uiderentur toleraturi obsidionem, in Vadandum unum ex megistanis, quos ceperat, animaduertit caputque eius ballista excussum intra munimenta hostium misit. id forte decedit in medium concilium, quod cum maxime habebant barbari; ad cuius conspectum uelut ostento consternati ad deditionem festinauerunt.

When Domitius Corbulo was besieging Tigranocerta, and the Armenians seemed likely to bear the siege obstinately, he executed Vadandus, one of the nobles he had captured, shot his head out of a ballista, and sent it flying within the fortifications of the enemy. It happened to fall in the middle of a council which the barbarians were holding at that moment, and disturbed at the sight of it (as though it were some portent), they hurried to surrender.

Tacitus perhaps saw such a sensational moment as discordant with the dignity of his genre, but the earlier detail about the soldier's frozen hands falling off implies that he could have included the story about the severed head if it had suited him to do so. Rather, the omission can be read instead as an expression of Tacitus's attitude towards Corbulo and his leadership techniques. By playing down this shocking aspect of the siege, he can draw attention to Corbulo's subversive but efficient fighting techniques, where intimidation supersedes direct military action. If the extraordinary story about the severed head derives from Corbulo's own memoirs, then Tacitus may have had sufficient doubts about its veracity to decide to exclude it, thereby indicating that he was not at the mercy of an (inevitably partisan) source.⁴³

Corbulo may not have replayed Lucullus's pitched battle outside Tigranocerta, but there is arguably another Lucullan moment in this section. Tacitus interrupts his narrative to describe a plot to kill Corbulo (*Annals* 14.24.3): "nam haud procul tentorio eius non ignobilis barbarus cum telo repertus ordinem insidiarum seque auctorem et socios per tormenta edidit, conuictique et puniti sunt qui specie amicitiae dolum parabant," "For not

43 See further Pomeroy p. 178 n. 21 in this volume on the fate of Hasdrubal's severed head (Livy 21.51.12) as originating a historical topos.

far from his tent, a high-ranking barbarian was discovered with a weapon, and revealed under torture the order of the plot, his own role as instigator, and his associates. Those who tried to prepare treachery under the guise of friendship were convicted and punished.”

The details of this failed plot seem rather elusive and unanchored,⁴⁴ but it is strikingly similar to more extensive accounts of an attempt on Lucullus's life in similar circumstances. Lucullus, too, having befriended a supposed barbarian deserter, a Dandarian prince named Olthacus, narrowly escapes when the man tries to enter his tent to kill him.⁴⁵ This is another instance where Tacitus's broadly similar story about Corbulo could derive from the general's memoirs, in which it was narrated in such a way as to suggest links between himself and Lucullus. We can only speculate, but this link with Lucullus may have been played in different ways by Corbulo and Tacitus: where Corbulo perhaps narrated a sensational escape extensively and dramatically, Tacitus offers a skeletal and more matter-of-fact version designed to assert his independence as a historian. Tacitus may, in addition, have been suspicious that both failed assassination attempts against Lucullus and Corbulo evoke in general terms a familiar trope from the campaigns of Alexander the Great, who frequently found himself the target of conspiracies and attempted murders (Badian 2003). After all, as Diana Spencer points out (2002.200), Corbulo is “on a campaign that takes him directly in Alexander's footsteps.”

In the final sections (*Annals* 15.1–17, 24–31; Gilmartin 1973.604–26), Tacitus continues the suggestive interplay with Lucullus, primarily through his presentation of the relationship between Corbulo and Caesennius Paetus, sent out by Nero when Corbulo requested a general to handle the Armenian situation separately. At a time when military glory was scarce, the presence of two generals in the same territory was likely to be fraught with difficulties, but the personalities of the main protagonists increase the tensions. Corbulo is said to be *neque . . . aemuli patiens*, “intolerant of a rival” (*Annals* 15.6.4), while Paetus (*Annals* 15.6.4): “cui satis ad gloriam erat, si proximus haberetur, despiciebat gesta, nihil caedis aut praedae, usurpatas nomine tenus urbium expugnationes dictitans: se tributa ac leges et pro umbra regis Romanum ius uictis impositurum,”⁴⁶ “For whom it would

44 Gilmartin 1973.601 points to the “static, paradigmatic force” of the assassination story.

45 Plutarch *Lucullus* 16 (with Keaveney 1992.89), Appian *Mithridateios* 79, Frontinus *Strategemata* 2.5.30.

46 Syme 1958.493, citing Dio 68.20.3, suggests that *se . . . impositurum* “recalls, and perhaps parodies, Trajan's proclamation when he annexed Armenia.”

have been sufficiently glorious if he were regarded in second place, was scornful about what had been done, repeatedly saying that there had been no killing or plundering, that the storming of cities had been purely nominal, but that he would impose tribute, laws, and the authority of Rome instead of a shadow of a king.”

The hybristic Paetus has a touch of a latter-day Quinctilius Varus about him, overconfident, unaware of the dangerous local conditions, and therefore vulnerable. Still, as a protagonist in the text, he simply observes what we have already been shown by Tacitus, that the glorified versions of the campaigns in Rome belie the sordid fighting methods used in Armenia itself. Yet so far, these had worked quite well. Corbulo understandably “bellum habere quam gerere malebat,” “preferred to have a war on hand rather than to fight one” (*Annals* 15.3.1). Paetus will eventually learn the lesson, but at a cost.

Paetus, in order to realise his claims, enters Armenia, pointedly planning to devastate areas previously left unravaged by Corbulo (*Annals* 15.8.1). Bad omens and inadequate preparation of a winter camp and food supplies (also Dio 62.21.2) proleptically suggest the likely outcome, but real trouble comes when Paetus confronts the Parthian king, Vologaeses. Tacitus explains what happens next (*Annals* 15.10.4): “aegre compulsum ferunt, ut instantem Corbuloni fateretur. nec a Corbulone properatum quo gliscentibus periculis etiam subsidii laus augeretur,” “They say that Paetus was reluctantly forced to admit to Corbulo that the enemy was pressing. Corbulo did not hurry, so that as the dangers escalated, praise for the rescue, too, might be increased.”

The critical tone here is accentuated by comparison with Dio, who says that Corbulo reached the Euphrates “with remarkable speed” (62.22.1). Tacitus’s representation of Corbulo as dawdling and endangering Roman lives to enhance his own status is shocking enough,⁴⁷ but becomes more so when we compare an incident from Lucullus’s campaigns. While Lucullus is instilling discipline in his soldiers, his consular colleague Cotta decides to fight Mithridates in battle before Lucullus can share in the glory. Yet it all backfires, and Cotta finds himself besieged by Mithridates’ forces. Some of Lucullus’s advisers suggest that he should simply abandon Cotta and

47 Cf. Agricola, who swiftly orders the “uelocissimos equitum peditumque adsultare tergis pugnantium,” “fastest of the cavalry and infantry to assault the backs of the combatants” (*Agricola* 26.1) when the Caledonians attack the legio IX Hispana.

attack Mithridates' undefended kingdom, but Lucullus memorably retorts that: ὥς ἕνα βούλοιντ' ἅν ἐκ πολεμίων σῶσαι Ῥωμαῖον ἢ πάντα λαβεῖν τὰ τῶν πολεμίων, "He would rather save one Roman from the enemy than take all the enemy's possessions" (Plutarch *Lucullus* 8.3). If Tacitus's Corbulo had sincerely modeled himself on Lucullus, then Paetus's crisis would have been the perfect chance to imitate his predecessor, but instead he emerges as callous and self-serving. Whereas Corbulo's earlier quarrel with Quadratus did no permanent damage to Roman interests, Paetus must now agree to a humiliating evacuation of all Roman troops from Armenia (*Annals* 15.14.3). It is particularly poignant that Paetus, while negotiating with the Parthian cavalry commander, draws attention to "Lucullos, Pompeios et si qua Caesares obtinendae donandaeue Armeniae egerant," "men like Lucullus, Pompey, and anything that the emperors had done to occupy or dispose of Armenia" (*Annals* 15.14.3). If Corbulo had resembled Lucullus more closely, then these negotiations would not even be taking place.

To add insult to injury, once Corbulo's powers are more or less increased to those which the state gave Pompey for the Pirate War (*Annals* 15.25.3), the general enters Armenia, deliberately and symbolically choosing Lucullus's route of 69 B.C.: "mox iter L. Lucullo quondam penetratum, apertis quae uetustas obsaeperat, pergit," "Next he followed the route once penetrated by Lucius Lucullus, after obstructions which time had laid down had been cleared" (*Annals* 15.27.1).⁴⁸ Even so, Corbulo still assures the Parthians that war to the end was not necessary (*Annals* 15.27.1). The finale is not a battle but a spectacular meeting between Tiridates and Corbulo and a diplomatic resolution to the Armenian problem, which enables Nero to close the doors of the temple of Janus (Suetonius *Nero* 13.2).

CONCLUSION

So why in the eastern narrative does Tacitus consistently evoke Lucullus, both overtly and by allusion? In all probability, he was responding to an agenda set by Corbulo himself, whose memoirs could self-consciously have represented the general as the heir to this famous republican *exemplum*.

48 For a general retracing another's steps in less auspicious circumstances, consider Tacitus *Annals* 1.63–68, where Caecina in confronting Arminius in the same territory almost re-plays Varus: "en Varus eodemque iterum fato uinctae legiones!," "Look! Another Varus and his legions caught up again in the same trouble!" (*Annals* 1.65.4). See Woodman 1998.121–25.

Tacitus was thus obliged to engage in a similar dialogue between past and present, albeit with more subversive touches.⁴⁹ Where Lucullus is strict, Corbulo is relentlessly cruel, and where Lucullus sacrifices his own personal glory to save Roman lives, Corbulo puts his own reputation above everything else. Yet there is more at stake here than the reputation of an individual general. Tacitus is juxtaposing different ideologies: the careers of Lucullus and Corbulo show that the rewards for military success are treacherous in any era, but only under the principate does such a surfeit of fame become potentially fatal.⁵⁰ Lucullus's notoriously hedonistic lifestyle on his return from the east was certainly an expressive way to turn his back on his previous role as a general, but Corbulo (no matter how careful he tried to be) was operating in a different world.⁵¹ As it happens, Lucullus's combined roles as talented general and hedonist extraordinaire are particularly expressive in a Neronian context: indeed, it is almost as if the two conflicting roles, combined in one man under the republic, have now been split between the military man Corbulo (professional Lucullus) and the self-indulgent emperor Nero (retired Lucullus). Plutarch records that the Stoic Tubero, while visiting Lucullus's pleasure palace on the bay of Naples, referred to him expressively as "Xerxes in a toga" (*Lucullus* 39). That would also be a fair label for the pejorative images of Nero that survive in our sources, except that now a figure of eastern excess is identified *with* the state (Nero), rather than in retirement from it (Lucullus).⁵²

Under the principate, the retirement of high-profile men such as Corbulo was difficult to achieve, even if that was what the general wanted to do. Seneca the Younger's fate had already shown that there was no scope for withdrawing peacefully, even for a non-military man in the public eye. Corbulo could not really emulate Lucullus, because the worlds in which the two men operated had changed so much. Indeed, the only way for Corbulo to survive would have been to imitate not Lucullus but his rival and successor in the east, Pompey, and to fight a civil war. Yet his "fatal

49 On this topic, see Ginsburg 1993.86–103.

50 Lucullus, on his return, had to face accusations from C. Memmius that he had prolonged his eastern campaigns to enhance his own glory, but he survived (Gruen 1974.266). See also Plutarch *Moralia* 785f–86a, 792b–c, *Lucullus* 37–43 for his hedonistic final years.

51 He was not the last such figure: Commodus killed Salvius Julianus, "who, after the death of Marcus Aurelius, could have done whatever he wanted against him, since he was enormously distinguished and in charge of a great army" (Dio 72.5.1–2).

52 See Gowing 2005.65 for the links between another emperor, Tiberius, and Lucullus, both of whom died in the same villa.

obedience" to Nero shut down that particular escape route.⁵³ The fact that Corbulo resisted rebellion opened up the principate to another competent eastern commander, the *nouus homo* Vespasian, certainly a much less likely candidate for *princeps* than Corbulo himself would have been.⁵⁴

It was under Vespasian, of course, that the myth making surrounding Corbulo started in earnest, as this "victim" of Nero's jealousy was emotively put on a pedestal as part of a wider process of drawing a sharp line between the last of the Julio-Claudian emperors and the first member of the new Flavian dynasty. Yet how clearly drawn was that line between the two dynasties, particularly if we consider relationships between emperors and generals? It is perhaps symptomatic of the nature of imperial power that even Vespasian had his own equivalent to Corbulo. The charismatic general Antonius Primus had helped him to seize power, but was then surreptitiously removed from his influential position after the civil wars had ended (*Histories* 4.39.3–4, 4.80.2).⁵⁵

Vespasian had a more secure grip than did Nero on the publicity machine (so Antonius Primus is less infamous than Corbulo), but it seems that the perennial problem of how to reconcile talented but ambitious generals with the imperial system transcended the principates of individual emperors. The careers of Germanicus, Corbulo, Antonius Primus, and Agricola, despite individual differences, all follow similar broad trajectories. Once the secret was out that "emperors could be made elsewhere than in Rome" (Tacitus *Histories* 1.4.2), such generals held an understandable fascination for Tacitus, who was so attuned to the dynamics and dangers of imperial power.⁵⁶

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53 See Vervaet 2002.181 for the phrase.

54 Vespasian's bid for power may have been actively helped by former friends and clients of Corbulo. "Domitius Corbulo is definitely to be perceived as the forerunner of the Flavian principate" (Vervaet 2003.464).

55 See Damon 271–73 in this volume for the machinations against Primus. For an overview of his character, see Ash 1999a.147–65.

56 I would like to thank Tony Woodman, Manuel Tröster, Martha Malamud, and the anonymous *Arethusa* reader for their extremely helpful suggestions, as well as Barbara Levick for kindly showing me a draft of her entry on Corbulo in the forthcoming new edition of Peter 1906–14 (repr. 1993). Audiences at the Triennial conference in Oxford in 2002 and at the Classical Association of the Atlantic States meeting in Wilmington, Delaware in 2003 also made valuable contributions to earlier drafts of this paper. I dedicate this paper to the memory of Judy Ginsburg, who was to have been the original co-editor of this volume and whose friendship, humour, and subtle readings of Tacitus, I continue to miss.