Classical Quarterly **50.2** 494–515 (2000) *Printed in Great Britain*

NERO'S *LUXURIA*, IN TACITUS AND IN THE *OCTAVIA*

sit ante oculos Nero, quem longa Caesarum serie tumentem non Vindex cum inermi provincia aut ego cum una legione, sed sua immanitas, sua luxuria cervicibus publicis depulerunt.
(Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.2)

Let Nero be ever before your eyes, swollen with the pride of a long line of Caesars; it was not Vindex with his unarmed province, it was not myself with my single legion, that shook his yoke from our necks. It was his own brutality, his own *luxuria* . . .

According to Tacitus, this was Galba's verdict on Nero's fall. The tyrant's undoing had been of his own making. As for what determined the outcome, Galba is unequivocal. Two factors had proved decisive: Nero's *immanitas* and *luxuria*.

The emphasis on *immanitas*, on 'brutality' or 'cruel inhumanity', stands to reason. Nero's murder of his mother, cousins, and sisters clearly appalled contemporaries.[1] Galba is known to have denounced these parricidal purges as glaring instances of cruelty and *impietas*[2]—and so did popular invective.[3] Whatever Tacitus' sources, it therefore makes sense that this charge should figure so prominently in Galba's speech.

But why let Galba ascribe such signal importance to the tyrant's *luxuria*? And what precisely does it denote?

If standard translations are to be trusted, Galba is here referring to Nero's *Ausschweifung* and *ausschweifender Lebenswandel*,[4] 'life of pleasure' and 'debauchery',[5] *sregolatezze* and *turpitudini*,[6] *débauches*, and *déreglées voluptez*.[7] In short, the public consequences of private vice. In historical studies this rendering is commonly accepted as correct. Galba's condemnation of Nero's 'debauchery' has even been presented as a

* For the early translations and editions of Tacitus and the *Octavia* quoted in the notes, see the standard bibliographies.

[1] *immanitas* a characteristic of parricides: Cic. *Cat.* 1.14; *S.Rosc.* 63; Quint. 9.2.53; [Quint.] *Decl. Mai.* 8.6; 17.7 (murders of a stepson and fathers); Suet. *Nero* 7 and Tac. *Ann.* 14.11.3 (Nero's murders of Britannicus and Agrippina).

[2] Cf. Suet. *Galba* 10 (Galba calling for revolt from a platform adorned with images of those murdered by Nero); *impietas* an anti-Neronian slogan: P. Kragelund, 'Galba's *Pietas*, Nero's victims and the Mausoleum of Augustus', *Historia* 48 (1998), 152ff.

[3] Three of the four contemporary pasquinades against Nero quoted by Suetonius, *Nero* 39.2 condemn him as a parricide; so did the actor Datus, from the stage (Suet. *Nero* 39.3), the tribune Subrius Flavus, to his face (*parricida matris et uxoris*), and Seneca, when ordered to die: Tac. *Ann.* 15.67.2, 62.2.

[4] *Ausschweifung*: H. Gutmann (Berlin, 1829); W. Boetticher (Berlin, 1864); J. Borst (München, 1969), and H. Vretska (Reclam, Stuttgart, 1984); *ausschweifender Lebenswandel*: W. Sontheimer (Stuttgart, 1959).

[5] 'beastly debaucheries': T. Gordon (London, 1737); 'life of pleasure': K. Wellesley, Penguin Classics (1964); R. J. A. Talbert, *AJAH* 2 (1977), 79 and J.-P. Rubiés, 'Nero in Tacitus and Nero in Tacitism', in J. Elsner and J. Masters (edd.), *Reflections of Nero* (London, 1994), 38.

[6] *sregolatezze*: F. Dessì (Milano, 1982). *turpitudini*: C. Giussani (Milano, 1945); similarly, the early Catalan translator E. Sveyro (Antverp, 1619) has 'su dissolucion'.

[7] *voluptez* (*sic*): R. Le Maistre (Paris, 1627); *débauches*: N. Perrot d'Ablancourt (Amsterdam, 1670); J. H. Dotteville (Paris, 1785–93) and J. L. Burnouf (Paris, 1878); similarly, H. Goelzer (Paris, 1921), J. Sancery, *Galba, ou l'Armée face au pouvoir* (Paris, 1983), 150, P. Wuilleumier and H. Le Bonniec (Paris, 1987) and P. Grimal (Paris, 1990).

prime instance of Tacitean moralizing: eager to edify, the historian has constructed a rhetorical image of imperial decadence.[8]

But is this in fact what Tacitus has done? And, more specifically: is it at all to debauchery that Galba is referring? To be sure, *luxuria* often denotes immoral excess and easy living, sex, drinking, and endless parties; indeed, this is one of the ways in which Suetonius defines Nero's *luxuria immoderatissima*.[9] In some cases the word is used so broadly that its meaning is difficult to determine. This is, however, unlikely to be the problem here. On the contrary, everything suggests that Galba—once again—is condemning what he regarded as his predecessor's irresponsible *liberalitas*, his profligacy and extravagance.[10]

Needless to say, this reading gives Galba's verdict a different (and, in historical terms, far more reasonable) gloss: it was not Nero's private immorality, but his financial profligacy—combined with his dynastic murders—that had proved his undoing.

But whence the tradition of condemning Nero as a spendthrift (granted this is what it is)?

While the first section of this article discusses the relevant economic terminology, the second examines some near-contemporary parallels to Galba's verdict on Nero. In the light of these findings the third section then argues that Tacitus' reference to Nero's *luxuria*, far from being the rhetorical construct of a moralizing historian, reflects the political slogans used by Galba and the Flavians to contrast the economic excesses of Nero with their own moderation.

I. TACITUS ON NERO'S *LIBERALITAS*

Ancient historians are unanimous in emphasizing Nero's zeal in displaying his *liberalitas*.[11] For an emperor the exercise of this princely virtue was always fundamental, but under Nero it seems to have reached unprecedented, even pathological, dimensions.

Suetonius maintains that Nero, while invoking the example of Augustus, missed no opportunity to imitate and even upstage the generosity of his great ancestor. The evidence goes far to confirm this claim. When courtiers teased the emperor for being a miser, there was no risk of offending, since this was obviously so far from being the truth.[12] In edicts, Nero himself would boast of the magnitude of his annual *largitiones*;

[8] No comments on the concept in H. Heubner and G. E. F. Chilver ad loc.; according to J. Elsner, 'Constructing decadence', in: *Reflections* (n. 5), 123, 'Their (i.e. the historians') combined argument was that the outrageous nature of Nero's actions, epitomised by *murder and debauchery in private* and by building and theatrical antics in public, caused his fall' (emphasis added).

[9] Suet. *Nero* 51: 'valetudine prospera (sc. Nero): nam qui luxuriae immoderatissimae esset, ter omnino per quattuordecim annos languit, atque ita ut neque vino neque consuetudine reliqua abstineret.'

[10] 'profligacy': A. J. Church and W. Jackson Brodribb (London, 1864) and W. Hamilton Fyfe (Oxford, 1912); 'extravagance': C. H. Moore (Loeb, 1925) and M. T. Griffin, *Nero. The End of a Dynasty* (London, 1984), 187 (the revised edition [London, 1996] has not been available to me). To judge from Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, *Schwelgerey* (J. S. Müllern, Hamburg, 1766 and K. L. von Woltmann, Berlin, 1812) covers much the same broad range as Latin *luxuria*, whereas *Verschwendung* focuses more precisely on misguided *liberalitas*.

[11] On the concept and on Nero's performance, H. Kloft, *Liberalitas principis: Herkunft und Bedeutung. Studien zur Prinzipatsideologie* (Köln/Wien, 1970) and Griffin (n. 10), 197–207 are basic.

[12] Augustan example: Suet. *Nero* 10 with H. Kloft, 'Freigebigkeit und Finanzen, der soziale und finanzielle Aspekt der augusteischen Liberalitas', in G. Binder (ed.), *Saeculum Augustum* I

the supervision of imperial *liberalitas* was now—unusually—considered an effort worth recording in the epitaph of a Roman consular.[13]

Nero was the first to commemorate imperial distributions of free corn in his coinage: the Emperor, Minerva, and an allegorical figure representing Liberalitas are shown presiding at the ceremony.[14] Cities and taxpayers, the *aerarium* and sanctuaries, friends and the Armenian king were among those who benefited from his generosity.[15] As did the entire Greek nation: at the very end of his reign Nero outdid the greatest republican instance of Roman *liberalitas* by liberating the whole province and granting it immunity from taxes.[16] In a discourse to the Greeks, the Emperor proudly described this as 'an unlooked for gift—if indeed anything may not be hoped for from one of my greatness of mind. . . . Other rulers have liberated cities, [Nero alone a whole] province.'[17]

Given such pride, Tacitus may well strike a contemporary note when presenting Seneca begging to be freed (!) from the emperor's innumerable gifts and incomparable *munificentia*, while Nero with mischievous mockery maintains his right to exert *mea liberalitas*.[18]

For reasons to which I shall presently return, Nero's much publicized *munificentia* and *liberalitas* came in for heavy criticism before and—above all—after his fall. In Latin, the key concepts of such criticism would be *luxuria* and its sinister consequence, *avaritia*.[19] The hostile tradition which evolved seems unanimous in viewing Nero as the prime instance of these vices. Plutarch condemns Nero's *liberalitas* as excessive, and Suetonius counterbalances his discussion of Nero's *liberalitas* in the first positive half of the biography, with a wholescale condemnation of his *avaritia* and *luxuria* in the second (negative) section. From references in Eutropius, Orosius, and the *Historia Augusta* it emerges that the terminology remained basic for evaluations of the period.[20]

(Darmstadt, 1987), 361ff. On Otho's and Petronius' jokes about Nero's being a miser, see Plut. *Galba* 19.3 and *Mor.* 60e.

[13] *Largitiones*: Tac. *Ann.* 15.18.3; cf. 13.18 and 15.44.2. The consul is Q. Veranius: *RE* 8A[1] (1955), 952 (A. E. Gordon); the relevant passage reads AVGVSTO PRINCIPE CVIVS LIBERALITATIS ERAT MINISTER. K. R. Bradley, *GRBS* 16 (1975), 308 dates the inscription to A.D. 51, but A. R. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), 53 and Griffin (n. 10), 246, n. 35 present a strong case for a Neronian rather than Claudian date.

[14] On the *congiaria* see *RIC* I[2] (Nero), no. 100–2 (*c.* A.D. 63), 151–62 (*c.* 64), 394; 434–5 (*c.* 65), and 501–6 (*c.* 66) with comments by Kloft (n. 11), 91 and A. U. Stylow, *Libertas und liberalitas* (Dissertation, München, 1972), 62, 210–11.

[15] On the range of Nero's generosity, see Griffin (n. 10), 205ff.; epigraphy yields new testimonies, from Cyprus, Pompeii, and Cosa: *AE* (1975), 834 (rebuilding a theatre); (1977), 217–18 (golden gifts to Venus); and (1994), 616 (rebuilding an odeum).

[16] The date of Nero's Greek oration is controversial: in my view, P. A. Gallivan, *Hermes* 101 (1973), 233 and Griffin (n. 10), 280, n. 127, and, most recently, C. Howgego, *NC* (1989), 206–7 argue convincingly for late 67; on the range of competitions, N. M. Kennell, 'Neron periodonikes', *AJPh* 109 (1988), 239ff.

[17] *SIG*[3] 814 = *ILS* 8794 (the words in brackets were deleted after Nero's fall). Flamininus' *liberalitas* towards Greece in 196 B.C. was of a kind which 'no writer will ever be able to celebrate according to its merits': Val. Max. 4.8.5.

[18] Seneca on *munificentiae* <*tuae*>, *innumeram pecuniam*, *muneribus tuis*, and Nero on *mea liberalitas* and ἐμῆς μεγαλοφροσύνης: Tac. *Ann.* 14.53.4–5; 14.56 and *SIG*[3] 814.

[19] On the phraseology, see Curt. 8.9.23: *regum luxuria, quam ipsi munificentiam appellant* and Quint. 4.2.77: *luxuria liberalitatis . . . nomine lenietur*; similarly, 5.13.26, 8.6.36, and Tac. *Hist.* 1.30 (quoted n. 27) with H. Kloft (n. 11), 141ff. Links between *luxuria* and *avaritia*: n. 25.

[20] Cf. Plut. *Galba* 16; Suet. *Nero* 30–2; Eutropius 7.14 (*inusitatae luxuriae sumptuumque*); Orosius 7.7.3–7; *SHA*, *Verus* 10.8; *Heliogabal* 18.4 (conjectural) and *Alex.Sev.* 9.4; on Eutropius

Tacitus agreed. His use of the term *luxuria* is neither frequent nor indiscriminate. With one insignificant exception,[21] all the occurrences are from the end of the *Annales* and first books of the *Historiae*, that is from the Neronian and post-Neronian period. And what the historian targets is not Nero's personal debauchery, but his harmful and unwise administration of wealth and distribution of gifts; along with Otho and Vitellius, Nero is here the chief culprit.

Not that this attitude characterized all aspects of his principate. In its early years such immoderation was in fact still tempered, at least in others: in A.D. 56 a naval commander named Clodius Quirinalis was condemned for economic extortion (later, such verdicts became rarer). Allegedly Quirinalis' *saevitia* (i.e. in obtaining riches) had mirrored his profligacy (*luxuria*); citizens of Italy had been treated like mere provincials. And even during the final, evil part of the reign, good men were still to be found. As praetor in Nero's last year, the historian's father-in-law, Julius Agricola, had been responsible for the *ludi*; his avowed policy had been 'to steer a middle course between reason and abundance, knowing that the more he distanced himself from *luxuria* the closer he was to true honour'.[22]

Nero, however, betrayed no such wish 'to steer a middle course'. His 'greed and extravagance' (*avaritiam ac prodigentiam*) were innate; and if his *largitiones* and *munificentia* were remarkable, they were also excessive. Far from being counterbalanced by true *parsimonia* (a point, on which even Tiberius had been admirable),[23] Nero's gifts had sometimes served as moral blackmail, to make people his accomplices in murder or depravity.[24] But their most serious consequences came from their staggering scale, since *luxuria* almost inevitably leads to *avaritia*.[25] In a private person such excesses are bad enough, but in an emperor they are a public menace, generating an ever more vicious spiral of spending and extortion. The more Nero disbursed, the greater his need. When, for instance, a rumour claimed that Queen Dido's fabled treasures had been located near Carthage, the prospect alone (which soon proved vain) 'increased Nero's extravagance' (*luxuria*). And Tacitus continues: 'Existing resources were squandered as though the material for many more years of wastefulness were now accessible. Indeed, he already drew on this imaginary treasure for free distributions.'[26]

Tacitus' narrative of Nero's last two years has not been preserved (assuming that he lived to write it). To what extent he described Nero's *luxuria* as a factor which determined the outcome is therefore unknown. But surely it is noteworthy that the

and Orosius, see e.g. W. Jakob-Sonnabend, *Untersuchungen zum Nero-Bild der Spätantike* (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, 1990), 44ff., 66ff.

[21] *Germania* 45.5 is an ironic reference to Roman *luxuria*: so highly is amber, a material 'useless to the natives', prized in Rome that it bewilders the virtuous Germanic traders, astonished to be paid for it at all.

[22] Clodius Quirinalis: Tac. *Ann.* 13.30. Praetor in A.D. 68: *ludos et inania honoris medio rationis atque abundantiae duxit, uti longe a luxuria, ita famae propior*, *Agr.* 6.4.

[23] Nero's *avaritiam ac prodigentiam*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.1.3; similarly, 15.37 (*eadem prodigentia*); *largitiones* and *munificentia*: n. 13 and 18; *nulla parsimonia*: 13.13.4. Tiberius a *princeps antiquae parsimoniae*, 3.52 with B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (London, 1976), 89–90.

[24] Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.18.1–2 (after the murder of Britannicus); 14.14.3–4 (gifts to aristocrats who degraded themselves on the stage); 15.44.2 (attempts to win goodwill after the fire of Rome).

[25] Cf. Cic. *S.Rosc* 75: *ex luxuria . . . avaritia* and *De Oratore* 2.171: *avaritiam si tollere voltis, mater eius est tollenda, luxuries*, and Sen. *Ep.* 95.33: *in avaritiam luxuria praeceps* with comments by Kloft (n. 11), 148.

[26] Tac. *Ann.* 16.3 [M. Grant, Penguin]: 'gliscebat interim luxuria spe inani, consumebanturque veteres opes quasi oblatis, quas multos per annos prodigeret. quin et inde iam largiebatur; et divitiarum expectatio inter causas paupertatis publicae erat.'

issue surfaces as soon as the narrative resumes—in the first chapters of the *Historiae*, where he contrasts Galba's and Piso's restraint with the Neronian excesses of their enemies.

Here too, Tacitus was in agreement with a by then well-established historiographical tradition. Galba, and in his turn Vespasian, would deliberately distance themselves from Nero's financial excesses. By contrast (this tradition claims), Otho and Vitellius were also Nero's successors when it came to spending; indeed this was, according to Tacitus, why Galba refused to make Otho his successor. Even when merely a private citizen, Otho's 'extravagance' (*luxuria*) had reached such proportions that it would have embarrassed an emperor; but then, it was of course this very aspect of his lifestyle that had endeared him to Nero. In the words of Galba's heir Piso, Otho's vices were of the kind which might ruin the empire: what Otho termed *liberalitas* was in fact prodigality (*luxuria*) masquerading as generosity, the difference being that whereas the generous man truly knows how to give, the victim of *luxuria* can only squander.[27]

Tacitus insists that Vitellius was no better: both were—he claims—chosen as if utterly to destroy the state; one of the salient points of similarity was their *luxuria*.[28] If only Vitellius 'had succeeded in restraining his extravagance (*luxuriae*), one would not have had to fear his greed (*avaritiam*)'. Instead his life became a lesson that 'generosity (*liberalitas*) . . . leads to doom, unless tempered with discretion'.[29]

Given these parallels, Galba's condemnation of Nero's *luxuria* is *a priori* unlikely to refer to his predecessor's debauchery. To be sure, Nero's 'life of pleasure' has been the perennial butt of moralists, from the Church Fathers down to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but according to Tacitus—as indeed to other historians—it was Nero's economy, not his immorality, which was Galba's chief worry. This was where the usurper insisted that drastic changes were necessary. It is a reasonable assumption that this is also what he is doing here.

Galba's speech is a solemn disquisition on political and constitutional problems, not on *déreglées voluptez*, let alone some 'Deadly Sin'.[30] To be sure, he describes political means in moral terms but the verdict is no less political for that: 'Let Nero be ever before your eyes': along with his murders, his extravagance had ultimately proved fatal.

II. NERO'S *LUXURIA*: THE EARLY EVIDENCE

But is such a verdict at all reasonable? Given the absence of reliable statistics, this

[27] Tac. *Hist.* 1.21: *luxuria* (sc. *Othonis*) *etiam principi onerosa*; 1.13.3: *gratus* (sc. *Otho*) *Neroni aemulatione luxus*; 1.30: *falluntur quibus luxuria specie liberalitatis imponit: perdere iste* (sc. *Otho*) *sciet, donare nesciet*. The reference at 1.71 to Otho's temperance during the final campaign (*dilatae voluptates, dissimulata luxuria*) seems to refer to lifestyle rather than economy.

[28] Tac. *Hist.* 1.50 (the *luxuria* of Otho and Vitellius).

[29] *Hist.* 2.62: *prorsus si luxuriae temperaret, avaritiam non timeres* and 3.86.2: *inerat* (sc. *Vitellio*) . . . *liberalitas, quae ni adsit modus, in exitium vertuntur*; by contrast, Mucianus managed to combine private *luxuria* with public success: 1.10.2. On the motif, see further R. Funari, 'Degradazione morale e *luxuria* nell'esercito di Vitellio (Tacito, *Hist.* II): modelli e sviluppi narrativi', *Athenaeum* 80 (1992), 133ff.

[30] In Catholic doctrine, *luxuria* is a Deadly Sin; among its manifestations Thomas Aquinas listed *fornicatio simplex*, *adulterium*, *incestus*, *stuprum*, *raptus*, and *peccatum contra naturam* (*Summ. Theol.* 2.2.154). Whether directly or indirectly, such definitions may well have strengthened the tendency to interpret references to Nero's *luxuria* within a similar framework; an early exponent is Aug. *Civ.D.* 5.19 according to whom Nero's *luxuries*, *fuit tanta . . . ut nihil ab eo putaretur virile metuendum*.

is of course difficult to determine. There are, however, clear indications that the catastrophic fire of Rome in A.D. 64 started—or accelerated—a process which compelled Nero to resort to irregular and offensive ways of financing expenditure.[31]

Even prior to the fire, complaints about extortion of provincials seem to have gone unheeded.[32] In the British revolt in A.D. 60 the heavy burden of usury and taxation had allegedly been part of the trouble. Queen Boudicca owes Tacitus the rhetorical contrast between Britons fighting for kinsmen and country against Romans motivated by nothing but 'greed and extravagance' (*avaritiam et luxuriam*)—but the complaint about Roman avarice figures strongly in accounts of the revolt.[33] On top of such burdens the great fire imposed the staggering cost of rebuilding the city and the new imperial palace, the *Domus aurea*. To finance this effort, temple-treasure, extraordinary taxes, and confiscations were clearly insufficient.[34]

In A.D. 64 it was also decided to debase the silver content of the denarius;[35] at about the same time, the Egyptian coinage was likewise devalued.[36] Whatever the range and exact percentage of these drastic 'devaluations', they are clearly not rhetorical constructs; and as for their main purpose there can be little doubt.[37] By the simple expedient of replacing old coins with new of smaller silver value, the treasury could obtain an easy profit, reduce the deficit, and diminish expenditure.[38] How the army reacted to the resulting reduction of its pay has gone unrecorded; surely, it cannot have strengthened its loyalty, when crisis finally broke.[39]

The strain on the economy was further increased when in A.D. 66 rebellion flared up throughout Judaea. The Jews had had enough of Roman taxes and confiscations.[40]

[31] As for the causes of the revolt, P. A. Brunt, 'The revolt of Vindex and the fall of Nero', *Latomus* 18 (1959), 531–59 (= *Roman Imperial Themes* [Oxford, 1990], 9–33) and Griffin (n. 10), 185ff. present a strong case for seeing the economy as a major factor.

[32] On the evidence for extortion of provincials in Britain, Judaea, and Spain (no trials for misgovernment on record after A.D. 61), see Brunt (n. 31), 553–9.

[33] *avaritiam et luxuriam*, Tac. *Agr.* 15.4 with G. Webster, *Boudica* (London, 1978), 86ff.

[34] On the exactions and confiscations after the great fire, see e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 15.45, 16.23; Suet. *Nero* 32.4, 38.3 with Brunt (n. 31), 556.

[35] Debasement of coinage in A.D. 64: D. R. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage* III (Oxford, 1978), 111, who further argues from Suet. *Nero* 44.2 that Nero at the end seems to have demanded 'payment in good (i.e. old) coin . . . [while] refusing to accept payment in his new and poorer money'; so, apparently, did Germanic traders: Tac. *Germ.* 5.5.

[36] In Egypt a new debased coinage replaced the old between A.D. 64 to 66: E. Christiansen, *The Roman Coins of Alexandria* (Århus, 1987), 104ff. The resulting profit has been variously estimated, but recoinage was clearly on a 'massive' scale: C. J. Howgego, *JRS* 80 (1990), 232; cf. A. Gara, *Gnomon* 62 (1990), 753.

[37] *Contra* M. E. K. Thornton, 'Nero's new deal', *TAPA* 102 (1971), 621ff., who regards Nero as a Keynes *avant la lettre* attempting to counteract widespread unemployment (for which there is no evidence); Vespasian was not of course alone in caring for his *plebecula* (Suet. *Vesp.* 18) but to describe such paternalistic concern as a New Deal seems anachronistic.

[38] By using different methods of measuring, K. Butcher and M. Ponting, 'Rome and the East. Production of Roman provincial silver coinage for Caesarea in Cappadocia under Vespasian, A.D. 69–79', *OJA* 14 (1995), 75–6 question the figures of Walker—but not the debasement itself.

[39] On the possible links between Nero's debasement and the defection of the armies in Spain, Gaul, Germany, and north Italy, see M. H. Crawford, 'Ancient devaluations' in *Les 'dévaluations' à Rome* I (Paris, 1978), 152.

[40] On the complex causes of the Jewish revolt, see e.g. E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden, 1976), 256ff.; S. Applebaum, 'Judaea as a Roman province', *ANRW* 2.8 (1977), 385 emphasizes the importance of the 'widespread problem of land-shortage, exacerbated by heavy taxation and tenurial oppression' in Judaea of the first century B.C. and A.D.

Whatever the truth of these charges, the increased output of the eastern mints illustrates the costs of the rapidly expanding military activity.[41]

Still, Nero seems to have refused to economize. Indeed, the sources claim that he ignored the warnings of his freedman, Helius. Instead Nero continued his histrionic (and costly) progress through Greece. The sanctuaries at Delphi and Olympia received lavish gifts, the taxes of all Achaia were remitted—grand, conciliatory gestures that the treasury could ill afford. Other measures were in demand but Nero had no sense for priorities. In his final years the already debased salary of the army allegedly fell into arrears. In any case the revolts in Gaul, Africa, and Spain in A.D. 68 seem to have found him without funds to meet the emergency. Desperate, he imposed a tax equivalent to one year's rent on tenants in Rome.[42]

Now, evidence such as this cannot, of course, be taken at face value; much is doubtless distorted, and some of it probably invented. But when seen in connection with the fire, the devaluations, and the Jewish revolt, it seems reasonable to conclude that Nero was indeed in dire financial straits when Vindex and Galba resorted to open revolt.

How far this circumstance influenced events remains debatable. That the depleted treasury left Nero with fewer options goes without saying. 'Money are the sinews of civil war', a contemporary observed.[43] Although Tacitus wrote some forty years after the event he is therefore not necessarily unduly anachronistic (let alone unreasonable) when allowing Galba to comment on the fatal consequences of Nero's prodigality. In fact, similar comments (presently to be examined) can be found in the writings of four of Galba's near-contemporaries.

The first of these early witnesses is the prefect of Egypt, Tiberius Iulius Alexander, whose edict from July 68 explicitly gives vent to similar complaints. At the time of the revolt Iulius Alexander had been in charge for little more than two years. But in his edict published a few weeks after Nero's fall, he claimed that he already had been compelled to listen to numerous complaints from the provincials without being able to come to their aid. Now, he made a point of promising to put an end to a number of economic iniquities.

The prefect may, of course, refer to local problems, but since he otherwise betrays a remarkable familiarity with the war-cries of the rebels, it is not unreasonable to assume that he is also here demonstrating his readiness to comply with official policy.[44] Complaints such as these were now to be given a fair hearing.

The second of the early witnesses is somewhat later. In his history of the Jewish War (the Greek version of which seems datable to A.D. 75–9), Josephus twice refers to Nero's fall and once to the year of the four emperors—but refrains from going into any

[41] By A.D. 67 60,000 men were fighting in Judaea: Jos. *B.J.* 3.69; activity of the eastern mints: Walker (n. 35), 115–117. On costs, see further n. 91.

[42] Helius' warnings: Suet. *Nero* 23; salary of the army: ibid. 32 with discussion of J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (Oxford, 1984), 173. One year's rent: Suet. *Nero* 44.2.

[43] Tac. *Hist.* 2.84: *eos esse belli civilis nervos* (thus Mucianus on the power of money).

[44] For the edict, see the edition of G. Chalon, *L'Edit de Tiberius Julius Alexander* (Lausanne, 1964); on its echo of Galban slogans, see n. 124. Whether conditions actually deteriorated or simply remained bad during Nero's principate, is problematic (53ff.). For discussions of new evidence, see O. Montevecchi, *Neronia* 1977.2 (1982), 41ff.; C. Wehrli, *MH* 35 (1978), 245ff.; and J. F. Oates, *Alter Orient und altes Testament* 203 (1979), 325ff. Montevecchi argues for an 'amministrazione fiscale efficiente, ma pesante e oppressiva, con frequenti abusi' and a 'crisi economica interna, che si trascina dai tempi di Claudio' (p. 51).

detail, since 'so many historians had already dealt with the matter, in Greek as well as in Latin'.

Yet for all their brevity, Josephus' summaries still throw an interesting light on Flavian attitudes. According to Josephus, Nero's reign was marred by his 'cruelty'; elsewhere Josephus singles out his 'madness in handling his riches'. Galba, by contrast, fell from power because of his 'meanness'—or rather what his soldiers viewed as such.[45] In other words, the image of Nero the cruel profligate versus Galba the miser had by then already taken root.

The third author of relevance is Pliny the Elder. Unfortunately his history of Nero's reign is lost; but in his *Natural History* (written in the late 70s) the harmful effects of *luxuria* are a recurrent theme. Indeed, *luxuria* has in Pliny achieved an almost metaphysical status as an all-embracing term characterizing attitudes and behaviour which somehow upset the just balance between man and nature.[46] In this work Pliny's main interest is, of course, neither economic policy nor causes of recent revolts. But since Pliny himself took pride in never letting the results of his research go to waste, it is not unreasonable to assume that his *Natural History* sometimes echoes his *Roman History*. In the present context it is therefore noteworthy that Nero looms large whenever Pliny casts around for the worst and greatest instances of *luxuria*. The emperor Gaius being the only true rival, Nero's principate witnessed the *ne plus ultra* in costly extravagance, be it in the use of tortoiseshell, of pearls, tableware (one item cost one million sestertii), and incense (the production of one year was consumed at Poppaea's funeral)—and when it came to the use of perfume which was also a product of *luxuria*, another Flavian *bête noire*, Otho, is said to have taught Nero new, expensive tricks.[47] A further reference seems to offer a direct echo of the official stance: when discussing Vitellius' order for a dish worth a million sestertii (*eo pervenit luxuria!*), Pliny quotes a pamphlet from A.D. 70, in which Vespasian's deputy at Rome, Mucianus, condemned Vitellius' gluttony in vigorous terms: this was what the Flavians had been up against![48]

As for the fourth of the relevant authors, his attitude to Nero's extravagance is by no means uncertain, but unfortunately his time of writing is less easily ascertainable (and his identity completely unknown). To be sure, his drama, the so-called *Octavia Praetexta*, has been transmitted among the tragedies of Seneca (indeed, the manuscripts ascribe it to Seneca himself), but since everything suggests that the *Praetexta* postdates the fall of Nero in June 68, the philosopher cannot be its author: he died on Nero's orders in A.D. 65.[49]

There is, in this context, no need to go into the whole range of problems concerning

[45] On the date of the *Bellum Judaicum*, see P. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome* (Sheffield, 1988), 79 (with bibliography). Galba's *ταπεινοφροσύνη*: Jos. *B.J.* 4.494; Nero's *πλούτου παραφρονήσας*: 2.250.

[46] J. Isager, *Pliny on Art and Society* (London, 1991), 52ff. (with bibliography).

[47] Plinian condemnations of Neronian *luxuria*: use of tortoiseshell under Nero: *N.H.* 16.232–3; incense (at Poppaea's funeral) 12.82–3; pearls: 37.17; tableware: 37.18–20 (at the cost of 1 million sestertii); perfume and *luxuria*: 13.1; Nero and Otho: 13.22.

[48] Plin. *N.H.* 35.163–4: 'Vitellius in principatu suo [x] HS condidit patinam cui faciendae fornax in campis exaedificata erat, quoniam eo pervenit luxuria, ut etiam fictilia pluris constent quam murrina. propter hanc Mucianus altero consulatu suo in conquestione exprobravit patinarum paludes Vitelli memoriae'; for an early parallel to Mucianus' *exprobratio*, note the oration *de cenarum atque luxuriae exprobratione* from *c.* 100 B.C. quoted by Gell. 15.8.

[49] For scholars favouring Seneca as the author, see notes 55, 70, and 72; on A.D. 68 as the *terminus post*: R. Helm, *Sitz. d. Preus. Akad.* (Berlin, 1934), 300ff. and O. Zwierlein, *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas* (Mainz, 1986), 445–6 (with bibliography); to judge from

date and authorship. What matters is, in the first place, that there are strong reasons for assuming that the drama belongs to the group of texts written *recentibus odiis*,[50] soon after Nero's fall,[51] while hatred was fresh and people still eager to manifest their *pietas* towards the tyrant's victims.[52] Which is why it seems worthwhile examining what the playwright has to say about Nero's economy. Along with the prefect of Egypt and with Josephus and Pliny, he may well be an early witness.

There is a second reason why this witness is of interest here. In phraseology and style his drama betrays a remarkable familiarity with the slogans and war-cries of the early revolt against Nero (a circumstance of the utmost relevance when discussing its historical background). The portrayal of the tyrant as the enemy of the *populus Romanus*, which figures so prominently in the Galban and Flavian propaganda (cf. below p. 512), is likewise fundamental to the plot and language of the *praetexta*; uniquely in imperial literature, it portrays the urban mob as the descendants of a great and free republican past, its riots and violent protests against the dismissal of Octavia motivated by noble but impotent *pietas*.[53]

Given these parallels, it is all the more telling that the dramatist should also condemn Nero's *luxuria*.

Two passages are central; both are prophetic, and although the first of these prophecies is strongly allegorical, its emphasis on the harmful consequences of Nero's extravagance is unmistakable; and the fact that this verdict is ascribed to no less an authority than Seneca only seems to underline its importance.

Seneca's commanding role in this drama is by no means incompatible with the idea of an early date. Quite the contrary: the philosopher's fame was probably never so high as in the decades immediately after his death. As Quintilian would later complain, the young were in those days 'hardly reading anyone but Seneca'.[54]

similar dream narratives, the dream of Poppaea (712ff.) foretells the death, murder, and suicide of Poppaea, her ex-husband Crispinus, and Nero, respectively: P. Kragelund, *Prophecy, Populism and Propaganda in the 'Octavia'* (København, 1982), 35ff.; they died (in that order) in A.D. 65, 66, and 68—all of them after Seneca.

[50] Tac. *Ann.* 1.1.2: *recentibus odiis*; for texts written or edited within months of the death of a tyrant, in A.D. 37, 54, 68, 96, and 193, see P. Kragelund, 'Vatinius, Nero and Curiatius Maternus', *CQ* 37 (1987), 197–202 and id., 'The prefect's dilemma and the date of the *Octavia*', *CQ* 38 (1988), 506–7; the playwright's anti-Neronian attitude has commonly been regarded as a possible indication of an early date: cf. e.g. H. Grassl, *Untersuchungen zum Vierkaiserjahr 68/9 n. Chr.* (Dissertation, Wien, 1973), *passim* and E. S. Ramage, 'Denigration of predecessor under Claudius, Galba, and Vespasian', *Historia* 32 (1983), 210, n. 32.

[51] How soon, remains debatable: T. D. Barnes, *MH* 39 (1982), 217; Kragelund (n. 49), 49–50 and id., 'Prefect's dilemma' (n. 50), 508; and J. P. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero* (Ithaca, NY/London, 1985), 72 belong to those who favour an early, probably Galban date, while Zwierlein (n. 49), 445–6 (with bibliography) argues for the first years of the Flavians. The latter would, admittedly, give the dramatist more time (if such was needed: in periods of transition literary activity seems to have been hectic), but in my view the chief difficulty is the puzzling absence of references to the civil wars and Flavian victory (a prophetic allusion like Sil. *Pun.* 3.571ff. could easily have been included).

[52] In view of this attitude the suggestion of V. Ciaffi, *RIFC* 65 (1937), 264 and E. Cizek, *L'Époque de Néron et ses controverses idéologiques* (Leiden, 1972), 7–8 that the *Octavia* is datable to the reign of Otho is *a priori* unlikely to be correct: Otho posed as Nero's successor and re-erected the statues of Octavia's foe, Poppaea (see note 111 below).

[53] On the 'populism' of the dramatist and of the coinage of the revolt, see Kragelund (n. 49), 38ff.; similarly, Zwierlein (n. 49), 445–6; P. Grimal, 'Le tableau de la vie politique à Rome en 62, d'après l'*Octavie*', *Studi . . . G. Monaco* III (Palermo, 1991), 1149–1158 brings out the remarkable differences between Seneca's and the playwright's attitudes to the *populus Romanus*.

[54] Quint. 10.1.125: *tum autem solus hic* (sc. *Seneca*) *fere in manibus adulescentium fuit.*

Now, whatever the precise date of the *Octavia praetexta*, the dramatist was clearly an admirer who had studied the works of his idol with the utmost care. To make his portrayal lifelike, he therefore knew how to employ *imitatio*.[55] Quoting extensively from Seneca's works on ethics and politics, he is in fact at his most impressive when depicting Seneca and Nero bitterly arguing *pro et contra* the merits of imperial *clementia*.[56]

If his audience were indeed near-contemporary, these pivotal scenes, with their word-for-word adaptations of the philosopher's *ipsissima verba*, must have sounded like hearing a voice from the grave bearing witness against the tyrant. In the present context it is therefore revealing that Seneca, in his opening soliloquy,[57] with its apocalyptic vision of modern decadence soon to culminate in impending chaos, condemns *luxuria* as nothing less than the 'greatest evil' of the modern, Neronian, age:

> maximum . . . malum, 426
> luxuria, pestis blanda, cui vires dedit
> roburque longum tempus atque error gravis

Given the apocalyptic setting, this verdict is of course fairly unspecific; as Pliny illustrates, condemnations of sensual pleasure and easy living were by no means alien to descriptions of modern decadence.[58] However, a few lines below it becomes clear that the dramatist attached considerable importance to the economic consequences of *luxuria*. At the very end of the monologue, the equation of Nero and the extreme degeneration of the Iron Age is made explicit by means of an effective *coup de théâtre*. As Nero enters, he stands revealed as the embodiment of all its vice:

> collecta vitia per tot aetates diu
> in nos redundant: saeculo premimur gravi, 430
> quo Scelera regnant, saevit Impietas furens,
> turpi Libido Venere dominatur potens,
> Luxuria victrix orbis immensas opes
> iam pridem avaris manibus, ut perdat, rapit.
> sed ecce, gressu fertur attonito Nero 435
> trucique vultu. quid ferat mente horreo.

As so often, the playwright here has recourse to allegory. What Seneca beholds is an awesome series of personifications which illustrate aspects of Nero's rule. Far from

[55] On the similarities and differences between the style and metre of Seneca and the dramatist, see e.g. Helm (n. 49), 300ff. and G. Ballaira, *Ottavia, con note* (Torino, 1974), *passim*; G. Simonetti Abbolito, 'Su alcuni passi dell' *Octavia*', *Studi Traglia* II (Roma, 1979), 731ff., 752 and F. Giancotti, *Orpheus* NS 4 (1983), 215ff. regard such similarities as proof of Seneca's authorship, but the argument is weak: they may just as well be the result of deliberate *imitatio*.

[56] The scene inspired dramatists, from Mussato down to Busenello and Monteverdi: H. J. Tschiedel, 'Die italienische Literatur', in E. Lefèvre (ed.), *Der Einfluss Senecas auf das europäische Drama* (Darmstadt, 1978), 81ff.; a late—and apparently unnoticed—echo is King Philip's 'Erbarmung hiesse Wahnsinn' in Schiller's *Don Carlos* 2.2; surely, the inspiration is Nero's pun, *dementia* (496) in reply to Seneca's pleas for *clementia*.

[57] On the monologue, see F. Bruckner, *Interpretationen zur Pseudo-Seneca-Tragödie 'Octavia'* (Dissertation, Nürnberg ,1976), 14ff.; H. Schwabl, s.v. 'Weltalter', *RE* Suppl. 15 (1978), 895ff. and G. Williams, 'Nero, Seneca and Stoicism in the *Octavia*', in Elsner and Masters (n. 5), 180ff.

[58] Prop. 3.13.4ff. contrasts *luxuria* with the conditions of an ideal, bucolic past; and at *Ep.* 90 and 95.19 (*luxuria, terrarum marisque vastatrix*) Seneca discusses Stoic attitudes (cf. Bruckner [n. 57], 30–1), but the item does not figure in such classic descriptions of the Golden Age as Cic. *N.D.* 2.159; Ov. *Met.* 1.89ff.; and Germanicus Caesar, *Aratea* 96ff.

being a Golden Age (as it had officially been described),[59] this had truly been an Age of Iron.

Scelera regnant (431) evokes its general nature: the dramatist uses the noun extensively to characterize Nero's deeds. Similarly with the powerful *saevit Impietas furens* (431): the dramatist only uses *impietas* here, but *saevire* and *impius* are used exclusively of the tyrant and his crimes (609, 225, 237, 598, 619) and *saevus* predominantly so.

As for the references to *Libido* and *Venus* (432), they are clearly meant to evoke Nero and Poppaea. *Libido* was a traditional characteristic of tyrants. In the *Octavia* it is otherwise employed to bring out the parallel between Nero and Appius Claudius (299) who outraged Verginia (i.e. Octavia).[60] And—as if to bring home the message—it is to Venus, and to her son, that Poppaea owes her ill-fated imperial elevation (697); indeed, Poppaea's opponents describe her love for Nero with the very words used by Seneca: it was a cheap and carnal affair (cf. *in Venere turpi*, 191 and *turpi . . . Venere*, 432).[61]

While the correspondence between these personifications and the *fabula* is palpable, this is, curiously, far from being the case with the final item in the series. Again *luxuria* is brought in, and adhering to the rhetorical precept of gradual expansion (first half-lines, then one and finally two), the playwright has made it amply clear that this is an item of the utmost importance. Yet, despite this singular emphasis, the reader will find not only the expression, but also the idea strangely unconnected with the drama itself. Apart from a brief, but wholesale, condemnation of Nero's extravagance and rapacity (to be examined below), this is virtually all one hears of this aspect of his rule. And yet it is *Luxuria* which is seen as the supreme evil of the Iron Age: it stands out as the climactic transgression in the array of allegorical vices. Only Nero himself surpasses them all. It can be argued, therefore, that the author considered this accusation so weighty that he was willing to go somewhat out of his way to include it in a plot with which it is not *per se* easily compatible.[62]

Given the dramatist's admiration for Seneca, one of the reasons for this emphasis seems obvious. Even prior to his death, Seneca's fabulous wealth had been a contentious issue. While the hostile tradition emphasized his hypocrisy and complicity in Nero's extortions, others would stress his attempts to oppose or at least dissociate himself from the greed and corruption of the tyrant's court.[63] By allowing Seneca openly to condemn Nero's *luxuria*, the dramatist shows clearly what was his own verdict.

[59] Nero's principate a Golden Age: Sen. *Apoc.* 4; Calp. Sic. 1.42, cf. 4.137ff.; similarly, Tac. *Ann.* 16.2.2, quoting panegyrics from 66 A.D..

[60] P. L. Schmidt, 'Die Poetisierung und Mythisierung der Geschichte in der Tragödie *Octavia*', *ANRW* 2.32.2 (1985), 1437 seems mistaken when claiming that *libido* has little part in the dramatist's characterization of Nero; for the dramatist on 'Nero in love', see F. Bruckner (n. 57), 97ff. and Williams (n. 57), 185ff.

[61] Venus is throughout this play an evil, amoral force. She had presided at Messalina's illicit nuptials with Silius, the cause and font of all the subsequent misery (257ff.).

[62] With the exception of Bruckner (n. 57), 32 ('So eng wie bei *scelera, impietas, libido* ist bei *luxuria* der Bezug zur Fabel der *Oc(tavia)* nicht, aber dem Octaviadichter war Nero's Verschwendungssucht doch ein so bezeichnender Wesenszug, dass er auch in der Praetexta darauf anspielte'), previous discussions of the monologue (see note 57) do not comment on the historical implications of Seneca's verdict.

[63] On Seneca's attitude to wealth, see M. T. Griffin, *Seneca* (Oxford, 1976), 286ff. (with bibliography); his stance was condemned as hypocritical by Publius Suillius in 58 A.D. (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.42.4) and later, with great vehemence, by Dio 61.10.3 (Bois.). Tacitus shows more sympathy, when describing the courtier's dilemma: *Ann.* 14.53 (Seneca vainly begging to be allowed to return Nero's gifts) and 15.45.3 (opposing Nero's confiscation of sacred objects as a *sacrilegium*). Note also Plut. *Mor.* 461F–462 (Seneca warning Nero against excessive extravagance).

Nero's greed and prodigality is memorably brought out: *ut perdat, rapit* (434). From Plautus onwards, the link between *luxuria* and *perdere* was standard, but for the dramatist it may well have mattered that the historical Seneca had used a similar expresssion to characterize perverted *liberalitas*.[64] And as he had repeatedly observed, the consequence of this evil was *avaritia*—whence the 'greedy hands' with which this monstrous creature grasps the 'countless riches' (*immensas opes*) of the world. This latter expression, which Roman historians[65] would use to condemn modern extravagance, brings out the enormity of the transaction: the adjective is otherwise used to describe the vast expanse of the universe (386) and, in the second of the passages relevant to this enquiry, the phrase once again illustrates the staggering extent of Nero's plunder. Briefly put, it had 'exhausted the world' (626–7):

> licet extruat marmoribus atque auro tegat
> superbus aulam, limen armatae ducis
> servent cohortes, mittat immensas opes
> exhaustus orbis, supplices dextram petant
> Parthi cruentam, regna divitias ferant:
> veniet dies tempusque quo reddat suis
> animam nocentem sceleribus, iugulum hostibus
> desertus ac destructus et cunctis egens.

Here again is a passage that deserves closer scrutiny. Due to the oracular style it is sometimes difficult to determine what the speaker, Agrippina's ghost, is referring to. But whatever they are, these incidents are clearly stations *en route* towards the final disaster; and it cannot be ignored that along that road extortion and extravagance are again considered important milestones.

As for the single items enumerated by Agrippina, it seems clear that she first (624–5) refers to the building of the *Domus aurea* (A.D. 64 onwards). For all the golden splendour of his *aula*, the arrogant (*superbus*, 625) tyrant would, the ghost assures us, still die in want of everything (631).

The *armatae . . . /cohortes* (625–6) guarding the palace are likewise well attested.[66] In the tense period after the detection of the Pisonian conspiracy in A.D. 65, the Guard was even multiplied, and still, Agrippina reminds us, Nero would die ignominously and alone (*desertus*, 631)—which is exactly how he did die: at the end, he was deserted even by the Praetorian Guard, its tribunes refusing to follow him in his flight.[67]

[64] On *luxuria* and *perdere*, see *TLL* 10.1, 1264–5; note Plaut. *Trin.* 13 (the speaker is Luxuria herself) and Tac. *Hist.* 1.30 (quoted in n. 27); Sen. *N.Q.* 1, *praef.* 6 has *non est tibi . . . luxuria pecuniam turpiter perdens quam turpius reparet* and Suet. *Nero* 30 quotes a pronouncement of Nero's: *sordidos ac deparcos esse quibus impensarum ratio constaret, praelautos vereque magnificos qui abuterentur ac perderent.*

[65] In one year, Caligula squandered all the funds accumulated under Tiberius: Suet. *Cal.* 37.3 (*immensas opes . . . absumpsit*); similarly, Nero was led to a new 'frenzy of spending' (*impendiorum furorem*) by the vain hope of finding Dido's *immensarum . . . opum*: *Nero* 31.4. By contrast, Aemilius Paullus appropriated none of the *immensas opes* (Liv. *per.* 46) from Spain and Macedonia for his own coffers—it all went to the public treasury: Cic. *Off.* 2.76; Val. Max. 4.3.8.

[66] Neither Ballaira (n. 55) nor L. Y. Whitman, *The 'Octavia'. Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Bern/Stuttgart, 1978), ad loc. comments on the plural *cohortes* (626). Normally, the palace was guarded by a single *cohors* commanded by a tribune: Tac. *Ann.* 12.69; *Hist.* 1.29 and Suet. *Nero* 9 with M. Durry, *Les cohortes prétoriennes* (Paris, 1938), 275. Nero had sometimes been careless with his safety (*omissis excubiis*, Tac. *Ann.* 15.52), but after the detection of the Pisonian conspiracy, the guard was doubled (*multiplicatis excubiis*): *Ann.* 15.57.4; if not a poetical licence, *cohortes* (626) may therefore well refer to such late emergency measures.

[67] Suet. *Nero* 47.

The pattern repeats itself, when Agrippina refers to the extortion of the world and triumph over the Parthians. Again, it would ultimately prove to no avail. The *orbis* would send its riches (626–7), but in the end there would be nothing left (*cunctis egens*, 631); Parthians would kneel in submission, but in the end Nero would be *destructus*.

While it is commonly agreed that these lines allude to the extortion of the provinces (roughly from A.D. 64 onwards), the date of the Parthian surrender is strongly disputed, the reason being that the prophecy seems on one reading to support, and on the other to preclude, Senecan authorship. Indeed, it is sometimes argued that the debate has reached a deadlock, the arguments for and against being of equal strength.

In my view this is, however, far from being the case. On the contrary, there are new as well as discarded aspects of the evidence which seem decisive.

Briefly to summarize, there are but two Parthian surrenders to consider: one before and one after the death of Seneca in A.D. 65.

In A.D. 63 Tiridates, the brother of the king of Parthia, deposited his diadem before Nero's statue in the Roman camp at Rhandia in Armenia, thereby recognizing that Armenia rightly belonged to the Roman sphere. It was then agreed that Tiridates should go to Rome, there to receive his diadem from Nero's hand.[68]

After lengthy preparations this was finally what happened in A.D. 66, more than a year after Seneca's death, when Tiridates arrived at Rome accompanied by a suite of Parthian princes. At a solemn ceremony in the Roman Forum he now confirmed the settlement by kneeling before Nero, whereupon he received the crown of Armenia from the emperor's own hand.[69]

To which of these events is Agrippina referring—the ceremony in A.D. 63 or the one in 66?

In attempting to answer this question, it should be kept in mind that a dramatic 'prophecy' drawing heavily on the formulaic imagery of imprecations and curses offers little in the line of photographic verisimilitude.[70] Nevertheless, if we assume that Agrippina's vision of suppliant Parthians (*supplices . . . Parthi*, 627–8) seeking Nero's right hand (*dextram*, 627), is at all referring to anything specific, it is hard to see how this could possibly be anything but the ceremony in A.D. 66.[71] Brief and sketchy, the allusion is in its outline perfectly recognizable. By contrast, there is in the dramatist's words nothing that bears even the slightest resemblance to the surrender in A.D. 63.[72] Then a Parthian prince had showed reverence to Nero's statue but, as the

[68] Tac. *Ann.* 15.29 and Dio 62.23.4 (Bois.); challenging *communis opinio*, M. Heil, *Die orientalische Aussenpolitik des Kaisers Nero* (München, 1997), 220–1 prefers dating Rhandia to early 64—but the issue is in this context immaterial.

[69] Suet. *Nero* 13 and Dio 63.3.4 (Bois.).

[70] S. Pantzerhielm Thomas, 'De Octavia praetexta', *SO* 24 (1945), 68ff.; Ballaira (n. 55) and Whitman (n. 66) are among those who argue that since the prophecy of Agrippina is so strongly characterized by conventional imagery, it is unlikely to have been written by someone who knew precisely what happened; in the opposite case, the prophecy would (so is it claimed) have been more accurate. As in discussions of Poppaea's dream, the argument fails to take the demands of genre into account: this was what curses and prophecies were expected to look like, even when written *ex eventu*: Kragelund (n. 49), 9ff.

[71] For arguments favouring A.D. 66, see e.g. K. Münscher, 'Bericht über die Seneca-Literatur aus den Jahren 1915–1921', *Bursians Jahresbericht* 192 (1922), 205–8; Helm (n. 49), 298–9; and M. E. Carbone, *Phoenix* 31 (1977), 50–1 (with bibliography).

[72] *Pace* e.g. Ballaira (n. 55), *ad* [Sen.] *Oct.* 627; Pantzerhielm Thomas (n. 70), 81ff.; and F. Giancotti, *L'Octavia attribuita a Seneca* (Torino, 1954), 57 (who all date the episode to A.D. 63).

phraseology[73] makes clear, suppliant Parthians (in the plural) are here showing reverence to Nero *himself*—which in fact they[74] did in A.D. 66.

Nothing daunted, the most recent commentary insists that these lines are by no means incompatible with the acceptance of Seneca's authorship: far from it, we are told that they 'agree equally well with the much-heralded promise of the visit and with the visit itself'.[75] On this reading, the prophecy is in other words not necessarily a *vaticinium ex eventu*, but may just as well be a pseudo-*vaticinium* based upon Seneca's knowledge of what had already been agreed.

This line of argument is, however, not only strained, but recent discoveries have also shown it to be misleading. In fact, nothing suggests that the surrender in A.D. 63 was 'much-heralded'. To be sure, this latter event is in the epitome of Dio said to have earned Nero a triumph as well as imperatorial acclamations, but Dio's claim now stands disproved by epigraphy: while the surrender in A.D. 63 resulted in no such celebrations,[76] an acclamation is known to have been among the numerous honours which Nero received in mid A.D. 66.[77]

Far from being a safe bet, let alone the logical next step after a 'much-heralded' surrender in A.D. 63, it therefore seems highly doubtful whether Seneca, by the time of his suicide in April 65, could have written with such assurance about Tiridates' future visit. By then, there may of course have been public proclamations[78] about the planned triumph, but it should be remembered that at the time of Seneca's death, the king had still not embarked upon his nine-month progress toward Rome; and in dealings with the Parthians, it was common knowledge that anything might happen.[79]

The idea of Seneca masquerading as a Sibyl is, in short, beset with difficulties. And a closer look at the immediate context only makes it more so.

In her prophecy, Agrippina repeatedly stresses that Nero would soon be punished for his crimes. Let him build or do this and that: *soon*, his power and success would be replaced by destitute misery: *tempus haud longum peto* (618). Surely, it is therefore significant that she evokes the Parthian triumph as belonging to the very last stage of

[73] As a parallel to *supplices dextram petant*, Ballaira (n. 55) follows Hosius (Bonn, 1922) in quoting Sen. *Med.* 247–8: *cum genua attigi, fidemque supplex praesidis dextrae peti.* But far from supporting, it seems to me that the parallel demolishes Ballaira's argument in favour of A.D. 63. In Seneca—as indeed elsewhere—the expression denotes a *personal encounter* like the one in A.D. 66: cf. e.g. Val. Max. 6.9.7, ext.; Sil. *Pun.* 8.59–60: *supplice visa! (rex) intremuit . . . dextramque tetendit*; Liv. 30.12.12: *si . . . vocem supplicem mittere licet si genua, si victricem attingere dextram*; and Tac. *Ann.* 12.19: *at Eunones . . . adlevat supplicem laudatque . . . quod suam dextram petendae veniae delegerit.* In 66, Nero observed a similar etiquette: prior to the coronation proper, he extended his *dextra* to the suppliant Tiridates: Suet. *Nero* 13.2.

[74] On his travel and visit in Rome, Tiridates was accompanied by his wife, by the sons of his brother, the king of Parthia, as well as by other Parthian princes: Dio 63.1.2 (Bois.); they all partook in the ceremony in the Forum: ibid. 63.4.3.

[75] 'Much-heralded': thus Whitman (n. 66), *ad* [Sen.] *Oct.* 624–8 while invoking Dio (cf. n. 76).

[76] A triumph and imperatorial salutations after Rhandia: Dio 62.23.4 (Bois.); in fact, there was no triumph at that date; and Nero's ninth acclamation was between July 61 and late 62 (too early for Rhandia), and the tenth between mid or late 65 and mid 66 (too late for Rhandia): Griffin (n. 10), 232 and Heil (n. 68), 126.

[77] On the evidence for the celebrations in A.D. 66, see Heil (n. 68), 133 (the *praenomen imperatoris* and laurels brought to the Capitol); Suet. *Nero* 13.2: *imperator consalutatus.*

[78] Suet. *Nero* 13.2 relates the closure of the Janus to Tiridates' visit, but the closure was already celebrated on coins minted between December A.D. 64 and December A.D.65: *RIC* I² no. 50 (with comments on p. 140); since Tacitus says nothing about this ceremony, the mint had perhaps anticipated events: Griffin (n. 10), 122.

[79] Nine months: Dio 63.2.2 (Bois.); the ceremony in Rome is datable to mid 66, prior to Nero's departure for Greece in September: Heil (n. 68), 130–1.

Nero's fortunate period, immediately prior to the turning of the tides. The prophecy of his fall begins in the following verse (628–9).

As is well known, this sequel mirrors what actually happened—a circumstance which in my view hardly leaves room for reasonable doubt. To be sure, Seneca must have known about Tiridates' promise, but there is no basis at all for assuming that he could have foreseen the suddenness with which the Parthian 'triumph' was followed by the ensuing débâcle. Like the allusions to Nero's actual death at 630 and 733, the emphasis in this passage on the proximity of future triumph and subsequent disaster is, in short, far too precise to be inspired guesswork.[80]

If it be granted that Agrippina is in fact alluding to the Parthian surrender in A.D. 66, the question arises why the dramatist, in the following half-line, lets the ghost proceed with yet another reference to Nero's economy. Empty 'rhetoric'? Or an allusion to something specific? And if so, what is then the date of this final incident?

The common (and in my view correct) translation of *regna divitias ferant* (628) is: 'Let kingdoms bring wealth to him'—he would still die in want of everything.[81] But since such a statement seems superfluous (the *exhaustus orbis* has already given up its *immensas opes*, so what are these kingdoms?), it has been suggested that *Parthi* be taken as subject (they 'brought kingdoms <and> riches').[82] From the sixteenth century onwards, editors would often endorse this reading with corresponding punctuation: *Parthi . . . regna, divitias ferant*.[83]

Others have, rightly, been less enthusiastic.[84] The merits of the proposed reading are after all not beyond dispute. While it seems straightforward to take *regna* as subject, the alternative is, in the first place, awkward; *regna* might of course be a poetic plural, but if the prophecy were indeed intended to foreshadow the Parthians offering 'a kingdom <and> riches', a conjunction of sorts would certainly have been helpful.

Whether or not this syntactical objection is decisive, there are historical circumstances that add to its weight. Neither Pliny, Suetonius, nor Dio mention any such 'rich gifts' (*divitias*, 628), be it from Tiridates or other Parthians. Far from it, they are unanimous in emphasizing that Nero was the one to disburse, again and again.[85]

Either way, *regna* is, in short, unlikely to refer to the Parthians. Nor is there any good

[80] The dream of Poppaea not only foreshadows three deaths in the correct order (cf. n. 49), but also the suicidal consequences of Nero's murderous policy: this latter, double-edged message is repeated no less than five times (732–3, 739, 742–4, 752): Kragelund (n. 49), 19ff. (with survey of interpretations, from the fourteenth century onwards).

[81] 'Kingdoms bring wealth': thus, or similarly, (I quote at random) Lodovico Dolce (Venice, 1560), Ettore Nini (Venice, 1622), F. Gustafsson (Helsinki, 1915), F. J. Miller (Loeb, 1917), and T. Thomann (Zürich/Stuttgart, 1961).

[82] Thus (again, at random) Thomas Nuce (London, 1581), M. de Marolles (Paris, 1660), J.-B. Levée (Paris, 1822), W. A. Swoboda (Prague, 1825), L. Herrmann (Paris, 1926), and E. F. Watling (Penguin Classics, 1966); they are followed by Ballaira (n. 55) and Whitman (n. 66), ad loc. Giancotti (n. 72), 58 considers both readings possible—and so did I. B. Ascensius (Paris, 1514), ad loc.

[83] Among those who print *regna, divitias* (with a comma), I have noted Heinsius (Leiden, 1611), Farnabius (Amsterdam, 1645), J. F. Gronovius (Amsterdam, 1662), T. Baden (Leipzig, 1821), L. Herrmann (Paris, 1926), and H. Moricca (Torino, 1947).

[84] Among those who print *regna divitias* (without a comma) are Delrius (Antverp, 1593), Peiper and Richter (Leipzig, 1867), F. Leo (Berlin, 1878–9), G. C. Giardina (Bologna, 1966), and O. Zwierlein (Oxford, 1986).

[85] In support of his reading ('Der Parther Königreiche bringen ihre Reichtümer nach Rom'), Münscher (n. 71), 207 claims that Tiridates payed 800,000 sestertii per day to the Fiscus on his nine-month journey to Rome, but this is without foundation; indeed, Suet. *Nero* 30.2 says quite

reason why it should. Although it has commonly gone unnoticed, there are other, far more plausible candidates.

Throughout his principate, but above all at its end, Nero received gifts and support from Rome's *reges socii*. In A.D. 61 he was made co-heir of the British king of the Iceni; and during the Parthian wars as well as the Jewish revolt the allied kings of the east contributed decisively to the military effort.[86] This reached its culmination in late A.D. 66 when extortion backfired and ignited open revolt in Palestine. Then no less than four *reges socii*, the kings of Judaea, Emesa, Commagene, and Nabataea, came to the aid of Nero's generals. This was the last time Rome went to war with the support of royal auxiliaries in such numbers.[87] And even if the details are elusive, the kings were clearly expected to finance much (if not all) of this from their own treasuries.[88] In 67 the Roman generals and their armies were, for instance, lavishly entertained by King Agrippa II of Judaea with 'the wealth of his house'; and when Vespasian in July 69 proclaimed himself emperor, it was considered an asset that his allies included such rich and powerful monarchs as King Antiochus IV of Commagene and Berenice, the sister of King Agrippa.[89] On 1 January 70 the Senate duly made a point of thanking the eastern kings for their help.[90] Since the eastern mints can be shown to have been unusually active from A.D. 67 onwards, there can be little doubt that their support had already proved invaluable under Nero.[91] To demonstrate their loyalty and uphold the status quo, the *reges socii* had little choice but to pay up. Seen from distant Rome and clad in the allusive language of a *vaticinium*, it is a reasonable assumption that it is to these instances of royal support that Agrippina refers.

To summarize: in what seems to be chronological order, Agrippina's prophecy focuses on the startling reversals that preceded Nero's fall. First the splendours of the Golden House guarded by Praetorian cohorts and financed by the exhausted provinces (A.D. 64 onwards), then the Parthian triumph and the support from the *reges socii* (A.D. 66 and 67)—and finally the débâcle in early 68 when it all proved to no avail. Even with such support and such wealth (note *auro*, 624; *immensas opes*, 626; *divitias*, 628) Nero had ultimately been left destitute and alone (*desertus ac destructus et cunctis egens*, 631). This was retribution for his *impietas* and crimes; this was the consequence of the *Luxuria victrix* which (personified by Nero) 'for a long time had clutched the world's unbounded stores with greedy hands—but only to squander them' (433–4).

the reverse (*in Tiridatem . . . octingena nummum milia diurna erogavit* [sc. *Nero*]); that it was Nero, not Tiridates, who was the benefactor is corroborated by Plin. *N.H.* 30.16 who describes Tiridates' journey from Armenia to Rome as *provinciis gravis*, and by Dio 63.2.2 (Bois.) who explicitly states that the Fiscus covered its staggering cost.

[86] L. Pedroli, *Fabularum praetextarum quae extant* (Genova, 1954), ad loc. regards *regna* as an allusion to the *reges socii* in general. King of the Iceni: Tac. *Ann.* 14.31; the kings Agrippa and Antiochus provided auxiliaries for the Parthian war in 54 A.D.: 13.7; Antiochus brought help to Corbulo in 57–60: 13.37.3.

[87] Four kings in A.D. 66: Jos. *B.J.* 2.500 and 3.68 with F. Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge, MA/London, 1993), 72.

[88] Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 12.63.3 (the city of Byzantium is recompensed for its financial support of the war in Thracia).

[89] King Agrippa in 67 A.D.: Jos. *B.J.* 3.443; the wealth of Antiochus *vetustis opibus ingens et servientium regum ditissimus*: Tac. *Hist.* 2.81; Jos. *B.J.* 5.461; to Vespasian, Berenice was *magnificentia munerum grata*: Tac. *Hist.* 2.81.2.

[90] Tac. *Hist.* 4.39.

[91] On the Eastern mints from A.D. 67 onwards: Walker (n. 35), I.69 (mint at Antioch reopens shortly before Nero's death); III.117 (increased output of other mints).

III. ECONOMY AND POLITICS

Two diverse voices, but the same verdict. The philosopher murdered by Nero is here, as it were, joining ranks with the pretender who brought down the tyrant. A coincidence? Or can the parallel be explained?

Pseudo-Seneca had a strong motive for ascribing this verdict to Seneca: it exonerates his hero from co-responsibility in some of Nero's most offensive crimes. This was a way of setting the record straight, once and for all.

But why ascribe a similar verdict to Galba? The view that Tacitus simply reproduces a standard topos underestimates the historian. This is by no means his verdict on all unpopular rulers.[92] But neither is it in this context new or original. Far from it, he is in Galba's case basing his view on a consensus that clearly had been quick in establishing itself. Not only is this an issue which within a decade from Nero's fall figures strongly in the early sources discussed above, but as a brief survey will illustrate, this is also how the sources claim that those who revolted against Nero had justified their enterprise—not in hindsight, but then and there.

According to Dio, Vindex would, for instance, justify the revolt against Nero with the allegation that the emperor had pillaged the whole of the *oikumene*.[93] In his biography on Galba Plutarch sounds a similar note: when governor of Spain, Galba had felt powerless in the face of Nero's rapacious financial managers, the *procuratores*. However, when the provincials voiced their indignation in anti-Neronian ballads, Galba did nothing to stop them. The tax-collectors were scandalized while Galba's popularity grew. When, finally, at a public gathering he threw off his allegiance, the assembly proved eager for change.

Suetonius adds that some of the *procuratores* were subsequently executed, along with their families. The charge was collusion with Nero in abortive attempts to assassinate the rebellious governor, but even at a formal trial the outrages of the past would probably have weighed heavily against them.[94] And in this case jurisdiction was clearly far from regular. On the contrary, the execution not only of the tax-collectors but also of their wives and children suggests lynching.

These sources are, of course, all fairly late, but what they offer is remarkably uniform: apart from being expressions of anger and hostility, the attacks on Nero's prodigality also served to justify disaffection and revolt.

On this assumption, it is only natural that Galba from the very first seems to have committed himself to a policy of rigourous restraint. The problem was that by trying to manoeuvre between the Scylla of financial exigency and the Charybdis of popular demand, he soon seems to have laid himself open to the charge of being greedy as well as miserly. In a speech, Tacitus lets one of Galba's opponents spell out the accusation: 'For what others call crimes he calls reforms, and, by similar misnomers, he speaks of strictness instead of barbarity, of economy (*parsimoniam*) instead of avarice (*avaritia*).'[95]

[92] Contrast the sometimes over-schematic verdicts of Suetonius and Josephus: Kloft (n. 11), 156–7.

[93] Vindex: Dio 63.22.3 (Bois.) with Brunt (n. 31), 553–4.

[94] Ballads: Plut. *Galba* 4; for similar incidents, see Jos. *B.J.* 2.295 (Jews mocking the greed of Florus in A.D. 66). Tax-collectors: Suet. *Galba* 12; 9.2; their identity is a riddle: H. Grassl, *Historia* 25 (1976), 496ff.

[95] Tac. *Hist.* 1.37.4 (Church and Jackson Brodribb): *nam quae alii scelera, hic* (sc. *Galba*) *remedia vocat, dum falsis nominibus severitatem pro saevitia, parsimoniam pro avaritia . . . appellat*; on Galba's being *parcus* and his *avaritia* and *parsimonia*, see *Hist.* 1.5.2, 18.3, 49.3; Suet. *Galba* 12, 14.2; similarly, Plut. *Galba* 3.2, 16.3.

Not surprisingly it was mainly the communities that had been averse or slow to join the cause of the rebels, which were subsequently forced to finance Galba's march on Rome. This was the case in Spain as well as in Gaul, and the stigma of *avaritia* may soon have been attached to his name.[96] There were of course the benefactions bestowed upon those communities which from the very first had come to his aid: citizenship, rapid promotions, and tax-reductions will have strengthened the loyalty of local worthies in Spain and Gaul. Throughout the area Galba furthermore abolished the so-called *quadragesima* toll (a change for the better which was much celebrated in his coinage).[97]

Indeed, there was apparently no dearth of grand and costly gestures. Galba restored cult images to the temples, and exiles to their *patria*. To win general favour it is not implausible that a *congiarium* was planned.[98]

Yet it was not so much for his *liberalitas* as for his chronic parsimony that Galba came to be remembered. He may have had personal inclinations for that ancient virtue, but his ostentatious manner of displaying it suggests ulterior motives. According to Plutarch 'he desired . . . to let it appear what a change would be made from Nero's profuseness and sumptuosity in giving presents'—and for those accustomed to the lavishness of Nero's court the change of style must have been shocking. Not everyone approved. Simplicity was not deemed consonant with the dignity of the imperial station. As a consequence Galba eventually accepted the reintroduction of his predecessors' ceremonial apparatus.[99]

Still, his attitude to *liberalitas* remained a problem: 'A man must be either frugal or Caesar' (*aut frugi hominem . . . aut Caesarem*), as a predecessor had observed.[100] Galba opted for frugality, indeed, he hardly had much alternative. Funds being scarce, the Sanctuary at Delphi and the Hellanodikaioi at Olympia were ordered to return Nero's gifts.[101] A committee of *equites* was set up to administer the difficult task of retrieving nine-tenths of the *liberalitates* which Nero had heaped upon his entourage.[102] None of these measures would, needless to say, have been universally popular, but it was the decision not to pay the Praetorian Guard a *donativum* which proved fatal. The Prefect Nymphidius' promises had, it is true, been exorbitant, and Plutarch maintains that there was no chance of fulfilling them without having recourse to methods far more harmful to humanity than those of Nero.[103] But, as Tacitus emphasizes, there seems to have been no attempt to reach a compromise; and the high-minded but ill-timed

[96] Galba exacted money from the Treviri, the Lingones, and Lugdunum: Suet. *Galba* 12; Tac. *Hist.* 1.53.3, 1.65; even at Tarraco where the local élite came out strongly in his favour (R. Syme, 'Partisans of Galba', *Historia* 31 [1982], 469 ff. = *Roman Papers* 4 [Oxford, 1988], 124ff.) there was an embarrassing episode: having melted down the golden crown that the citizens of the town had presented to him, Galba proceeded to exact from them the three ounces he claimed were missing from it.

[97] Tax-reductions and promotions: Plut. *Galba* 18 and Tac. *Hist.* 1.8, 51.4, and 65 (with comments of Chilver *ad loc.*). *Quadragesima*: Suet. *Vesp.* 16; for the relevant coin legends, see S. J. de Laet, *Portorium* (Brugge, 1949), 171ff.

[98] Images and temple treasure: Suet. *Nero* 32.4; Tac. *Agr.* 6.5; *tesserae* may suggest plans for a *congiarium*: Sancery (n. 7), 116.

[99] 'He desired': Plut. *Galba* 16 (trans. A. H. Clough, 1864); for the subsequent compromise, ibid. 11.2.

[100] Suet. *Cal.* 37.

[101] Dio 62.14.1–2 (Bois.). Vespasian invoked financial necessity when doing likewise: Suet. *Vesp.* 16.3.

[102] Suet. *Galba* 15; Plut. *Galba* 16.2; Tac. *Hist.* 1.20 (with Chilver's discussion of the chronological problem).

[103] In the estimate of Chilver *ad* Tac. *Hist.* 1.5, Nymphidius had promised a *donativum* of 1280 million HS. Harmful methods: Plut. *Galba* 2.2.

pronouncement, 'I levy soldiers—I do not buy them' (*legi a se militem, non emi*), will not have helped matters.[104] But even if the performance failed so grossly in measuring up to the standards, posterity still acknowledged Galba's single-minded commitment to a policy as different from Nero's as was humanly possible. The stories of his notorious stinginess, of his groans at the sight of a luxurious banquet, and of his grotesquely miserly gifts to a *dispensator* (a dish of beans) and to a famous *choraules* (five denarii), speak for themselves.[105] Here was an emperor who in his zealous attempts to escape the odium of excessive *liberalitas* fell prey to the opposite vice.

Of the latter incident Plutarch provides a telling detail. Galba had made a point of the fact that his gift to the *choraules* came from the privy purse, not from τὸ δημόσιον.[106] Whatever the precise relations between *Fiscus* and *Aerarium*, the anecdote is clearly intended to illustrate Galba's respect for proper procedure, and for the ideals of the *res publica*. Like his rebellion, religious measures, adoption of heir, and death, his parsimony was also, he seems to have insisted, for the benefit of the *res publica* and 'the people of Rome'.[107]

While markedly less prominent in the political phraseology employed by Otho and Vitellius, Galba's professions of allegiance to the *res publica*, to *libertas*, and to the *populus Romanus* were taken over by Vespasian, but only in the first years of his principate. Then official enthusiasm for *libertas* petered out.[108] However, in economic matters Vespasian remained faithful to the anti-Neronian tradition. For all their differences Vespasian was, like Galba, renowned for his *parsimonia*. As he would himself proclaim, he inherited a bankrupt state.[109] No wonder, therefore, that he too was intent on dissociating himself from the style and the vices of the *aula Neroniana*.

The Flavian demolition of Nero's Golden House is a case in point. The hateful *Domus*, which was 'piled up with the plunder of the citizens' (thus Nero's adversaries are said to have described it), may soon have become a symbol of the *ancien régime*. While Galba used the Palatine (the seat of the first *princeps* and of his revered ancestor, Catulus) as his residence, the pro-Neronian (and similarly spendthrift) Otho allegedly had plans to complete the unfinished palace, Vitellius' only objection being

[104] No compromise: Tac. *Hist.* 1.18.3: *constat potuisse conciliari animos* (sc. *militum*) *quantulacumque parci senis liberalitate*; 1.5.2: *non emi*; similarly, Suet. *Galba* 16 with Kloft (n. 11), 109–10.

[105] Groans and miserly gifts: Suet. *Galba* 12.3; Plut. *Galba* 16; emperors were expected to pay in denarii, not sestertii (Kloft [n. 11], 149, n. 316), but to pay five was worse than nothing.

[106] Treasury: Plut. *Galba* 16; similarly, of Vespasian: Dio 65.10.3a; such professions were commonplace, but their economic implications are unclear: F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1977), 189ff. (with prev. lit.).

[107] At first, Galba proclaimed himself *legatum . . . senatus ac populi Romani* (Suet. *Galba* 10); a partisan later described the revolt as BELLO QV<OD> IMP G<A>LBA PRO <RE P(VBLICA)> GESSIT, *IRT* 537; temple-treasure was revised, *ne cuius alterius sacrilegium res publica quam Neronis sensisset*, Tac. *Agr.* 6.5; the adoption of Piso was for the benefit of *populus Romanus* and *res publica* (*Hist.* 1.16, 13.2; cf. Plut. *Galba* 21) and Galba died willingly, *si ita <e> re publica videretur*, *Hist.* 1.41.2; cf. Plut. *Galba* 27; Galba's coinage is characterized by a similar emphasis on SPQR and the POPVLVS ROMANVS: Kragelund (n. 49), 41ff. (with bibliography).

[108] On the numerous references to *libertas* in Galba's coinage, see C. M. Kraay, 'The coinage of Vindex and Galba', *NC* (1949), 140 and P.-H. Martin, *Die anonymen Münzen des Jahres 68 nach Christus* (Mainz, 1974), 63; there is a significant drop in the use of such slogans during the two following principates, and only a short-lived resurgence in the first years of the Flavians: Kragelund (n. 49), 46.

[109] Tac. *Hist.* 2.77.3: *tua . . . parsimonia* (Mucianus of Vespasian); his occasional displays of *liberalitas* (Tac. *Dial.* 9.5) did not suffice to amend the general image: cf. Tac. *Hist.* 2.5 and Suet. *Vesp.* 16–19 on Vespasian's *avaritia*; bankrupt state: 16.3; similarly, Tac. *Hist.* 4.9 quotes a report of the *praetores aerarii* from December 69 on the *publicam paupertatem*.

that the outlay was too modest.[110] Again these anecdotes are perhaps merely an echo of hostile rumours, but even so, they illuminate how the two pro-Neronian successors were remembered. They represented the extravagance or—in Juvenal's phrase—the *luxuriam imperii veterem noctesque Neronis* which Galba and the Flavians made a point of denigrating.[111] Thus Vespasian returned the statues from the Golden House to the public and placed his plebeian amphitheatre in the very gardens of the tyrant's palace. What had once been 'for the tyrant's pleasure, now served the people'. And it had all cost the citizens nothing: as its dedication (which has recently been recovered) proclaimed, the Colosseum was built 'from the proceeds of enemy booty', [EX] MANVBIS.[112] Gestures such as these were clearly intended to advertise Flavian aversion to tyrannical *luxuria*.[113] Unlike Nero (but very much like Augustus),[114] the new dynasty abhorred selfish profusion. Instead, the Flavian *Augusti* provided buildings for the common good.

Tacitus owed the Flavians more than career and priesthoood. His outlook was strongly influenced by the Flavian restoration, and by the disaster from which the empire had been saved. The year of the four emperors was a clear warning. It had not only been the last of four Caesars but very nearly of the *res publica* itself.

As for the causes of this near-catastrophe, explanations ranged far and wide, from fate to accident, but Tacitus clearly agreed that the economy had loomed large. Far from being the rhetoric of moralizing nostalgia, the anti-Neronian insistence on the necessity of *parsimonia* is—in his presentation—a genuine response to a real political problem: the state was bankrupt.

Some would (implausibly) claim that this state bankruptcy had in fact been what Nero intended, but it is more likely that he regarded it as an emperor's privilege, even his duty, to excel in flamboyant generosity, rather than stoop to the kind of

[110] Tac. *Ann.* 15.52 (trans. Church and Jackson Brodribb): *illa invisa et spoliis civium extructa domo* (thus the conspirators against Nero); cf. Mart. 1.2.8: *abstulerat miseris tecta superbus ager* (of the *domus*). Otho, Vitellius, and the *Domus Aurea*: Suet. *Otho* 7 and Dio 65.4. Galba on the Palatine: Tac. *Hist.* 1.29. Catulus: Plin. *N.H.* 17.2; Suet. *Gram.* 17.2.

[111] Juv. 4.137: *luxuriam*:. On Otho and Vitellius as Nero's successors, see n. 110 and Cluvius Rufus, fr. 3P; Suet. *Otho* 10.2 and Tac. *Hist.* 1.78.2 (Otho's adoption of Nero's name, plan to marry his widow, and restitution of Nero's and Poppaea's statues) and *Hist.* 2.71, 2.95 and Suet. *Vit.* 11.2 (Vitellius' admiration and *inferiae* for Nero, his *dominicus*) with A. Ferrill, *CJ* 60 (1964–5), 267ff.; A. Garzetti, *Melanges Piganiol* (Paris, 1966), II.781–2 and Kragelund (n. 50), 504; by contrast, the Flavians soon adopted the Galban attitude to Nero: J. Gagé, 'Vespasien et la mémoire de Galba', *REA* 54 (1952), 295, Ramage (n. 50), 209ff., and M. Zimmermann, 'Die *restitutio honorum* Galbas', *Historia* 44 (1995), 56ff.

[112] Statues: Plin. *N.H.* 34.84. The Colosseum as *deliciae populi, quae fuerant domini*: Mart. 1.2.12; [EX] MANVBIS: *CIL* 6.40454.

[113] Cic. *Mur.* 76: *odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam diligit.* Architecture as a symptom of *luxuria*: Vell. 2.33.4 (Lucullus' *profusae . . . in aedificiis . . . luxuriae*) and Ov. *Fasti* 6.644 (Augustus' destruction of Vedius Pollio's mansion *quia luxuria visa nocuere sua*); in its place Livia dedicated a complex which combined piety with utility, the *Porticus Liviae*: M. Boudreau Flory, '*Sic exempla parantur*: Livia's shrine to Concordia and the *Porticus Liviae*', *Historia* 33 (1984), 309ff.; P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (München, 1987), 141ff.; and C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), 164ff.

[114] On Augustan attitudes, see n. 113 (demolition of Vedius Pollio's mansion); Plin. *N.H.* 17.5–6, 36.6, and Ascon. *In Scaur.* 45 with Zanker (n. 113), 142 (Augustus using the columns from Scaurus' luxurious *atrium* for the theatre of Marcellus); and Plin. *N.H.* 9.119ff. (Cleopatra dissolving a pearl worth 10,000,000 sestertii in vinegar; after the fall of Egypt, the statue of the goddess Venus in Agrippa's Pantheon received the companion pearl as a trophy of war).

cheeseparing for which his successors would soon come to be remembered.[115] But whatever Nero's motives, the uninhibited spending of his final years—and this at a time when the economy was already strained—cannot have helped matters, when crisis broke. To be sure, the artistic innovation of the *Domus aurea* remains unrivalled, but far from being an example of 'good timing', its building is also a glaring symptom of political folly.[116] The obvious remedy was the return to good, old-fashioned simplicity. This was the policy prescribed by ancestral tradition—and Galba's failure did not diminish its appeal. When adopted by Vespasian it proved a success. Indeed, Vespasian's example had, according to Tacitus, been decisive in promoting a wholesome and widespread return to *domesticam parsimoniam*—a lifestyle that almost inevitably must have made attitudes to the excesses of the past even more hostile.[117]

IV. 'CONSTRUCTING DECADENCE'

Tacitus and Pseudo-Seneca were neither the first nor the last to warn the Romans about the dangers of excessive spending. In republican literature the idea is pervasive, and from early on it led to intense speculation. When did the rot set in? Was it the fall of Carthage? Or rather the defeat of Antiochus? The symptoms were manifold. The ornaments of women, the first marble columns in a private *atrium*, the first temple all in marble.[118] To modern readers such verdicts may appear superficial. Still, it would be misguided to dismiss such statements as 'moralizing' tropes of no analytical value.

At Rome, *luxuria* was an issue of vital public import. The repeated condemnations of *largitiones* and debauchery, easy living and splendid banquets reflect widespread and nagging concerns about their ultimate consequences for the body politic. That is not surprising. During the republic the massive influx of booty and the fierce competition within the aristocracy led to an ever-increasing emphasis on splendour and generosity; from this it was but a small step to bribery and corruption, debt and insolvency—evils which easily led to extortion of provincials or demands for the cancellation of debts. Far from being hackneyed commonplaces, the emphasis on public disapproval, in rhetoric[119] and historiography, from Cato[120] onwards, vividly

[115] According to Suet. *Nero* 30, Nero admired Gaius for having squandered all the funds accumulated by Tiberius; for similar comparisons between the two spendthrift tyrants see Plin. *N.H.* 36.111 (their palaces) and n. 65 (their finances).

[116] 'Good timing': thus Elsner (n. 5), 119, according to whom the *Domus aurea* is merely an instance of Nero's going 'one step further than his predecessors' (p. 122); 'many gigantic steps' would be more accurate, since none of Nero's predecessors had built a palace of such extent and cost within such a brief timespan.

[117] Tacitus praises Vespasian for his strict economy when dealing with the army, *Hist.* 2.82.2: *egregie firmus* (sc. *Vespasianus*) *adversus militarem largitionem*; his example strengthened the tendency to abandon old style *magnificentia* and return to *domesticam parsimoniam* after the fall of Nero (*Ann.* 3.55.4: *praecipuus adstricti moris auctor Vespasianus fuit*).

[118] Carthage: Vell. 2.1; Asia: Liv. 39.6.7–9 and Plin. *N.H.* 34.14, 37.12. Marble columns in *atria*: Plin. 36.6–7 (cf. n. 114). Temple all in marble: Vell. 1.11.6; its builder, Metellus Macedonicus, *vel magnificentiae vel luxuriae princeps fuit*. Livy 1, *praef.* 11 concluded that Rome had been faithful to *parsimonia* and resisted *luxuria* more strongly than all other great nations.

[119] As a well-known manual concludes, two things lead directly to crime, *luxuries et avaritia*: [Cic.] *Her.* 2.34; cf. Sen. *Cont.* 2.6ff. Cicero could talk for more than a day about the evils of *luxuries*: *Cael.* 12.29.

[120] Condemnations of *luxuria* figure in historians from Claudius Quadrigarius fr. 1P down to Sallust (*Cat.* 5.8, 12.1–3); Liv. 34.3.9 offers (and probably quotes) a speech of Cato's on *luxuria* (in his speech *De suis virtutibus*, *ORF* fr. 128, the censor would himself stress his *parsimonia*); for

illustrates the perceived and actual threat to political consensus and stability; and so, of course, do the repeated renewals of the sumptuary laws.[121]

Yet, despite all the heart-searching, all the opposition, all the warnings of impending disaster, *liberalitas* had by the end of the republic established itself as an indispensable aristocratic virtue. And far from discarding, the Julio-Claudians and their successors were in this respect faithful to the republican precedents. Throughout antiquity *liberalitas* remained a touchstone which distinguised the rule of good emperors and underlined the shortcomings or excesses of the mean or irresponsible. And since emperors had privileged access not only to the privy purse but also to the public treasury, it is only natural that high and low would scrutinize each and every deviation from accepted standards with either anxiety or joy: here, all had a vested interest, be it that one feared extortion or hoped to profit.

'Galba's speech, with its vision of a good emperor, is of course invented by Tacitus.'[122] Less confidently, and more plausibly, others have pointed out that Marius Celsus was present when Galba announced his decision to adopt Piso. The indications are that Celsus left a memoir.[123] Nor should oral tradition be discounted. In any case it has long since been recognized that Galba's solemn appeals to the *genus humanum*[124] and *populus Romanus*, to *libertas* and the *res publica* have clear, no doubt deliberate, parallels in the political slogans of that short-lived reign.[125] Whatever the historian's sources, the use of such slogans enhanced the verisimilitude of his composition.

In my view, the same applies to Galba's condemnation of Nero's extravagance. This was a topic on which all educated readers would expect the pretender to pronounce himself. If Galba had failed to deliver a suitable oration when declaring Piso his successor, Tacitus—or some previous historian—would therefore rightly have seen it as his duty to amend the *lapsus*. And Tacitus' readers are bound to have appreciated the paradox that even while Galba was holding forth about excesses to avoid and lessons to draw, he was, in the most literal sense, falling victim to his own rhetoric; after all it was, in Tacitus' view, Galba's rigid and indiscriminate insistence on *parsimonia* which more than anything had alienated the very soldiers on whose loyalty his survival depended.

Royal Academy of Art, Copenhagen PATRICK KRAGELUND
pkr.kab@kb.dk

similar verdicts, see Gell. 6.11.9 (Publius Africanus condemning *luxum vitae prodigum effusumque*); Gell. 15.8 and 15.12.1 (speeches of one Favorinus condemning *luxuria* and of Gaius Gracchus stressing his own *parsimonia*); and Sall. *Cat.* 52.7 (speech of Cato the younger).

[121] On debates concerning *luxuria*, see e.g. I. Sauerwein, *Die leges sumptuariae* (Hamburg, 1970) and A. La Penna, 'La legittimazione del lusso privato da Ennio a Vitruvio', *Maia* 41 (1983), 3ff.

[122] Thus Rubiés (n. 5), 38.

[123] On Celsus, see R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 297, 683.

[124] The claim that Galba was elected by the *consensus generis humani* (Tac. *Hist.* 1.31) is clearly a contemporary echo: cf. the edict from Alexandria of 6 July A.D. 68 = Chalon (n. 44), 50 and Suet. *Galba* 9.2 on Vindex's proclaiming Galba the saviour of the *genus humanum*; the slogan recurs in Galba's coinage: Kraay (n. 108), 138.

[125] Galba refers twice to political *libertas* (Tac. *Hist.* 1.16 and 1.16.4), twice to the *res publica* (1.15.2 and 1.16) and once to the *populus Romanus* (1.16); for contemporary parallels, see n. 107 (*populus* and *res publica*) and n. 108 (*libertas*).