

TACITUS, GERMANICUS AND THE KINGS OF EGYPT (TAC. *ANN.* 2.59–61)*

‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.¹

In Book 2 of Tacitus’ *Annals*, Germanicus visits Alexandria and then tours the Egyptian *chora*. On leaving Alexandria he journeys first to Canopus and a nearby mouth of the Nile, then to the ruins of ancient Thebes. Various other sites arrest his attention: the colossus of Memnon; the pyramids near Memphis; Lake Moeris; and finally the deeps in the Nile near Syene and Elephantine. The episode is rather odd. Tacitus reports several of Germanicus’ other touristic diversions, but this is by far the most detailed account of the young prince’s sightseeing activities. Yet the narrative of what Germanicus saw outside of Alexandria has no obvious implications for the general flow of events in Book 2. One could accuse Tacitus of having slipped into the mindless compilation of facts, but there is clear selectivity and artistic arrangement in the account: Tacitus chooses to mention only a few of the sites Germanicus visited; he gives special emphasis to Thebes; and he presents the stops after Thebes out of geographical order.² This is more than an antiquarian account of a journey. The usual suggestion is that Tacitus is using the episode to allude to Alexander the Great:³ after all, Alexander did visit Egypt as well. Yet even if one believes that these allusions exist – and most of them are open to serious doubt – they still do not take us terribly far in understanding either Tacitus’ overarching purpose in giving the incident such detailed attention, or the rationale behind its arrangement. A fresh approach is desirable.

In the rereading of the episode that follows, I focus on what Tacitus says about the sites that Germanicus visits, and the resonances that they are likely

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¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Ozymandias’ (1818), lines 10–14.

² They are mentioned in the following order: the Colossus of Memnon (just to the west of Thebes); the sand-covered pyramids near Memphis (and far to the north of Thebes); Lake Moeris (south-west of Memphis); and the deeps near Elephantine and Syene (south of Thebes).

³ J.A.P. Gissel, ‘Germanicus as an Alexander figure’, *C&M* 52 (2001), 277–301, at 293–6; A.B. Bosworth, ‘Mountain and molehill? Cornelius Tacitus and Quintus Curtius’, *CQ* 54 (2004), 551–67, at 563; D. Spencer, *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth* (Exeter, 2002), 191–3; G.J.D. Aalders ‘Germanicus und Alexander der Grosse’, *Historia* 10 (1961), 382–4, at 384; S. Borzsák, ‘Das Germanicusbild des Tacitus’, *Latomus* 28 (1969), 588–600; F. Santoro L’hoir, *Tragedy, Rhetoric and the Historiography of Tacitus* (Ann Arbor, 2006), 202–4.

to have had for Tacitus and his audience. Particular attention is given to the accounts of Egyptian antiquities provided by the Elder Pliny and Herodotus, since it is clear from other passages in the *Annals* and *Histories* that Tacitus knew the *Natural History*,⁴ and it is patent from this very passage that he knew Herodotus. I make two suggestions about the purpose of the incident. First, I argue that both the report of the Theban visit and the selection of sites mentioned after it are intended to stress the transience of tyrants and their megalomaniac projects. Tacitus takes up a motif that goes back to Herodotus' description of Egypt, according to which ancient Egypt was a place in which tyrannical kings constantly engaged in projects involving monumental building and the manipulation of the landscape. As Phiroze Vasunia has observed, Herodotus' pharaohs 'transgress the natural order of space by altering, modifying, or transforming the space of Egypt'.⁵ Tacitus' kings behave likewise, but it is unsuccessful or transient projects that are placed in the foreground. Secondly, I suggest that the tone of the incident should be read as hopeful, at least in a qualified sense. The passage hints that, unpleasant as it is while it lasts, tyranny will ultimately be destroyed by time and nature. It is especially appropriate that it is Germanicus who looks upon such symbols of hope, since Tacitus frequently reminds the reader of the *spes* entertained by the Roman *populus* that Germanicus would bring a sudden end to despotism by restoring the Republic. Tacitus, of course, did not share this hope, and portrays Germanicus in a complex and at times ambiguous way. Rather, the author's hopes for *libertas* are placed in the slow march of time.

GERMANICUS, ALEXANDER AND EGYPT

Much of the scholarly literature on *Annals* 2.59–61 has focussed on ferreting out supposed allusions to Alexander in the passage. Some of these allusions are more persuasive than others, but none inspires a great deal of confidence. Perhaps the most serious claim to an Alexander allusion rests on the first words of the Egyptian episode. Brian Bosworth has suggested that the first words of the passage possibly echo a sentence in Curtius Rufus' account of Alexander's visit to Egypt. Tacitus introduces the Egyptian episode by saying that in the consulate of M. Silanus and L. Norbanus, *Germanicus Aegyptum proficiscitur cognoscendae antiquitatis* (2.59). Curtius Rufus, in discussing how the looming Persian campaign forced Alexander to cut his trip short and abort his further sightseeing plans, writes that *cupido ... incesserat non interiora modo Aegypti, sed etiam Aethiopiam invisere; Memnonis Tithonique celebrata regia cognoscendae vetustatis avidum trahebat paene extra terminos solis* (4.8.3). It is true that a large number of verbal similarities in the texts of Curtius and Tacitus have been identified – by 1887 Friedrich Walter claimed to have found some 600 of them.⁶ Some of these are reasonably convincing, others less so. In the present case, *cognoscendae* followed by synonymous nouns

⁴ O. Devillers, *Tacite et les sources des Annales. Enquêtes sur la méthode historique* (Leuven, 2003), 17–22.

⁵ P. Vasunia, *The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to Alexander* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2001), 78 (for the quotation) and 77–82 (for the motif in general).

⁶ F. Walter, *Studien zu Tacitus und Curtius* (Munich, 1887), cited in Bosworth (n. 3), 551. See too Bosworth, 551 n. 2 for other literature. J.C. Yardley has recently suggested some additional similarities in the texts of Curtius and Tacitus: J.C. Yardley, 'Livy, Quintus Curtius and

in the genitive could suggest an intentional echo, and the phrases *cognoscendae antiquitatis* and *cognoscendae vetustatis* are unique in Latin literature, or at least in the small part of it that is extant. Of course, if this really is an echo, it could be that Curtius echoed Tacitus rather than the other way around, since it is far from certain that Curtius wrote the *Historiae Alexandri Magni* before the *Annals* appeared.⁷ On the other hand, as J.E. Atkinson has suggested, the echo could be purely coincidental,⁸ and one could reasonably object that, in the end, the only real similarity is in the exceptionally common verb *cognoscere*.⁹

Still more problematic are claims that Tacitus alludes to Alexander by mentioning figures in the Egyptian episode who could themselves be conceivably associated with Alexander. This would seem to be a strangely circuitous way for Tacitus to allude to Alexander, and in most of these cases Germanicus is not so much likened to these third parties as mentioned in the same breath.¹⁰ Possibly the strongest example of such a 'third party' allusion is Tacitus' observation that in Alexandria, Germanicus emulated Scipio Africanus' behaviour amongst the Greeks. The claim is that this is possibly intended to imply that Germanicus was like Alexander amongst 'the Orientals'.¹¹ Perhaps; but then again the western Greeks of Syracuse whom Scipio emulated hardly count as 'Orientals'. And although Scipio was perhaps sometimes likened to Alexander,¹² it does not follow that *Tacitus* saw him as a Roman Alexander.¹³ Tacitus shows clear signs of subscribing to the view that Alexander was essentially an immoderate and bloodthirsty tyrant,¹⁴ and it would be somewhat surprising if he saw the victor of the Second Punic War in the same terms. There is a simpler explanation for the reference to Scipio: by invoking a Republican hero, Tacitus intends to contrast Germanicus' Republican-style *civilitas*

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⁷ On the date of Curtius Rufus, see Gissel (n. 3), 284 n. 27 (favouring a late-antique date), and Bosworth (n. 3), 551–3 and *OCD*³ (2003), 416 (favouring a date before Tacitus).

⁸ J.E. Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni, Books 3 and 4* (Amsterdam, 1980), 364.

⁹ Something could perhaps be made of the fact that the word *cupido* appears in Curt. 4.8.3 to describe Alexander's travel aspirations in Egypt, as well as in Tac. *Ann.* 1.61 and 2.54 in relation to Germanicus' desire to visit the site of Varus' defeat and to tour the east. Yet, as Syme commented, *cupido* is used of the desire of a variety of figures in Tacitus, including Titus, Vespasian and Julius Civilis, which tends to throw doubt on whether Tacitus really does use the word to allude to the *πόθος* of Alexander: R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 2.770–1.

¹⁰ A number of these supposed allusions are discussed by Gissel. For instance, he points out that, within a few lines, Tacitus mentions Hercules (who could be associated with Alexander), and Libya (which was visited by Alexander): Gissel (n. 3), 293. Yet Tacitus nowhere connects Germanicus with Hercules or claims that he visited Libya, but rather says that Menelaus was blown ashore on the coast of Libya and that the mouth of the Nile that Germanicus visited was sacred to Hercules. Gissel also claims that Ramses, in his inscription, claimed to have conquered an Empire 'similar to that of Alexander', and that the Roman and Parthian empires 'covered great areas formerly conquered by Alexander': Gissel (n. 3), 294. But none of these three empires, either individually or in combination was co-extensive (even roughly) with that of Alexander. Nor does Tacitus liken Germanicus to Ramses. It also seems a stretch to say that Piso was like Darius or that the situation facing Germanicus in Syria on his return from Egypt was paralleled by that facing Alexander on his return from India: Gissel (n. 3), 295.

¹¹ Gissel (n. 3), 294–5; cf. Spencer (n. 3), 192; Livy 29.19.

¹² Spencer (n. 3), 162, 168–9, 182.

¹³ Tacitus' other references to Scipio certainly show no such negative assessment: *Ann.* 3.66; 12.38; *Dial.* 40.

¹⁴ See below, p. 224.

with the high-handed and autocratic reaction of Tiberius.¹⁵ Alexander does not necessarily need to enter into the equation.

Thus, even the stronger arguments in favour of Alexander allusions in the passage are open to objections, although they cannot be definitively disproved: allusions are by their nature in the eye of the beholder. Yet there is a more fundamental problem. Even if one finds, say, the echo between Tacitus and Curtius Rufus convincing, it is not at all clear how this would bring us closer to understanding why the passage exists at all, or what its overall artistic point is. In other words, the allusions that have been found in the passage tend to lack explanatory power.

Just how might Alexander be relevant to understanding *Annals* 2.59–61? Many of the discussions of Alexander allusions are vague about this, but one obvious possibility is that Tacitus is trying to make Germanicus appear to be similar to Alexander.¹⁶ This seems unlikely, however. In the one passage in the *Annals* in which Germanicus and Alexander are explicitly compared and contrasted, the verdict is that they were in most important respects quite different. Tacitus claims that when Germanicus died, the onlookers at his funeral compared him with Alexander (*Ann.* 2.73), and he then reports on what they said – all of which is surely a device for Tacitus to air his own views. Tacitus' 'onlookers' observe superficial similarities in the two men's ages, looks, birth, and in the circumstances of their deaths, but judge Germanicus to have been morally superior, showing moderation, sexual restraint, gentleness and clemency. The implied judgment is that Alexander showed cruelty and a lack of moderation. Not enough attention is usually paid to the resonances of these vices: these are the traits of the stereotypical tyrant in Graeco-Roman rhetoric and historiography.¹⁷ Tacitus therefore places himself firmly within the tradition visible in Seneca and Lucan, according to which Alexander was a tyrant.¹⁸ Germanicus thus emerges as an anti-tyrant, showing *clementia*, *temperantia* and other *bonae artes*.

On the other hand, Tacitus' 'onlookers' also claim that Germanicus would have surpassed Alexander in generalship, had he been given the opportunity. Tactful though this is, the implication is clear: Alexander in reality was a success as a general; Germanicus, in the final analysis, was not, even though he was a good soldier. He might have become more successful than Alexander as a general, had he not been hindered by Tiberius' malevolence and cut off in his prime. But as things stood, his achievements fell well short of Alexander's. The result of the report of the judgement of Tacitus' 'onlookers' is therefore deliberate ambiguity and complexity: there is no simple similarity here.¹⁹

¹⁵ See below, pp. 231–2.

¹⁶ Cf. Santoro L'hoir (n. 3), 202–4.

¹⁷ For references to and discussion of the tyrant in Roman rhetoric and historiography, see B. Kelly, 'Dellius, the Parthian campaign, and the image of Mark Antony', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 14 (2008), 209–34, at 223–4, 229–31; M. Leigh, 'Varius Rufus, Thyestes and the appetites of Antony', *PCPhS* 42 (1996), 171–97; J.R. Dunkle, 'The Greek tyrant and Roman political invective of the late Republic', *TAPhA* 98 (1967), 151–71; J.R. Dunkle, 'The rhetorical tyrant in Roman historiography: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus', *CW* 65 (1971), 12–20.

¹⁸ D. Gillis, 'Imitatio Alexandri: the license to kill', *Centro ricerche e documentazione sull'antichità classica. Atti* 9 (1977–8), 45–65, at 45–6; Gissel (n. 3), 282; cf. Bosworth (n. 3), 559–61.

¹⁹ Cf. A. Malissard, 'Germanicus, Alexandre et le début des *Annales* de Tacite. À propos de Tacite, *Annales* 2, 73', in J.M. Croisille (ed.), *Neronia IV. Alejandro Magno, modelo de los emperadores romanos* (Brussels, 1990; *Collection Latomus*, Vol. 209), 328–38.

In view of this, it is no surprise that Germanicus' Egyptian tour as recounted by Tacitus in no way emerges as a re-enactment of Alexander's. The traditions relating to Alexander's Egyptian journey have him visiting a variety of places.²⁰ But the only point of contact between those itineraries and that of Tacitus' Germanicus is a visit to the site of Alexandria – although in Alexander's day it was obviously missing a city. It even seems that Tacitus passed up opportunities to draw parallels between Germanicus and Alexander.²¹ Although Tacitus neglects to mention it, Germanicus visited Memphis and consulted the Apis bull (Plin. *HN* 8.185; Amm. Marc. 22.14.8), just as Alexander visited Memphis and made sacrifice to Apis (Arr. *Anab.* 3.1.4). We also know from two papyri that Germanicus was rapturously received by the people of Alexandria,²² just as Alexander was supposedly welcomed enthusiastically by the Egyptians, tired as they were of Persian domination (Curt. 4.7.1–2). Yet Tacitus says nothing of how Germanicus was received in Alexandria and edits out the visit to Memphis altogether. Tacitus was obviously not in the habit of reading Oxyrhynchus papyri; yet it is possible that such a reception would have been reported in the writings of the younger Agrippina, which Tacitus had read, and which would be likely to contain such information.²³ In any case, he had certainly read the Elder Pliny, yet chose to omit the entire incident in Memphis.

Tacitus' Germanicus is therefore no Doppelgänger of Alexander, either during the Egyptian trip, or at any other stage. This raises the question of whether Tacitus intends to use the whole episode to contrast the two, just as he does in the obituary at *Annals* 2.73. Bosworth has suggested that the episode is designed to stress Germanicus' poor judgement. The argument is that by subtly evoking the passage in Curtius, Tacitus wants us to see Germanicus' itinerary as allowing him to do 'what Alexander failed to do', thanks to the latter's hasty departure from Egypt.²⁴ Tacitus expects us to reflect that had Germanicus spent less time sightseeing, Piso would not have had the chance to overturn the orders that Germanicus had given to the legions and the cities in Syria, an action which sparked the final disintegration of the relationship between the two men. Again the argument seems fragile. Tacitus nowhere attributes Piso's behaviour to the length of Germanicus' absence; nor does he say anything at all about whether Piso overturned Germanicus' orders immediately or took some time to work up the courage to do so. The reader is not given even the hints that would be reasonably expected were this particular criticism of Germanicus implicit. Indeed, in so far as there is any trace in the *Annals* of an explanation for why Piso was emboldened to act as he did, it is not that

²⁰ Arrian (*Anab.* 3.1–6) mentions Alexander's stops in the following order: Heliopolis; Memphis; Lake Mareotis, and the site of Alexandria; the oasis of Siwah; Memphis again (possibly via the site of Alexandria). Arrian differs slightly from Curtius Rufus in that he claims that Alexander visited Pelusium when he entered Egypt from the east; Curtius Rufus claims he sent troops there, but himself stopped at a place now called *castra Alexandri* (4.7.2). There is also no parallel in Arrian to Curtius' claim that Alexander went to 'the interior' of Egypt (4.7.5). Plutarch (*Alex.* 26–8) mentions only his foundation of Alexandria and his visit to the oasis of Siwah.

²¹ For Germanicus' actual itinerary, see D.G. Weingärtner, *Die Ägyptenreise des Germanicus* (Bonn, 1969).

²² *P. Oxy.* 25.2435 recto; *SB* 1.3924, lines 31–45.

²³ Tac. *Ann.* 4.53; cf. Devillers (n. 4), 35–7.

²⁴ Bosworth (n. 3), 563. In one respect, however, Tacitus' Germanicus did not do what Alexander had planned to do: Germanicus goes to the Colossus of Memnon near Thebes, but Curtius' Alexander wanted to visit the so-called palace of Memnon in Abydos. For the *regia* of Memnon in Abydos, see Plin. *HN* 5.60; Str. 17.1.42; Kees, *RE* 15.1.649–52. For the Colossus, see G. Bowersock, 'The miracle of Memnon', *BASP* 21 (1984), 21–32 and references there.

Germanicus spent too long in Egypt, but that he treated Piso's insubordination with a *clementia* that bordered on the excessive.²⁵ In any case, Bosworth's suggestion can only explain the length of the Egyptian digression, but not its precise details and structure. Something more is needed to understand the incident fully.

This lack of explanatory power has implications for the entire endeavour of hunting for Alexander allusions in the passage. As Rhiannon Ash has observed in connection with allusions in the *Histories* to Naevius and Sallust, '[o]ne useful criterion for assessing the credibility of a possible allusion is relevance. If the echo fails to add interesting layers of meaning to the text under consideration, then there is limited mileage in asserting a connection between two passages in different authors'.²⁶ The same might be said of alleged allusions to historical figures as well as those to specific texts. Unless one is willing to believe that Tacitus was engaging in a learned parlour game in which he attempted to slip gratuitous allusions to Alexander into his text, it is perhaps best to treat these supposed allusions with ambivalence, and search for another approach to the passage.

GERMANICUS AND THE KINGS OF EGYPT

A more promising explanation for the Egyptian episode is suggested if we begin by considering Tacitus' description of Germanicus' visit to Thebes, which is treated at greater length than any other stop in the *chora*.²⁷ Germanicus, Tacitus says, visited the vast ruins (*magna vestigia*) of the city. There, a priest translated inscriptions in Egyptian making (highly inflated) boasts about the extent of the empire of Ramses II, the size of his army, and the revenues that he exacted from subject nations in Africa and Asia – revenues, says Tacitus, that rival those now exacted by Parthia or Rome (*Ann.* 2.60; cf. *Str.* 17.1.46). It is unconvincing to see the episode as a triumphal statement of Roman power, in view of Tacitus' nuanced and ambiguous attitude to Roman imperialism.²⁸ Nor is it quite a warning to Rome, since this Egyptian empire is presented not as a national achievement, but as that of a particular monarch, Ramses II. The warning delivered amongst the ruins is therefore about the transience of kingly achievement.

Moreover, Ramses' inscription evokes not only monarchical power, but also something more specific: tyrannical boastfulness. There is a nexus between inscriptions, monumentality and tyrannical behaviour throughout Herodotus' accounts of the despots of Egypt and of other barbarian lands.²⁹ Germanicus' visit to Thebes evokes two of these Herodotean tyrants and their inscriptions. First, in his account of Egypt, Herodotus reports that a translator read to him an inscription on the pyramid of the wicked and tyrannical Cheops boasting of the costs incurred feeding

²⁵ L.W. Rutland, 'The Tacitean Germanicus. Suggestions for a re-evaluation', *RhM* 130 (1987), 153–64 at 159–60, stressing in particular Tac. *Ann.* 2.55 and 2.57.

²⁶ R. Ash, 'Warped intertextualities: Naevius and Sallust at Tacitus *Histories* 2.12.2', *HISTOS* 1 (1997). <<http://www.dur.ac.uk/Classics/histos/1997/ash.html>> accessed 28 June, 2009.

²⁷ For general discussions of the visit to Thebes, see L. Kákosy, 'Germanicus in Theben', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32 (1989), 129–36; P. Dils, 'On several cartouches supposedly of C. Iulius Caesar Germanicus', *ZPE* 100 (1994), 347–50, at 348.

²⁸ e.g. Tac. *Agr.* 16, 21, 30–2.

²⁹ The Egyptian inscriptions are reported at Hdt. 2.102, 106, 125, 136, 141. For scholarly discussions, see D.T. Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, 1994), 127–41; Vasunia (n. 5), 136–82, esp. 142–6.

the multitudes whom the pharaoh forced to build the monument (2.125). Secondly, Darius is said to have set up an inscription at the Bosphorus in which he listed the nations represented in the army with which he invaded Scythia, an army which contained contingents from all the nations over which he ruled. On the inscription, Herodotus says, Darius listed the total number of men in his army, and the number was 700,000 (4.87). In a coincidence too striking to be accidental, the Ramessid inscription described by Tacitus claims that Ramses' army had 700,000 men, and was used to conquer places including Scythia.

The Theban episode calls to mind Roman tyrants as well. The contents of Ramses' inscription reflect another set of autocratic boasts already encountered in the *Annals*. Following Augustus' death, a statement of *opes publicae* was read to the senate, listing 'how many allies and citizens were under arms; the number of fleets, kingdoms and provinces; the direct and indirect taxes; the necessary expenses and the benefactions'.³⁰ These boasts were, of course, repeated at greater length in epigraphic form on Augustus' *Res Gestae*. Moreover, Roman emperors of the first century developed something of a taste for setting up hieroglyphic inscriptions in the city of Rome. Augustus transported to Rome from Egypt ancient obelisks which honoured Ramses II and Psammetichus II, and erected them in the capital.³¹ Domitian went one better and erected the so-called *Obeliscus Pamphilius*, the hieroglyphic inscription on which attributed traditional pharaonic traits to Domitian, including military strength, foreign conquests, and the extraction of tax from Asia. It also referred to him with honorific names that were used of Ramses II.³² Thus, to a Roman of Tacitus' day, the Ramessid inscription encountered by Germanicus would have evoked the epigraphic self-aggrandizement of later Roman tyrants, and the fascination that some Roman emperors had with hieroglyphic monuments.

In the Theban vignette, therefore, Tacitus presents an image of the transience of tyrants, and their monuments and projects. I suggest that the sites listed by Tacitus both before and after the Theban visit are mentioned because they reflect a similar theme. All are connected with particular kings. All evoke tyrannical (or at least royal) projects or behaviour. And all were connected in some sense with royal failure or the transience of royal achievement. Thus, after leaving Alexandria, Germanicus first visits the town of Canopus and then the mouth of the Nile sacred to Hercules. Both are also associated with the thwarting of kings. As Tacitus himself notes, Canopus was supposedly named after a helmsman of king Menelaus, who was buried there after Menelaus' ships were blown off course thanks to the anger of the gods (Tac. *Ann.* 2.60; cf. Hdt. 2.119; Hom. *Od.* 4.351–586). In Herodotus' version, Menelaus was actually expelled from Egypt by its irate inhabitants after he wickedly sacrificed two Egyptian children (Hdt. 2.119).

Tacitus says that, after Canopus, Germanicus visited the mouth of the Nile sacred to Hercules. This calls to mind the famous shrine of Heracles near the

³⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 1.11: ... *quantum civium sociorumque in armis, quot classes, regna, provinciae, tributa aut vectigalia, et necessitates ac largitiones*; cf. Suet. *Aug.* 101.

³¹ Amm. Marc. 17.4.12, 17–23; Plin. *HN* 36.70–3; Str. 17.1.27; cf. E.M. Ciampini, *Gli obelischi iscritti di Roma* (Rome, 2004), 89–119, 143–9; A. Roulet, *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing Monuments of Imperial Rome* (Leiden, 1972), 69–70, 79.

³² For translation, commentary and literature, see K. Lembke, *Das Iseum Campense in Rom. Studien über den Isiskult unter Domitian* (Heidelberg, 1994), 37–41, 210–12; R.H. Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Brussels, 1996; *Collection Latomus*, Vol. 231), 145–53; Ciampini (n. 31), 157–67; Roulet (n. 31), 72–3.

mouth of this branch of the river.³³ According to Herodotus' account, the servants of Paris sought asylum here when the prince was forced off course and landed in Egypt while in the process of fleeing from Sparta with Helen. The Egyptian King Proteus then learned of the elopement of Helen, and confiscated her and various items of Paris' property before sending Paris on his way (Hdt. 2.113–20). Heracles is connected with Egypt in a second way by Herodotus. According to the story, Heracles came ashore in Egypt, only to have the Egyptians prepare to sacrifice him to Zeus, thanks to the wicked King Busiris' penchant for using foreigners for human sacrifices. At first he played along with this, but at the critical moment he cut loose and killed some of his captors (Hdt. 2.45). According to the myth, King Busiris and his son Amphidamas were amongst those killed.³⁴

The sites mentioned after Tacitus' account of the visit to Thebes reflect the same themes still more strongly. Consider the first of these: the Colossus of Memnon. In Graeco-Roman minds, the Colossus of Memnon depicted the legendary king of Ethiopia. More generally, the building of colossi was often linked to autocratic power. Alexander had supposedly planned to carve Mt Athos into a colossus.³⁵ Germanicus' own tyrannical grandson Nero also erected a colossal bronze statue of himself in the vestibule of the *domus aurea*, which Suetonius cites as proof of the size of the ruinously expensive palace (Suet. *Ner.* 31).

Moreover, the Colossus of Memnon also evokes the transience of kingly achievement, much like the ruins of Thebes. Memnon himself was said to have been killed in battle while fighting on the losing side at Troy.³⁶ The Colossus was located in the so-called Memnonion, which was ringed by hills whose caves supposedly contained tombs of kings, an obvious reminder of royal mortality (Str. 17.1.46). The Colossus had suffered the ravages of time, having been smashed entirely in two by an earthquake, although Cambyses was sometimes blamed.³⁷ The result of the earthquake was the statue's musical tendencies. Thus this kingly monument which nature had broken became a tourist attraction, thanks to the good offices of nature.

Next in Tacitus' list of places visited by Germanicus are the pyramids, presumably those near Memphis. These, as Tacitus expressly states, were kingly creations. And not only were they related to kings, but they also evoked absolute power – perhaps even tyrannical excess. Tacitus reflects this in his description of them as ... *instar montium eductae* ... *certamine et opibus regum*. This judgement of pyramids as monuments to autocratic excess and tyranny is found in Herodotus and Aristotle,³⁸ and is echoed by Roman moralists of the Principate. The Elder Pliny, for instance, sees the pyramids of Egypt as a product of the kingly *aemulatio*, which were a ... *regum pecuniae otiosa ac stulta ostentatio* (HN 36.75–82). Tacitus'

³³ See Weingärtner (n. 21), 139–40 and F.R.D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus. Books 1–6. Volume II: Annals 1.55–81 and Annals 2* (Cambridge, 1981), 381 for discussion and references concerning this mouth of the Nile and the temple of Heracles.

³⁴ Ov. *Met.* 9.182–3; Plut. *Thes.* 11; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11; Pherec. *FGrH* 3 F 17; Agathon of Samos *FGrH* 843 F 3. See too A.-F. Laurens, 'Bousiris', *LIMC* 3.147–52 for additional literary and iconographic references to the story.

³⁵ For references, see N. Purcell, 'Town in country and country in town', in E.B. MacDougall (ed.), *Ancient Roman Villa Gardens* (Washington, 1987), 187–203, at 190 n. 11.

³⁶ Ovid *Met.* 13.576–622; Paus. 3.18.12; T.H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London, 1991), 205–6; pls 309; 324–7.

³⁷ References in Bowersock (n. 24).

³⁸ Hdt. 2.126–8, 136, discussed by Vasunia (n. 5), 82; Arist. *Pol.* 1313b.

reference to the fact that they reared up like mountains is also reminiscent of the attack made by an Augustan moralist, Papirius Fabianus, on wealthy villa owners who sought to build artificial mountains in their gardens, in imitation of nature.³⁹

Furthermore, pyramids were sometimes read as symbols of kingly vanity and transience. Tacitus' description of the pyramids visited by Germanicus falls into the latter category: the pyramids in question are now ... *disiectas inter et vix pervias arenas*. This appears to be a forced interpretation of Herodotus' report that near Memphis there are sand-covered mountains, in which there are pyramids (Hdt. 2.8). But the symbolic resonances are clear, however dubiously Tacitus has treated his source. The pyramids still stand, but they are pointless, since they are virtually impossible to visit and behold. Nature is slowly reclaiming the stones originally cut from the mountains of the eastern desert (cf. Hdt. 2.8). The vanity of the pyramids was a theme in the works of other first-century moralists. The Elder Pliny sees them as instances of kingly *vanitas*, and claims that the inscriptions indicating their builders have been erased, so one cannot tell whose pyramid is whose, a fate which he judges to be *iustissimus* (HN 36.75–82).

Lake Moeris would appear to have similar associations. Although a natural lake, it was believed to have been excavated by the mythical King Moeris, hence Tacitus' description of it as *effossa* (Hdt. 2.101, 149–50; Plin. HN 5.50). There was also a further royal association in that Herodotus claims (wrongly) that in the centre of the lake were two pyramids topped with stone colossi of men on thrones (Hdt. 2.149). The idea of a huge man-made lake evokes another category of despotic projects, namely large-scale works of hydraulic engineering. As Nicholas Purcell has argued, such projects are an example of 'a tendency which was widely recognized in antiquity for absolute kings to wish to express their power by altering the face of nature ...'⁴⁰ In Herodotus, the pharaoh Sesostriis, using forced labour, builds a network of dykes throughout Egypt, which cut up the landscape and make it impassable for horses and wheeled vehicles (Hdt. 2.108). Later on in Herodotus, the tyrant Xerxes engages in an aquatic project, cutting a canal through the Mt Athos promontory (Hdt. 7.24). The Julio-Claudians, for their part, showed an enthusiasm for similar feats of aquatic engineering, with Caesar, Augustus, Caligula, Claudius and Nero digging or planning to dig a variety of canals and lakes.⁴¹

But Lake Moeris was also, in some sense, a failure. It was still there in Tacitus' day; however, the Elder Pliny assumes that the lake had actually contracted from its previous proportions, and others apparently thought the same.⁴² They were

³⁹ Sen. *Controv.* 2.1.13; cf. Purcell (n. 35), 190. See too Hor. *Carm.* 3.1.33–40 for lavish villa-building projects which alter nature, and for moralizing statements about their ultimate vanity.

⁴⁰ Purcell (n. 35), 190; see too K.M. Coleman, 'Launching into history: aquatic displays in the early Empire', *JRS* 83 (1993), 48–74, at 57, 68–9.

⁴¹ Tac. *Ann.* 12.56, 14.15, 15.42; *CIL* 14.85; Dio Cass. 43.23; [Lucian], *Nero* 1–4; Mart. *Spect.* 2.6, 28.11; Plin. *HN* 4.10; 14.61; Quint. *Inst.* 3.8.16; Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.7–8, 59–60; Suet. *Iul.* 39; *Aug.* 43; *Ner.* 19, 31. See too Suet. *Dom.* 5 for Domitian's building of a *naumachia*, and Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.54–5, 72–94 for his changing the course or flow of various rivers.

⁴² Plin. *HN* 5.50: *inter Arsinoiten autem ac Memphiten lacus fuit circuitu CCL aut, ut Mucianus tradit, CCCCL et altitudinis quinquaginta passuum, manu factus, a rege qui fecerat Moeridis appellatus*. The use of the word *fuit* makes it clear that Pliny believed that the lake had diminished, either from an original circumference of 250 miles, or from one of 450. This belief is reflected also in Pliny's statement (HN 36.76) that two pyramids stand ... *ubi fuit Moeridis lacus, hoc est fossa grandis, sed Aegyptiis inter mira ac memoranda narrata*. One suspects that the figure of 250 miles was simply the result of a textual error in one of Pliny's sources. Mucianus' figure of 450 miles is equal to 3,600 stades, which is the figure given by

essentially right: archaeology has shown that extensive land reclamation in the Fayum in the early Ptolemaic period had shrunk the lake's size,⁴³ although authors like Pliny perhaps had less scientific reasons for their belief.⁴⁴ It is plausible that Tacitus, who knew Pliny's *Natural History*, would therefore have seen the lake as another symbol of the transience of regal achievement, and one that now relies on the overflowing Nile for its remaining waters.

The final site that Tacitus says fascinated Germanicus is the abyss near Elephantine and Syene, which he claims is so deep that explorers' attempts to plumb it have been frustrated.⁴⁵ This is an allusion to the story reported by Herodotus that the source of the Nile in fact lies in an abyss between Syene and Elephantine, from which the waters flow both north and south. The Pharaoh Psammetichus tried and failed to measure their depths with a cable many thousands of fathoms long (Hdt. 2.28; cf. Str. 17.1.52). Here, then, we have another royal failure. It also evokes another category of autocratic project: the exploration of land and waters. Just as autocratic power allowed insane building projects, so too did it allow expeditions to push back the limits of geographical knowledge. These expeditions sometimes excited the disapproval of moralists, who saw them as traversing the boundaries set by nature.⁴⁶ Most relevantly, the desire to explore the sources of the Nile was regarded as a pet project of mad autocrats. For instance, in Lucan, Caesar asks the Egyptian priest Acoreus about the sources of the Nile, expressing a wish to see them (10.189–93). The priest gives an account of the river's sources and course, and relates to Caesar how a succession of despots, including Sesostris, Cambyses and Alexander attempted unsuccessfully to discover these sources (10.194–331). Earlier in Book 10, Lucan also mentions an expedition to explore the sources of the Nile at the culmination of a list of the tyrannical Alexander's insane schemes.⁴⁷ It is also worth noting that several Julio-Claudian emperors had a taste for exploration

Herodotus (2.149, followed by Diod. Sic. 1.51). For Mucianus' fondness for measurement and quantification, see R. Ash, 'The wonderful world of Mucianus', in E. Bispham, G. Rowe, with E. Matthews (edd.), *Vita Vigilia Est. Essays in Honour of Barbara Levick* (London, 2007), 1–17 at 7–8. Pomponius Mela's figure of 20 Roman miles (= 160 stades) for the circumference of Lake Moeris (1.55) is consistent with Pliny's belief that the lake's circumference had shrunk at some stage to less than 250 or 450 miles. Strabo also claims that the lake was once much larger, covering all of Lower Egypt, and being confluent with the Red Sea, although he believed that the lake was natural rather than man-made (17.1.35–37).

⁴³ J.G. Manning, *Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Structure of Land Tenure* (Cambridge, 2003), 99–108.

⁴⁴ It has been suggested that Pliny (or his source) assumed that the two pyramids of Amenemhet III at Dahshur and Hawara were Herodotus' pyramids, laid bare by the retreat of the waters: A. Corso, R. Mugellesi and G. Rosati, *Gaio Plinio Secondo. Storia Naturale. V. Mineralogia e storia dell'arte* (Turin, 1988), 631.

⁴⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 2.61: *profunda altitudo, nullis inquiringentium spatiis penetrabilis*. There are difficulties with the Latin here, since *spatia* cannot really mean 'lengths of rope'. A textual emendation might be required to render the passage fully coherent: for a full discussion of the possibilities, see Goodyear (n. 33), 386–7. Whatever the case, there can be no serious doubt that the passage refers to the story of Psammetichus in Hdt. 2.28.

⁴⁶ Sen. *Suas.* 1.3–4, 10–11; cf. D.W. Roller, *Through the Pillars of Herakles: Greco-Roman Exploration of the Atlantic* (New York and London, 2006), 126–7.

⁴⁷ Lucan 10.40. For additional references to Alexander's dispatch of an expedition to discover the sources of the river, see S.M. Burstein, 'Alexander, Callisthenes and the sources of the Nile', *GRBS* 17 (1976), 135–46 (= id., *Graeco-Africana: Studies in the History of Greek Relations with Egypt and Nubia* [New Rochelle, NY, 1995], 63–76); Vasunia (n. 5), 275–82. For references to other stories about Alexander's taste for exploration, see Roller (n. 46), 59–60, 92–4.

projects.⁴⁸ These included the expedition that Nero sent into Ethiopia to discover the sources of the Nile.⁴⁹

TACITUS, GERMANICUS AND THE PRINCIPATE

Tacitus therefore chooses to mention sites on Germanicus' itinerary that serve as symbols of the ultimate fragility of the power of kings and the transience of their megalomaniac projects. This raises the question of Tacitus' underlying purpose. Our answer to this, I believe, is tied up with how we understand the figure of Germanicus in the *Annals*.⁵⁰ At one time, Tacitus' Germanicus was seen as a straightforward hero whom Tacitus uses as a foil to Tiberius.⁵¹ More recently, however, a more nuanced understanding of Germanicus in the *Annals* has emerged. Christopher Pelling has argued that Tacitus' Germanicus, more than operating as a foil for Tiberius as an individual, represents the antithesis of the system of the Principate.⁵² The young prince acts with an openness that is reminiscent of the Republican virtues of *civilitas* and *comitas*. This is in marked contrast to the dissimulation, repression, and high-handedness of the Principate, vices which Tacitus makes incarnate in Tiberius.⁵³ Thus, the juxtaposition of the behaviour of Tiberius and Germanicus in the first two books of the *Annals* is more than a contrast between two individuals. It is a contrast between the styles of two political systems: the Republic and the Principate. One might also add here that Tacitus' comparison of Alexander and Germanicus at *Annals* 2.73 is designed to make a related contrast, namely between tyrannical styles of ruling, and more moderate political behaviour characterized by *clementia* and *temperantia*.⁵⁴

This is not to say that Tacitus makes Germanicus into a hero: there are signs of ambivalence in his characterization. For all his Republican virtues, the blood of a tyrannical dynasty courses through Germanicus' veins. He was the grand-nephew of Augustus, the father of Caligula, the brother of Claudius and the grandfather of

⁴⁸ Plin. *HN* 2.167; *Mon. Anc.* 26; Str. 16.4.22–4.

⁴⁹ Sen. *Q. Nat.* 6.8.3–5. Pliny also reports Nero's dispatch of an expedition into Ethiopia, but says that its purpose was to conduct reconnaissance in advance of an attack on the area (*HN* 6.181, 184–6; 12.18–19). The accounts differ considerably in their details, and some have suggested that two separate expeditions were made; for literature and discussion, see A.M. Demicheli, *Rapporti di pace e di guerra dell'Egitto romano con le popolazioni dei deserti africani* (Milan, 1976), 94–126, esp. 95–104; M. De Nardis, 'Seneca, Plinio e la spedizione neroniana in Etiopia', *Aegyptus* 69 (1989), 123–52.

⁵⁰ For discussions of the characterization of Germanicus in the *Annals*, see: D.C.A. Shotter, 'Tacitus, Tiberius and Germanicus', *Historia* 17 (1968) 194–214; Borzsák (n. 3); id., 'Zum Verständnis der Darstellungskunst des Tacitus. Die Veränderungen des Germanicus-Bildes', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 18 (1970), 279–92; D.O. Ross, 'The Tacitean Germanicus', *YCS* 23 (1973), 209–27; Rutland (n. 25); Malissard (n. 19); C. Pelling, 'Tacitus and Germanicus', in T.J. Luce and A.J. Woodman (edd.), *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition* (Princeton, 1993), 59–85; E. O'Gorman, *Irony and Misreading in the Annals of Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2000), 46–77; L. Fulkerson, 'Staging a mutiny: competitive roleplaying on the Rhine (*Annals* 1.31–51)', *Ramus* 35 (2006) 169–92; Santoro L'hoir (n. 3), 201–4.

⁵¹ See Ross (n. 50), 209–10 for a survey of this earlier literature.

⁵² Pelling (n. 50); cf. Ross (n. 50), 225–6.

⁵³ Cf. M. Griffin, 'Tacitus, Tiberius and the Principate', in I. Malkin and Z.W. Rubinsohn (edd.), *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World: Studies in Honour of Zvi Yavetz* (Leiden, New York, and Köln, 1995), 31–57, at 36–7; Devillers (n. 4), 77–8.

⁵⁴ Cf. above, p. 224.

Nero (as well as being Tiberius' adoptive son),⁵⁵ and Tacitus frequently reminds his readers of these facts.⁵⁶ Furthermore, his personal behaviour gives rise to ambiguity. At various points of the narrative, he shows a troubling tendency toward naivety, incompetence and histrionics.⁵⁷ There is also the fact that Germanicus' unsavoury relatives exhibit some of the same qualities that he does, but, lacking his *temperantia*, these virtues become tyrannical vices. Augustus, for instance, shows *civilitas* by attending theatrical performances (1.54), but in his hands, this *civilitas* becomes the calculated public relations ploy of the autocrat.⁵⁸ Nero takes this *civilitas* still further, revelling by night in the city's brothels and taverns, bringing entertainments to the people, and engaging in theatre riots. Without *temperantia*, Nero's *civilitas* causes a breakdown in public order and morality.⁵⁹ Tacitus' Germanicus is thus a sort of Janus-faced figure, who looks backward to the Republic, but forward to the excesses of the Principate that his family creates. His personal qualities make him anti-tyrannical; but his relatives take some of these same qualities to tyrannical excess.

Tacitus' juxtaposition of Germanicus' personal style with that of the Principate in general is made very clear in the narrative of the young prince's behaviour in Alexandria, and in Tiberius' reaction to it. Germanicus opens state granaries, thereby lowering grain prices, much like a *popularis* politician of the late Republic. He walks around the city unaccompanied by soldiers. Tacitus strikingly states that his style of interaction with the Alexandrians was rather like Scipio Africanus' interaction with the Syracusans during the Second Punic War (cf. Livy 29.19). Tiberius inevitably reacts with anger when he discovers that Germanicus has been acting in the manner of a Republican hero. He lightly rebukes Germanicus' dress and civil behaviour toward the Alexandrians, and vehemently criticizes the fact that Germanicus entered Egypt in breach of Augustus' ban on senators and *equites inlustres* visiting the province without imperial permission. In view of the Cornelius Gallus affair, Tiberius' sensitivity may have been quite justified, but Tacitus instead presents this ban as one of the *dominationis arcana*,⁶⁰ a rule in force since the beginning of the Principate,⁶¹ designed to secure the emperor's power by infringing the liberties of senators. The digression on the origins of the rule makes it clear that Germanicus is the victim not of the whim of an individual *princeps*, but of the entire system of the Principate.

Immediately after this account of the sojourn in Alexandria and of the *dominationis arcana* it threatened, Germanicus takes his tour of the monuments to kingly power. Tacitus therefore shows his reader the secrecy, repression and high-

⁵⁵ Malissard (n. 19), 336–7; Ross (n. 50), 222.

⁵⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 2.43, 53 (grand-nephew of Augustus); 6.46 (father of Caligula); 11.12, 12.2 (grandfather of Nero); cf. 1.33 (married to Augustus' granddaughter).

⁵⁷ Borzsák (n. 50), esp. 287; Rutland (n. 25); Fulkerson (n. 50), 175–82.

⁵⁸ O'Gorman (n. 50), 48–9; Pelling (n. 50), 79 n. 44.

⁵⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 13.25, 14.14–15. Note too *Ann.* 13.11, in which *clementia* is turned from a virtue into a rhetorical *topos* at the hands of Nero, following Seneca's cynical advice. For further discussion of the ways in which Tacitus' Germanicus anticipates Nero, see R. Mellor, *Tacitus* (New York and London, 1993), 75–6; Fulkerson (n. 50), 183; Santoro L'Hoir (n. 3), 202.

⁶⁰ For the *arcana imperii*, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.36; *Hist.* 1.4. For the *arcana* of the imperial *domus*, see *Ann.* 1.6.

⁶¹ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.3, with Griffin (n. 53), 44. For discussion of the legalities of the situation, and Germanicus' possible motives in breaching this prohibition, see D. Hennig, 'Zur Ägyptenreise des Germanicus', *Chiron* 2 (1972), 349–65.

handedness of the Julio-Claudian Principate in the Alexandrian episode, and then immediately sends Germanicus, victim of that Principate, to view a series of sites evocative of tyranny. There is an added irony in that several of the monuments are reminiscent of the crazed projects of Germanicus' own family.

This juxtaposition of the Alexandrian episode with the tour of the *chora* could be read in several different ways, and it is even possible that, in creating it, Tacitus was being deliberately ambiguous. One way to view Germanicus' tour of the kingly remains would be as a sort of crashing recapitulation of the theme of the Alexandrian incident, and indeed that of the whole of the first two books of *Annals*. In these books, the grip of tyranny slowly tightens, and Roman *libertas* grows pale and lifeless. In this suffocating world, Germanicus is a last symbol of hope.⁶² During the turbulence following Augustus' death, the legions in Germany mutiny with high hopes (*magna spes*) that Germanicus would lead a coup against Tiberius (1.31). In discussing Germanicus' family connections, Tacitus says that the people believed that, had Germanicus' father Drusus lived, he would have restored *libertas*; this same hope (*spes*) was transferred by the people to Germanicus when Drusus died (1.33; cf. 2.82). Germanicus even rededicates a temple to *Spes* in Rome (2.49).

Yet this hope is increasingly undercut by the fact of which every Roman reader would have been perfectly aware: Germanicus' impending extinction. The first reference to Tiberius' decision to dispatch the young prince on his eastern mission contains a statement that the emperor was aware that, separated from his legions, Germanicus would be exposed to treachery and accidents (*Ann.* 2.5). In the account of the triumph in A.D. 17, this sense of foreboding is heightened, with the crowd reflecting that the popularity of Germanicus' father Drusus had not brought him fortune, and that his uncle Marcellus had been cut off in his prime (2.41). Tacitus also repeats a supposed rumour that, when the prince visited the oracle of Clarian Apollo, he received a prediction of his impending fate in suitably obscure language (2.54). Finally, as Germanicus' ashes are interred in the Mausoleum of Augustus, this mounting despair comes to an almost choral climax, with the soldiers, magistrates and other members of the citizen body all lamenting 'that the Republic had fallen and that no hope remained'.⁶³ The Egyptian tour could thus be read in series with these passages: by bringing this frail and mortal hope face to face with the enduring monuments of kings, Tacitus could be making another bitter reflection on the inexorable nature of tyranny.

But there is a second – and to my mind more convincing – way to read the incident. The starting point for this reading is the fact that, for Tacitus, political time was not necessarily linear, but could be cyclical, with states moving periodically between despotism and freedom (*dominatio* and *libertas*). The prologue to the *Annals* emphasizes that Roman political time assumed such a structure. Rome was first ruled by kings, then L. Brutus introduced *libertas*; after a series of short-lived *dominationes* in its final decades, the Republic then gave way to the autocracy of Augustus.⁶⁴ Nor did the story necessarily end here. In the opening of the *Agricola*, Tacitus states that, following the assassination of the despotic Domitian, 'Nerva Caesar intermingled two things previously irreconcilable: the

⁶² O'Gorman (n. 50), 47–8.

⁶³ Tac. *Ann.* 3.4: ... *concidisse rem publicam, nihil spei reliquum clamitabant*.

⁶⁴ See too Syme (n. 9), 2.498.

Principate and freedom'.⁶⁵ If this statement is at all sincere, then Tacitus believed that in Nerva (and his successor Trajan) the hope for *libertas* which the *populus* vainly placed in Germanicus was finally realized.⁶⁶

Furthermore, in *Annals*, Egyptian time, although not exactly cyclical, certainly ebbs and flows. The Egyptian episode in Book 2 reminds us that Ramses' Thebes flourished and decayed; tyrants once ruled the land, then passed away, and were replaced by new, Roman tyrants. Elephantine and Syene once stood at the border of the *imperium Romanum*, but this too has changed, and Roman dominion now extends to the 'red sea'.⁶⁷ Originally there was one Hercules, but with time others were adopted to the name (2.60; cf. Hdt. 2.43–5). In the other major Egyptian digression of the *Annals*, the author describes how the phoenix goes through its cycle of death and renewal over a vast span of time, appearing in the reigns of Sesosis and Amasis, and then during Macedonian rule, in the reign of the third Ptolemy.⁶⁸ In some senses, the model would seem to be Herodotean. Herodotus sees Egypt as an unimaginably ancient civilization,⁶⁹ and many of the social customs on which his ethnographic gaze falls are treated as existing changelessly over a vast time-span. Yet although Egyptian social time is static for him, political time is not.⁷⁰ Whilst Herodotus regards Egypt as unable to cope for long without a king,⁷¹ nevertheless it swings back and forth between enlightened monarchy and tyranny. Rhampsinitus and the kings who governed before him produced good order and great prosperity. After them, Cheops brought all kinds of misery,⁷² as did his successor Chephren (2.127), before Cheops' son came to the throne and reversed his father's religious policy and ruled with justice – although not without misfortune (2.129). Over a larger timescale, rule by indigenous kings gave way to Persian domination. The ancient kings like Sesostrius might have achieved dominion greater than Darius, but by Herodotus' day, Egypt was now under Persian dominion (2.110).

⁶⁵ Tac. *Agr.* 3: *et ... primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerva Caesar res olim dissociabiles miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem ...*

⁶⁶ This possibility of a well-governed monarchy is visible too in Tac. *Dial.* 41.

⁶⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 2.61: *exim ventum Elephantinen ac Syenen, claustra olim Romani imperii, quod nunc rubrum ad mare patescit*. For the controversy over just what Tacitus understands the *rubrum mare* to be, see Goodyear (n. 33), 387–93.

⁶⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 6.28. Tacitus raises the possibility that the phoenix that supposedly appeared in A.D. 34 was indeed bogus. The digression has therefore been plausibly taken to be an ironic reference to the unrelenting tyranny and slaughter that characterized the end of Tiberius' principate as well as that of his successor Caligula, and also to the lack of familial piety that both showed: E. Keitel, 'The non-appearance of the phoenix at Tacitus *Annals* 6.28', *AJPh* 120 (1999), 429–42.

⁶⁹ Vasunia (n. 5), 110–35.

⁷⁰ In this sense I would differ from the conclusion reached by Vasunia (n. 5), 116 that Herodotus' narrative 'allows the encapsulation of personalities, events, and circumstances, but the narrative dynamic yields to the static imparted to Egypt in Herodotus' semiotization of the country, and the overall frame of Herodotus' Egyptian account is a stable, fixed, and immobilized time'. For similar claims about the immutability of Egypt in the eyes of Herodotus and other Greeks, see F. Hartog, *Memoires of Odysseus: Frontier Tales from Ancient Greece*, tr. J. Lloyd (Chicago, 2001), 57.

⁷¹ Hdt. 2.147; cf. Hartog (n. 70), 54.

⁷² Hdt. 2.124: *μέχρι μὲν νῦν Ῥαμφινίτου βασιλέως εἶναι ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ πᾶσαν εὐνομίην ἔλεγον καὶ εὐθενέειν Αἰγύπτου μεγάλως, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτον βασιλεύσαντά σφεων Χέοπα ἐς πᾶσαν κακότητα ἐλάσαι*.

I would suggest that Tacitus' report of Germanicus' visit to the *chora* should be read in the context of how he understood political time in both Rome and Egypt. By choosing to mention crumbling monuments, and sites evocative of ultimately kingly failure and transience, Tacitus reminds his reader that political time does not stay still. This emphasis makes a universal statement about the fragility of fortune, including the fortunes of tyrants – a statement loaded with implications for Rome.

An analogy with a more recent author's response to ruins helps to clarify Tacitus' reading of Egyptian antiquities. In 1818, inspired by a passage in Diodorus Siculus (1.47) and by his reading of Volney's *Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires*, Shelley wrote the sonnet 'Ozymandias', which celebrates the ruins of another pharaonic monument and the ironies of its boastful inscription. As John Rodenbeck has recently argued, the poem 'seeks to remind its readers ... that no tyrannical power lasts forever, no matter how efficient its repressive apparatus or how deep its degree of self-deceit'.⁷³ Whilst no one would accuse Tacitus of being a Romantic, his reading of the antiquities of Egypt is in some ways similar to Shelley's reading of Egyptian antiquities. Tacitus, like Shelley, saw in the reports of the royal ruins of Egypt a reminder that, in time, all tyranny must come to nothing, just as surely as Thebes was ruined, the Colossus of Memnon lay broken, and the pyramids near Memphis were choked with sand.

Such a sense of the mutability of fortunes in fact runs through Germanicus' earlier touristic diversions. This is redolent of a theme that features very strongly in Herodotus: that fortune is changeable and unpredictable, even for kings.⁷⁴ During the German campaigns, Germanicus visits the site of the massacre of Varus' legions in the Teutoburger Wald, and hence of the greatest military disaster of Augustus' reign. The place and the mournful remains of the Roman dead move Germanicus and his army to sadness, not just because of the relatives and friends who fell there, but 'on account of the fortunes of war and the lot of humans'.⁷⁵ In Book 2, the passion for tourism continues, as Germanicus visits Actium, the place where his great-uncle Octavian defeated his grandfather Antony. This presents him with an 'image of sadness and of joy',⁷⁶ an ambiguous phrase that Tacitus leaves suspended: his joy is for a great-uncle's success, but is the sadness just for a grandfather defeated, or for a Republican world lost? Soon after, his eastern tours take him also to Ilium, whose remains, says Tacitus, are venerable 'because of the changeability of their fortune and our origins'.⁷⁷ Germanicus' sightseeing activities before he reaches Egypt are therefore characterized by a melancholic pensiveness, and an overpowering sense of the mutability of human fortune, and the ambiguity of supposed successes. These are the themes that are reprised at greater length in the Egyptian episode.

⁷³ J. Rodenbeck, 'Travelers from an antique land: Shelley's inspiration for "Ozymandias"', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 24 (2004), 121–48, at 139; cf. C. Woodward, *In Ruins* (London, 2002), 64–72, 204.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Hdt. 1.5, 32, 86; 3.40, 43; 7.10, 14, 18, 46. For another statement in Tacitus about the unpredictability of fortune, see *Ann.* 3.18.

⁷⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 1.61: ... *ob casus bellorum et sortem hominum*.

⁷⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 2.53: ... *imago tristium laetorumque*.

⁷⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 2.54: ... *adito Ilio quaeque ibi varietate fortunae et nostri origine veneranda...*

CONCLUSIONS

The Egyptian digression in *Annals* Book 2 should not, therefore, be read as part of an attempt by Tacitus to create yet another Roman Alexander, or to make vague and pointless 'allusions' to the Macedonian king. Rather, it should be read as part of a complicated meditation on the rise and fall of tyranny. Tacitus' account of Germanicus' Egyptian journey stands firmly within the tradition of what François Hartog has called the 'Egyptian voyage' (*voyage d'Égypte*), in which the alien viewer is not genuinely interested in describing Egypt for its own sake, but for what it says about that viewer and his own world.⁷⁸ In Herodotus, the vision of Egypt has ramifications for the world of the democratic Greek *polis*;⁷⁹ in Tacitus, the description of Egyptian antiquities is really a discussion of cycles of power, domination and liberty at Rome.

It would be too much, of course, to say that in raising a hope for the end of tyranny, Tacitus is making a *detailed* prediction about the political future of Rome. The extant sections of the *Annals* do not make it explicit whether he continued to see in contemporary Rome the felicitous mix of *principatus* and *libertas* that he observed when he wrote the *Agricola*, or whether he regarded a drift back toward tyranny as having begun.⁸⁰ In any case, no sensible historian can claim to know the future. It could be, therefore, that Germanicus' confrontation with the memories of failed kings in Egypt offers a model that only the hindsight of future generations of readers can truly elaborate. Again, there is a Herodotean analogy. The *Histories* end in an oddly abrupt fashion, with the Athenian siege of Sestos, the execution of the wicked Artayctes, and an anecdote about how Cyrus warned the Persians about the corrupting effects of extending control over wealthy lands. Carolyn Dewald has plausibly suggested that this termination is intended to invite future generations to interpret this in the light of what they knew about the fate of Athenian imperialism: 'Writing for readers farther into the future than himself, Herodotus has left it for us to look back and fit the Athenian presence at Sestos in 479 into what happened afterward, in his own generation and later ...'⁸¹ Likewise, only readers in the decades and centuries after Tacitus could say how and when the hope implied in the fate of Germanicus' Egyptian kings was realized. Our author, like Herodotus, perhaps recognized this fact.

This is not to say that Tacitus' *spes* is utterly without specific content. The studied ambiguity of his portrait of Germanicus at least makes it clear enough that he does not expect *libertas* to be realized through the agency of a melodramatic exhibitionist like this. Germanicus represents a Republican style of power, but Tacitus fully realized that the faults of the Republic had led to mob violence and

⁷⁸ Hartog (n. 70), 8 = F. Hartog, *Mémoire d'Ulysse: récits sur la frontière en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1996), 15–16; discussed with approval in Vasunia (n. 5), 29–32.

⁷⁹ Thus Vasunia (n. 5), 75–135.

⁸⁰ Syme (n. 9), 2.498 suggested that there are hints in the *Annals* that Tacitus saw the beginnings of a new despotism in Hadrian's early years. This suggestion assumes that *Annals* was really written in the early years of Hadrian's principate, an assumption that is not altogether secure. For the question of the date of the *Annals*, see Goodyear (n. 33), 387–93; Syme (n. 9), 2.768–82.

⁸¹ C. Dewald, 'Wanton kings, pickled heroes, and gnomic founding fathers: strategies of meaning at the end of Herodotus's *Histories*', in D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn and D. Fowler (edd.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton, 1997), 62–82, at 80.

civil war.⁸² Instead of pinning his hopes on one man, Tacitus, like Shelley, saw that nature and the passage of years would triumph over absolutism – at least for a time. And here I finish with a coincidence perhaps worthy of a Tacitean eulogy. The statue that inspired Shelley's 'Ozymandias' has survived: the head is in the British Museum, the remnants of the body are *in situ* at Thebes in the so-called Ramesseum,⁸³ around a kilometre north of the Memnonion. The name Ozymandias, which Shelley found in Diodorus' account, is the result of a misreading of the cartouche on the statue: the statue does not depict an 'Ozymandias', for there was no such king. Rather, it depicts Ramses II.⁸⁴ In Thebes, Germanicus heard the vain boasts of 'Ozymandias', and perhaps even gazed upon his broken head.

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⁸² Ross (n. 50), 226–7; Pelling (n. 50), 77–8; Devillers (n. 4), 77–81.

⁸³ For discussion and references, see K. Vandorpe, 'City of many a gate, harbour for many a rebel. Historical and topographical outline of Greco-Roman Thebes', in S. P. Vleeming (ed.), *Hundred-Gated Thebes. Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Leiden, New York and Köln, 1995) [=P. L. Bat. XXVII], 203–39, at 227.

⁸⁴ Rodenbeck (n. 73), 128–9, 135–6.