VOLOGAESES AS MIRROR[*]

Abstract: This paper explores how, like other 'barbarian' leaders in Roman historiography who have received more extensive scholarly interest, the Parthian king Vologaeses is presented in *Ann.* 15.1–2 and 15.15 as, amongst other things, a kind of mirror for the Julio-Claudian emperors who are the principal *foci* of the *Annals*. The images Vologaeses offers are refractions rather than specular reflections. The ways in which he is depicted and the claims put into his mouth encourage the reader to think of earlier leaders, Roman and non-Roman, and, variously, of all the Roman emperors treated by Tacitus in his *Annals*, and thus to reflect further on crucial general Tacitean themes: the nature of the principate and of Rome itself under different individuals and one family; the differences between past and present; and decision-making and its agency in imperial Rome. The opening chapters of *Annals* 15 have often been thought of as somehow anomalous in their position: one suggestion is offered as to why, on the contrary, they might be considered to have been carefully placed.

Interea rex Parthorum Vologaeses, cognitis Corbulonis rebus regemque alienigenam Tigranen Armeniae impositum, simul fratre Tiridate pulso spretum Arsacidarum fastigium ire ultum uolens, magnitudine rursum Romana et continui foederis reuerentia diversas ad curas trahebatur, cunctator ingenio et defectione Hyrcanorum, gentis ualidae, multisque ex eo bello inligatus. atque illum ambiguum nouus insuper nuntius contumeliae exstimulat: quippe egressus Armenia Tigranes Adiabenos, conterminam nationem, latius ac diutius quam per latrocinia uastauerat, idque primores gentium aegre tolerabant …

Meanwhile the king of the Parthians, Vologaeses—learning of Corbulo's affairs and that the alien-born Tigranes had been installed as king in Armenia, and in addition wanting to embark on avenging the eminence of the Arsacidae, which had been spurned with the banishment of his brother Tiridates—was being drawn contrariwise to different concerns by the greatness of Rome and by his respect for the unbroken treaty, being a hesitator by instinct and tangled up in the defection of the Hyr-

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cani, an effective people, and in the many wars resulting therefrom. While in two minds, he was goaded by word of a new and additional insult: having left Armenia, Tigranes had devastated the bordering people of the Adiabeni too extensively and lengthily for mere banditry, and the chiefs of the peoples were enduring it only with difficulty.

(*Ann.* 15.1.1–2; tr. Woodman (2004), very slightly adapted)

Igitur commotus his Vologaeses concilium uocat et proximum sibi Tiridaten constituit atque ita orditur: 'hunc ego eodem mecum patre genitum, cum mihi per aetatem summo nomine concessisset, in possessionem Armeniae deduxi, qui tertius potentiae gradus habetur: nam Medos Pacorus ante ceperat, uidebarque contra uetera fratrum odia et certamina familiae nostrae penates rite composuisse. prohibent Romani et pacem numquam ipsis prospere lacessitam nunc quoque in exitium suum abrumpunt. non ibo infitias: aequitate quam sanguine, causa quam armis retinere parta maioribus malueram. si cunctatione deliqui, uirtute corrigam. uestra quidem uis et gloria in integro est, addita modestiae fama, quae neque summis mortalium spernenda est et a dis aestimatur.'

Vologaeses, roused by these arguments, therefore called a council and set Tiridates next to himself and began thus: 'Although this man, born of the same father as myself, had conceded the supreme name to me by reason of age, I escorted him to the possession of Armenia, which is regarded as the third rank in powerfulness (Pacorus had previously taken the Medes); and I seemed, contrary to the old hatreds and competitions of brothers, to have achieved a proper settlement for our family's household gods. But the Romans are preventing it, and the peace, which they have never challenged with advantage to themselves, they are now again severing, to their own extermination. I shall not embark on denial: I should have preferred to retain by fairness rather than by bloodshed, by reason rather than by arms, the acquisitions of our ancestors. If I have failed through hesitation, I shall rectify it through courage. At least your strength and glory remain intact, with the addition of a reputation for modestness which is not to be spurned by the highest of mortals and is valued by the gods.'

(*Ann.* 15.2.1–3; tr. Woodman (2004), very slightly adapted)

It is well recognised nowadays that important connections exist between the foreign and domestic narratives in Tacitus' *Annals*.[1] Over thirty years ago, Elizabeth Keitel highlighted many of the ways in which the Armenian and Parthian episodes in *Annals* 11 and 12 in particular serve to articulate and foreshadow the patterns of dynastic politics at Rome. She remarked that 'None of the other extended eastern narratives in Book 6 or Books 13–15 is as imbued with dynastic intrigue, nor do they foreshadow events at Rome in the same way.'[2] I aim here to explore some early chapters of *Annals* 15 and to suggest some ways in which the presentation of the Parthian king Vologaeses I (who ruled AD 51/2–79/80) enhances the depiction of other characters in Tacitus' work, especially Julio-Claudian emperors, and encourages the reader to look not forwards but back to a number of episodes already treated by Tacitus. Although dynastic intrigue in Parthia and Armenia is indeed not as prominent in the surviving Neronian books of the *Annals* as it is in the extant Claudian narrative, the claims put in Vologaeses' mouth in his speech to his council at *Ann.* 15.2 and Tacitus' description of his actions and motivations at 15.15 both implicitly and explicitly invite comparison with leaders of the past and those of the Julio-Claudian 'present', especially with imperial family members themselves. As such, the episodes allow readers to think back to a range of earlier moments both in Roman and in non-Roman history and provide further opportunities for considering the relationship between Republic and Principate and the nature of Rome under its ruling family. The presentation of Vologaeses' natural hesitation; his manner of addressing his council; the claims he is made to articulate about family, household gods, courage, fairness, and ancestors; his pride and the reputation for modestness he is alleged to seek; his abjuring of spectacle; and his crossing of the river Arsanias all do more than conform to a stereotypical presentation of an eastern king. They also recall the actions of leaders from Xerxes to Nero, and so contribute to Tacitus' evaluation of how times have changed in the world of the principate. The nature of decision-making under that system is another vital element of Tacitus' exploration of imperial power, and his presentation of Vologaeses' council contributes to the development of this theme, standing, I suggest, at the opening of the book partly as one counterpoint to the Claudian 'council' on the choice of a new wife at the beginning of *Annals* 12.

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[1] Discussed in e.g. Walker (1952) 70–71 (Nero and Italicus), Gilmartin (1973), McCulloch (1984) 60 (Tiridates and Abdagaeses with Caligula and Macro), Gowing (1990), and Pelling (1993) 79–81 (Germanicus and Arminius; Tiberius and Maroboduus).

[2] Keitel (1978) 472–3; see also Keitel (1977) 193 for the point, and 239ff. for some parallels in *Annals* 6.

I

Surprisingly little has been written about Vologaeses' speech, , in which he presents Tiridates to the Parthian *concilium* and crowns him king of Armenia. Gilmartin's is the fullest and best discussion of the opening chapters of Book 15, noting the speech as the longest in *oratio recta* in this part of the narrative, and, importantly, one for which Corbulo is given no comparable oration, direct or indirect.[3] She sees the balanced sentence construction, un-Tacitean vocabulary (*aequitas, ire infitias*), and Ciceronian clausulae (which were noted by Koestermann)[4] as a means to Tacitus' end of having Vologaeses justify the Parthians and discredit the Romans. She also isolates the elements of disingenuousness in the presentation, as accords with her exploration of the importance of appearances and deceptive language. Such elements include the declaration of Parthian control over Armenia and Media, the affirmation of excellent brotherly relations, and the 'concluding pious claim to *modestia*'. Her contextualization of the speech in terms of Romano-Parthian rhetoric, of the connection to Vologaeses' other appearances in Tacitus' narrative, both earlier and later,[5] and in particular of our foreknowledge of the outcome, in which Nero rather than Vologaeses will crown Tiridates,[6] is vital for our understanding of the words that Tacitus chooses to put into Vologaeses' mouth.

It is also profitable, however, to consider the speech in terms of the relationship of its presentation of Vologaeses to that of other leaders and to compare it to other speeches by enemies of Rome in Tacitus' works. These have received much more scholarly attention .[7] Calgacus' speech in the *Agri-*

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[3] Gilmartin (1973) 605–6. See Scott (1998) on Tacitus' play with suppressing direct speech in the case of Nero, Laird (1999) 121–52 on *oratio recta* and *obliqua*, with 121–6 on Calgacus' speech, and esp. Rutherford (2010) 315–19 for an interesting discussion of the lack of response to the most important part of the speech of Calgacus in the *Agricola*, with comparisons to Greek tragedy. A little later in the Parthian narrative of *Ann.* 15, Corbulo is given a reply (15.27) to Vologaeses' embassy, and so to Vologaeses' assertions, made by letter, about what the past has shown. Here too, as at *Ann.* 15.14, Vologaeses places much emphasis on the gods, while Corbulo characterises those occasions on which Parthians have been victorious as lessons for the Romans against *superbia*. Gilmartin (1973) 623 notes the sophistry at work in Corbulo's 'fairer' sounding version, with his subtle assertion of many Roman victories as opposed to a few Parthian successes.

[4] Koestermann (1968) *ad loc.*

[5] *Ann.* 12.14, 12.44, 12.50, 13.7–8, esp. 13.34–40, 14.23–26, 15.1–17, 15.24–31.

[6] Suet. *Nero* 13, Dio 63.1–6; the 'golden day' is of course lost from the surviving *Annals*. See Champlin (2003) 221–9 on the episode.

[7] The bibliography is vast. See e.g. Keitel (1993) esp. 51–7 on *Hist.* 4.73–4, Clarke (2001) on Calgacus, Rutherford (2010) on anti-imperialist rhetoric in Tacitus, with fuller bibliography.

cola has been found particularly rich, allowing exploration of the implications of Tacitus' giving to the 'barbarian' Caledonian seemingly more powerful rhetoric than he allowed to his own father-in-law,[8] and of 'typically Roman virtues' being ascribed to such an individual. The idea that Tacitus, in situating such virtues and values 'at the edges of the earth', is making a point as much about the absence from Domitianic Rome itself of *uirtus* and other qualities associated with Romans of old as about its presence in a worthy opponent, is very persuasive.[9]

A number of qualities that are also associated with Roman self-presentation or with particular episodes of Roman history, and which are likely to have struck a contemporary reader in this light, are also to be found in the mouth of the Parthian king. Vologaeses is made to allude to his failures through delay or hesitation. The mention of *cunctatio* brings to mind a particular Roman from ages past: Fabius Maximus *Cunctator*. Tacitus lays some emphasis on this point by having Vologaeses himself admit to *cunctatio* in a speech that follows Tacitus' own description of the king as *cunctator ingenio* ('a hesitator by instinct') at 15.1.1, phrasing that itself recalls Fabius all the more clearly, given that Livy called the latter precisely *ingenio cunctator* (30.26.9). Although verbs of hesitation and delay are not uncommon in Tacitus, no other character in the *Annals* is described as *cunctator*. The noun also occurs twice in the *Histories* to describe individuals. One of these, Suetonius Paullinus (called *cunctator natura* at *Hist.* 2.25.2), is set up in the *Annals* as rival (which no doubt he was), both in his deeds and in memorialising those deeds in writing, to Corbulo, whose work was one of Tacitus' sources for this part of *Annals* 15.[10] Corbulo's Roman rival and his Parthian enemy are thus both described in the same way. In both cases one might argue that one effect of the evocation is to draw attention to differences between past and present: just as in the *Histories* Tacitus seems to highlight by the use of the term that 'Paullinus is no Fabius Maximus and these Romans are not fighting Hannibal',[11] so too here Vologaeses' propensity to delay is (and is conceded by the king himself in the speech to have been) a failing: the Romans now stand in the place of the Carthaginians, and the quality that was required to fight Hannibal, to which attention is drawn by the earlier description, is no longer praiseworthy or effective. As so often in Tacitus' work, the reader is reminded of how times and circumstances have changed.

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[8] On this seemingly intractable problem, Rutherford (2010) provides important insights into the historian's ability to see more deeply than any character or shorter-lived actor.

[9] See Clarke (2001) esp. 105–9 for a clear exposition of such an approach.

[10] Corbulo is mentioned as a source explicitly at *Ann.* 15.16.1.

[11] Ash (2007) *ad loc*. The other instance is Tampius Flavianus (*Hist.* 3.4.1).

That this was the case in Rome as well as in Parthia is suggested by other elements of the very same speech. Given the reader's sense of the Parthian court and its internal divisions (and of the ways in which in earlier books of the *Annals* such divisions have foreshadowed rifts and rivalries in the Roman ruling family)[12], Vologaeses' assertions about his brothers in the speech are striking. He claims to have placed Tiridates on the Armenian throne *contra uetera fratrum odia et certamina* ('contrary to the old hatreds and competitions of brothers'),[13] and—with Pacorus ruling over the Medes—that he seemed *familiae nostrae penates rite composuisse* ('to have achieved a proper settlement for our family's household gods'). He further stresses his preference for *aequitas* over bloodshed[14] and refers to his ancestors (*maiores*). He sets his past failures through *cunctatio* in opposition to his intent now to act *uirtute* ('through courage').[15] All of these elements together could suggest 'Rome' in a number of ways to a contemporary reader, not only in the forced nature of the claims presented by both sides in this dispute, but also in reference to the specific assertions made concerning piety with respect to family (brothers) and gods (*penates*)[16], *uirtus*, and *maiores*.

One implicit point of reference in the speech seems therefore to be (perceptions of) 'Romans': as well as being reminded of earlier Roman history through Fabius, the reader is further invited to consider whether certain other qualities are now more plausibly to be found among the Parthians, in the light of the collapse of morals depicted at Rome in the Neronian books. Given the specious nature of the rhetoric on both sides, the answer is perhaps unlikely to be 'yes' as regards Parthians, but that does not detract from

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[12] Keitel (1978).

[13] This evokes not only the many examples of internecine strife in Arsacid history, some of which Tacitus has conveyed to his readers earlier in the *Annals*, but Sallust's presentation of Numidian brothers in the *Bellum Jugurthinum* and the interrelationship of their actions with Roman ways, culminating in a struggle against Rome herself. It may also make the reader pause to consider the contrast between Germanicus and Drusus, or even Tiberius and Nero Drusus, and the state of the Neronian court, on which see further below (pp. 213–4)—not to mention the *ur*-myth of Romulus and Remus or the fratricidal struggles of Attic tragedy.

[14] In Livy 3.53–4 the Roman people are addressed in *contio* after their secession to the Aventine, in a passage where their *modestia*, preference for *aequitas* over arms, and commands to return to their *penates* also occur. On *aequitas* in Livy, see Moore (1988) 55–6. Active intertextuality with Livy here seems attractive.

[15] Gilmartin (1973) 595 and esp. Ash (2006) treat the intertext with Corbulo's claims to (Lucullan) *uirtus*.

[16] Strikingly, this is one of only two occasions in the *Annals* when the *penates* in question are not Roman. The other instance is *Ann.* 11.16.

the force of the posing of the question about Neronian Rome.[17] Past Roman actions appear in a positive light in comparison to Vologaeses', but another, negative frame is the contemporary Roman one, that of Nero's principate. This is especially clear when *Ann.* 15.1–2 is considered in its immediate context. Nero in the early part of *Annals* 13 (6–8) had clearly shared with Vologaeses at the opening of *Annals* 15 the need to deal with a pretender to the Armenian throne without losing face. He had received praise for appointing Corbulo to the command, although the Parthian threat to Armenia had at that point been delayed, because Vologaeses was diverted by the need to deal with his son Vardanes (who in rising against his father was presenting a distinct lack of the family piety to which Vologaeses lays claim at 15.2). After Book 14, however, the situation is very different. In its immediate context, the presentation of Vologaeses at *Ann.* 15.1–2 follows very shortly after the account of the fall of Octavia (*Ann.* 14.60–4), which is located near the end of a book that principally featured the fall of Nero's mother Agrippina (*Ann.* 14.1–13) and its consequences. The year is AD 62, which is generally agreed to be Tacitus' clearest 'turning point' for Nero's reign. Nero's adoptive brother Britannicus had by then been dead for seven years, but Vologaeses' claims of piety towards his brothers, made to a Parthian *concilium*, are found in their immediate context just after descriptions of a Roman court where only one child of Claudius, and an adopted child at that, could be tolerated—for Octavia's fall saw the end not only of Nero's wife but also of Claudius' daughter. The Parthian king is therefore juxtaposed in the text with a Nero who has dispatched brother,[18] mother, and now sister. Vologaeses' claim to family piety may itself be unjustified, but at this precise point in the text, it sets the king up as a plausible foil for, or even as superior to, Nero.

Other vocabulary in the speech invites the reader to make further comparisons with earlier *principes* and their rule, extending the dramatic 'present' from Nero's time in power to the whole of the earlier part of the *Annals* and the early years of the principate. Questions central to Tacitus' work concerning the nature of that system and the effect of one-man rule on both ruled and ruler are raised by the attribution to the Parthian king of certain qualities and forms of behaviour that were claimed by, or ascribed to, earlier

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[17] Clark (2007), esp. ch. 3, analyses such claims and counter-claims to particular qualities as active constituents of their association with particular people or peoples.

[18] The account of Britannicus' murder is placed shortly after that of the postponement of hostilities with the Parthians early in Nero's reign, at *Ann.* 13.15–7. It was itself foreshadowed at *Ann.* 12.2–3, where the mention of the dangers of a stepmother to Britannicus, and the emphasis on Nero, in the arguments in favour of Agrippina strike an ominous note.

emperors. Vologaeses' formulation when claiming that the Romans had never challenged the peace to their own advantage (15.2.2: *pacem numquam ipsis prospere lacessitam*), for example, recalls, in the choice of participle, Tacitus' explanation of the ostensible limitations on his own material caused by Tiberius' time in power: *immota quippe aut modice lacessita pax* (*Ann.* 4.32.2: 'peace was immovable or only modestly challenged'). These are the only two occasions in Tacitus' surviving works in which *pax* is described as *lacessita*.[19] In the earlier passage, Tacitus compares past and present: the many wars available for historiographers of the Republic to treat and the lack of such wars and of challenges to *pax* under Tiberius. By putting the same term in the Parthian king's mouth in *Ann.* 15.2, and by having him speciously smooth out past and present in claiming that the Roman attempt to challenge the peace had been a failure in the past and was proving so once again, Tacitus reminds the reader of, and further contributes to, the ongoing comparison of past and present throughout his work.

Tiberius himself is recalled in other ways. Tacitus describes Vologaeses as *ambiguus* ('wavering', 'uncertain', or 'in two minds'). This is a common word in Tacitus, but when used directly to describe an individual it is an adjective that he had used by the time he reached *Annals* 15[20] only once each of five people (Civilis, Rhescuporis, Arminius, Agrippina the Younger, and, again, Suetonius Paullinus),[21] and four times to describe one person: Tiberius.[22] The way in which, and the extent to which, Vologaeses is influenced in his decision-making makes this chapter a point of comparison for many of the decision-making processes in the principate in which Tacitus is so interested. We shall examine one of these in more detail later.[23] Vologaeses also claims a *modestiae fama* ('reputation for modestness') for the Parthian *concilium*.[24] The idea recurs a few chapters later, when the king himself is de-

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[19] I am grateful to Chris Pelling for alerting me to this point.

[20] Or at least, so as to avoid the thorny problem of the order in which Tacitus wrote the *Annals*, a word that a reader who had previously read the *Histories* had encountered this number of times on reaching *Annals* 15.

[21] *Hist.* 4.21.1, 2.67.1, 2.88.2, 14.4.4 and 14.33.1 (with n. 11 above).

[22] Three of the descriptions of Tiberius concern indecision (*Ann.* 1.7.3, 2.40.1, 6.1.1). The fourth, retrospective assessment, uses the word in a different sense, of active deployment of ambiguity when speaking (*Ann.* 13.3.2). The occasions on which the word is used to describe an individual in the *Annals* fall for the most part in the Tiberian hexad and/or concern Tiberius: *Ann.* 1.7.3, 2.40.1, 2.67.1, 2.88.2, 3.15.1, 6.1.1, 6.21.2, 13.3.2.

[23] See below, pp. 221–6.

[24] In Livy the word is usually used of self-restraint on the part of the ruled, while *moderatio* refers to that quality on the part of rulers (see e.g. Moore (1989) 75), but notable examples of *modestia* occur in the *Annals* with reference to Tiberius (esp. *Ann.* 1.11.1; also 3.12.7, 3.56.1, 5.2.1, and 4.38.4, in which Tiberius' spurning of cult is interpreted by some

scribed as seeking a *fama moderationis … postquam superbiam expleuerat* ('a repu-
tation for moderation, now that his haughtiness had had its fill'; *Ann.* 15.15.3)
in circumstances to be examined in more detail shortly.[25] The notion of
haughtiness and of a questionable reputation for moderation again recalls
Tiberius. *Moderatio* and *superbia* are used of a number of individuals in Taci-
tus, but the combination of the two is telling.[26] Tacitus notably undercuts the
fama moderationis that Tiberius had won for clamping down on accusers by
juxtaposing it with the emperor's request to the senate for *tribunicia potestas*
for Drusus (*Ann.* 3.56.1), while Tiberius' Claudian *superbia* forms the essential
part of his first description in the *Annals* (1.4.3). Tacitus' decision to describe
Vologaeses in this fashion presents the king in terms evocative both of the
rhetoric used in the current hostilities[27] and of the second emperor of Rome.

The chapter in which Vologaeses is described in these terms, which may
well, like much of this narrative, be underpinned by Corbulo's memoirs,[28]
shows a defeated Caesennius Paetus (the legate of Cappadocia, who had ad-

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as *modestia*. This last is another passage in which there are more direct links with *Ann.*
15.2.3, since Vologaeses claims that a *modestiae fama … neque summis mortalium spernenda est et
a dis aestimatur*. See Pelling (2010) on the implications of the Tiberian passage. The vast
majority of uses of the noun occur in the Tiberian hexad (22 examples, as opposed to
only three in the Claudian books and four, including this claim by Vologaeses, in the
Neronian). See also n. 14 above.

[25] See below, pp. 217–21.

[26] For *modestia* see n. 23 above. *Moderatio*: Augustus (*Ann.* 4.34.5), M. Lepidus (6.27.4),
Caractacus (12.37.1), Felix (12.54.1), Titus (*Hist.* 2.2.1); Valens (2.29.3), the mob (2.37.2),
meliores (2.53.2), Helvidius Priscus (4.6.2), Vespasian (4.42.6). The quality is prominent
when used of Tiberius (*Ann.* 1.8.5, 2.36.2, 3.50.2, 3.56.1) and in the account of Nero's rule
(*Ann.* 14.49.2, 14.53.2, 14.56.2). On the importance of *moderatio* in contemporary presenta-
tions of Tiberius see Martin (1990) 1501–2; Cowan (2009) 480–3. *Superbia*: Tiberius (*Ann.*
1.4.3, 1.72.4, 4.17.2, 6.13.2), Arminius (*Ann.* 1.61.4), Piso (2.57.1), Germanicus (2.78.1), Se-
janus (4.1.3, 4.68.3), Artabanus (6.31.1), Italicus (11.17.3), Messalina (11.37.1), Vannius
(12.29.1), Pallas (13.23.2), Nero (13.46.2), Agrippina (14.1.2), the Parthians (14.26.2), provin-
cials (15.20.4), Vologaeses (*Ann.* 15.15.3, 15.31), Caecina (*Hist.* 2.20.1), Vitellius (2.73.1), An-
tonius Primus (3.49.1) and Vespasian (3.66.2). Ginsburg (2006) 129 n. 94 discusses those
associated with *superbia*; Keitel (1977) ch. 4 discusses Tiberius (and Claudius' wives) and
superbia.

[27] It is an important term in the Parthian narrative: see e.g. *Ann.* 14.26.2, where it is as-
cribed to the Parthians in the alleged view of most Armenians, who are said to prefer a
king chosen by Romans; also *Ann.* 15.27.2 where Corbulo passes off Parthian successes as
a lesson against *superbia* for Romans, and *Ann.* 15.31 in a telling authorial comment on
Vologaeses.

[28] Koestermann (1968) 164 suggests that Corbulo's memoirs cannot underlie the pres-
entation of Vologaeses in the speech at *Ann.* 15.2, or at least must be supplemented by
another source, noting that Dio's depiction at 62.21.3 shows Vologaeses as a very moder-
ate and disciplined victor.

vanced into Armenia on Nero's orders but who had had to capitulate to the Parthians) building a bridge over the River Arsanias, ostensibly for his own use, but in fact at Parthian behest. Tacitus then reports a rumour that the Roman legions were sent beneath the yoke and humiliated by the Armenians in various ways that involved the latter re-appropriating (unspecified) historical events. On the other hand:

> Vologaeses armis et corporibus caesorum aggeratis, quo cladem nostram testaretur, uisu fugientium legionum abstinuit: <u>fama moderationis quaerebatur, postquam superbiam expleuerat</u>. flumen Arsaniam elephanto insidens, proximus quisque regem ui equorum perrupere, quia rumor incesserat pontem cessurum oneri dolo fabricantium; sed qui ingredi ausi sunt, ualidum et fidum intellexere. (*Ann.* 15.15.3)

> Vologaeses, with the arms and bodies of the slaughtered piled up to testify to our disaster, refrained from viewing the fleeing legions: he was seeking a reputation for moderation, now that his haughtiness had had its fill. Sitting on an elephant, he charged across the River Arsanias, as did the king's entourage on a team of straining horses, because a rumour had circulated that the bridge would yield under their weight owing to the guile of its manufacturers; but those who dared to go onto it ascertained its sturdiness and reliability.[29]

Koestermann labels 'unfair' (*unbillig*) Tacitus' claim that Vologaeses refrained from viewing the fleeing Roman legions because he was seeking *fama moderationis … postquam superbiam expleuerat*. Gilmartin more satisfyingly considers the chapter within the perspective of the workings of '*fama, species* and related ideas', declaring it 'a graphic illustration of the use of appearance, not a mere descriptive interlude'.[30] We have already noted how the two qualities encourage the reader to think back to Tiberius' style of rule. The episode itself also evokes both earlier and later moments in Roman history.

The rumour that the Roman troops were sent under the yoke recalls again the Roman humiliation at the Caudine Forks (Livy 9.1–6), which has just been mentioned at 15.13.2 together with the defeat at Numantia,[31] and perhaps also the humiliation of 107 BC in which the consul L. Cassius was killed and his defeated army forced under the yoke, which is presented by

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[29] Tr. Woodman (2004).

[30] Koestermann (1968) 189; Gilmartin (1973) 616–17.

[31] Cf. *Ann.* 3.33.4, in which Caecina is made to refer explicitly to the *lex Oppia*, for which Livy's version of Cato's speech is Tacitus' model; see Woodman and Martin (1996) *ad loc.*

Caesar as influencing his own decision-making, in the first book of his Gallic War commentary (*B.G.* 1.7).[32] The reference to the appropriation of episodes from history is interesting in a number of ways, building upon other, more implicit allusions, such as that to Fabius Maximus in the opening part of the book. It encourages the reader to be particularly alert to other such episodes in what follows, namely the building of the bridge and crossing of the river. It would be pointless to try to establish 'what really happened' here, and it is very difficult to try to isolate the claims lying behind the various elements of this chapter, but if we keep as our focus a Tacitus who, while using Corbulo and perhaps others, was more firmly in control of his material than some have allowed him to be in Book 15,[33] what we see is a king crossing a river with a certain amount of display, riding on an elephant and followed by an entourage on horseback; a king allegedly crossing in this manner in order to prove a point, and crossing *alongside* a bridge of Roman construction. Possible points of comparison include Xerxes, Hannibal and, I shall argue, Tacitus' own Gaius.

Xerxes' crossing of the Hellespont in Herodotus is clearly more spectacular, centred on conquering nature (especially Hdt. 7.33–7), but there are similar concerns, both in this episode (7.53ff., 8.108–10) and in Artabanus' evocation of Darius' earlier fears of the Ionians dismantling his bridge over the Ister (7.10), with the construction and potential destruction of a bridge. Vologaeses' riding on an elephant may recall Hannibal's crossing of the Rhone with many such animals (Polyb. 3.44; Livy 21.28), especially for readers primed by earlier allusions to Fabius and Livy and to other, more humiliating episodes of Republican history. As with the resonance of *cunctatio* discussed above, however, Vologaeses' present action is rendered feebler by the implicit contrast with such predecessors: just as he was 'no Fabius' in his delaying, so too he is no Hannibal (and no Xerxes), despite riding one elephant across the river. I have argued above that both contemporary and older Rome are evoked by Vologaeses' speech at 15.2, so that the implicit comparison of Vologaeses and the Republican past is made richer as readers are also reminded through carefully chosen vocabulary of contemporary rulers. Here too, I suggest, there is a more recent episode, one surely treated

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[32] I owe the latter example to Chris Pelling.

[33] E.g. Syme (1958) I.361 and II, App. 59, although none of his examples of stylistic deficiencies come from this section of the book. Scardigli (2007) discusses incongruities in *Ann.* 15.15, which she imagines go back to an eye-witness account perhaps transmitted to Tacitus through Corbulo's memoirs, but her argument allows too little space for Tacitean creativity. Ash (2006) does not deal specifically with this passage, but is a much more rewarding and subtle reading of Tacitus' engagement with Corbulo's memoirs, envisaging him taking over what is likely to have been Corbulo's presentation of himself as Lucullus' successor, 'with more subversive touches' (374).

by Tacitus in the lost part of the *Annals*, which could also have been brought to mind. Contemporary readers who had access to the Gaian books might also have recalled that emperor riding across a bridge of boats to Puteoli. If so, in the crossing of 15.15 we have another example that encourages readers to look both further back in time and less far back in the work itself. As another very pale echo of Xerxes, Vologaeses' crossing here sets up another three-way comparison, and reinforces the prevailing sense that times have changed both in Rome itself and among Rome's traditional enemies.

Such a connection is technically impossible to prove without the relevant book of the *Annals*, but certain features of the extant versions of the episode in Suetonius and in Dio are suggestive.[34] Four elements of Suetonius' version are worthy of note: firstly, that Gaius rode across the bay on the first day on a horse and on the second in a chariot and had in front of him on the second day a boy called Darius, who was one of the Parthian hostages; secondly, that Gaius was attended by his praetorian guard and a cohort of friends in chariots; thirdly, that many supposed that Gaius was seeking in this act to rival Xerxes; and fourthly, that according to a version known to Suetonius' father, the whole episode was carried out because the astrologer Thrasyllus had told Tiberius that Gaius had no more chance of becoming emperor than of riding across the gulf of Baiae on horseback. Dio's version is much more detailed, perhaps presenting the episode as a parody of a military expedition followed by a triumph. Although he does not mention the explanation attributed by Suetonius to his father, he both refers to the Arsacid hostage, Darius, who in Dio's version was among those *following* Gaius' chariot, and has Gaius claim to have outdone both Xerxes and Darius in bridging expanses of sea. Dio also describes Gaius as 'keen to drive [his chariot] through the sea, as it were' (59.17.1), and even has Gaius in a speech to troops praise them for crossing the sea on foot (59.17.7).

Much is at stake in these much-discussed descriptions, which can profitably be viewed in terms of military expeditions, triumphs, and indeed Nero's celebrations (including his reception of Tiridates in Rome, when Vo-

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[34] Suet. *Cal.* 19 and 32; Dio 59.17; Jos. *AJ* 19.5; Sen. *Brev.* 18. On the relationship between the three principal surviving versions of Nero's reign, see Griffin (1984), esp. ch. 3, and Champlin (2003) ch. 2. Whatever the source or sources that Tacitus is shaping here, the episode of Gaius' crossing is usually accepted to have taken place in 39 (so Dio 59.17, although Sen. *Brev.* 18.5 places it at the end of the reign, and Barrett (1989) 211–12 is not convinced of the date). Interestingly, this is the year in which Corbulo was co-consul with Gaius. The allusion, if plausible, is more likely to have been Tacitus' own, but it is worth noting that Corbulo, who was also Gaius' brother-in-law, must have known of the episode, and this makes it 'poetically' an even more appropriate allusion in Tacitus' narrative.

logaeses' brother was crowned king of Armenia by the Roman emperor),[35] but for the purposes of the argument here only certain features need be addressed. I am not interested in trying to divine a plausible logic for Gaius' actions, but rather in the many and varied ancient justifications apparently given for the tale. In different stories told in the accounts of both Suetonius and Dio, Gaius crosses the water in spectacular fashion in order to prove a point about his rule. In each account there are suggestions of Gaius drawing explicit links with the Achaemenids and their 'descendants' the Arsacids,[36] with representatives of each being outdone or 'conquered' by him. This is best encapsulated by the child (Darius), who is said to have been taken from among the Parthian hostages at Rome, and is thus an Arsacid with the name of a famous Achaemenid.[37]

Vologaeses at 15.15 is certainly not seeking to outdo Xerxes as Gaius had (hypothetically) claimed to. His crossing is much less spectacular and happens in only one direction. His purpose is much more pragmatic, his choice of method (if the worry about the bridge is credible) perhaps more prudent. His crossing seated upon an elephant and followed by attendants on horseback is nonetheless remarked by Tacitus, while the failure to use the bridge that was built to prove Parthian victory is itself a visible form of power-play, for Vologaeses is ignoring an edifice that he had forced the enemy to construct for him (whatever the rumoured reason for his avoiding it).

Vologaeses is said deliberately not to make himself a spectator of the Roman legions' flight. This contrasts with Nero's hunger for spectacles, which comes across so clearly in the Neronian books of the *Annals* (and notably perhaps in the lost account of Tiridates' procession to Rome to receive the crown from Nero),[38] and which was no doubt a prominent element of the Gaian books as well. Vologaeses crosses the water without using an available, Roman-built bridge. This is reminiscent of the terms used by Dio

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[35] See e.g. Kleijwegt (1994), emphasising the establishment of a relationship with soldiers by Gaius, and Malloch (2001) on the issue of imitation of Alexander, with further bibliography to which should now be added the warnings of Kelly (2010), and Allen (2006) 122 about Suetonius' account of the treatment of the Parthian hostage.

[36] Fowler (2005) esp. 129ff. problematises the extent to which images of Achaemenid Persia shaped Arsacid ideology beyond its depiction in Greco-Roman literary accounts.

[37] Kleijwegt (1994) 659 suggests that this too could be part of the imitation or outdoing of Alexander, given Caligula's pleasure in punning names: he could have been capturing 'Darius' alive, a feat which Alexander had not achieved.

[38] Tiridates' procession and reception: n. 6 above. See esp. Champlin (2003) for a stimulating reading of Neronian spectacle in general, and on spectacle in earlier Roman historiography, e.g. Feldherr (1998).

to describe Gaius' crossing.[39] Once again, reflections of Roman imperial be-haviour are not mirrored in any straightforward fashion, but the distorted reflections that are produced encourage the reader to compare past and present and Roman and non-Roman. Tacitus has alluded to the Armenians appropriating episodes from history, replaying (and reversing) previous encounters. If Tacitus' treatment of the Puteoli episode did indeed intersect with his description of Vologaeses' crossing, both episodes again suggest how pale the present times are in contrast, *domi forisque*, and in Book 15 the reader could reflect on this through the direct mention of Armenian actions and through the possible connections to Gaius' (and Nero's) behaviour.

II

We have seen that various elements in the opening chapters of Book 15 send the reader back both to episodes of Republican and earlier history and within Tacitus' own exploration of the early principate. One other passage and *princeps* may be evoked, both in a similar way and by the placement of the council and of Vologaeses' decisions about Tiridates at the beginning of the book. Sage and others have suggested that the opening of Book 15 is it-self 'something of an anomaly'.[40] The opening chapters, in which the Par-thian narrative is reprised, with Vologaeses learning of Corbulo's actions and calling the council to which he announces his intentions in the speech discussed above, were in fact, I contend, more carefully placed. Given the number of ways in which other book openings and endings relate to each other,[41] it would be rather surprising if this were not the case. In the light of the arguments made thus far about the relationship between Vologaeses and Julio-Claudian *principes*, one reason for the placement may be suggested. It is worth considering a pair of book openings not often discussed together: *An-*

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[39] It is worth noting that Dio (63.7) claims that Vologaeses refused Nero's later sum-mons to Rome, but offered to meet him in Asia, with the words 'It is far easier for you than for me to cross so great a body of water'. If this goes back to a contemporary source, the question of oneupmanship over water-crossing was clearly in the air (cf. Caligula's claims of outdoing Xerxes and Darius, above).

[40] Sage (1990) 984.

[41] See e.g. Koestermann (1967) 109, who notes a 'gewisse Verwandschaft in Ton und Darstellung' between the witty, ironic opening of 12 and that of Book 16, which opens with a 'skurrilen Suche' for Dido's treasure. There is also a comparison to be made be-tween these two passages in terms of haste of decision-making. Syme (1958) 539 n. 7 also compares the placing of these two scenes, miscited by Sage (1990) 985 ('the end of 12'). Morris (1969) 76 compares *Ann.* 16.1 with *Ann.* 4.1 in terms of analysis of the effects of *for-tuna* on Tiberius and Nero. Keitel (1977) 137 discusses very productively the way *Ann.* 12.1–9 mirrors the end of *Ann.* 11 in 'structure, themes and diction'.

nals 15 and *Annals* 12 and the well-known debate over Claudius' next wife. Both books have been thought to avoid a more obvious starting point.[42] *Annals* 15 is the third book covering Nero and *Annals* 12 may have been the third book covering Claudius. Both openings draw attention to the decision-making processes that so interested Tacitus. *Annals* 12.1 epitomises perceptions of Claudian decision-making and with it many of the concerns shared by Tacitus and others about the dangers of one-man rule. As with Vologaeses' speech, Tacitus can have had no reliable source for the episode. Indeed, one point of the literary construct that is the 'council' of freedmen advising on the next wife is to draw attention to how the nature of decisions on this and on other matters under Claudius was not officially known to traditional advisers and to historians.[43] The highly 'literary' nature of the passage is clear (Tacitus' Claudius has been viewed here as a 'comic Paris' and the passage compared to Juvenal's fourth satire involving a *consilium* over a turbot; he has also been seen as a *senex amator* of Roman comedy, while the political nature of the vocabulary used to describe the 'competition' between women and freedmen has been well noted).[44]

A number of similarities and differences bring this passage to the reader's mind when the opening of Book 15 is reached and Tacitus resumes the Parthian narrative last treated at *Ann.* 14.25–26. Both Claudius and Vo-

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[42] Morris (1969) 73–4, contesting Koestermann's suggestion that *Ann.* 14–16 are a coherent unit, notes that Book 15 'dissipates the ominous force of the narrative and changes subject and scene'. Sage (1990) 984 notes a growing tendency in the Neronian books to open years with reports of foreign operations, but suggests that the 'anomaly' was occasioned by Tacitus' desire to end Book 14 with the death of Octavia. The latter is a plausible suggestion, but in order to accept it we do not need to see the placement of the Parthian narrative as an uncomfortable compromise. Sage (1990) 985 n. 679 unfairly dismisses as a 'desperate expedient' McCulloch's suggestion that the breakdown in logical order of the narrative reflects a similar breakdown in Nero's government. Ginsburg (1977) argued convincingly for the increasing lack of alignment of books and consular years as reflecting the increasing distance of the Principate from Republican government. More convincing is the attention Sage gives to the comparisons to be made between the opening of *Ann.* 15 and 15.18, contrasting the pretensions of the Parthian and Roman courts. Gilmartin (1973), too, rightly compares 15.1 with 15.18 and 15.23–4, observing the similar emphasis on the honour of the community and public appearance, and (604) explains the placement of the material at the beginning of *Ann.* 15 as allowing this aspect to be emphasised. McCulloch (1984) 158, notes that '[h]owever long Book XI may have been, it would have been easy enough for Tacitus to include within it the first four chapters of Book XII, thereby enabling him to open Book XII with a new consular year, AD 49'.

[43] Dio's account at 60.31.8 differs in having the freedmen act in concert to bring about the marriage to Agrippina, as Ginsburg (2006) 22 notes.

[44] Vessey (1971) 401 on 'comic Paris'; Crook (1955) 42 on *Ann.* 12.1; 50–51 on Juvenal *Sat.* 4; Syme (1958) 539 on *Ann.* 12.1 ('in mockery of a cabinet council'); Koestermann *ad loc.*; Dickison (1977) on the *senex amator*. On political vocabulary, see e.g. Ginsburg (2006) 22.

logaeses have an important decision to make,[45] with different considerations pulling them in opposing directions. Both are swayed by arguments presented to them (in Vologaeses' case *before* the council takes place).[46] Vologaeses is in a position to make a decision because he has become aware of Corbulo's moves (*cognitis Corbulonis rebus*), whereas by the beginning of Book 12 Claudius had been clearly established by Tacitus as an emperor unaware in his rule of basic realities.[47] Lack of awareness is a characteristic shared by a number of Tacitean emperors on different occasions, and in the narrative between *Annals* 12 and 15, the theme of shifting power and control as expressed through shifting awareness has been one of the threads guiding the reader's understanding of Nero.[48] As Keitel has shown, it was also one of the traits used by Tacitus to underline resemblances between Claudius and eastern dynasts such as Meherdates and Mithridates, whom Tacitus used to throw the Roman dynastic situation into higher relief.[49] In this respect, Vologaeses presents a clear contrast to Claudius.

Both rulers call a council: Vologaeses *concilium uocat* and Claudius *discordantis in consilium uocat ac promere sententiam et adicere rationes iubet* ('called the disputants to his *consilium* and ordered them each to express his opinion and to adduce reasons').[50] Both councils are off-key and end as a travesty of their

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[45] Other passages might also profitably be compared in explorations of decision-making. In the Neronian books alone, *Ann.* 13 begins with a decision taken and crime committed without the emperor's knowledge; *Ann.* 14 with the culmination of a long-meditated decision, to kill Agrippina; and *Ann.* 16 sees Nero made a fool of by a snap and credulous decision. On Claudius' quick decision at *Ann.* 11.1.3, see Dickison (1977) 643, although this was not of course originally a book opening. Gilmartin (1973) 605 notes another connection concerning decision-making for those in power when she compares Tiridates' assertion of what should be done *in summa fortuna* (*Ann.* 15.1.4) with the analysis of Nero's position at *Ann.* 13.6.4 (*in summa fortuna*).

[46] Gilmartin (1973) 606 contrasts the 'force and order' of Vologaeses' acts in Tacitus' account (*Ann.* 15.2.4) with 'the more complicated composition of the analysis of his problems (1.1)'.

[47] See Santoro l'Hoir (2006) esp. 180ff. on Tacitus' use of vocabulary concerning knowledge and ignorance; also Keitel (1978), on pointed use of e.g. ignarus to draw parallels between Roman and Parthian characters (and see n. 49 below); and Keitel (1977) esp. 115, on the fall of Messalina as portrayed in terms of awareness and ignorance. For Claudius, note *Ann.* 11.2, 11.13, 11.24, 11.25, 11.27 and esp. *Ann.* 11.31.

[48] *Ann.* 13.1.1, cf. Claudius at 11.2; *Ann.* 13.1.3, 13.12.1, 13.16.4. Other emperors include Gaius at *Ann.* 6.48, Galba at *Hist.* 1.29, Vitellius at *Hist.* 2.70, but none of the presentations is as marked as that of Claudius.

[49] Keitel (1978) 468–70 on *Ann.* 11.2, 12.12 and 12.44.

[50] Dickison (1978) 643 notes the chiastic word order and repetition of *modo* as 'rather unusual' and as emphasising Claudius' total indecision. See also Koestermann (1967) *ad loc.* and Keitel (1977) 141. On the Parthian *concilium* see Koestermann (1968) 163.

ostensible aim: Vologaeses announces his decision to the Parthian assembly rather than consulting them, as he should, while Claudius is too easily persuaded at a meeting that he has supposedly brought about in order to overcome his own vacillation. Claudius is pointedly presented in *Ann.* 12.1 as swayed by the advice he has most recently heard: *huc modo, modo illuc, ut quemque suadentium audierat, promptus* ('leaning sometimes this way, sometimes that, depending on which persuader he had heard last'), but summoning the freedmen actively in order to make his choice (with *uocat* and *iubet* both, unusually for Tacitus' Claudius, active verbs, and *iubet* constituting the final word of *Ann.* 12.1).[51]

Less often remarked is just how swiftly Tacitus subverts this apparently active Claudius, in line with his general presentation of that emperor. He structures the following section (*Ann.* 12.2) so that Narcissus first speaks up for Paetina, then Callistus for Lollia, and finally Pallas (with help from Agrippina herself) for the woman who turns out to be the successful candidate. Claudius' final decision is therefore still—and surely deliberately—presented as the one that he has heard last, even in a *consilium* that he has summoned himself in order to conquer his vacillation.[52] Tacitus' Claudius continues, in other words, to be persuaded in less than statesman-like ways—not only by wiles of a different and probably non-verbal kind, in the shape of his niece Agrippina's own *inlecebris* ('wiles' or 'allurements'; *Ann.* 12.3.1),[53] but also still by the advice of the last person he has heard speak.[54]

Vologaeses' actions again echo those of Xerxes (Hdt. 7.8), who also summoned a council ostensibly to hear views on the Athenian expedition, claiming at the end of his speech that his aim was to avoid the impression of being self-willed, but in fact announcing his intentions before hearing any other opinions.[55] This echo on one level simply adds to the sense of Vologaeses as tyrant, but if we take the Claudian passage again as a further point for comparison, it becomes clear that the contrast between the opening scenes of *Annals* 12 and 15 is more complex than that of famously biddable emperor and stereotypically single-minded Parthian king: Vologaeses too is per-

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[51] Oost (1958) 123. Scott Ryberg (1942) 404 n. 83 discusses Claudius seldom being the subject of action in Tacitus.

[52] Keitel (1977) 141–2 notes the 'telling' order, but her focus is on the force of the respective arguments, rather than the irony. See also Dickison (1978) 643 on the final position of *iussa* in *Ann.* 12.3.

[53] As Koestermann (1967) notes *ad loc.*, Suetonius uses the same word (*Cl.* 26.3).

[54] The emphasis on Nero in the arguments in favour of Agrippina also foreshadows disasters to come, not least to Britannicus, as I have already noted (n. 18).

[55] I am grateful to Chris Pelling for this point.

suaded by the (false) arguments of others,[56] outside the *concilium*, and in both cases some of the persuaders are said to inflame the situation: *nec minore ambitu feminae exarserant* ('no less was the self-aggrandizement with which the ladies <u>burned</u>') in Claudius' case, while Vologaeses' situation is exacerbated by the arguments of Monobazus (*accendebat dolorem eorum Monobazus;* 'their pain was <u>inflamed</u> by the arguments of Monobazus').[57] The dangers of listening to advisors are not limited to the case of Claudius.

Family problems are the key to both situations. Claudius' decision is ostensibly a private one, concerning the choice of wife, but it is swiftly revealed to be one which will have an impact on his wider rule: *uersa ex eo civitas* ('as a result of this the community was overturned').[58] Vologaeses' decision is on the face of it one of state—whether to challenge the Roman placement of Tigranes on the Armenian throne—but it is even more quickly revealed (in the first sentence of the book) also to involve a family member, since Tiridates is his brother. In both cases, private/public is an inappropriate category for describing the situation in the ruling house, and the potential effect on rule of a ruling family is made clear. In Book 12 this is emphasized by the striking opening: *caede Messalinae conuulsa principis domus* ('with the slaughter of Messalina the princeps's household was torn apart'), which is one of three examples singled out by Santoro l'Hoir of Tacitus' vision of the *domus* as a tragic, and more specifically Aeschylean setting, as shown through imagery of the house 'falling or being wrenched apart'.[59] The subject of the opening sentence of Book 15, Vologaeses, is described at 15.2.1 as *commotus* by the arguments of Monobazus and Tiridates. *Commotus* can mean 'moved', 'shaken', 'roused', 'enraged', or 'provoked'.[60] If we compare the opening of *Annals* 12 (*conuulsa principis domus*), *conuulsa* is clearly stronger and more

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[56] The arguments made are plausible but do not stand up to serious scrutiny. Gilmartin (1973) 605 rightly notes that these claims by Monobazus and Tiridates are presented by Tacitus in indirect speech to point up how they, 'like so many imperial proclamations, are only real as words'.

[57] The more obvious comparison for *exardesco* here is *Ann.* 11.12.2 on which see Keitel (1977) 141 and Walker (1952) 65 n. 1, 159, noting fire-related vocabulary as particular to Tacitus' account of Tiberius.

[58] *Ann.* 12.7.3, on which see Ginsburg (2006) 22; also Keitel (1977) 136.

[59] Santoro l'Hoir (2006) 37 on 12.1.1, 4.52.1, and 12.65.2. Examples of this kind of imagery can also be found in other Latin writers, e.g. Cic. *Cael.* 60; *Phil.* 2.45; Pliny too uses *domus … conuulsa* in his discussion of Fannia and her illness (*Ep.* 7.19.8), but in contrast to the other examples does so to describe an exemplary house and an exemplary woman. I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers for drawing my attention to the last passage.

[60] Woodman (2004) chooses in translating *Ann.* 15.2 the more neutral 'convinced by these arguments'.

pointed than *commotus*, conveying as it does here a sense of the (personified) house being torn apart.[61] However, Tacitus has also described the *domus principis* at *Ann.* 4.52.1, using a phrase very similar—and surely deliberately so—to that which opens *Annals* 12, but using the same word (*commotus*) that he here uses to describe Vologaeses: *commota principis domo* ('the princeps' household was shaken', with reference to the beginning of the fall of Agrippina the Elder). This further point in another chain of comparison again shows Tacitus' Vologaeses as more than a straightforward contrast to Claudius. Rather, he is unlike Claudius in ways that make us recall Claudius and his household as described at *Ann.* 12.1, in the light of the earlier description of the vicissitudes of the Julio-Claudian house as a whole. He is neither mirror image nor polar opposite, but is portrayed in a manner that encourages the reader to see in him a refracted version of various prominent Romans. The presentation of Vologaeses as a leader who is torn, alert to different pressures, persuaded by arguments, but who acts publicly as though he is in firm control, thus gains further depth through connections that are created for readers, who are urged to explore with Tacitus what can be learned, or what must rather be imagined, about those who rule. The Parthian court, with its ruler and entourage, provides a lens for viewing the effects of persuasion and of the presentation of information on choices made in the Roman court, of which the Claudian passage stands as one obvious because particularly carefully crafted example.

III

Vologaeses thus appears (among many roles that might be assigned to his presentation here) to encourage the reader to think back both to earlier times from the actions of Herodotus' Xerxes to the Caudine Forks and Fabius 'the Delayer', to the more recent years of the Julio-Claudian principate that are Tacitus' main focus. In the space of a few chapters, he is made to look in interesting ways not only like his Persian antecedents, but both rather like and rather unlike various earlier leaders and Julio-Claudian emperors: Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero. Vologaeses was in the same situation as was Nero at the beginning of his reign in needing to deal with a pretender to the Armenian throne and to save face for his empire, but his claims to piety (however specious, or at least selective, in the context of the broader history of the family) are presented immediately after a book that

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[61] See n. 59 above. McCulloch (1984) 159 notes that four of the five transferred or figurative uses of *conuello* refer to members of the royal house (*Ann.* 4.40, 6.48, 12.1, 12.65), and are thus associated with the fall of a member or members of the imperial family through internal discord.

has focussed largely upon Nero's dispatch of mother and sister/wife. A number of the adjectives and qualities used to describe him evoke Tiberius in particular (especially *ambiguus, superbia,* and *moderatio*). His avoidance of the spectacle of the fleeing legions contrasts *inter alia* with Nero's eventual reception of Tiridates, while the description of his crossing of the river Arsanias may have left readers thinking of differences (and similarities) with Gaius' crossing to Puteoli. His decision-making process at *Ann.* 15.1–2 in particular is an effective and not uncomplicated foil for viewing Tacitus' Claudius. Gilmartin has shown very effectively the ways in which the claims made by both Romans and Parthians in these chapters are set up by Tacitus to illustrate the deceptive nature of rhetoric and appearance in Romano-Parthian relations. Those relations are not only, however, the interactions (in person and by embassy or letter) between the two sides. The interrelations among the presentations of the king and emperors and earlier leaders across the work can also be revealing.

Very different sorts of characters in other works are made to look like Julio-Claudian emperors. Petronius' Trimalchio, for example, was rendered 'imperial' in his ambition through a series of very precise associations with Julio-Claudian emperors, illustrated through his actions and possessions.[62] The associations to which I have tried to draw attention here are much more subtle, and they are also less clearly defined in terms of linguistic echoes than those explored by Keitel and others. The choice of a Parthian king as a mirror for Roman emperors adds to the active process of comparison in which a reader is invited to engage.[63] One of Tacitus' many achievements in this section of the Parthian/Armenian narrative is to encourage a reading of Vologaeses in the light of his depiction of other characters, especially the emperors themselves on whom I have focussed here, and to add further depth to his presentations of them through the Parthian lens.[64] Vologaeses is no specular reflection of any other character, but the distortions in the mirror he provides are what makes his presentation an undervalued element of

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[62] See Walsh (1970) 138–9 for examples such as the wearing of a golden bracelet, owning a slave called Carpus, etc.

[63] Writing of 'others' in histories to illuminate in less than straightforward ways those who are closer to home in geographical or cultural terms, and thereby actively encouraging thoughtful consideration of both, is not of course a practice unique to Tacitus. Fundamental work, on Herodotus in particular, must include Hartog (1988) and Pelling (1997).

[64] Cf. Ogilvie and Richmond (1967) 20 on Tacitus' importing sayings and incidents from Caligula's and Nero's reigns into his account of Domitian 'because that is how tyrants behave'. I see Tacitus as encouraging comparison rather than operating within rigid definitions or understandings of 'types'.

Tacitus' exploration of the early principate and its ruling family, and of the ways in which it differed from the Republican past.

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