**Environmental Determinism and the Rationalization of Imperialism in Tacitus’ Germania**Molly Jones-Lewis, University of Maryland, Baltimore College

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1) Germania omnis a Gallis Raetisque et Pannoniis Rheno et Danuvio fluminibus, a Sarmatis Dacisque mutuo metu aut montibus separatur: cetera Oceanus ambit, latos sinus et insularum inmensa spatia complectens, nuper cognitis quibusdam gentibus ac regibus, quos **bellum** aperuit.

All Germania is separated from the Gauls and Raetians and the Pannonians by the Rhine and Danube rivers, and from the Sarmatians and Dacians by either mutual fear… or mountains: the Ocean encircles the rest, embracing wide bays and immense stretches of islands, [in which] certain peoples and kings, whom **war** has exposed, have been recently discovered. *Germ.* 1

2) γὰρ ἐκ τῶν μαλακῶν χώρων μαλακοὺς γίνεσθαι. Because from soft places, soft men arise. Herodotus 9.121.3

3) καὶ περὶ μὲν τῆς φύσιος τῆς διαφορῆς καὶ τῆς μορφῆς τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ καὶ τῇ Εὐρώπῃ οὕτως ἔχει. περὶ δὲ τῆς ἀθυμίης τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῆς ἀνανδρείης, ὅτι ἀπολεμώτεροί εἰσι τῶν Εὐρωπαίων οἱ Ἀσιηνοὶ καὶ ἡμερώτεροι τὰ ἤθεα αἱ ὧραι αἴτιαι μάλιστα, **οὐ μεγάλας τὰς μεταβολὰς ποιεύμεναι οὔτε ἐπὶ τὸ θερμὸν οὔτε ἐπὶ τὸ ψυχρόν, ἀλλὰ παραπλησίως. οὐ γὰρ γίνονται ἐκπλήξιες τῆς γνώμης οὔτε μετάστασις ἰσχυρὴ τοῦ σώματος, [10] ἀφ᾽ ὅτων εἰκὸς τὴν ὀργὴν ἀγριοῦσθαί τε καὶ τοῦ ἀγνώμονος καὶ θυμοειδέος μετέχειν μᾶλλον ἢ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ αἰεὶ ἐόντα. αἱ γὰρ μεταβολαί εἰσι τῶν πάντων αἱ ἐπεγείρουσαι τὴν γνώμην τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ οὐκ ἐῶσαι ἀτρεμίζειν. διὰ ταύτας ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ τὰς προφάσιας ἄναλκες εἶναι τὸ γένος τὸ Ἀσιηνὸν** καὶ προσέτι διὰ τοὺς νόμους. τῆς γὰρ Ἀσίης τὰ πολλὰ βασιλεύεται. ὅκου δὲ μὴ αὐτοὶ ἑωυτῶν εἰσι καρτεροὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι μηδὲ αὐτόνομοι, ἀλλὰ δεσπόζονται, οὐ περὶ τούτου [20] αὐτοῖσιν ὁ λόγος ἐστίν, ὅκως τὰ πολέμια ἀσκήσωσιν, ἀλλ᾽ ὅκως μὴ δόξωσι μάχιμοι εἶναι. οἱ γὰρ κίνδυνοι οὐχ ὁμοῖοί εἰσι.

That is all I have to say about the differences in nature and shape between the inhabitants of Asia and Europe. There is more to be said about the faint-heartedness and cowardice of Asians. Asians are less warlike than the peoples of our part of the world. The reason is, of course, the climate. **There are no great shifts in the weather, which is neither hot nor cold, but temperate. Therefore, they experience no mental anxiety and no physical shocks. Such shocks enflame the temper and increase recklessness and passion more so than constant sameness. As a result, it seems to me that Asian races are feeble.** Their laws only add to this condition. Asians live mostly under kings. Where men neither rule themselves nor are autonomous, but are subjects to a despot, there is no self-interest in appearing warlike. On the contrary, it benefits them more to seem the opposite since their dangers are not the same as those who self-govern.

Hippocrates *Airs, Waters, Places* 16, trans. R. Kennedy

4) Ipsos Germanos indigenas crediderim minimeque aliarum gentium adventibus et hospitiis mixtos, quia nec terra olim, sed classibus advehebantur qui mutare sedes quaerebant, et inmensus ultra (utque sic dixerim) adversus Oceanus raris ab orbe nostro navibus aditur**. Quis porro, praeter periculum horridi et ignoti maris, Asia aut Africa aut Italia relicta Germaniam peteret, informem terris, asperam caelo, tristem cultu adspectuque, nisi si patria sit?**

I have been given to believe that the Germani themselves are native, and very little mixed with visitors from other peoples and with guest-friends, because long ago it was not that case that those who wished to change their homeland were carried by land, but rather by sea, and moreover (as I have already said) the vast ocean is approached by only the occasional ships from our sphere. **Who, moreover, setting aside the peril of a terrible and unknown sea, after leaving Asia or Africa or Italy behind, would head for Germania, a place shapeless in its lands, harsh in its weather, and gloomy in its cultivation and appearance, unless it were his fatherland?** *Germ.* 2

5) Celebrant carminibus antiquis, quod unum apud illos memoriae et annalium genus est, Tuistonem deum terra editum. Ei filium Mannum, originem gentis conditoremque…

They proudly claim in ancient songs, which are the one form of memory and annals among them, that their god Tuisto was born from the earth. He had a son named Mannus, the origin of the people and its founder …

6) Fuisse apud eos et Herculem memorant, primumque omnium virorum fortium ituri in proelia canunt. …Ceterum et Ulixen quidam opinantur longo illo et fabuloso errore in hunc Oceanum delatum adisse Germaniae terras, Asciburgiumque, quod in ripa Rheni situm hodieque incolitur, ab illo constitutum nominatumque…. **Quae neque confirmare argumentis neque refellere in animo est: ex ingenio suo quisque demat vel addat fidem.**

They recall that even Hercules was among them, and they sing about him first of all brave men when about to go into battles. … But even one Ulysses is believed to have been carried in that long and fabled wandering into this Ocean, and to have approached the lands of Germania, and Asciburgium, which is located on the bank of the Rhine and still inhabited today, was founded and named “” by him. … **Which I intend neither to back up with arguments nor to refute: let each person either take or add credibility according to their own personality.** *Germ.* 3

7) Ipse eorum opinionibus accedo, qui Germaniae populos nullis aliis aliarum nationum conubiis infectos propriam et sinceram et tantum **sui similem** gentem exstitisse arbitrantur. Unde habitus quoque corporum, tamquam in tanto hominum numero, idem omnibus: truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae, magna corpora et tantum ad impetum valida: laboris atque operum non eadem patientia, minimeque sitim aestumque tolerare, frigora atque inediam caelo solove adsueverunt.

I myself yield to the opinons of those who believe that the peoples of Germania, because they have been undone by no other marriages of other nations, have stood out as a special people, both without admixture and so very similar to itself. From that cause the appearance of their bodies, as much as can be the case in such a [large] number of people, is the same for all of them: piercing and sky-blue eyes, gingery hair, bodies that are big and only strong for spurts of effort: there is not the same endurance of labor or toil, and they have become least accustomed to tolerate thirst and heat, [but instead] cold and hunder due to their weather and soil. *Germ.* 4

8) Terra etsi aliquanto specie differt, in universum tamen aut silvis horrida aut paludibus foeda …; satis ferax, frugiferarum arborum inpatiens, pecorum fecunda, sed plerumque improcera. Ne armentis quidem suus honor aut gloria frontis: numero gaudent, eaeque solae et gratissimae opes sunt. Argentum et aurum propitiine an irati di negaverint dubito. **Nec tamen adfirmaverim nullam Germaniae venam argentum aurumve gignere: quis enim scrutatus est? Possessione et usu haud perinde adficiuntur. Est videre apud illos argentea vasa, legatis et principibus eorum muneri data, non in alia vilitate quam quae humo finguntur**.

Although the land differs a bit in its character, nevertheless the whole of it is either bristling with forests or grimy with swamps; sufficiently productive of grain, intolerant of fruit-bearing trees, productive for flocks, but for the most part [those flocks are] stunted. Not even the cattle herds have their own particular honor or glory of the brow: they rejoice in the number [of cattle], and that is their only and most valued wealth. **I hesitate to say whether generous or angry gods have denied them silver and gold. Nor can I even confirm that no part of Germany has given rise to a vein of silver or gold: for who has even looked? For that reasons there is barely affixed any value to its possession or use. It is possible to see silver vases among them, given to their ambassadors and leaders as gifts, not held in any different value [lit. cheapness] as those which are sculpted from earth.** *Germ*. 5

9) Faenus agitare et in usuras extendere ignotum; ideoque magis servatur quam si vetitum esset.

To scheme after profit and extend it into collecting interest is unknown [to the Germani]; for that reason, it is more absent than if it were forbidden. *Germ.* 26

10) … Sua quemque mater uberibus alit, nec ancillis ac nutricibus delegantur. Dominum ac servum nullis educationis deliciis dignoscas: inter eadem pecora, in eadem humo degunt, donec aetas separet ingenuos, virtus adgnoscat. Sera iuvenum venus, eoque inexhausta pubertas. Nec virgines festinantur; eadem iuventa, similis proceritas: pares validaeque miscentur, ac robora parentum liberi referunt. … Heredes tamen successoresque sui cuique liberi, et nullum testamentum. Si liberi non sunt, proximus gradus in possessione fratres, patrui, avunculi. Quanto plus propinquorum, quanto maior adfinium numerus, tanto gratiosior senectus; nec ulla orbitatis pretia.

… Each mother feeds her own child with her breasts, nor is the task delegated to female slaves and wet-nurses. You could discern master and slave by no delights of education: they lead their lives among the same herds, in the same earth, until age separates out the freeborn, and *virtus* marks them. Sexual activity among the youth is late, and for that reason their puberty is not drained. Nor do they hurry virgins along [into marriage]; the same [span of] youth, similar offspring: equal and healthy they are mated, and the children inherit the strength of their parents. … Nevertheless, their own children are heirs and successors to each of them, and there is no will. If there are not children, then next step in inheritance is brothers, paternal uncles, maternal uncles. By however many more there are of relatives, by that much more is the number of in-laws, and by that much more is old age more pleasant; nor is there an advantage to childlessness. *Germ.* 20

11) Potui umor ex hordeo aut frumento, in quandam similitudinem vini corruptus: proximi ripae et vinum mercantur. Cibi simplices, agrestia poma, recens fera aut lac concretum: sine apparatu, sine blandimentis expellunt famem. **Adversus sitim non eadem temperantia. Si indulseris ebrietati suggerendo quantum concupiscunt, haud minus facile vitiis quam armis vincentur.**

For drink, they have a liquid derived from barley or grain, spoiled into a certain semblance of wine: the river-banks nearest to us purchase wine. Their foods are simple, rustic fruits, fresh wild game or cultured milk: without fuss, without frills they banish hunger. **Against thirst there is not the same restraint. If you were to indulge them by enabling their drunkenness as much as they desire, they would be scarcely less easily conquered by vices as by arms**. *Germ.* 23

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