

Tacitus' *Philippics*: Tiberius, Augustan Precedent, and Literary Memory

Throughout the *Annales*, Tacitus' Tiberius repeatedly insists on adherence to precedents set by his predecessor Augustus. That the historical Tiberius' stance of unquestioning compliance with Augustan precedent was illusory, and that Tiberius construed liberally and even created out of whole cloth "Augustan precedent" according to his own expediencies is a view that scholars (Martin 1955, Ober 1982) have expounded and find corroborated by comparison to other historians' accounts of the Tiberian succession and principate. Cowan 2009 further argues that Tacitus as an author was alive to this possibility and makes that interpretation available to the reader in his depiction of his Tiberius' grappling with Augustan example.

In the same vein, this paper approaches Tacitus' Tiberius and his ongoing process of definition of his relationship to Augustan precedent as being as much, if not more, a literary creation as it is an historical inquiry. I argue that Tacitus activates an allusion to Cicero's *Second Philippic*, by which Tacitus can insinuate by comparison of Tiberius to Cicero's Antony what he cannot state openly about Tiberius' policy towards his predecessor. Furthermore, by aligning himself with the Cicero of the *Second Philippic*, Tacitus is able to assert his own power as a historian to manipulate, manufacture, and propagate literary memory.

The Tiberian succession shares some situational parallels with Antony's stint in power after Caesar's assassination: unclear succession protocol, and a lack of clarity as to what of the predecessor's acts constituted binding precedent. I argue that Tacitus is deliberately activating resonances with the *Second Philippic* by adopting an approach to Tiberius that is very similar to that of Cicero against Antony. In his diatribe against Antony in the *Second Philippic*, Cicero accuses Antony of counterfeiting *acta*, which he then attributed to Caesar. It is particularly in scrutiny of Antony's language that Cicero finds symptoms of Antony's moral failings and

evidence of Antony's manufacturing of "Caesar's" *acta*. Tacitus, too, uses Tiberius' speech as diagnostic of Tiberius' defective personality. Furthermore, it is in his speeches, specifically 4.37-8, that Tacitus' Tiberius subtly reveals his loose construction of what of Augustus' *facta* Tiberius considers to be binding precedent. In this section of the narrative, I argue, Tacitus especially alludes to the *Second Philippic* in order to show his Tiberius at his most Antonian, and in order to hint at Tiberius' selectively flexible stance towards and possible misrepresentation or manipulation of Augustus' precedent.

If Tacitus assimilates Tiberius to Cicero's Antony, then the role of Cicero falls to Tacitus. Based on the language he uses in the Tiberian books and the thematic content of the narrative surrounding 4.37-8, in the second half of my paper, I argue that Tacitus deliberately casts himself as such. N. P. Miller's (1964; 1968) exhaustive work on the unique nature of Tiberius' speech in the *Annales* and, in particular, her examination of the concentration of Ciceronian style, usage, and vocabulary in Books 1-6 have shown that Tiberius in particular employs Ciceronian language. I take Miller's evidence further, and argue that it is not merely Tiberius who uses Ciceronian language, but Tacitus the narrator employs Ciceronian language when referring to Tiberius—which suggests all the more that Tacitus is casting himself as Cicero to his Tiberius' Antony.

Additionally, in the passages surrounding 4.37-8, Tacitus also suggests that his project as a historian is akin to Cicero's project in the *Second Philippic*. Tiberius in 4.37-8 seems unusually concerned with non-material forms of commemoration over physical monument (Pelling 2010)—in short, with exactly the kind of literary memory, *fama*, that Tacitus as historian creates and promulgates, and that Cicero, in his *Second Philippic*, upbraids Antony for neglecting. Cicero particularly revels in Antony's neglect for his own *fama*, since it gives Cicero the

opportunity to fashion Antony's *fama* as a historian might, and, as Tacitus asserts in his assimilation of Tiberius to Antony, as a historian can.

Works Cited

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