

Extortion, Narrative, and Annalistic Style in Tacitus' *Annales* 14

Tacitus' annalistic structure has received increased attention since Ginsburg's work on *Annales* 1-6. (Ginsberg, 1981) While this has led to a wider reconsideration of the annalistic structure of Tacitus' Tiberian books (Gingras, 1992; Griffin, 2009) and Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (Kraus, 1994; Rich, 2011), Tacitus' Neronian books have received little attention in this regard. This paper investigates annalistic style in *Annales* 14 by analyzing a sequence of senatorial trials for *repetundarum* (extortion) clustered as type scenes at the end of annalistic years. By closely evaluating the court cases of the Cyreneans, the Mauritians, and the Bithynians, I argue that Tacitus uses annalistic structure to create an annual, increasing pattern of improper and negligent senatorial behavior and the denigration of morality within the Senate.

I first examine the court victory of the Cyreneans and the effects of Tacitus' decision to connect this senatorial trial in a narrative sequence with the deaths of noble senators, Domitius Afer and Marcus Servilius. In 14.18, the senate expels Pedius Blaesus for maltreating the Cyreneans, *motus senatu et Pedius Blaesus accusantibus Cyrenensibus violatum ab eo thesaurum Aesculapii dilectumque militarem pretio et ambitione corruptum*. While Cicero's Verrine orations proved that provincial extortion was all too common, Tacitus highlights the Senate's admirable self-policing. Moreover, he juxtaposes it with the deaths of Afer and Servilius (14.19) to further emphasize proper senatorial judiciary actions. Afer was a successful litigator, *ille orando causas*, Servilius, a man of the law courts, *Servilius diu foro* and both men were known for their high positions and eloquence, *qui summis honoribus et multa eloquentia viguerant*. Tacitus juxtaposes the exempla of Afer and Servilius (depicted as noble men of the law) with the living, duly punished Blaesus to create an image of harmony between Senate, provinces, and Emperor.

This harmony, however, is short lived; at 14.28, a similar cluster of type scenes at the end of the year points to a decline in efficiency and increased senatorial corruption. Despite the successful legal victory of the Mauritians, *Vibius Secundus eques Romanus accusantibus Mauris repetundarum damnatur*, Vibius Secundus escapes proper judgment through his brother's wealth, *atque Italia exigitur, ne graviore poena adficeretur Vibii Crispi fratris opibus enisus*. Though justice is technically served, Tacitus emphasizes instead the ability of a single man to subvert an entire legal system through his own wealth. This corruption continues the following year, as the case of the Bithynians demonstrates complete collapse of political harmony and the Senate's fall into total moral depravity. In 14.46, the Bithynians win their suit against Tarquinius Priscus not only because of justice but also because the Senate remembered a personal grudge against him, *damnatus isdem consulibus Tarquinius Priscus repetundarum Bithynis interrogantibus, magno patrum gaudio quia accusatum ab eo Statilium Taurum pro consule ipsius meminerant*. The proper juridical proceedings of the Cyrenean trial two years ago have fallen victim to personal vendettas and a collectively petty, conniving Senate. Moreover, as he did with the Cyrenean case, Tacitus juxtaposes this episode with the memorable death of Regulus Memmius, a senatorial man famous for his influence, constancy, and reputation, as much as was possible under an imposing emperor, *auctoritate constantia fama, in quantum praeumbrante imperatoris fastigio datur, clarus* and who protected himself by keeping quiet and maintaining a meager personal wealth, *Regulus quiete defensus... neque invidiosis opibus erat* (14.47). By creating a pattern of extortion and death at the end of years, Tacitus asks us to compare Afer and Servilius with Memmius and to see the shadow that passes for senatorial glory in Neronian Rome.

By looking at how Tacitus varies these set type scenes in a carefully developed sequence of three successive annalistic years, this paper offers a new framework to reexamine the annalistic structure of Tacitus' *Annales* Book 14. Through the often-overlooked trials and court scenes, I argue that Tacitus frames the end of years with trials of senatorial extortion as a narrative device, incorporating a theme of corruption into his annalistic framework. The trials in Book 14 work as pivots around which Tacitus turns his narrative and with which Tacitus compels his reader to view the subsequent years. This paper contributes to the wider considerations of narrative structures in the later books of Tacitus' *Annales*.

Bibliography

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