

*Apis Matina*

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Types of Freedom and Submission in Tacitus' *Agricola*

Suggesting a new explanation why Tacitus narrates the desertion of a German auxiliary cohort within the laudatory biography of his father-in-law, I will argue that in this work Tacitus exemplifies three basic ways of dealing with loss of freedom and thus explores the possibility to conceive both the rule of the Roman people over provincial subjects and of the emperor over the Roman elite as a form of empowerment in the service of a common cause. The *Agricola* displays the military sphere as a model for balancing the emperor's claim for uncontested leadership and the senators' claim for liberty, but also shows limits of this model. I present a literary reading with no pretence to revealing historical reality. The only aim is to point out possible signifiers of authorial intention in the *Agricola*.

In this, I build on Wolf Liebeschütz's theses that "[...] there is a theme running through the whole of the *Agricola*: the consequences of the loss of liberty" and that it "is not treated from the same point of view throughout"<sup>1</sup>. Inspired by Liebeschütz, Myles Lavan analyses the theme of slavishness as an umbrella for "a shared set of polarities", such as "passivity and action"<sup>2</sup>. Different from Lavan, I will develop Liebeschütz's original typology based on the passage (42.3-4) that expresses the essence of *Agricola*'s exemplarity. Tacitus distinguishes three different types of senators. [1] The inert majority is subdued into servility by pressure and pleasure<sup>3</sup>, suffering humiliation under bad emperors and happier under good ones. [2] A few brave but vainglorious individuals, whom I will call 'defiant senators'<sup>4</sup>, throw away their life in acts of impressive but futile resistance. [3] *Agricola*, a representative of the third type, subordinates himself to the ruler and still achieves recognition for his service to the Roman state<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this now widely accepted tripartition, I claim that the three types of senators are mirrored by three types of non-Roman subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> Liebeschütz 1966, 138.

<sup>2</sup> Lavan 2011, 303.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Lavan 2011, 298-300.

<sup>4</sup> The terms 'senatorial' or 'Stoic opposition' would denote a somewhat organised group. Irrespective of the historical facts and what Tacitus writes in other works, the *Agricola* displays the individuality and isolation of that type and does not call attention to Stoicism.

<sup>5</sup> Liebeschütz 1966, 127-132.

As the first mirror type, the average provincials correspond to the anonymous majority of senators: after some resistance, they succumb, and then their fate depends on how they are ruled by their governor. The second type, which corresponds to the defiant senators, is instantiated by the Usipi, a cohort of newly recruited Germans, who kill the centurion and legionaries that serve with them and, after an adventurous flight by sea along the coast of Britain, are enslaved upon their arrival in Germany (28). A third type, auxiliaries serving loyally in Agricola's army, mirror senators like Agricola himself<sup>6</sup>.

## I

Isabelle Künzer (2014) is right to stress that the Usipi excursus requires an explanation. Why would Tacitus interrupt a narrative in honour of his father-in-law to draw attention to a mutiny that detracts from Agricola's achievements? Jörg Daumer demonstrates how Tacitus took pains to downplay both the Germans' achievement and the impact of the rebellion<sup>7</sup>. Even if the event was well known<sup>8</sup>, a biographer could have omitted it. That Tacitus nevertheless chose to narrate it, in spite of its problematic content, points to an important function. However, none of the suggestions made so far is sufficient to explain the inclusion of the story. A purely literary or narrative function<sup>9</sup> cannot account for the choice of the problematic subject; reader reception may be manipulated by different means<sup>10</sup>; and there are other ways of contrasting Agricola's and Domitian's conquests<sup>11</sup>. My explanation has the advantage of coherence: it assigns the passage an integral role in promoting core ideas of the *Agricola*, it provides a more consistent explanation for peculiarities of the narrative, and it draws on intra-textual correspondences much stronger than the repeated use of *verba propria*<sup>12</sup>.

Two features of the Germans' enterprise stand out in Tacitus' narrative: failure and fame. The same features characterise the defiant senators. The desertion of the Usipi is a

<sup>6</sup> Rutledge 2000 distinguishes Britons like Calgacus as representing values of the old (Roman) republic from the Britons in *Agr.* 21 as standing for "decadent imperial culture" (84). Others have seen a positive or negative connection between the Usipi and Agricola (e.g. Clarke 2001; see also Künzer 2014) or Calgacus and the defiant senators (e.g. Lavan 2011, 304).

<sup>7</sup> Daumer 2005, 241-244.

<sup>8</sup> Steidle 1965, 110; Daumer 2005, 241; Ash 2010.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Steidle 1965, 99-100; Ogilvie-Richmond 1967, 245; Ash 2010, 276, 292.

<sup>10</sup> This is Künzer's (2014) explanation. She is somewhat unclear about where exactly the reception is supposed to be directed.

<sup>11</sup> Ash 2010, 291-292; Künzer 2014.

<sup>12</sup> 10.4; 38.3: *circumuehi Britanniam*: Clarke 2001, 110; Ash 2010, 292; Künzer 2014, 447. The repetition could have been intended to flag the contrast between the Germans' disastrous trip and the "triumphal procession of studied leisure" of Agricola's fleet "displaying the completeness of Roman imperial control" (Braund 1996, 171). Künzer (452) also points to *rapere* in 28.3 and 30.4.

“great and memorable” *facinus*, a “deed” – and a “crime”. Even the murder of a Roman soldier can be a great deed. From the non-Roman enemy’s perspective, killing a centurion is an achievement; committed by a Roman soldier, it is an abominable crime. It is up to the readers which viewpoint they take. A similar ambiguity characterises the acts of the defiant senators: they commit “forbidden things” (42.4 *illicita*), which may be something wrong – or only something the emperor has outlawed in abuse of his power.

Whatever the perspective, Tacitus connects the idea of greatness to memory. Like the deaths of defiant senators, the inconsequential exploit of the Germans derives greatness not so much from its results as from the continued remembrance it engenders. They are a spectacle rather than bearers of solid glory. The Usipi’s adventure is something extraordinary viewed by astonished spectators, by the readers and observers written into the story. What exactly is so extraordinary becomes less and less clear as the narration continues and, parallel to this, the Germans appear increasingly passive. When proceeding simultaneously by land and by sea, Agricola’s fleet attracts attention (25.1). This is the result of a general’s well-considered plan to impress the locals. The Germans also attract attention when they sail along the British coast, but in their case it happens to them against their will. There is no mention of any such desire, and usually a deserter would prefer to stay unnoticed. The event that triggers the observers’ reaction is also an undesired necessity for the Germans: they are on ships that they cannot steer. At first they determine their own movements and grammatically appear as the agent subject of the verbs with which their story is told. At the end of the passage, those Usipi who reach Roman territory are reduced to passive objects both syntactically and in terms of content: they are handed from slave owner to slave owner. Nor do they shine forth among others because of deeds they themselves would tell; they are passively illuminated by a spotlight directed at them through the impersonal indication of how great a misfortune has befallen them<sup>13</sup>.

This anti-climax links the motif of fame with the other main theme of the passage: failure<sup>14</sup>. Tacitus underscores the Germans’ inability to achieve their goal. Their attempt to break the Roman yoke ends in slavery much worse than their previous condition. Tacitus amplifies their plight by narrating four kinds of adversity: lack of supplies, lack of nautical expertise, lack of support by the inhabitants of the British coast, and the Usipi’s dubious status among the people of Germany, who treat them as outlaws. None of these problems occurs in Cassius Dio’s version. Only in the *Agricola* do the Usipi meet constant opposition. It is also only there that the deserters, however valiant in battle, are reduced to cannibalism. At this point, the reader glimpses some organisation for the first time<sup>15</sup>, but this positive feature only serves to enhance the gruesome detail by

<sup>13</sup> 28.3 *indiciū tanti casus illustravit*. Contrast how in 45.3 Agricola himself has actively attained *claritas uitae* and how the perception of his *forma mentis aeterna* impresses others.

<sup>14</sup> See also Künzer 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Not strictly distinguishing between historical fact and narrative, Ash 2010, 283-285 argues that

narrating it in two stages: first the weakest are eaten; then they draw lots. The Germans are unable to make good use of the helmsmen they have kidnapped. Whatever becomes of the third who is not immediately killed, they lose all their ships not knowing how to steer them (28.3). Tacitus exaggerates the Usipi's incompetence: after all, they did manage to cross the North Sea and reach Germany, and they could not have done this holding on to a plank of their sunken vessel. Further repetitions amplify their enslavement in Germany. If we take the narrative literally, they are seized not once but twice: "they were captured first by the Suebi and soon after by the Frisii." Tacitus could have opted for an expression like "some by the former, the remnant by the other"<sup>16</sup>, but chose not to. The section ends with the pathetic image of slaves who stick out among the other human merchandise because of the glamorous story told about them, and yet another time the most humiliating fact, that they have become something to be sold and bought, is repeated by the author<sup>17</sup>.

Not only with regard to its flashy greatness paired with futility is the exploit of the Usipi reminiscent of the ambitious, useless deaths of the defiant senators. In both cases, Tacitus acknowledges the splendour of the deed and distinguishes two aspects, intrinsic greatness and its external recognition<sup>18</sup>. Both passages present the external viewpoint of an admirer (28.1 *ut miraculum* – 42.4 *mirari*) and both passages end with words that describe fame as some kind of illumination (28.3 *illustravit* – 42.4 *inclaruerunt*). In both passages the admiration is partly the result of the observers' ignorance: the ships with the Germans are a miracle only until rumours have spread (28.1); the admirers of defiant senators "should know" that a more substantial form of greatness is possible<sup>19</sup>. The underlying attitude, obstinate insistence on maintaining their freedom, is mentioned of the Romans (42.3) and evident in the case of the Usipi. Although they display extraordinary personal courage, even to the degree of self-sacrifice, both stand outside their community. The Romans pursue personal fame "without any benefit for the commonwealth" (42.4 *in nullum rei publicae usum*); the Germans are mutinous murderers – not only from a Roman viewpoint: rather than negotiating for supplies and safe conduct home, they behave like a band of pirates trying to rob the Britons of their possessions and are treated as such when the Britons fight back (28.2) and when other Germans enslave them (28.3 *pro praedonibus habiti*).

If we ask for the causes of failure, the answer seems to be different in each case. The defiant senators fail to achieve more than a splendid death because they set themselves such a limited aim, while the Usipi have a reasonable purpose: returning home. They fail because

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Tacitus characterises the Usipi as a well-coordinated unit.

<sup>16</sup> Ogilvie-Richmond 1967, 249.

<sup>17</sup> 28.3 *per commercia uenumdatos; mutatione ementium*.

<sup>18</sup> 28.1 *magnum ac memorabile* – 42.3 *famam*; 42.4 *magnos uiros* (the phrase includes both types of men).

<sup>19</sup> 42.4 *sciunt*, emphatically at the beginning of the sentence.

they do not possess the resources, skills and leadership required for a safe journey and are unable to negotiate with other peoples as an organised unit. In this sense, the failure of the Usipi does illustrate Roman superiority<sup>20</sup>. Confronted with this superpower, the peoples whom Rome chooses to subject seem to have only two options: slavery or death.

## II

The directly following narrative of the battle at Mons Graupius, which at first sight seems to confirm precisely this idea, in fact showcases a third choice. The auxiliaries in Agricola's army are set off against the foil of both the ordinary Briton (29.2) and the Usipi (28), who reoccur in Calgacus' speech. Contrary to Calgacus' assumption that a common interest of all provincials will lead the auxiliaries to defect like the Usipi before them (32.3-4), these men win the battle for Agricola (35.2), while the reader has already witnessed the lack of solidarity between Usipi and Britons. It is striking to which degree Tacitus underscores the loyalty of auxiliaries and the role they play in Agricola's conquests. The decisive advance at Mons Graupius is made by cohorts of Batavi and Tungri (36.1). By explicitly referring to *German* tribes, Tacitus points to the contrast between two types of non-Roman valour and greatness. The newly recruited Usipi reject the discipline, leadership and good example personified by the Roman centurion and legionaries whom they kill, and accordingly they fail. Together with their Roman fellow soldiers, they are proper Roman maniples; without them they count as lawless pirates (28.1, 3). The Batavi, Tungri and other auxiliaries have become successful conquerors through experience and military training (36.1 *uetustate militiae*)<sup>21</sup>. Following the orders of a competent general, they are safe from foolishly rushing to self-destruction in the heat of victory and capable to protect their Roman comrades (37.4; 35.2). These men have taken a third option for people subject to Roman power and become part of that power themselves. If only they are prepared to subordinate to military discipline, they can belong to an army whose *uirtus* together with the 'glory of the name "Roman"', which they now share, is the motor of conquest (23).

Anthony Birley and others misunderstand the import of a claim made in the narrative, that the victory was going to be even more glorious if won without spilling Roman blood (35.2). This is not cynical gloating at barbarians killing each other<sup>22</sup>. We must not forget that Tacitus focalises the auxiliaries. The reader looks through *their* eyes when Tacitus uses the preposition *citra* to say that "the legions stood in front of the rampart, as the victory's supreme decoration of fighting the war on *this* side (*citra*) of Roman blood, and as an aid should they be driven back (*pellerentur*)" (35.2). It is only from

<sup>20</sup> Ogilvie-Richmond 1967, 245.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Gilliver 1996 and Haynes 2013 for historical background.

<sup>22</sup> Birley 1999, 89 and, e.g., Gerlinger 2008, 315-316.

the standpoint of the auxiliaries that the expression assumes the intended meaning, and the focalisation is continued with the omission of a subject with *pellerentur*: the reader must first disregard the grammatical subject of the sentence (*legiones*), mentally place the legionaries in the background and then supply the correct subject, the auxiliaries about to fight in the battle. The focalisation also determines whose honour it is if the battle is won without drawing Roman blood. It is *the auxiliaries'* distinction if they do not need the support of the legions witnessing their valour and standing ready to help if necessary. Calgacus scornfully refers to the fact that Gauls, Germans and many Britons “make their blood available to foreign domination” and doubts that they feel any loyalty to their masters (32.1). Similar to the reference to deserting auxiliaries and the Usipi (32.3), this idea is now inverted by the narrated ‘facts’: risking their blood for their Roman fellow soldiers has become an honour for the provincials serving under Agricola’s command. Calgacus’ errors and their ‘correction’ in the following narrative, confirm the actual bond between Agricola and his auxiliaries, and the degree to which they are a well integrated and loyal part of the army.

The forces as a whole are portrayed as a harmonious unity. When mixed bands of elated soldiers compare their deeds with “military boastfulness” (25.1), differences create a pleasant, colourful picture without disruption. Diversity appears in purely military categories – infantry, cavalry or navy – and there is no mention of ethnic background or Roman citizenship<sup>23</sup>. Nor does Tacitus distinguish between Roman legionaries and auxiliaries when describing the army confident in their *uirtus* and eager to fight (27.1; 33.1). Agricola addresses “fellow soldiers” (*commilitones*) in his pre-battle speech that must have been directed, first of all, at the auxiliaries about to fight. He calls himself the *legatus*, the emperor’s deputy, and speaks to the “trained army” (*exercitus*). It will demonstrate “to the commonwealth” (*rei publicae*) that not they were responsible for revolts of the conquered or any delays in victory (34.3). Among Agricola’s audience there are also Britons, whose outstanding courage and loyalty, demonstrated by their keeping peace for a long time, had qualified them for this expedition (29.2). There is no sign that they resent hearing such words. The whole army receives the speech with “extraordinary eagerness” (35.1), and this eagerness is borne out by the events of the battle itself, in which Agricola must constantly restrain his auxiliaries<sup>24</sup>. Accordingly, they are called “our men” when Tacitus refers to them for the first time in the battle description<sup>25</sup>. With the exception of the Usipi, all auxiliary units mentioned in the *Agricola* are loyal and contribute decisively to Agricola’s success. Already his important first victory was won by auxiliaries (18.3).

<sup>23</sup> In the *Histories* Tacitus ominously highlights the linguistic and ethnic diversity of armies fighting in the civil war: Ash 1999, 67-69.

<sup>24</sup> 33.1 *laetum et uix munimentis coercitum militem* (note also the collective singular, which makes the Roman and non-Roman soldiers appear as one single-minded unity); 35.1-2; Agricola takes care that the Batavians, who are hurriedly pressing forward (36.2), are not circumvented from the back (37.1; 37.4-5).

<sup>25</sup> 36.1 *missilia nostrorum*; Ash 2007, 437.

Most of all, it is Agricola's willingness to put his life into the hands of these men that speaks against Birley's reading. Having drawn out the battle line to such a length that some admonish him to call in the legions, Agricola shows his confidence in the strength and loyalty of his auxiliaries not only by dispensing with further reinforcements but also by sending away his horse and taking his stand in front of them (35.5).

To summarize the results so far: the battle of Mons Graupius together with the Usipi excursus serve to contrast three attitudes to Roman rule: the mass of non-Roman people resists but loses the fight and becomes subject to domination, whether unjust or just; a few will lose their life or relative freedom in daredevil attempts to break free; a third type will become part of Roman rule themselves by willingly subordinating themselves to the discipline of the Roman army. This discipline restricts their individual freedom but is not slavery since these soldiers share the name of Rome and the virtue and glory of the victorious Roman army (23). This threefold division corresponds to the three senatorial attitudes to the emperor's rule: the majority may rebel but submits; a few show obstinate and spectacular resistance; a third group gains relative freedom of agency as military leaders, maintaining the Roman Empire and thus also the rule of the emperor himself. Tacitus acknowledges the greatness and fame of both the second and the third group, but only the third group attains the solid glory that arises from real success in a serious, useful cause. This is service in an army held together by manly valour and its shared purpose of promoting the Roman commonwealth (23; 33.1)<sup>26</sup>.

### III

Agricola is a paragon of the third group. His *modestia* and *obsequium* are not the versatile "self-effacement and adaptability" that "might be associated with a knight like Atticus"<sup>27</sup>, nor are they just "qualities of a senator who recognised the subordinate rôle, and who did not see it as part of his duty to challenge authority"<sup>28</sup>: they are first of all military virtues<sup>29</sup>. Towards Domitian, Agricola behaves like an officer under the command of a man who is incompetent and morally inferior to him. He respects the other's rank and tries to make the best of the situation, just as he subordinates his talent to Vettius Bolanus because he "had experience in obeying (*obsequi*) and learned how to

<sup>26</sup> Apart from 4.5, where Agricola is fascinated with the vision of a philosopher's "great and lofty glory", *gloria* occurs in the *Agricola* only with reference to military glory (8.2-3, 23.1, 32.1, 33.6, 39.3; opposed to survival and safety [*salus*]: 26.3, 31.5; conjoined with the glory of the Roman name: 23.1; Agricola's glory: 41.2 and 41.4; 44.3; 46.4).

<sup>27</sup> Liebeschütz 1966, 130.

<sup>28</sup> Shotter 1991, 3270.

<sup>29</sup> Lendon 1997, 248 and, more generally, Phang 2008. See also the nuanced discussion in Vielberg 1987.

combine what is honourable with what is useful” (8.1), e.g. as Suetonius Paulinus’ *tribunus* (5), when he served with modesty and vigour. This is not inert slavishness; it is the duty of a soldier. For this reason Agricola’s subordination to his commander-in-chief<sup>30</sup> Domitian does not detract from his dignity. He shows the same *modestia* and *obsequium* which, together with his energy and application (42.4 *industria et uigor*), had qualified him for his splendid military career.

Since the “virtue of a good military leader is the virtue of an emperor” (39.2), Agricola’s leadership is a model of conduct for emperors and the army a model for the Roman state<sup>31</sup>. Men with diverse backgrounds and different interests rally under a common banner in the tradition of a powerful hierarchy: they are the *exercitus* led by a *dux* together with whom they serve the *res publica* and the *nomen Romanum*. This common submission to an empowering system of military discipline and the orientation toward something greater than any individual creates a win-win situation: *both* leader and subordinates give up part of their autonomy and, in return, receive their due share of freedom to promote not only the “glory of the Roman name” but also their own name to earn the glory that they deserve<sup>32</sup>.

#### IV

It is evident that these results, if accepted, have consequences for much debated issues such as the genre and purpose of the *Agricola* or the question to which extent the work was written for the new emperor Trajan<sup>33</sup>. Here, I will close with a few remarks on the limitations of the military model as they are displayed in the *Agricola* already by Tacitus himself.

Firstly, its success requires effective leadership. Lack of leadership characterises the non-Roman people in the *Agricola*<sup>34</sup>. The revolt under Suetonius Paulinus (15-16.3) arises from general dissatisfaction vented in anonymous conversations (15.1-16.1). Only after the Britons are ready to fight does Boudicca make a fleeting appearance and immediately disappears again. Successes occur in the passive voice; outrages are committed by impersonal “barbarian ire and victory” (16.1). Paulinus deals with several anonymous groups differentiated by their interests, not with Briton leaders<sup>35</sup>. The Usipi’s misfortunes begin when they kill their commander and the helmsmen (18.1). Calgacus is nothing

<sup>30</sup> Vielberg 1987, 47.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Braund 1996, 159.

<sup>32</sup> Sailor 2008, 76-77 sees a similar win-win situation between Cerialis and Agricola.

<sup>33</sup> See, most recently, Geisthardt 2015 and, e.g., Braund 1996, 152-153, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Compare Rutledge 2000, 82-83.

<sup>35</sup> 16.1. The parallel account in the *Annals* (14.29-39) shows that Tacitus deliberately effaces the role of Briton leaders in the *Agricola*.

more than a name tacked to a highly topical speech and vanishes as soon as he has spoken<sup>36</sup>. The battle narrative leaves us with the impression that the Britons have no leadership whatsoever. No Briton commander makes an appearance, and the nobles, the men in the war chariots (*couinnarii*), give a spectacle of futile disorder, first when they fill the plain with inconsequential noise and random movements (35.3), the second time when they have turned to flight (36.3) without any fighting the reader would be aware of. At the end, there are only empty chariots and panicking horses (36.3). The headless behaviour of the commoners reflects this lack of leadership. Those on the mountain top misjudge the danger and begin to partake in the battle only when it is too late (37.1). Their fervour causes them to be repelled even more violently (37.1). Well armed, strong contingents panic and turn their backs on a small number of Roman soldiers; others throw themselves onto the enemy without any defence and have themselves slaughtered (37.3). They disperse and hide in the wilderness, each man caring only for himself (37.5). Agitated by mixed emotions, they burn their own houses and do one thing and then the opposite (38.1). Finally, the reader witnesses how they slaughter – not themselves but their wives and children “as if they were having mercy with them” (38.1).

The Romans have a command structure that helps them win their battles against the Britons. But what if the Roman commander is a bad leader? The short history of Roman conquest in Britain parades different governors as examples of the beneficial or detrimental effects of certain types of leadership. It also illustrates the connection between good leadership in the provinces and the emperor: one of the worst governors, Trebellius Maximus, rules during the civil war (16.3), and as soon as Vespasian has become emperor, there are “great leaders, excellent armies and very little hope for the enemy” (17.1; see also 13.3). The contrast figure is Domitian, “a fierce enemy of all excellence” (41.1 *infensus uirtutibus*), whose negative characterisation, more than anything else in the *Agricola*, highlights the limits of the military model. In Tacitus’ portrayal, Domitian must fake a military success (39.1) and fears that “the name of a private citizen be raised above that of the emperor” (39.2). It is important to note that these two points are made not in Tacitus’ authorial voice but in indirect speech, as thoughts of Domitian himself<sup>37</sup>. The fundamental problem is not so much that the emperor is not also a good military commander but rather that he is incapable of seeing himself as Agricola’s superior in a military hierarchy. For him, Agricola is *priuatus*, a civilian subject to his rule, not his deputy (*legatus*). Since he does not regard himself as a commander (*dux*), he cannot conceive of Agricola as his soldier (*miles*). Nor does Domitian understand that if he would behave like a real *imperator*, the glory of his subordinates would be his to share

<sup>36</sup> Ash 2007, 436.

<sup>37</sup> Lendon 1997, 108-109 quotes this passage as an example of the emperor’s competition for “conventional honour of Graeco-Roman aristocrats”. When discussing honour in the Roman army, however, he also refers to soldiers’ “concern for the praise of their superiors” (260). There honour is enhanced when personally conferred by a superior.

with them to the degree he sees fit<sup>38</sup>. As a result he cannot avail himself of a loyal follower's services, but wishes him dead and endangers the success of the Roman military system by preferring incompetent commanders that cause defeats and the death of true "military men" (*uiri militares*) serving under them (41.2)<sup>39</sup>.

Another problem for the military model is its limited transferability to the civilian sphere. Vielberg highlights the discrepancy between Agricola's energetic, active military life and his passivity in politics<sup>40</sup>. We never encounter Agricola in the senate or as an advisor at court; upon his return from Britain, he is received by Domitian without a word and, after a perfunctory kiss, sent away to blend with the other servants (40.3); Agricola is so inconspicuous that people ask themselves whether this really is the famous general (40.4). Whereas it was a tradition to accept inequality in the field, the civilian life of the senatorial class promoted an ideal of equality<sup>41</sup>. In the *Agricola*, Tacitus not only denounces the suppression of military ambitions by the emperor, there is also a strand of references to the indifference, rejection and envy with which military men are met by "the times"<sup>42</sup>. This refers to the successful commanders' peers, while the common crowd (*uulgus*) desires another command for Agricola (41.3; 43.1). The monarchic rule of the emperor-commander is as problematic in the civilian sphere as a fixed internal hierarchy within a peer group of men supposed to be equals.

What is more, in the civilian sphere *obsequium* may become morally "disfigured"<sup>43</sup>. Nowhere in the *Agricola* do we find an indication that obeying his commanders would ever have brought Agricola into moral conflict. Even under a corrupt governor (6.2), a weak general (8.1) and an emperor like Domitian, his integrity is never compromised. However, after he has returned to the life of a civilian in Rome, it is only his death that saves him from involvement in the crimes that taint Tacitus and his fellow senators when they are forced not only to watch but actively participate in the incarceration and murder of their peers (44.4).

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<sup>38</sup> 5.3; 8.2; 22.4; Braund 1996, 173.

<sup>39</sup> On Agricola's loyalty to Domitian, see Vielberg 1987, 39.

<sup>40</sup> Vielberg 1987, 40-42.

<sup>41</sup> Lendon 1997 argues that the army was an exception to the rule that following someone else's orders was perceived as degrading and slavish (18-21) and that, in late antiquity, imperial service was assimilated to military service since "it was especially under military discipline that aristocrats could obey one another without loss of face" (21).

<sup>42</sup> 1.1; 1.4; 5.3; 9.2; 40.4; 41.4; 42.1; Geisthardt 2015, 47-55.

<sup>43</sup> *Ann.* 4.20.3 *deforme obsequium*; Heldmann 1991.

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