

IDENTIFYING ROMANNESS:

***VIRTUS* IN LATIN HISTORIOGRAPHY DURING
THE LATE REPUBLIC AND EARLY EMPIRE**

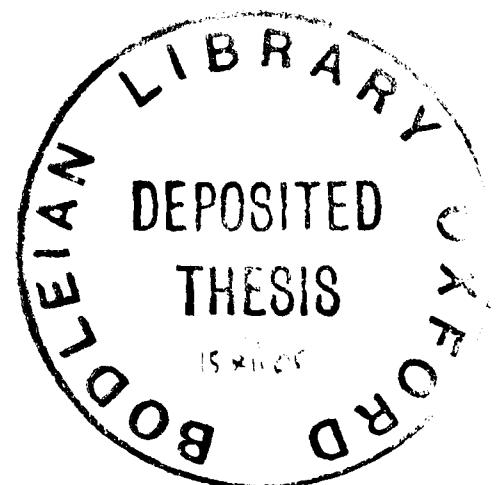
by Catalina Balmaceda

(Brasenose)

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Title: 'Identifying Romanness: *Virtus* in Latin Historiography during the Late Republic and Early Empire'.

Candidate's name and society: Catalina Balmaceda, Brasenose College.

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the role of the concept of *virtus* in Roman historiography of the late Republic and early Empire. I shall argue throughout the study that analysing and tracing this concept in the works of the historians of this period take us to the very heart of the question of their appraisal both of political change and Roman identity. Understanding this moral appraisal does not mean just a better comprehension of their concept of *virtus*, but a new approach to their concept of history as *magistra vitae*.

In the first chapter, I shall introduce some characteristics of the nature of historical writing and the approaches of ancient and modern historians. I shall be challenging some current views on the complexity of evaluating ancient history by rhetorical and moral standards.

In chapter II, I shall consider the concept of *virtus* in terms of its etymology and usage; I will then attempt to show the particular connection between *virtus* and Romanness. I will also develop and explain the concepts of *virilis-virtus* and *humana-virtus* and place them in their philosophical context.

Chapters III, IV, V and VI will form part of what I have called '*Virtus* in History', and in these chapters I shall deal with four historians. The first section is dedicated to Sallust and his analysis of political decline in relation to *virtus*. I shall attempt to assess Sallust's influential creation of moral language in the writing of history. Then, I will consider the connection of *virtus* as a means to preserve *libertas* in Livy's work, especially considering the author's time. Chapter V is concerned with Velleius' history and his view that the principate has re-established *virtus* in Rome. I shall concentrate on Tiberius for my analysis of *virtus* and challenge some traditional approaches to this author and his prince. Finally, in chapter VI, I will examine Tacitus' perception of the nature of the political change that Rome has undergone. I will show how the transformations in politics have a deep influence on the very idea of Romanness and how the disturbance of this concept leads to a more profound and internal interpretation of it.

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Preface

The interest in studying Roman history and historiography was first awakened in me as an undergraduate by the excellent teaching of Nicolás Cruz, who combined serious work and vividness of delivery in a remarkable way. I thank him for his constant support, stimulating discussions and friendship throughout all these years. My Latin tutor, Antonio Arbea, also played a very significant role in my decision to do some research on the Roman historians; working with him spurred my curiosity in matters of style, literary techniques and the power of speech.

My project started more as a piece of research on a concept in historical writing, but since then it has developed in such a form that has allowed me to unite both my interest in and passion for Roman history and the theory of history in general. Analysing the historian's work, concrete and concerned with a certain period in time, is at the same time to come to a better understanding of his conception of history, as an abstract and timeless idea that shapes the present in which one lives.

My time in Oxford has been a continuum of inspiring and thought-provoking meetings, lectures, tutorials and seminars. Scholars have greatly helped me with their general comments as much as with their specific suggestions; my debts are many. First, I would like to thank Michael Comber, whose expert guidance and brilliant teaching opened up new ways of thinking and showed me many unexpected possibilities for approaching history; his friendship and patience were constant sources of support. Miriam Griffin has been extremely generous helping me throughout and especially on the philosophical aspects of this thesis. I am grateful for stimulating conversations with Peter Derow, John Marincola, Teresa Morgan, Chris Pelling and Nicholas Purcell. I would also like to thank Fergus Millar for his ongoing support and good advice since my first day at Brasenose.

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My family and friends have contributed greatly to make the ups and downs of any doctoral research into a vast majority of ‘ups’ and I am grateful for their patience and generosity. The scholarship given by Universidad Católica de Chile made possible my stay and studies in Oxford and I would like to thank all the people involved in the process.

Abbreviations

<i>AJA</i>	American Journal of Archaeology
<i>AJP</i>	American Journal of Philology
<i>ANRW</i>	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
<i>CAH</i>	Cambridge Ancient History
<i>CIL</i>	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
<i>CJ</i>	Classical Journal
<i>CQ</i>	Classical Quarterly
<i>G&R</i>	Greece and Rome
<i>HRR</i>	Historicorum Romanorum Reliquiae
<i>HSCP</i>	Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
<i>JRS</i>	Journal of Roman Studies
<i>OCD</i>	Oxford Classical Dictionary
<i>ORF</i>	Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta
<i>PCPS</i>	Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society
<i>REL</i>	Revue des Études Latines
<i>TAPA</i>	Transactions of the American Philological Association

All translations are from the Loeb editions, unless otherwise indicated.

I Introduction

‘We derive pleasure from history, which we are so fond of following up, to the remotest detail, turning back to parts we have omitted, and pushing on to the end when we have once begun. Not that I am unaware that history is useful as well as entertaining’.

Cic. *De Fin*, 5.19.51.

Cicero is right. We have grown fond of history. We write it, read it, follow it and live it from within. Perhaps this is because history is not an invented form of understanding imposed on reality; nor an invention of epic poets and novelists. Human life has a determinate form, the form of a certain kind of story. We dream history, remember history, construct history, forget history. History appears to be, then, the most straightforward and at the same time essential genre for the characterisation of real human actions and life. Although we may be always discovering and defining, re-discovering and re-defining what history is, our perception of human life as historical remains stable.

There is always something vital involved when someone embarks upon any doctoral project, but in the case of history that vital element develops more strongly: history is life. The process becomes almost something personal and it affects the participant in so many ways that it can be difficult to express it in an appropriate manner. One learns so much; one changes so much in the process. Not only opinions, ideas or thoughts, but also ways of seeing the world, ways of *being* in the world. The project of identifying Romanness through the historians has worked as a kind of self-definition and self-identification for myself as well, although I did not plan it that way. Being a historian studying other historians has proved at the same time challenging and rewarding. One sees all the time how literature is essentially connected with the life of its time; one experiences the way in which history – the story one is reading –, the way it is expressed by the historians, and one’s own life are constantly interacting in such a way that they feed each other making the process richer, but also more complex.

In this introduction, I plan to address briefly three problems that will help us to approach and explore the relationship of history with both its mode of self-expression and the validation of its subject-matter. In the first part, I shall deal with the question of the definition of history, not to give a new one, but to propose categories by which history could be explained. I also touch cursorily on some of the problematic modern and post-modern techniques of treating the topic. Secondly, I tackle the on-going debate of the role of rhetoric in Latin historiography and the question of what identifies and/or distinguishes a modern and an ancient historian. Lastly, I move on to the connection of history and *virtus* and the validity of this Roman approach.

1. The Definition of History: a Historical Problem

Coming back to Cicero, but in a different context now, we can see that his well-known metaphor of history seen as a building having foundations [*fundamenta*] and a superstructure [*exaedificatio*] has somehow marked our approach to historical writing in a very forceful way.¹ For centuries, we have continued to analyse, with a greater or lesser degree of awareness, how deep and strong should the groundwork be for the edifice not to collapse, and how the actual arrangement of the material affects the final construction. Truth, the Ciceronian basis of the building, has been the subject of an endless discussion which moves from radical scepticism to positive certainty, and now seems to have calmed down a little only to be regarded as a rather ‘fundamentalist’ topic within historiographical theory. On the other hand, content and form – *res* and *verba*, which constitute the structure –, have suffered the storms of fashion which have reduced one or the other to oblivion at best or annihilation at its worst. The debate has put history to the test and the consequence of this is that history has ‘grown’. Trying to find an answer and dealing with the difficult trials of theorising about history have helped our historical consciousness to expand not only to new and undiscovered territories, but also in constructing new paths to reach others.

¹ Cf. Cic. *De Or*, 2.63.

In this first part of the introduction, I will try to show that Cicero's comparison is still applicable nowadays, that the positive contributions and also the less felicitous input of the modern and post-modern interpretations of history have continued to reinforce – sometimes unwillingly – the image of the building. I will not give a summary of the history of historiography nor present the different strands of the historical theories as so much has been written about them,² but try to illustrate how these approaches have reshaped our understanding of history within the familiar notions of science and art.

It is precisely this blend which creates difficult problems in defining history: it is a scientific task, but the result can be a work of art. The historian is therefore like an architect. To build a house it is necessary both to have the knowledge of how to do it and the creativity so as to construct something attractive that invites people to live in it. It is this attraction that first moves someone to buy a house: the beauty of the building, the practical arrangement, etc. But when the buyer considers or decides to make an offer for a particular one, he takes for granted that it is a 'house', i.e. a building with roof, walls, bedrooms, and all the rest, because if it were a stadium no matter how wonderful it was, he would not buy it as a house. Something similar happens with history. The historian 'builds' history by telling what has happened,³ what has actually changed through time, but in addition he tries to do this in such a way that his reader will find it easier to 'engage' with the past he is telling. The attraction of the subject to the object is necessary for this engagement, which is, at the same time, essential for understanding. Style, therefore, matters. It is the style or manner in which history is presented the way through which we 'get to know the story', and our comprehension, assimilation and acceptance depend largely on it.

² For these different views, see for example: R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1946); M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002, orig. in French, 1954); E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, Macmillan, 1961); G. Elton, *The Practice of History* (London, Methuen, 1967); H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 1973). A. Momigliano, combines in a rich analysis the practices of ancient and modern historiography, see for example, *Studies in Historiography* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1977); *Fondamenti della Storia Antica* (Torino, Einaudi Editore, 1984); *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1990). For an excellent survey on the contemporary debates on history, see R.J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, Granta Books, 2000 [1997]). For a more complete bibliography on the topic, see A. Munslow, *Companion to Historical Studies* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000) esp. 235-61.

³ In a quasi 'Rankean' way.

Style matters. It is the way we choose to explain something. Here, for example, I have consciously chosen the comparison of the architect and the historian, not because it is particularly original or beautiful, but because I think it illustrates well the reality of the elements of science and art needed to produce good history. The 'house metaphor' is the means I have used to make my argument clearer. The historian chooses and develops a style that suits his history, which is why content and form cannot be divorced: they feed each other in a reciprocal way. Content and form will make good history provided that the foundation is there: if it is not a true report of the past, no matter how appealing or how interesting the story may appear, it will not be history. Style, then, should serve the true facts to be unfolded. Here, of course, we understand that it is not the 'actual past' that is recaptured, but an 'account' of that past which was, at some point, 'actual and real'. Some post-modern approaches claim that when we study history we are not studying the past but what historians have constructed about the past. This is true, but only to a certain extent: we study those 'constructions' of the past as the means to learn about the real past. The multiple relationships present in the writing of history between the historian and his material, the reader and the narrative, and the historian and the reader create a rich interaction which constitutes the centre of the development of the historical knowledge. It is essential to collect the material seriously and truthfully; it is also indispensable to deal with it in a creative manner to reconstruct that past we no longer have, it is important that the historian gets into the mind of the people who lived in the past; and it is useful for the reader to try to get closer to the historian's mind to understand his intention.

Dealing with truth and true accounts can be slippery. Truth about the past is not something easily attained, and there is no such thing as 'pure' objective narration. Confidence in objectivity is no longer fashionable, but more importantly, was it ever possible? The reaction against this over-optimistic view, which focused on the documentary evidence as the impartial source of accuracy and truth, has brought a chain of responses which claim, with very different voices, their dissatisfaction with the absence of the personal and creative element. Bloch warned his audience: 'Let us guard against stripping our science of its share of poetry. Let us also beware of the inclination, which I have detected in some, to be ashamed of this poetic quality. It would be sheer

folly to suppose that history, because it appeals strongly to the emotions, is less capable of satisfying the intellect'.⁴ And Carr complained: 'It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls them'.⁵

But the historian, as human being, has in his nature some features that do not help towards the attainment of truth. He is fallible, because nobody can know everything and with the best will in the world, everybody makes mistakes. He has to be selective and decide what to record and what to leave out, and he is biased: is it possible to write with complete impartiality? Postmodernists have reached the conclusion not only that objective knowledge about the past is impossible, but also that it is pointless to argue about it. All we have are literary models, an a priori constructed interpretation, rather than an interpretation springing from the sources and being presented in an appropriate literary expression which serves the analysis.⁶ It seems that Bloch's share of poetry is all that is left in history now.⁷

Extremes are always dangerous because of their reductionism, their insistence on having a part as the whole, their lack of engagement with the total reality. It is as wrong to say that 'history is facts' as it is to say that 'history is text'. With this, I do not seek to hide myself in the comfortable middle course between the extreme poles of postmodernist absolute relativism and historicist empiricism. Both have done a good deal of harm to history because they have reduced it to one of its aspects only, but at the same time, both have contributed to the present stage of the development of historical understanding. History has 'grown' because in the fight for survival, when put to the test, it conquered and became greater. We are seeing and experiencing the 'expansion of history'. When we talk about history we mean more things now, there are more elements that can play a role in it, but it is we who have discovered the many more nuances that history always had. The fact that we will never be able to attain the absolute truth, that we make mistakes in our search for it, that there will always be a new way of interpreting the past does not mean that there is no such thing as the truth at all. On the

⁴ Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 7.

⁵ Carr, *What is History*, 5.

⁶ Cf. White, *Metahistory*, *passim*.

⁷ If at all. See, for example, the attempts of deconstructionism to unsettle the very meaning of words and their relationship to reality.

other hand, there is no reason why historical works cannot be analysed in literary and linguistic terms, or why better writing should not be encouraged. History has become a larger house, with more rooms and more varied materials have been incorporated in its construction, but we can still see it as a house: with firmer foundations and a more sophisticated structure.

Thus, the dichotomy between science and art in history is just apparent. It only becomes real when we reduce history, when we try to make it fit into something of smaller horizons, with shallower aims. Art and science are not totally antagonists after all, they are two ways of approaching reality and they form part of history because both help us to reconstruct the truth of the past. Through the sources we use and the creative interpretation of them we can, if we do it seriously – which does not mean boringly –, approach the real past and give some meaning to it. It will be partial, provisional perhaps, but nonetheless true.

I am aware that I should move towards ancient historiography, but I think it is necessary to provide, even if schematically, a theoretical frame of what I think the ancient historians were doing when writing history. My approach to the ancient sources has been a stimulus to penetrate into the modern debate which I have tried to outline above, and at the same time, my encounter with the ancient material has been deeply affected by the very nature of this debate.

2. The Roman Historian's Craft

What role does ancient historiography play in all this? Have ancient historians taken part in the dialogue on history? Our answer will be affected by what we think they were doing and how we see them working as historians. All too often there is a tendency to be patronizing towards them, to put them down as falling short of 'our' idea of history as regards truthfulness and factual accuracy. That is perhaps not the best way of reading the historians productively to see what we can learn from them about what is involved in the writing of history. It may be rather the case that ancient historiography was, in some respects, more aware of and more up front about its own problematics and complexities.

There has been a long and lively discussion to determine to what extent classical historiography is more devoted to its dramatic features, as a branch of rhetoric, and whether its moralising function leads it not to be wholly concerned with the facts and historical truth, but with persuading the reader of a particular view.⁸ What these questions are really trying to establish is the relationship between ancient and modern historiography, whether they function in the same way and under the same rules, if at all. Two main different approaches to ancient historical texts can be found nowadays. In general terms, one group sees ancient and modern historiography acting more or less alike and the other affirms that the writing of history in the classical world is essentially different from the way history is written today.⁹ Are these differences between ancient and modern historians essential or is it just the focus that has changed?

As we have seen, the word history is ambiguous. We have only one word to refer both to the events that happened in the past and to the account of the events written by a historian. The concept of historiography is an attempt to differentiate them. Probably Cicero was referring to both when he gave that inspiring definition: *testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis*.¹⁰ The deeds carried out in the past are not only witnesses, they can also teach us – according to Cicero – but they have to be properly recorded so that we do not forget them and then they can act as the written life of the memory. The task is demanding, but at the same time a stimulating challenge: ‘any historiography is an act of optimism, assuming that the past can be tamed into some sort of order’.¹¹

In the ancient world, history formed part of rhetoric and it was ‘subject to the same types of literary analysis as poetry or oratory. The historian’s terrain might be

⁸ This debate appears in many ‘introductions’ or ‘epilogues’ of books dealing with ancient historiography, see for example, S. Usher, *The historians of Greece and Rome* (London, Methuen & Co. 1969); C.S. Kraus and A.J. Woodman, *Latin Historians, Greece and Rome, New Surveys in the Classics 27* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997); J. Marincola, *Greek Historians, Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics 31* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001); and also in books dealing specifically with the topic of classical historiography, see for example T.P. Wiseman, *Clio’s Cosmetics* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1979); Ch. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, California University Press, 1983); A.J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London and Sydney, Croom Helm, 1988).

⁹ Cf. Marincola, *Greek Historians*, 3-5, where he classifies the different historians who have dealt with the issue into these two groups.

¹⁰ Cic. *De Or*, 2.36: ‘History bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to recollection and guidance to human existence, and brings tidings of ancient days’.

¹¹ C.B.R. Pelling, ‘Epilogue’ in C.S. Kraus (ed.), *The Limits of Historiography* (Leiden, Brill, 1997) 351.

different and he might have a different relationship to his subject matter, but it was expected that he would give care and attention to the arrangement, language and presentation of his material; that his finished product would be ‘artistic’ and appealing’.¹² The problem, I think, comes from our understanding of the word ‘rhetoric’. Rhetoric, in its basic meaning, as the art of speaking well is a necessary condition for history. History needs clarity. The main difficulty when we say that ancient historiography is rhetorical is our concept of rhetoric as an instrument for insincerity; we just have to think of what is meant when one says, for example, that is *mere* rhetoric. Rhetoric is not *necessarily* an instrument for falsehood; on the contrary, it can be an instrument for the truth. It was certainly this latter sense what Cicero meant with his *opus oratorium maxime*.¹³ The context in which these words were said emphasises that rhetoric is a helpful instrument when writing history,¹⁴ because it provides the historian with the appropriate techniques and methods to unfold the narrative and the argument in a clearer way. ‘History needs rhetoric: facts have to be interpreted, material organized, details selected, events reconstructed, words matched to deeds’.¹⁵ Rhetoric could encourage or stimulate people to read history and know what had really happened.¹⁶ Rhetorical techniques are useful to write history, but this latter has its own rules and they have to be followed first; otherwise, Cicero’s remarks in *De Oratore* would make no sense: ‘For who does not know history’s first law to be that an author must not dare to tell anything but the truth? And the second that he must make bold to tell the whole truth?’¹⁷

In the debate on the role of rhetoric in ancient historiography, we can distinguish two very well defined views. Brunt, for example, insists that the faults we find sometimes in ancient historians, namely, their carelessness in reporting, their acceptance of marvels and prodigies and their readiness to conceal or misrepresent whatever does

¹² J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) 13.

¹³ Cic. *De Leg*, 1.5.

¹⁴ ‘A kind of writing particularly suited to an orator’ is Zetzel’s translation, cf. *On the Commonwealth and on the Laws* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999) 107.

¹⁵ M.R. Comber, ‘Re-reading the Roman Historians’ in M. Bentley (ed.), *the Routledge Companion to Historiography* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997) 54.

¹⁶ Cf. P.A. Brunt, ‘Cicero and Historiography’, in *Studies in Greek history and thought* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993) 209.

¹⁷ Cic. *De Or*, 2.62.

not suit their purpose, are not necessarily products of a rhetorical training. For him, and others like Fornara or Cornell, the ancient historians were carrying out essentially the same job that modern historians do nowadays, ‘history has altered but little’.¹⁸ For Wiseman and Woodman, on the contrary, the impact of rhetorical education was such, that it somehow shaped and affected completely their approach to the past and the record of it. Rhetoric was a form of ‘secondary education which left its marks on literature of every kind, and historiography in particular’.¹⁹ Rhetoric then, was not a simple adornment, but the real core of history-writing. The classical historians carrying the mark of oratory appear to be responsible of ‘unhistorical thinking’,²⁰ especially with their compositions of speeches, their filling the narrative with plausible – but invented – considerations, and the borrowings from other genres.

This discussion of the distinction and overlapping of poetry and history naturally generates the fundamental question about truth and fiction in history. Those who think that classical historians’ thought was profoundly different from ours in its assimilation of historiography to poetry and oratory, conclude that Roman historians had even a different concept of truth, because they resorted to invention on a large scale.²¹ They think that, when Roman historians in their prefaces profess to be telling the ‘truth’,²² they are denying bias and not – in our terms – ‘fabrication’.²³ For both authors, Cicero and his successors saw the truth in terms of impartiality. Thus, ‘contrary to what scholars have generally believed, Cicero in *De Oratore*, does not present truth as the opposite of what we would call fiction’.²⁴ If the society in which the ancient historians lived is so different from ours, they argue, is it not possible that the view of historical truth might have been correspondingly different? I am inclined to think, though this may sound terribly unfashionable in our relativistic age, that the meaning of truth in its essence is much the same for human beings in all societies. In fact, I am not really sure

¹⁸ Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 200.

¹⁹ Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics*, 8.

²⁰ This concept is developed in Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics*, 41-53.

²¹ In some way these scholars agree with H. White, who emphasises the linguistic and poetic component of the writing of history, especially how explanations are rhetorically reconstructed.

²² See especially the prefaces of Sallust, Livy and Tacitus.

²³ Cf. Woodman's analysis of *De Or*, 2.62-4 in Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, chapter 2 and also Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics*, part 1.

²⁴ Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 83. For his translation of Cic, *De Or*, 2.62-4 and *Ad Fam*, 5.12, see chapter 2.

what it would mean to assert otherwise. When ancient historians insist on their impartiality they are being consciously aware of the difficulty of writing a true account of the past and the temptation to fall into bias which can lead to falsehood and falsification. Partiality, then, is not the absolute opposite of truth, but one possible and familiar way for the historian not to achieve it, and that is why they make explicit statements about not having reasons for prejudice or favour. ‘A profession of impartiality was a statement about the historian’s inquiry – he was aware of the human tendency to invent or exaggerate – and the historian’s character: he wished to be seen as competent to judge both men and deeds’.²⁵ It was necessary to say *sine ira et studio*,²⁶ they wanted to establish a borderline between simple fictional accounts and history: ‘my mind is free from hope, fear and partisanship’.²⁷

The use of *inventio* in history – ‘a concept which is naturally the antithesis of the “scientific”’ –²⁸ was certainly a determining factor to reach the conclusion that modern historians are essentially different from the ancient ones.²⁹ But *inventio* does not have a straightforward translation; it does not mean to ‘invent’ or to ‘make things up’, but coming from *invenio* is more to find and discover, search out by means of reflection, find a possible explanation using creativity. Rhetorical handbooks defined it as *excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae causam probabilem reddant*.³⁰ *Inventio*, then, was absolutely necessary. To reconstruct the past was – and it still is – always an imaginative act. This ‘expansion of the past’³¹ is not mere fiction, but creative reconstruction.³²

²⁵ Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 164.

²⁶ Tac. *Ann*, 1.1.

²⁷ Sall. *BC*, 4. For the topic of impartiality, see Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 158-74.

²⁸ Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 199.

²⁹ Cf. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 202: ‘any similarity between the ancient and modern [historians] remains no more than an assumption’.

³⁰ Cic. *De Inv*, 1.9: An important definition and distinction is made by D.A. Russell, ‘Rhetoric and Criticism’, *Greece and Rome* 14 (1967) 135: ‘[*Inventio*] it is simply the ‘discovery’ of what requires to be said in a given situation (*ta deonta heurein*), the implied theory being that it is somehow already ‘there’ though latent, and does not have to be made up as a mere figment of imagination’.

³¹ E. Badian, ‘The Early Historians’ in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Latin Historians* (London, Routledge, 1966) 11.

³² For the role of the imagination in this, see T.P. Wiseman, *Historiography and Imagination* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1994) xiii: ‘Fantasy is as pejorative a term as mere speculation; but imagination, controlled by evidence and argument, is the first necessity of our understanding if the past is ever to be improved’.

Even though history involved an act of ‘creation’ similar to poetical writing, they were seen as very different types of writing. Aristotle in the *Poetics* states his famous contrast between history and poetry: ‘the difference lies in the fact that the one [historian] speaks of events which have occurred, the other [poet] of the sort of events which should occur. It is for this reason that poetry is both more philosophical and more serious than history, since poetry speaks about the universals, history of the particulars’.³³ Polybius’ declaration also sheds light on the ancient understanding of history in relation to poetic writing: ‘For the aim of tragedy is by no means the same as that of history, but rather the opposite. The tragic poet seeks to thrill and charm his audience for the moment by expressing through his characters the most plausible words possible, but the historian’s task is to instruct and persuade serious students by means of the truth of the words and actions he presents, and this effect must be permanent, not temporary’.³⁴ And Lucian, in one of the most significant texts dealing exclusively with the theory of historical writing that has been handed down to us from antiquity, also pointed out and stressed the dissimilarities of both types: ‘such writers seem unaware that history has aims and rules different from poetry and poems. In the case of the latter, liberty is absolute and there is one law: the will of the poet’.³⁵ We may agree more or less with these statements,³⁶ but what is clear is that the historians saw themselves doing something different from poetry.

Another feature derived from the connection between historiography and rhetoric is the importance of *delectatio*. *Delectare* and *movere* were what an orator had to achieve to be considered successful, and they were legitimate aims for history as well. And entertainment is an aim – at least secret – of any writer. What does Woodman mean when he says: ‘however foreign it may be to us today, historians were expected to

³³ Arist. *Poet*, 9.1451a. For a brief, but suggestive interpretation of this passage, see Pelling, ‘Epilogue’, 348-9.

³⁴ Pol. 2.56.10-12. Translation by Wiseman in C. Gill and T.P. Wiseman, *Lies and fiction in the Ancient World* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1993) 134.

³⁵ Lucian, *How to write History*, 8. Although Finley, *Use and Abuse of History* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1975) 12, did not think very highly of his work: ‘[it] is nothing more than a concoction of the rules and maxims which had become the commonplaces of a rhetorical education, a shallow and essentially worthless pot-boiler’.

³⁶ At the cost of disagreeing with Aristotle, I think history – and not only in the ancient world, but all history – is more poetic than he would have us believe.

provide entertainment’?³⁷ Modern historians do not only write for scholarly debate; and if they did, who sets his goal on getting the reader to fall asleep when reading history? Is *delectatio* one of the features that unite us or separate us from the Roman historians? The world of emotions was not alien to history either.³⁸ To arouse emotions in the audience is in itself a valid and reasonable aim in historiography. ‘Provided that the author arouses appropriate emotions in the audience, by ensuring that the characters with whom they are encouraged to sympathise actually deserve their sympathy, audience-based emotions are not only derived from, but may reinforce, underpin, the moral and historical analysis’.³⁹

The agonistic quality of oratory is also present in ancient historiography. Competition and emulation appear clearly in the works of the Roman historians. The most obvious example is Livy because he said so without scruples: ‘Whether I am likely to accomplish anything worthy of the labour, if I record the achievements of the Roman people from the foundation of the city, I do not really know ... perceiving as I do that the theme is not only old but hackneyed, through the constant succession of new historians, who believed either that in their facts they can produce more authentic information, or that in their style they will prove better than the rude attempts of the ancients ... and if in so vast a company of writers my own reputation should be obscure my consolation would be the fame and greatness of those whose renown will throw mine into the shade’.⁴⁰ He is competing and he hopes to be the best.⁴¹ Sallust’s contest is different, but it is also present. His challenge is not only against other historians, but against the doers of the actions he is telling us about: ‘I regard the writing of history as one of the most difficult tasks, because the style and diction must be equal to the deeds recorded’.⁴² In his rejection of the Ciceronian style he is also competing in trying to

³⁷ D. West and A.J. Woodman, *Creative imitation and Latin literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979) 84.

³⁸ For a more detailed analysis of emotions in history, see J. Marincola, ‘Beyond Pity and Fear: The Emotions of History’, *Ancient Society* 33 (2003) 285-315.

³⁹ D. Levene, ‘Pity, Fear and the Historical Audience: Tacitus on the Fall of Vitellius’ in S. Morton Braund and C. Gill, *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) 134.

⁴⁰ Livy *praef.* 1-3.

⁴¹ In fact, if Livy was not the best, he did it quite well if we remember that man from Cadiz who went all the way to Rome, just to see the historian. (Pliny *Ep.* 2.3.8: *T. Livi nomine gloriaque commotum*).

⁴² Sall. *BC*, 3.2.

achieve, by different literary means, the glory of the orator. The competition in which Tacitus is involved is subtler: after the battle of Actium there were no historians who could write proper history: 'first, because they were ignorant of politics as being not any concern of theirs; later, because of their passionate desire to flatter; or again because of their hatred of their masters. So between the hostility of the one class and the servility of the other posterity was disregarded'.⁴³ With a few words he presented himself as better prepared than previous historians to do history. It is clear that rivalry with predecessors and contemporaries was a common motive.⁴⁴

A great part of the value of history was perceived in the ancient world as connected with its educational function. In one way or another, it was regarded as a beneficial guide to conduct or a *magistra vitae*.⁴⁵ Polybius had stressed it before Cicero's memorable words. At the beginning of his work he states history's twofold purpose: 'All historians have started and ended their work by praising the lessons of history as the truest education and training for political life, and the study of what happened to others as the most effective, or indeed the only, school in which the right spirit for enduring the changes of fortune can be acquired'.⁴⁶ To give political instruction and advice, and to provide *exempla* were two major aims of history. Among the things that one could learn from history,⁴⁷ perhaps the central one for Roman historians was the moral teaching. They saw all changes in moral terms, and they saw important historical issues like causation as a fundamentally moral question. Thus, history had to do more than merely tell pleasant stories from the past: it had to pass moral judgement. For it was from the study of the past, from the virtues and vices of their ancestors, that the Romans derived their concept of public morality. This ethical preoccupation marked Roman historiography so profoundly that it has been regarded – together with rhetoric – as one of its most distinctive characteristics. For Auerbach, for example, it is 'the combination of ethical and rhetorical preoccupations [which] gives [antique historiography] a high

⁴³ Tac. *Hist*, 1.1.

⁴⁴ For a Greek example, see Thuc. 1.22.4

⁴⁵ Cf. Cic. *De Or*, 2.36.

⁴⁶ Pol. 1.1.2. For other examples of 'political learning' from history, see Diodorus Siculus, 1. *praef*.; Semp. Asellius (in Gellius, *NA*, 5.18); Sall. *BJ*, 3.6.7.

⁴⁷ For these other things that one could learn from history, see R. Rutherford, 'Learning from History: Categories and Case-Histories', in R. Osborne and S. Hornblower (eds.), *Ritual, Finance and Politics: Athenian Democratic Accounts* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994) 53-68.

degree of order, clarity, and dramatic impact', but at the same time, 'the ethical and rhetorical approach are incompatible with a conception in which reality is a development of forces. Antique historiography gives us neither social history nor economic history nor cultural history. These can only be inferred indirectly from the data presented'.⁴⁸ And so, the general tendency has been to disregard the ethical considerations that ancient historians provide in their writings mainly for two reasons. First, it is seen as somewhat naïve and simplistic,⁴⁹ we think we have moved forward from going around preaching to everybody how to behave; 'the late twentieth century has no taste for moralism. Moralising tends to have an adjective before it – 'mere', or 'shallow', or 'hackneyed'.⁵⁰ In its extreme position, it is seen as a threat to the freedom of choosing one's own way in life; the autonomy and independence could be inhibited by the example or advice of others. Ethical approaches to history are also seen as totally subjective and, in some way, they should stay at a personal level. See, for example, this statement: 'Ancient historiography, despite its claims to objectivity, has a strong moral agenda'.⁵¹ Perhaps we could say the same about social history and its political agenda, history of gender and its ideological agenda, etc. In one way or other, every history has 'an agenda', but by this I do not mean something pejorative, but the simple 'necessity for the historian to take sides – not in the crude sense of bias for one side or another, but rather in the matter of choosing a purpose for his history, an orientation, and a vision of the world'.⁵² Another reason why we tend to pay less attention to moralising remarks in ancient historiography is because time and again history has proved a bad prophet of future events, and so we have become rather sceptical of the capacity of history to teach us anything.⁵³

⁴⁸ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representations of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 1953, orig. in German, Bern, 1946) 40.

⁴⁹ Though ethical considerations are not restricted to ancient historiography, see for example, Comber, 'Re-reading the Roman Historians', 43 n.1.

⁵⁰ C. Pelling, 'The Moralism of Plutarch's Lives', in D. Innes, H. Hine and C. Pelling (eds.), *Ethics and Rhetoric* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 206.

⁵¹ S. Morton Braund, *Latin Literature* (London and New York, Routledge, 2002) 20. She sees Roman historiography more linked with modern novels and cinema. For the role of historical novel in particular, see G. Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (transl. from German by H. and S. Mitchell, London, Penguin, 1976 [1962]).

⁵² J. Marincola, 'Alliance and Alienation: the Historian's Attitude', forthcoming.

⁵³ Cf. Evans, *In Defence of History*, 59 and E. Gabba, 'The True and False History in Classical Antiquity', *JRS* 71 (1981) 50.

But history is certainly useful for self-definition. The action of identifying with or distancing oneself from the story narrated is not always a completely conscious process in the reader, but it occurs almost simultaneously with the act of reading history. Roman historians were especially keen on projecting a particular image of Rome and used all the means they had at hand to transmit this idea powerfully. They aimed more at the identification of the readers with the actors of the deeds they were narrating, so that it would be clear what it meant to be Roman. There is a certain obsession in Roman historiography in its search for self-definition and self-identification. Description of people and institutions is given to show their essential characteristic and nature, and thus, be able to emphasise their specific role and function in society. To write about the history of Rome worked somehow as an instrument of domestic policy within the Roman society: the description of public life and the *res publica*, the relations between the ruling elite and the plebs, the military, the growth of the empire and the increasing importance of individual actors, the powerful new leaders and their political decisions, etc., everything served the Romans to discover who they were and how to continue behaving like Romans even in changing circumstances. And Latin historians appeared open and explicit in pursuing this goal.⁵⁴ Modern historiography does not do it quite in the same unambiguous way; much of its attention has been directed towards the other and the different, as a way of opening up possibilities for exploring the new. Modern – and post-modern – historians try to find the strange in the familiar, and sometimes it seems that the larger the gap between themselves and the past, the better. But a history that stresses the dissimilar and the contrasting is in itself another way of crying for self-definition. In the end, although modern and ancient historiography may use different methods and approaches, they do essentially the same job, and they work towards the same aim: the discovery of man and human nature studying their changes through time.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Livy, *praef.* 10.

3. History and *Virtus*

To discover how the Romans identified Romanness, we need to turn to their history and to their description of the men who incarnated this Romanness. If Roman historians tried to describe and explain men and their actions in time, the explanation and causes of their conduct for them had to be linked to the *mores*, i.e. the customs, habits, dispositions and ways of being. ‘Morality’, then, in its original meaning, was an essential feature when illustrating and giving meaning to the past.

We have narrowed down the concept of ‘moral’ so much – almost to one specific standard of behaviour – that we run the risk of misunderstanding ancient historiography; we think we have ‘overcome’ that stage, when what we have really done is closed or at least restricted the possibility of communicating because of the change of meaning in language. Perhaps we need to accept that ‘serious moral evaluation was a sign of political sophistication rather than naïveté’.⁵⁵

This thesis is not about moral history or the history of morality in the Roman historians. The questions I am trying to raise are, I think, broader. Is morality a valid category for explaining the past? Is the analysis of such an ethical concept as *virtus* a sound way of approaching Roman history? I will argue in this thesis – and hopefully convincingly demonstrate – that our understanding of *virtus* in Latin historiography not only tells us something about its meaning and role in history, but perhaps more importantly, it tells us more about the Romans’ understanding of history itself. I shall also show why this specific moral category, *virtus*, was so relevant and why especially to the historians of the late Republic and early Empire who, in some way, assumed the responsibility of recording it as a means to preserve it.

Tracing the concept of *virtus* from Sallust onwards also leads us to more questions through which to analyse Roman history during the early principate. When historians sought *virtus* – or vice – as the final explanation of history, were they trying to justify – or condemn – the system as well as the individual? Was the state seen as a moral entity? Perhaps the significance of a ‘monarchical’ or individual-dependent system – as opposed to a republican one – made it easier to see the history of the state

⁵⁵ C.B.R. Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000) 60.

itself as something which could be analysed in ‘moral’ or ‘biographical’ terms. Historians of the early principate had to deal with these questions, and their responses have depicted the treatment of political changes over time. The step from the Republic to the Empire needed a new interpretation of an old concept: the standards of *virtus* were more necessary than ever to validate the system or to censure it. The historians’ different viewpoints on the principate and the *virtus* of its players have contributed to enriching and expanding our knowledge of the particular circumstance in which Rome was immersed at that time.

Dealing with a concept like *virtus* not only gives us a better comprehension of the moral appraisal, but it also opens up new horizons when interpreting history. I fear that, for some time in the history of historiography, we have practised an ‘unhistorical treatment’ of moral history. Somehow we have learnt to leave aside what we do not consider as ‘proper’ history or as ‘unhistorical’, and this has only impoverished our approach. If I am right and the Romans did see *virtus* as their defining feature, it is justifiable to investigate and research how this concept shaped their identity and the changes it suffered through time, particularly in the turbulent period of the crisis of the Republic and the following establishment of the new political system, the principate.⁵⁶

Although there are several works on Roman *virtus* and others in preparation,⁵⁷ they seem to propose either a more thematic approach or one which involves Latin literature in such a general way – it was precisely their purpose – that the conclusions become considerably more difficult to grasp. As far as I am aware, there has been no attempt to follow up ‘*virtus* in history’ as a means of identifying not only what the Romans thought about themselves and about Romanness, but especially, how and why they had to keep defining it and re-defining it over time.

In the development of the argument it will appear clearly, I hope, that I have been working with two parallel strands. My analysis will be marked inevitably by the problem of the relationship between history and historiography: the time in which the historian writes affects the way he writes about the period he is referring to. The approach of

⁵⁶ A modern example would be the self-definition of Western civilization as ‘democratic’. It would seem therefore reasonable to investigate what the concept originally means, the changes it has experienced and the way it works as an idea shaping reality.

⁵⁷ They will be named in their specific contexts.

Sallust, himself in the middle of a crisis, will be shaped in a different way to that of Livy writing in a transitional period or that of Tacitus when, for better or for worse, the crisis seemed to have been settled. And not only the political situation of the time they were writing but also the complexities of the literary tradition mirror and at the same time model the historical interpretation. Roman historical prose meant a step further in the development of cultural history in Rome and henceforward. Sallust, Livy, Tacitus and even Velleius, did not just provide powerful narratives of war, compelling characterisations or deep political analyses; in some way, they helped to ‘construct’ the categories by which reality could be measured and expressed – the images and narratives which we experience in life.⁵⁸

This project has been shaped and planned, and then re-shaped and re-planned many times: some authors have been taken away and new concepts have been included till it reached a reasonable and justifiable unity. The four Roman historians I have chosen to deal with here by no means constitute the definitive answer to the problem of *virtus* in the period I am looking at, but they portray well the development and evolution of the concept at a time when political changes were so intense that the very foundation of Romanness, the liberty of the Republic, seemed to have shaken. It was, therefore, all the more necessary to stop and think what remained as truly Roman and try to define it in a way that would make sense in the new circumstances.

In the first part of the thesis I will start by looking at the etymology and original usage of the word and the connection with its Greek parallels *andreia* and *arête*. Then I will try to explain when, how and why the ‘courageous’ meaning of *virtus* was used for Roman self-definition and the role it played in politics. I shall then deal with the idea of the ‘expansion of the concept’ in a twofold way: its broader range of meaning and its wider appeal to different sectors of society. The meeting of the Greek and Roman cultures will also be addressed here and I will develop the concepts of *virilis-virtus* versus *humana-virtus*. Later, I will consider the influence of Greek philosophy in Roman thought and Stoicism in particular. I will discuss the development of a philosophical

⁵⁸ Cf. S. Goldhill, *The Invention of Prose*, Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics n. 32 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002) 44 and A. Cameron, ‘Postlude: What Next in History?’, in A. Cameron (ed.), *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History* (London, Duckworth, 1989) 206-7.

definition of the concept and the Stoic application of it to Roman society. I shall develop my argument around Cicero's writings.

After this examination of the theory of *virtus*, I shall turn to one of the main aims of the thesis, the study of its development through the Roman historians. In the first chapter of this section I shall show Sallust not only as 'the historian of the decline and fall', but also as the advocate of an expansive concept of *virtus* bringing new *nobilitas*. I will stress the creation of a 'language of decline' and how this emphasises precisely what *virtus* is all about and its dangers. The issue of the devaluation of language will also be addressed here and its relation to political corruption.

Moving on to Livy, I will argue that his is the history of the gradual acquisition of *libertas* for the Roman people: first with the consulate (aristocratic *libertas*) and then with the tribunes of the plebs (plebeian *libertas*). I will try to show how Livy, recording deeds of *prisca virtus*, is encouraging the Romans of his time to preserve their freedom in the same way.

Analysing Velleius' 'mini-universal history' I will try to prove that his positive portrayal of *virtus* is not confined only to the republican past, but that he emphasised the coming of a new and better era, the Principate. I will stress how Velleius adds and highlights that the Principate had come not just to re-establish peace and order, but to restore something very important to the Romans: *virtus*. The analysis of the emperor Tiberius in Velleius' work will be given as a study case to illustrate his interpretation.

Tacitus will appear as the 'climax' of the thesis, and in some way the previous chapters could be seen as working towards building up an adequate background to situate him in the proper historical context. I shall concentrate not so much on Tacitus' pessimism and gloominess regarding the Principate, but suggest another deeper expansion of the concept of *virtus* together with the progression of the understanding of the idea of internal freedom. I will discuss Tacitus' works separately implying an *in crescendo* redefinition of Romanness.

Together with *virtus*, the concept of *libertas* will often emerge in the analysis of the historians' works. Freedom appears to be linked to *virtus* in a two-fold relationship:

they are both essential elements for Roman self-identification; one presupposes the other in a reciprocal and inseparable way.

A deeper comprehension of '*virtus* in history' might help us in so far as it broadens our knowledge of human nature and provides us with an inspiration to understand the indissoluble connection between life and literature.

II The Concept of *Virtus*

‘But as soon as you can read of the glories of heroes
and your father’s deeds, and can know what *virtus* is,
slowly will the plains yellow with the waving corn,
on wild brambles the purple grape will hang,
and the stubborn oak distil dewy honey’.

Virg. *Ecl*, 4.26-30.

Before we start analysing what *virtus* meant to the particular authors and the role they assigned to it in their histories, we shall try to investigate what it signified in its original meaning and try to illustrate the journey of this concept. My approach will be somewhat unusual: we will begin not from the general moving on to the particular, but the other way round. We will not look back for the Greek influences in the first place. Searching primarily for ‘the particular’ in Roman *virtus* will lead us to a more secure path for the definition of this intrinsically Roman concept and will help us to discover in what way the Greek input was relevant to the more general notion of the term.

We shall have to look not for a few brief striking events whose character is indisputably clear, but for a much longer, more complex and less easily identified process and probably one which by its very nature is open to rival interpretation. But it is precisely in this challenging task that I see an important aim of this thesis, i.e. not only in exploring and presenting a literary debate on a particularly important concept, which might enrich our reading of some ancient texts, but also in considering how the question of the definition and origin of the idea of *virtus* soon becomes transformed into an issue of wider significance. In searching beyond the literary and historical aspects of it and conceiving different ways to approach the subject, we start unravelling a piece of intellectual history.

Is *virtus* a totally Roman concept? What is the relationship between *virtus* and its Greek parallels *andreia* and *arête*? Can we translate *virtus* indiscriminately as courage or virtue? Was *virtus* the attribute of a particular sex, social group, nation? I will attempt

to answer these questions and hopefully the complex, historical, multi-layered character of the core concept of *virtus* will become clearer. I am aware that in the process of responding to these points many others may arise, but this is in no way discouraging, but on the contrary, a stimulating proof that history is all about asking questions.

We find *virtus* working as a complex set of ideas whose meaning and usage are so varied that a precise definition of it seems hardly possible. The etymology of the word tells us something intrinsically related to its significance, but it falls short when applied to the more general connotation and what was going to develop later as the common meaning of *virtus*. I will also try to show in this section that the supposed contrast between traditional Roman *virtus* and the Greek parallels, although it has been very useful in identifying the differences and particular nuances of the concepts, has also created a misleading dichotomy of the terms. This has been presented by some scholars as the existence of an originally Roman *virtus* meaning courage until later, mainly under the influence of Greek doctrines and especially Stoicism, *virtus* became a more embracing concept specifically related to morality.¹ This is, of course, true in some sense, but it can carry a dangerous presupposition or assumption that Romans had to wait till Greek culture had settled in Rome, and only then would they have started thinking about their own Roman way of being or the principles of their code of values.

1. *Virtus* as courage

The etymology of *virtus* does not offer problems in identifying the word with its first and primitive meaning. *Virtus* comes from the noun *vir* and the suffix ‘tut’ – which appears to indicate the state or form of existence –, in the same way that *senectus* is the state of being a *senex* or *iuventus* of being a *iuvenis*.² Its exact Greek parallel would be

¹ One of the latest versions of this view can be found in M. McDonnell, ‘Roman Men and Greek Virtue’ in R. Rosen and I. Sluiter (eds.), *Andreia: Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden, Brill, 2003) 235-62.

² For an expanded explanation of the formation of the word and its original meaning see W. Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana: Ihre Stellung im römische Wertsystem* (München, Wilhem Fink Verlag, 1973) 12-3; J. Sarsila, ‘Some Aspects of the Concept of *virtus* in Roman Literature until Livy’, *Studia Philologica Jyväskyläensia* (1982) 17-22; A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue latine*

andreia from *aner*. However, *virtus* seems to have developed more freely than other words with the suffix 'tut', and is more commonly used not as a state of being man, but as the proper characteristic of a man: what is proper to a *vir* is *virtus*. Cicero gives this etymology in the *Tusculan Disputations* and adds a qualification to it: *appellata est enim ex viro virtus; viri autem propria maxime est fortitudo, cuius munera duo sunt maxima mortis dolorisque contemptio*'.³

In a highly militaristic society such as Rome, physical prowess and courage – especially shown in war – remained the central elements of manliness throughout the Republican period and into the Empire.⁴ It was the valour of her soldiers that had won Rome a reputation of a fierce and invincible nation. This is found in the early writers,⁵ particularly historians; they want to make us believe that the Romans were braver than other peoples. The concept of courage in Rome works not only as a self-definition, but also as the cause of their success. Claudius Quadrigarius in his memorable account of the fight between a Gaul and a Roman, set the latter's superiority in his spirit and courage to challenge a man better armed than himself, and thus, *virtus* was precisely the reason for his triumph.⁶ In Cato this aspect becomes even more evident and explicit: various examples can be summed up in one: the tribune's brave deed to save the state, says Cato, was not exceedingly praised at that time because for a good Roman to serve the *res publica* with valour was not (and should not) be uncommon.⁷

This idea was not something exclusive to Roman thought. Already with Thucydides we find Pericles claiming the willingness of the Athenians to give their lives for the sake of their city.⁸ And later, Plato devotes a whole dialogue, the *Laches*, trying to give a definition of what courage is and what the implications for the service to the

(Paris, Klincksieck, 1951) 1305-6 and J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politique sous la république* (Paris, Belles Lettres, 1972) 242-6.

³ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.*, 2.43.

⁴ See, for example, the representation of *virtus* in coins in Appendix 2.ii.

⁵ Cf. Sarsila, 'Some Aspects of the Concept of *virtus*', 23-64, who gives the occurrences of the word *virtus* from Livius Andronicus onwards.

⁶ Cf. Claudius Quadrigarius fr. 10b P. (= Gellius 9.13.4ff).

⁷ Cf. Cato, book 4.83 P = 4.7aC = Gellius 3.7: 'the immortal gods accorded the military tribune good fortune to match his courage. This is what happened: although he was wounded many times, his head remained unharmed, and he was recognised among the dead, exhausted by his wounds and loss of blood; they picked him up and he recovered. Often thereafter he gave brave and energetic service to the state; and by his act leading off those soldiers, he saved the rest of the army'.

⁸ Cf. Thuc. 2.39.4. For a more detailed presentation of this idea see R. Balot, 'Pericles' anatomy of Democratic Courage', *AJP* 122 (2001) 505-25.

state are.⁹ When Cicero says that ‘brave men do not feel wounds in the line of battle, or feel them but prefer death rather than move a step from the post that honour has appointed’,¹⁰ the meaning he gives to *virtus* is almost identical to the definition that the general Laches gives of *andreia* in the Platonic dialogue: ‘anyone who is willing to stay at his post and face the enemy, and does not run away, you may be sure, is courageous’.¹¹ Laches defends the traditional view of courage,¹² and both *virtus* and *andreia* are referring here to the manliest characteristic of all: courage. Bravery appears then, to be semantically related to man and to be the original and basic meaning of *virtus*; we can call it *virilis-virtus*.

Courage is not simply a quality of individuals, but a quality necessary to sustain the household or the community. Honour and glory belong to the individual who excels in battle or in a contest as a mark of recognition by his household and his community of the part he played in sustaining public order. To be courageous is to be someone on whom reliance can be placed. Hence courage is an important ingredient in all who have the mission to defend something, like soldiers, politicians, etc. Courage is always publicly oriented, so Cicero says that ‘the courage that is prompt to face danger, if it is inspired not by public spirit, but by its own selfish purposes, should have the name of effrontery rather than courage’.¹³ Thus, this *virilis-virtus* appears as a social quality. As Roller has pointed out, one of the main features of the Roman ethical system is that moral values are deeply connected with and oriented towards the community: ‘it is the community as a whole that is the ultimate source of and reference point of moral value, the generator of incentives and sanctions that reproduce its socio-political arrangements and ideologies’.¹⁴ Alasdair McIntyre, in his influential analysis of the concept of virtue, describes courageous behaviour and finds it expressed principally in the ability to risk oneself for a reason, namely, valuing somebody else or something else more than your own life or benefit. His portrayal of someone courageous *in genere* can be also

⁹ A thorough exposition and commentary on the main ideas of the *Laches* can be found in W.T. Schmid, *On Manly Courage: A Study of Plato's Laches* (Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.*, 2.24.59.

¹¹ Plato, *Lach.* 190E.

¹² In opposition to Nicias who argues for a more ‘intellectualised’ one.

¹³ Cic. *De Off.*, 1.63.

¹⁴ M. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy: Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2001) 22.

adequately applied to the Romans: 'We hold courage to be a virtue because the care and concern for individuals, communities and causes which is so crucial to so much in practice requires the existence of such a virtue. If someone says that he cares for some individual, community or cause, but is unwilling to risk harm or danger on his, her or its own behalf, he puts in question the genuineness of his care and concern. Courage, the capacity to risk harm or danger to oneself, has its role in human life because of this connection with care and concern. This is not to say that a man cannot genuinely care and also be a coward. It is in part to say that a man who genuinely cares and has not the capacity for risking harm or danger has to define himself, both to himself and to others, as a coward'.¹⁵

Courage, like any other virtue, can be corrupted in two ways: by excess or by deficiency. The virtue of courage lies between rashness and timidity. It appears, then, that it has to be the response to danger according to reason. 'Reason possesses an intrinsic element of dignity and grandeur, suited rather to require obedience than to render it, esteeming all the accidents of human fortunes not merely as endurable but also as unimportant; a quality of loftiness and elevation, fearing nothing, submitting to no one, ever unsubdued [*semper invictum*]'.¹⁶ Socrates in the *Laches* states that courage is a kind of wisdom: the fearless and the courageous are not the same thing. 'In my opinion very few people are endowed with courage and forethought, while rashness, boldness and fearlessness with no prudence to guide it, are found in many men, women, children and animals'.¹⁷ Courage appears then as a proper quality of the human soul.

But perhaps we are going too far in describing this original and basic idea of *virtus*. It could be that at the start the Romans did not question the concurrence of other qualities, such as prudence or reasoning, which worked together to make up courage. It was simply valour, and as such, it had 'its precepts and its rules, rules of constraining force, that forbid a man to show womanish weakness in pain'.¹⁸ Courage had to be

¹⁵ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (London, Duckworth, 1981) 179.

¹⁶ Cic. *De Fin*, 2.14.47.

¹⁷ Plato, *Lach*. 197B.

¹⁸ Cic. *De Fin*, 2.29.94: *Fortitudinis quaedam praecepta sunt ac paene leges, quae effeminari virum vetant in dolore*. There was a tendency to suggest that in general, women were weaker and less brave than men, but all the authors I deal with are also generous in attributing 'manly courage' to specific women who deserve that praise, and we will see them in due course. For this, see B. Levick, 'Women, Power and Philosophy at Rome and Beyond' in G. Clark and T. Rajak (eds.), *Philosophy and Power in the Greco-*

shown in deeds, not in words;¹⁹ especially in a pragmatic society like Rome where a man is what he does: ‘the glory of *virtus* is in activity’.²⁰

According to McDonnell, ‘this “courageous” meaning of *virtus* is minimised in the major philological studies of Earl and Eisenhut, who hold that it is but one aspect of the wide ranging concept. But both studies misinterpret *virtus* in pre-classical Latin’.²¹ The interpretation of *virtus* as courage is here sacrificed – according to McDonnell – in favour of the more general and moral aspect, which for Earl and Eisenhut would be the dominating feature of *virtus*. ‘Eisenhut’s idea that from the beginning *virtus* had a broad semantic significance centring around the idea of general capability does not stand up to scrutiny and Earl’s influential theory of a *virtus*-complex of moral ideals, in which *virtus* functions as an all-embracing concept which subsumed other cardinal Roman virtues, is demonstrably untrue’.²² In defence of these scholars I have to say that Earl’s theory of *virtus* is most illuminating when applied to the concept in the late Republic, especially in Sallust and Cicero. His view that *virtus* was a collection of attitudes, emotions and sentiments, seems to me, to explain what *virtus* meant ‘as a whole’; Earl’s reinforcement of the imprecision of the word gives strength to the role it played in social and political life. His approach to *virtus* has the validity of someone who analyses the concept ‘from within’: Earl is immersed in the system he has created, the consistence and coherence of it will depend on the level of adhesion to its principles. As McDonnell himself recognises, Earl’s has been an ‘influential theory’ indeed and one not without merit. In Eisenhut’s case, what I can see is in one sense an agreement between him and McDonnell in the main idea that *virtus* as courage was the original Roman meaning: ‘..., der Römer dagegen sieht in *virtus* zuerst das, was den Mann zum Manne macht; die Werthhaftigkeit als solche, die *virtus* von etwas, was nicht *vir* ist, dem römischen Begriff ursprünglich fremd’.²³ But the emphatic verdict which McDonnell passes on their works encourages us to look forward to his own forthcoming book, *Roman Manliness: Virtus*

Roman World. Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002) 133-156, especially 139: ‘Although there was a linguistic difficulty, in that essentially it meant manliness par excellence, women too could possess *virtus*’.

¹⁹ Plato, *Lach.* 193E.

²⁰ Cic. *De Off.* 1.6.19.

²¹ McDonnell, ‘Roman Men and Greek Virtue’, 236.

²² McDonnell, ‘Roman Men and Greek Virtue’, 236.

²³ Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana*, 22.

and the Roman Republic.²⁴ McDonnell seems to emphasise so much the ‘courageous’ meaning of *virtus* and to place it as a consequence of Rome’s militaristic society, that he almost forgets that *virtus* meaning courage is *also* ethical. Courage is not something ‘given’ with manliness,²⁵ but a quality of the soul, and as such it is developed and exercised by those who choose to. It seems that by trying to recover the ‘courageous’ meaning of *virtus* McDonnell has ‘minimised’ the ethical aspect of courage.

Another study of the concept of *virtus* is that of Sarsila.²⁶ He considers and catalogues exhaustively the different kinds of *virtus* in Roman literature before Livy – valour among them – but gives little time to explaining one of the most interesting phenomena, namely, why all these meanings are encapsulated in only one word. His thorough and industrious analysis author by author lacks a final synthesis and in the end one can draw an idea of what *virtus* meant for each of them, but not why they used it in that particular way or what the characteristics of *virtus* were that made it so flexible and versatile a concept.²⁷

This flexibility and wide range of meanings is found as early as we happen to have written evidence of it. From some of the comedies of Naevius and Plautus we can find *virtus* meaning not only military valour, but also moral excellence.²⁸

2.- *Virtus* as *arête*

Why is it that when *virtus* is so clearly ‘manly courage’ by etymology and usage it appears also with a broader ethical meaning? How did it come to mean good qualities in general, courage being only one of them? Is there a way of distinguishing these usages?

²⁴ Forthcoming at Cambridge University Press.

²⁵ See his description of *virtus* as innate in McDonnell, ‘Roman Men and Greek Virtue’, 255. *Arête* and *andreia*, as courage and any virtue, can be achieved by men with the help of reason and practice. See for example the Roman emphasis on training and discipline; games as a means of hardening youngsters and training them to bear pain, cf. Plut. *Cato Maior*, 20.3-5.

²⁶ Sarsila, ‘Some Aspects of the Concept of *virtus*’, 1-148.

²⁷ See Sarsila, ‘Some Aspects of the Concept of *virtus*’, *passim*, but especially 132-6.

²⁸ For a detailed account of these occurrences see Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana*, 24-9 and Sarsila, ‘Some Aspects of the Concept of *virtus*’, 23-40.

The expansion of the word *virtus* was more complex than at first meet the eyes. The difficulties lie partially in the evidence we have. Most of our earliest sources dealing with *virtus* come from the second century BC and thus we have no way to prove whether *virtus* before that meant *only* courage or *more* than that. As far as we can trace the concept, we find it meaning something like a quality of men, but in quite general terms.²⁹ Manliness, militarism and morality appear inseparable in Roman thought from the beginning and therefore a term qualifying any of these had to be related to the others. We can take Ennius as an example. His famous *moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque*,³⁰ offered a complete programme of what could be identified as Romanness.³¹ This description of national character and values provided the grounds for self-identification and even though it did not give an explicit definition of *virtus*, it certainly presented the moral atmosphere where *virtus* could arise. Probably one of the first definitions we have of *virtus* as such is that of Lucilius and it is remarkably open and general:

‘*Virtus*, Albinus, is the ability to pay the true price in whatever business or affairs of life; *virtus* is knowing what there is in every undertaking for a man; *virtus* is knowing what is right and useful and honourable for a man, what is good, bad useless or shamefully dishonourable; *virtus* is knowing the means and the ends of a pursuit; *virtus* is the ability to pay the price from one’s store of wealth; *virtus* is giving to honour that which is in fact due to it, to be an enemy and a hater of bad men, and bad habits and, on the other hand, a defender of men of good habits or morals, to make much of these, to wish them well, to live with them as a friend, and beyond these traits, to think first of one’s fatherland, then of one’s parents, and third and last of our own interests’.³²

²⁹ Cf. W. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979) 20. See also J. Ferguson, *Moral Values in the Ancient World* (London, Methuen and Co., 1958) 161-2.

³⁰ Ennius, *Ann.* 5.156.

³¹ Cf. L.R. Lind, ‘Concept, Action and Character: the Reasons for Rome’s Greatness’, *TAPA* 103 (1972) 235-83, who sees in Ennius the initiator of the literary tradition that links Rome’s moral and martial greatness, stressing the dependence of the latter upon the former.

³² Lucilius, 1096-1208. Lind’s translation, slightly adapted, in ‘Concept, Action and Character’, 240. He translates *virtus* as manliness, meaning broadly ‘to be a proper man in all senses’, I have preferred to keep the original word *virtus*.

Even though it has been stated that this fragment owes much to Stoic ideas of *virtus*, it seems possible also that these set of maxims worked simply as a code of values for the behaviour of Roman men.³³

At the mention of foreign influences in Roman realities, I perhaps need to dwell here not so much on the influence of the Stoics in Roman thought – as I shall deal with that later – but with the attitude with which Romans approached all Greek things, especially Greek culture. It involved not only the reception of philosophical ideas from Greece, but also the presence of good and convincing orators to present these doctrines in an appealing way to a Roman audience. *Imitatio* and *aemulatio* are probably good concepts to define in some sense the relationship that Rome developed towards the Greek way of life and knowledge.³⁴ But imitation and competition was only a part of a very complex liaison between the two cultures.³⁵ They admitted the intellectual superiority of the Greeks, sometimes reluctantly, but they kept a tendency to find the Greeks fickle, prone to theorise and certainly inferior in political, military and moral practices.³⁶ Cicero, who devoted a great part of his time to studying and writing about philosophy, which he had learned from Greek masters, also recognises the dangers of dedicating one's life to intellectual activities detached from the social and ethical values of society. He touches this point emphatically in *De Oratore*, where he argues in favour of the superiority of Rome in matters of morality,³⁷ natural law,³⁸ and practical wisdom.³⁹ In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero again is going to confirm the statement that Romans are in some aspects – in fact, the most important ones – superior to the Greeks: 'For morality, rules of life, family and household economy are surely

³³ For the risk of overvaluing Stoic ideas in Lucilius see D. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961), 26 and Sarsila, 'Some Aspects of the Concept of *virtus*', 57-9.

³⁴ Cf. Cic. *De Fin*, 1.10; *Nat. Deor.* 1.8.

³⁵ Horace's *Graecia capta, ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio* (*Ep.* 2.1.156-7) expresses partly the complexities of this relationship.

³⁶ Cf. Cic. *Rep.* 2.1.2; *Tusc.* 1.1-3; *ad Quint.* 12.2.30. For more on this topic see E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (London, Duckworth, 1983) 3-18 and J. Zetzel, 'Plato with Pillows: Cicero on the Uses of Greek Culture' in D. Braund, and C. Gill (eds.), *Myth, History and Culture in Republican Rome. Studies in Honour of T.P. Wiseman* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2003) 119-38.

³⁷ Cf. Cic. *De Or.* 1.47-8.

³⁸ Cf. Cic. *De Or.* 1.193; 1.195; 1.198.

³⁹ Cf. Cic. *De Or.* 1.193; 1.224; 2.18. Cicero expresses his preference also for Roman orators, showing their *auctoritas* in the art of rhetoric as something genuinely and deeply Roman, cf. *De Or.*, passim, but especially 1.23. and *Brut.*, 254.

maintained by us in a better and more dignified way; and beyond question our ancestors have adopted better regulations and laws than others in directing the policy of government. What shall I say of the art of war? In this sphere our countrymen have proved their superiority by valour as well as in an even greater degree of discipline.’⁴⁰ Rome maintained her traditions with pride and taught her children the customs of their ancestors faithfully and even nostalgically, turning a cautious eye on *res novae*,⁴¹ and this was partly the reason for her originality. The ability to recognise what was superior in Greek culture was combined with the struggle to maintain what was properly Roman in a fight for self-identification which was going to yield rich intellectual fruits: it was Rome’s complex relationship with Greek culture, the mixture of admiration and contempt, subjection and domination which brought forward the best of the Roman minds.⁴² In the process of characterising themselves and differentiating from others – especially the powerful and dominant Greek culture – the Romans had to search for appropriate self-definitions which helped them along the way to have a clearer vision of what their essence and mission were. It is here where the concept of *virtus* appears most significant, and I hope to show the importance of this point throughout the thesis.

Contacts between Greeks and Romans had started a long time ago, ‘even old Italy was crowded with Pythagoreans, in the days when a part of this land was Great Greece as they called it’,⁴³ and so the exposure to and intercourse with Greek culture was never totally absent from the formation of Rome. Around the mid-second century BC, after the eastern wars were finished and Macedonia and Greece were finally conquered, a large influx of Greeks came to Rome in search of better opportunities.⁴⁴ The embassy of 155 BC brought to Rome the leading philosophers of the day, heads of the three major Athenian schools of philosophy: Carneades (Academy) Diogenes of

⁴⁰ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.1.2.

⁴¹ It is significant that the Latin expression *res novae* is used to translate ‘innovation’ as well as ‘revolution’. On traditional Roman education see H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (English edition: trans. by G. Lamb, London, Sheed and Ward, 1956) and S. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (London, Methuen & Co. 1977).

⁴² As Velleius would say later: ‘Genius is fostered by emulation and it is now envy, now admiration, which enkindles imitation, and, in the nature of things, that which is cultivated with the highest zeal advances to the highest perfection’, 1.17.7.

⁴³ Cic. *De Or.* 2.154.

⁴⁴ Cf. M. Griffin, ‘Philosophy, Politics and Politicians at Rome’, in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata I* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989) 1-37.

Babylon (Stoa) and Critolaus (Peripatetics).⁴⁵ They were especially attractive to young Romans, including Scipio Aemilianus and his friends, and the effect of their teachings started to spread little by little and became popular. But their influence was not wholly unquestioned and Rome at this time saw the appearance of the champion of Roman traditional values: Cato the Elder. His attack was not so much on Greek culture as such, but rather on the influence that a misguided or unrestrained training in rhetoric and philosophical education would bring to young Romans.⁴⁶ He feared, in Plutarch's words, 'that the young would rather win a reputation through rhetoric than through deeds and military campaigns'.⁴⁷ But Cato's warnings were difficult to take into account at a time when Rome seems to have been especially receptive to Greek authority. This was also the period of the influence of the historian Polybius, resident in Rome from 168 to 150 BC and the companion of Scipio Aemilianus in Africa and Spain, and of the Stoic philosopher Panaetius.

But philosophy was not the only area of dealings between Greek and Roman culture. The many Greek people – coming from the conquests – who lived in Rome from the mid-second century onwards created an almost bilingual atmosphere in the city and made the linguistic interactions into the first and foremost way of exchanging ideas. The presence of a bilingual population was vital for the absorption and development of these new ideas. Apart from the educated Roman elite, who knew Greek perfectly well, and the soldiers who must have picked up some Greek in the wars of conquest, there was a constant stream of Greek slaves or people of servile origin that came to Rome and stayed there. The borrowing of words must have been something relatively common in the streets of Rome around the second century BC,⁴⁸ and even more so later, when they finally decided that they wanted to write philosophy.

In the case of *virtus*, the word seems to have had an exact Greek parallel in the word *andreia*: both coming from man (*vir* – *aner*) and related to the manly quality of courage. But *virtus* was also used to translate *arête*. McDonnell gives a possible

⁴⁵ For a more detailed account of this event see M. Morford *Roman Philosophers* (London and New York, Routledge, 2002) 14 ff.

⁴⁶ Cf. A.E. Astin, *Cato the Censor* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978) 157-81. See also Cic. *De Sen*, 26.38.

⁴⁷ Plut. *Cato Maior*, 23.1.

⁴⁸ This is the world portrayed by the comedian Plautus and as McDonnell points out: 'in his plays the great majority of Greek words are spoken by slaves or characters of low status' in 'Roman Men and Greek Virtue', 246.

explanation for this in Latin's shortage of words,⁴⁹ but precisely for that reason they could have borrowed the Greek term for 'excellence' as they had done with other Greek words before. I am inclined to believe that the Romans – at least in pre-classical Latin – saw little distinction between *arête* and *andreia*. In a highly militaristic society the excellence of a man was manifested in his courage at war. One possible 'bridge' between *arête* and *virtus* could be that in fighting one displayed courage and bravery (*andreia*) and thus displayed or possessed excellence as a man (*arête*) according to the nobility's code of ethical behaviour. The expansionist wars gave enough opportunity to the Romans to show their manliness, their courage and their excellence as proper men.

The Greeks originally understood *arête* as excellence, something that gave a living creature the power to perform its function well. In the Homeric poems *arête* was used for excellence of any kind: a fast runner displayed the *arête* of his feet,⁵⁰ and also horses could surpass other horses in *arête*.⁵¹ Thus, as Eisenhut has pointed out, the origin of *arête* had no specific connection with ethics: 'aus Etymologie und Grundbedeutung erklärt sich, daß *arête* – in Gegensatz zu *virtus* – ursprünglich frei von moralischer Wertung ist: *arête* ist die gute Qualität und 'Tauglichkeit schlechthin'.⁵² But ethical considerations became more and more popular during the fifth century BC; the sophists and Socrates had called into question some of the core moral concepts and one can start finding *arête* with a more ethical significance, meaning not just excellence, but mainly moral excellence.⁵³

When the Greek language became more widespread in Rome – third to second century BC – the term *arête* already had a wider range of meaning; thus, the Greek word also influenced the use of *virtus* to denote excellence and in particular moral excellence. To point out the precise moment when *virtus* became predominantly an ethical word is hardly possible. It might have been in so early a stage of the Roman literature that there are no literary sources which retain the exclusive original Roman meaning of *virtus*. Around the third and second century BC the *Elogia Scipionum* appeared, with its clear

⁴⁹ Cf. McDonnell, 'Roman Men and Greek Virtue', 236. Cf. Cic. *De Fin.* 3.2.5.

⁵⁰ Homer, *Il.* 20.411.

⁵¹ Homer, *Il.* 23.276. For this same meaning of 'excellence' in *virtus* see Plautus, *Mil. Gl.* 3.1.131, Cato, *RR*, 1.2 and more examples in J. Ferguson, *Moral Values in the Ancient World*, 161-2.

⁵² Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana*, 16.

⁵³ See e.g. Thuc., 2.40.4, on Pericles' speech: 'In *arête* we stand in sharp contrast to most men'. See also 2.34.5.

message of *virtus* in the double meaning of courage and moral excellence;⁵⁴ Cato's speeches were delivered, where *virtus* was bravery and virtue in a more comprehensive sense.⁵⁵ Plautus' and Terence's comedies also have some references to *virtus* with a more general appreciation of the term than just valour,⁵⁶ and we have already seen the meaning that Lucilius assigns to it, so on the whole, I would be cautious in attributing an overwhelming importance to the power of *arête* over *virtus*.⁵⁷ Without denying this influence, what seems to me more plausible is that when Romans encountered the Greek terminology for philosophical ideas – and specifically the Stoic and Peripatetic ones – they found that *arête* was the Greek word to translate and signify their Roman *virtus* in the broader sense, which remained in essence the *virtus* that Ennius and Lucilius had spoken of in their verses and which the early Romans had lauded without explicitly defining. That would also explain why it was not necessary to borrow a Greek word to express *arête*: they already had a Latin one. Vague, indefinable and pluri-semantic, *virtus* could represent the Greek *andreia* and *arête* simultaneously and without problems, and it was precisely in these features where its power – political, social, moral and linguistic – lay.

Thus, *virtus*, had a different development from its originally Greek parallel *andreia* – we may only speculate upon this process as language does not always develop as logically as we would like – and came to be identified with virtue in the moral sense in a way that *andreia* never did. *Arête* appears to have influenced *virtus* in the philosophical and rigorous definition we find later, but only later and it had to wait till Cicero to reach its fullest rational expression in Latin.

⁵⁴ Cf. *CIL*, VI, 1285, 1288, 1289, 1293. See appendix 3.

⁵⁵ Cf. Cato, *ORF* 3, fr.146 and *HRR* I fr. 83.

⁵⁶ See for example, Plautus, *Most.* 139, 144; *Cap.* 690; *Mil Gl.* 649; Terence, *Adel.* 257; 442; *Heau. Timor.* 207.

⁵⁷ As it seems to be the claim of McDonnell, 'Roman Men, Greek Virtue', 247-51. Cf. Cic, *De Leg.* 1.16.45: 'we by a misuse of the term call the virtue (*virtus*) of a tree or of a horse...'

3. Stoicism in Rome

As I have mentioned above,⁵⁸ Stoicism deserves a special place in our account of *virtus* in Rome since it placed a noteworthy stress on this particular concept. Looking at Stoicism can help us to set *virtus* against its philosophical and intellectual background. In this section I will give particular attention to one of the many influential philosophical schools in Rome and deal with the possible connections of the Stoic philosophical system and the maturity of Roman *virtus*.

Although Epicureanism had also entered the scene towards the late Republic,⁵⁹ it was Stoic thought which prevailed in Rome over the other Greek philosophical schools during this period and especially during the early Empire.⁶⁰ Much has been said about the affinity of Stoic ideas with those of the traditional hardy and resilient Romans. In fact, we can find a double approach to the relation between Greek Stoicism and traditional Rome. One affirms that the successors of the Greek philosophers, who had come in the embassy of 155 BC, developed adaptations of their philosophy that were necessary to make it acceptable to Roman culture.⁶¹ A good example of this could be Panaetius, who seems to have been most appreciated for having adjusted the rigid and dogmatic doctrines of Stoicism to the Roman taste. Cicero comments that ‘he [Panaetius] fled from the gloom and harshness [of the rigorous Stoics] and did not approve their thorny arguments. In one branch of philosophy [ethics] he was gentler, in the other [physics and logic] clearer’.⁶² Another view is that the popularity of Stoicism in Rome lay in its ability to meet current needs of the people of the time. The idea that the world is ruled by Providence or the notion that man’s excellence does not depend on the success of obtaining external goods was unquestionably appealing in an age of uncertainties.⁶³

⁵⁸ See II.2, with n.33.

⁵⁹ For this, see for example, D.P. Fowler, ‘Lucretius and Politics’ in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata I. Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989) 120-50.

⁶⁰ Cf. C. Gill, ‘The School in the Roman Imperial Period’ in B. Inwood, *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) 33-58.

⁶¹ For this position see Earl, *Sallust*, *passim*, but especially 113. *Contra*: Rawson, *Intellectual Life*, 64.

⁶² Cic. *De Fin.*, 4.79.

⁶³ Cf. B.D. Shaw, ‘The Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology’, *Latomus* 44 (1985) 16-54.

Although it is hard to calculate the real influence of philosophers in Roman politics, somehow ‘philosophy played an important role in a society where religion had little metaphysics and less ethics’.⁶⁴ In his *De Republica*, Cicero mentions that Scipio often discussed politics with Panaetius and Polybius, and gives us evidence of this influence in his other writings.⁶⁵ Politics and morality were closely connected in Roman life, so much so that moral concepts seem to have been principally social in application as opposed to private, and they concentrated around ideas of public function and success rather than more individual ethical notions of right and wrong. The modern distinction between ethical concepts and social values was for them, if not non-existent, at least somewhat blurred.

The ethical scheme of Stoicism presents a consistent set of ideas which work only within the system and the acknowledgement of all its premises and propositions.⁶⁶ This involves a certain division between the world of the wise man – as rare as the phoenix – and the everyday world, where the rest of the mortals are striving to become like the wise man. The Stoics claimed that virtue was the comprehensive goal of the human being, such a goal was set by his own nature and was indispensable to achieve the *eudaimonia* that all men were after.⁶⁷ Nothing but virtue is necessary for the well-

⁶⁴ M. Griffin. ‘Philosophy, Politics and Politicians’, 36. See also P.A. Brunt, ‘Philosophy and Religion in the Late Republic’, in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.) *Philosophia Togata I. Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989) 174-98.

⁶⁵ Cf. Cic. *De Rep.*, 1.34. Cf. also *De Off.*, 2.51; 2.60; *Ad Att.*, 16.14.3. See also Gellius, 13.28. The real impact of the so-called ‘Scipionic circle’ in Roman politics is difficult to measure precisely. For Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971) 31: ‘all the contributions to the theory of Roman imperialism which modern scholars have ascribed to Panaetius are of course pure products of the imagination. There is not one fragment of Panaetius dealing with political matters’. For a stimulating debate and different opinions, see esp. A.E. Astin, *Scipio Aemilianus*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967) appendix 6: ‘The Scipionic Circle and the Influence of Panaetius’, 294-306. Cf. also E. Rawson, ‘Roman Rulers and the Philosophic Adviser’ in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata I* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989) 233-58; M. Mazza, *Storia e Ideologia in Tito Livio* (Catania, Bonanno Editore, 1966) 137-49; A.E. Eckstein, *The Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1995) 7-9 and F.W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1972) 8.

⁶⁶ Cf. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London, Duckworth, 1974) 208: ‘The Stoics offer a complete world picture and in a sense, as they themselves observed, one must swallow the whole thing or none of it’. See also A. Long, ‘Stoic Eudaimonism’ in A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996) 196, 201.

⁶⁷ As approaching in depth the fascinating topic of Stoicism would go far beyond the scope of this thesis, I will only give an extremely brief summary of its contents. For good introductions to Stoicism, see A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*; F.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London, Duckworth, 1975); R.W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (London, Routledge, 1996);

being of men, and therefore any other good, such as wealth, health, fame, etc. are only 'preferable' to their corresponding contraries: poverty, sickness, ill-reputation, which are also strictly 'indifferent'.⁶⁸ As far as goodness is concerned, it is of no importance whether one has success in the external world. What counts is having the right mental attitude towards those things. In a strict sense, nothing can be an evil for the sage because he is not touched by what the eternal plan of providence had designed for him and accepts everything, maintaining his soul unalterable even towards great misfortunes. Suffering is ordained by Nature not for its own sake, but for the good of the whole, and men are not always capable of seeing and understanding the deep causes of things. It is not always easy to agree with this optimistic outlook towards natural events, no matter how terrible they may seem, and this appears as one of the difficulties in achieving a perfect conformity with Stoicism.⁶⁹

The way to reach perfect happiness is, therefore, to live according to Nature.⁷⁰ The human being with his reason is the only creature who can act deliberately harmoniously with Nature and so it is in his power to achieve the final goal of *eudaimonia*.⁷¹ Happiness is not only within the power of all human beings, but it is also what we are made for and equipped to attain. Happiness is then something objective that is the same for all because it springs from our human nature. To engage with this view is to believe that we are all made with an integral *telos*, something for which everything is done, but which is not itself done for the sake of anything, in other words, the *summum bonum*.⁷² In general, ancient philosophy started from the supposition that human actions were undertaken for a purpose, to fulfil an end: to reach the *summum bonum* of our

A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Stoicism differs in this point with Aristotle's view, for whom *eudaimonia* was also achieved by virtue, but recognized that other possessions may also help in attaining it.

⁶⁹ For determinism see, D. Frede, 'Stoic Determinism' in B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) 179-205 and R.W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics*, 76-8.

⁷⁰ Nature, God and Providence are pretty much the same in Stoic terminology. Cf. A. Long, 'The Logical Basis of Stoic Ethics' in Long, A.A., *Stoic Studies*, 134-55, and S. Lovibond, 'Virtue, Nature and Providence' in C. Gill (ed.), *Virtue, Norms and Objectivity* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005) 99-113.

⁷¹ According to Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 169, Nature is a complex term: 'Nature plays a double role in any causal explanation. To say of something that it is natural in Stoicism is to combine description with evaluation. Nature embraces both the ways things are and the way they should be'.

⁷² Cf. S. Broadie, 'On the Idea of the *summum bonum*', in C. Gill (ed.), *Virtue, Norms and Objectivity* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005) 41-58.

nature or *eudaimonia*. In fulfilling this end or *telos* – given by nature – our actions must not be based on feelings or utility,⁷³ but on virtue, the perfection of human nature: ‘the project of ancient moral philosophy is to teach us how to become what we essentially are’.⁷⁴ The holistic view of the person made it easier to relate all aspects of life into one purpose: man has a function to accomplish as a human being, as a member of a family, as a citizen, soldier, etc. Human nature works as a principle which gives unity to the fulfilment of our *telos*.⁷⁵

That the end for a human being is to fulfil his nature has not always been universally agreed. McIntyre and Williams⁷⁶ have picked up on this topic and have reopened the debate of whether ethical norms should be conceived as grounded in a way that is internal or external to the agent’s perspective, that is, whether morality derives from nature or from an outside norm. This latter view was held by Kant, who proposed the ‘categorical imperative’ as something external, which regulated the morality of the individual, but was not related or connected with his happiness. He saw human nature dualistically, as consisting of a physical aspect whose goal is happiness/pleasure, and a higher rational nature whose purpose is morality. The fact that morality is not connected with welfare or happiness created a dangerous dichotomy, putting the person in the situation of choosing whether to act ‘morally’ (to be good) or ‘by pleasure’ (to be happy), a polarity that did not exist in the ethical Aristotelian tradition, where to be a good person was at the same time to be a happy one.⁷⁷

Stoicism, then, shared with Plato and Aristotle the doctrine that virtue was necessary to be happy; where the Stoics stood alone was in their claim that happiness consisted *only* in ethical virtue. Of all the Greek schools, Stoicism was perhaps the most

⁷³ To name two of the grounds for some modern theories.

⁷⁴ A. Long, ‘Greek Ethics after MacIntyre’ in Long, *Stoic Studies*, 158.

⁷⁵ According to McIntyre, *After Virtue*, 56: ‘Moral arguments within the Aristotelian tradition ... involve at least one central functional concept, the concept of man understood as having an essential nature and an essential purpose or function’. Long, ‘Greek Ethics after MacIntyre’, argues that Stoicism belongs to this Aristotelian tradition refuting, with abundant evidence, McIntyre, for whom the Stoic system would be something different and apart from this tradition. See also A. Long, ‘Stoic Eudaimonism’, 179.

⁷⁶ A. McIntyre, *After Virtue* and B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London, Fontana, 1985) and *Moral Luck. Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁷⁷ Another ethical system that places the basis of morality outside man’s nature is Utilitarianism. The ‘Greatest Happiness Principle’ which Mill developed can vary according to people, circumstances, and other external factors.

ambitious and idealistic one: the sage is a perfect man, whose character mirrors the perfection of Nature.⁷⁸ Men should develop all the virtues, which is not so difficult as they are all related.⁷⁹ Understanding one's life as a whole and developing oneself as a unity were very much the purposes of ancient moral ethics; this was, of course, related to the function or mission that one played in society. One's happiness depended on whether one had accomplished the task assigned by nature, and there was no conflict (in theory) between what was good for me as a man and good for those with whom I formed a community.

Making sense of human life as a life with a mission or duty to fulfil towards oneself and others, implied that morality was not something that one could choose to ignore; part of being properly human involved living morally. Life and happiness depended heavily on morality and the attainment of virtues was indispensable for fulfilling one's *telos* as an individual and as a member of a society. This meant that the virtues were, on the one hand, objective and permanent with regard to nature and, on the other, 'socially' definable according to one's function.⁸⁰ Thus, man appeared to be 'answerable' for his actions, he could be questioned as to whether he had or had not fulfilled his task.⁸¹ We have arrived now at the difficult problem of freedom and personal responsibility. How much are we preconditioned by our personality to act in a particular way? How much are we responsible for developing such a personality? According to Stoicism, 'once the inner conditions of a person are settled, it is difficult to change the individual's personality. This ethical determinism has important consequences. Judgement of moral conduct will focus less on what a certain person does in a specific situation than on the inner condition that is responsible for the act'.⁸² This, however, does not exclude the possibility of improvement. Not only can experience

⁷⁸ Cf. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 203-4.

⁷⁹ Cf. Arist, *NE*, 6. 1144b32-1145a6

⁸⁰ Cf. L. Siep, 'Virtue, Values and Moral Objectivity' 83-99, especially 91 and C. Gill, 'In What Sense are Ancient Ethical Norms Universal?', 15-40, both in C. Gill (ed.), *Virtue, Norms and Objectivity* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005).

⁸¹ For the issue of responsibility (although not with regard to Stoicism, but in more general terms to ancient ethics), see A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960).

⁸² D. Frede, 'Stoic Determinism', 196. I shall develop this topic more fully when I deal with Tacitus, see chapter VI.

affect the internal conditions of an individual, but also society's censures or recompenses may produce long-lasting results on one's inner nature.⁸³

Coming back to the relationship between Stoicism and Rome: how far can we take the claim of finding Stoic influences in Roman writings, Roman politics and even in Roman morality? Firstly it is important to be able to distinguish between subscribing to a philosophical creed and being naturally exposed to a certain language and environment. Scholars have shown us a way to approach the understanding of this complex situation which can be summed up in the words of Miriam Griffin: 'To establish connections between philosophical doctrines and particular policies and decisions fails, but in failing, they are instructive. They teach us that establishing such connections is difficult'.⁸⁴ Philosophy, more than giving absolute or unequivocal answers, provided the technical language for intellectuals to analyse and justify in a rationalised manner their moral and political decisions.⁸⁵ Thus, the influence of Stoicism in Roman life should not be overvalued; in fact it could be a good exercise just to imagine for a moment what Roman values would have been, had Stoicism not entered the scene at all. Probably not very different, only equipped with fewer philosophical and theoretical arguments for explaining them.

In the first century BC, mainly through Cicero, there is a formal attempt to define and systematise what has been called *philosophia togata*.⁸⁶ He transmitted Greek doctrines on ethics, epistemology and theology to the Romans in Latin, developing a philosophical vocabulary for which he kept some key Greek words – as *philosophia* itself – and created new Latin ones. It is to him that we owe the Stoic emphasis on virtue

⁸³ On Greco-Roman views on character, see for example, C. Gill, 'Character-Development in Plutarch and Tacitus', *CQ* n.s. 33 (1983) 469-87; C. Gill, 'The Character-Personality Distinction', 1-31; S Halliwell, 'Traditional Greek Conceptions of Character', 32-59 and C. Pelling, 'Childhood and Personality in Greek Biography', 213-44, in C. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990). Also C. Pelling, 'Plutarch: Roman Heroes and Greek Culture' in M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata I. Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989) 231.

⁸⁴ Griffin, 'Philosophy, Politics and Politicians at Rome', 32.

⁸⁵ Cf. Griffin, 'Philosophy, Politics and Politicians at Rome', 34-7. For a similar view cf. P.A. Brunt, 'Stoicism and the Principate', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 30 (1975) 31; B. Shaw, 'The Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology', 49; Ch. Wirszubski, *Libertas as a political idea at Rome during the late Republic and early Principate* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1950) 138.

⁸⁶ Although less popular at the time, we must not forget Lucretius and his Epicurean poem, *De Rerum Natura*.

and reason when talking about morality in Rome, even though he was himself an Academic.

Cicero's aim to define and to relate the narrower term *virtus* to its origin and to its broader sense seems to have been successfully achieved in the *Tusculan Disputations*: 'and yet though perhaps all right-minded states [*rectae animi adfectiones*] are called virtue, the term is not appropriate to all virtues, but all have got the name from the single virtue which was found to outshine the rest, for it is from the word man [*vir*] that the word virtue is derived; but man's peculiar virtue is fortitude, of which there are two main functions, namely scorn of death and scorn of pain. These then, we must exercise if we wish to prove possessors of virtue, or rather, since the word virtue is borrowed from the word man, if we wish to be men'.⁸⁷ And later in the same treatise he defines *virtus* as a more generic term: 'virtue is an equable and harmonious disposition of the soul making those praiseworthy in whom it is found, and is of its own nature and by itself praiseworthy, apart from any question of expediency; there spring from it good inclinations, opinions, actions and all that makes right reason; though indeed virtue itself can best be summed up as right reason'.⁸⁸

We see clearly how there is an overlap in Cicero's definitions. It is not the case that one word serves to identify two completely different realities, as homonyms do,⁸⁹ but that, even though the two realities expressed by the same word are similar and interconnected, we can still recognise them as two different things. On the one hand we have a particular word to define bravery, and on the other a general term to classify any good qualities, bravery among them.

It might seem a happy development (or it seems to me at least) that the word *virtus* deriving from *vir* came to mean both the excellence of man manifested in actions, and 'the natural perfection of a rational being as a rational being'.⁹⁰ We can say then that while *virtus*-courage appeared to be the attribute proper of a man, *virtus*-virtue came to mean what should be the attribute of mankind: *humana-virtus*. We might also say that manliness itself had broadened so as to mean the attribute proper to mankind, rather than

⁸⁷ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 2.18.43.

⁸⁸ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.14.34.

⁸⁹ E.g. *ora* = border, outside edge; *ora* = hawser.

⁹⁰ Diogenes Laertius, 7.94.

just men – as a sex: now women, slaves and barbarians had the chance to develop their excellence as human beings.⁹¹ What was in the beginning the mark and identification of *virilitas* (courage) evolved to signify the identification of *humanitas* (virtue in general). The expansion of the concept of *virtus* shows the more profound understanding of human nature that philosophy was able to express and the development of the thought from the more physically-oriented man to the interior-intellectually-oriented human being.

Deeds of courage involved the exercise of freedom, an exterior freedom: of movement, of expression, of speech. It was necessary for generals like Marcellus or Scipio Aemilianus to have the liberty to do what they wanted, the freedom to expose their lives in defence of their country and to carry out brave campaigns for her sake. Little by little, when the concept of *virtus* became more and more an interior one, shown not only on the battlefield, but in other areas of human activity, the freedom it required became more interior as well: a man in prison or a dying man could display *virtus*.⁹² With the inclusion of the ethical connotations to the concept of *virtus*, this latter became also more universal. What in the first place had been a characteristic only of Roman aristocrats, whose mission was to display *virtus* in society, expanded to characterise the *homines novi* and later to everybody, even slaves and women.⁹³ It could be said that there was a ‘universal call to *virtus*’: ‘in fact there is no human being of any race who, if he finds a guide, cannot attain virtue’.⁹⁴ *Virtus*, in the beginning the characteristic of the male sex, became an ideal attribute of the human being.

Before I continue with the ‘expansion’ of *virtus*, a long and complicated process, I would like to say something about the problem that this overlapping of meanings creates in translating the word *virtus*. The problem actually lies not only in the act of translating *virtus* to other languages, but also on how it was understood by the Latin speakers themselves. Some cases are more easily identified than others; one can be

⁹¹ Aristotle’s view was different. For him some men were slaves by nature (*Pol.* 1.2.7) and freedom and fully developed reason being pre-requisite for the exercise of virtue, it was unavailable to natural slaves or to barbarians. Cf. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, 342 ‘Aristotle leaves no hope of establishing any standard for the whole community. Artisans have no share in Aristotelian *arête* as a whole, for its implications make this impossible; and Aristotle’s system of morals and responsibility is founded on this *arête*’.

⁹² We will see this especially in Tacitus and the death of Seneca, Thrasea Paetus, etc.

⁹³ Cf. Tac. *Ann.*, 15.57.

⁹⁴ Cic. *De Leg.*, 1.10.30.

almost sure about the meaning of the word in the following passage: *absolveruntque admiratione magis virtutis quam iure causae*.⁹⁵ To contrast virtue with the justice of the law would make no sense at all, and yet there are cases where a courageous action can be placed in opposition to justice; as in this instance, where the war hero Horatius kills his own sister who was crying for her dead betrothed, Horatius' enemy. He is condemned for treason, but the father appeals and saves him. The jury absolved him more in admiration of his valour [*virtus*] than from justice of his cause. This is also the case of Ennius': *melius est virtute ius*.⁹⁶ We can find many examples of the same situation, or even more clearly, cases where *virtus*-courage is definitely held by bad men, such as Catiline in Sallust,⁹⁷ for whom bravery was perhaps the only virtue he could claim; or when Caesar decides not to punish some men for their crimes *multa virtuti eorum concedens rem totam distulit*.⁹⁸ If *virtus* in these cases were used as something broader than courage the text would be meaningless and contradictory.

There are other circumstances where *virtus* is used with its general ethical meaning, referring to a particularly good standard of behaviour. When Lucan says that *virtus et summa potestas non coeunt*,⁹⁹ it cannot mean anything else but the non-specific moral virtue, because courage and supreme power is a pair not difficult to find. Other instances of this are found in Tacitus, for example, when in the Histories he says: *et vires et luxu corrumpebatur, contra veterem disciplinam et instituta maiorum apud quos virtute quam pecunia res Romana melius stetit*.¹⁰⁰ And in the Annals when he complains that Germanicus did not have the proper funereal honours: *ubi illa veterum instituta, propositam toro effigiem, meditata ad memoriam virtutis carmina et laudationes et lacrimas vel doloris imitamenta*?¹⁰¹ We also find this usage of *virtus* in Sallust, especially when he argues that *vitium propius virtutem erat*.¹⁰²

However, there are some passages where it is very difficult to discern to which kind of *virtus* the author is referring. See for example the translation of Valerius

⁹⁵ Livy, 1.26.12.

⁹⁶ Ennius, *Hec. Ly.* 188-9.

⁹⁷ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 57.5; 60.4; 60.7.

⁹⁸ Caesar, *BC* 3.60.1.

⁹⁹ Lucan 8.494.

¹⁰⁰ Tac. *Hist.*, 2.69.

¹⁰¹ Tac. *Ann.*, 3.3.

¹⁰² Sall. *BC*, 11.1. And, of course, in the passage from Lucilius, 1096-1208.

Maximus 2.6.1, *cum aliquanto faciliorem virtutis ad luxuriam quam luxuriae ad virtutem transitum*: ‘seeing how much easier was the passage of *manliness* into luxury than of luxury into *manliness*’.¹⁰³ We can see that *virtus* here could have been translated also as ‘virtue’ which appears as a very good term contrasting with luxury; or even as ‘courage’, as an association is made with *labor*, *patientia* and *fortitudo*. On the other hand, the oriental customs, to which Valerius Maximus is making reference here, were very much regarded as the pleasures proper to women and therefore opposed to ‘manliness’. We will see more cases of debatable translations of *virtus* because of the ambiguous usage in the text later on when we discuss *virtus* in each particular historian, but now I would like to concentrate on Cicero, as he appears to be an author for whom we have more evidence of the two senses of *virtus* being juxtaposed.

4. Cicero and *virtus*

It has been said that in his speeches Cicero uses the word *virtus* in the traditionally Roman meanings of bravery or courage, and that in most of his philosophical works he brings forward the ‘*arête* meaning’ of *virtus*.¹⁰⁴ As we shall see, the situation is more complicated than that, but it is true that in his speeches Cicero gives *virtus*-courage a great pre-eminence, sometimes by virtue of the content of the speeches or the rhetorical points demanded by the political situation. Let us see some passages of the *Pro Murena*: ‘by serving in the war which was the most important ... war then being fought by the Roman people, he gave proof of his bravery [*virtus*],’¹⁰⁵ or ‘I cannot think of a more important campaign or one conducted with greater skill and valour’.¹⁰⁶ There is no need for him to say what kind of *virtus* he is emphasising, here Cicero is clearly talking about Murena’s valour, the word does not need a qualifier.

For further illustration of this usage of *virtus* we can give two passages of the *De Provinciis Consularibus*. Here Cicero is again praising Marius’ and Caesar’s *militaris*

¹⁰³ Trans. by Shackleton Bailey, Loeb edition 2002. My italics.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana*, 57-76; Sarsila, *Some Aspects of the Concept of Virtus*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Cic. *Pro Mur*, 12. See also *Pro Mur*, 16; 32; 37.

¹⁰⁶ Cic. *Pro Mur*, 33.

virtus and not their moral virtue in general: ‘The great Gaius Marius himself, whose divine and outstanding bravery was our stay after grievous disasters [*Ipse ille C. Marius, cuius divina atque eximia virtus*].¹⁰⁷ ‘Therefore let Gaul remain under the guardianship of him to whose honour, valour and good fortune it has been entrusted [i.e. Caesar]’ [*Quare sit in eius tutela Gallia, cuius fidei, virtuti, felicitati commendata est*].¹⁰⁸ And the same meaning is conveyed in several passages of *De Imp. Cn. Pomp*: ‘such is the superhuman and unbelievable genius [*incredibilis virtus*] as a commander’¹⁰⁹ or ‘the danger... was removed by the inspired strategy and extraordinary valour [*virtute*] of Cn. Pompeius.’¹¹⁰

One possible way of identifying the type of *virtus* is looking at whether it appears in the plural or singular. In the plural *virtus* or *virtutes* always meant virtues or good qualities; one person cannot have at the same time ‘courage’ or ‘braveries’, so when the word is written in the plural the meaning is clearer. This can be seen explicitly for example in: *non solum militaris illa virtus, quae est in Cn. Pompeio singularis, sed aliae quoque virtutes animi magnae et multae requiruntur*.¹¹¹

When defining the ideal general, Cicero says that he must possess four attributes (*res*): knowledge of warfare (*scientiam rei militaris*), ability (*virtutem*), prestige (*auctoritatem*), and luck (*felicitatem*).¹¹² Clearly ‘ability’ here should be ‘courage’. What kind of ability, or ability for what might a general need if he already has *scientia*? What he needs besides prestige, knowledge on military subjects and luck is valour to undertake brave actions. Although ability can be an adequate translation for *virtus* in some cases, in military contexts it is much safer and fitting to use courage.

At this point a logical question comes to our minds: is there a way to get it right? Is there a definitive way of deciding what kind of *virtus* they were talking about? While acknowledging the great achievement of the Loeb edition of classical texts, I have to confess my disappointment in its treatment of the word *virtus*. I am, of course, aware of

¹⁰⁷ Cic. *Prov. Cons.* 13.32.

¹⁰⁸ Cic. *Prov. Cons.* 14.35.

¹⁰⁹ Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 13.36.

¹¹⁰ Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 4.10.

¹¹¹ Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 22.64. The difference of the plural and singular is also seen in Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 1.3; 10.27; 11.29; 12.33; 13.36; 23.67; 23.68.

¹¹² Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 9.28. Trans. by Grose Hodge, Loeb edition, 2000.

the difficulty,¹¹³ but there are some cases in which it is not easy to understand or follow the logic of the choice: in the same paragraph, talking of the same thing, *virtus* is translated as valour and then as good qualities: ‘the danger... was removed by the inspired strategy and extraordinary valour [*virtute*] of Cn. Pompeius; while on the Eastern front the conduct of the campaign by that fine general Lucullus, suggests that the great and glorious achievements with which it began were due more to his good qualities [*virtuti*] than to his good luck’.¹¹⁴ Why not use valour again? Especially when the same Lucullus a bit later on is praised for his valour,¹¹⁵ the word is in the singular and within a military context!

The same could be said about the translation of some passages in the *Pro Murena*, where *militaris virtus*, meaning *fortitudo* appears in a pre-eminent position. Cicero praises Murena’s *egregia virtus* (exceptional bravery),¹¹⁶ and *maiore virtute* (greater valour),¹¹⁷ but then it seems that, quite without reason, the translator has switched to the other meaning: ‘you spoke with truth and conviction of his exceptional virtue (*praestanti virtute*)’,¹¹⁸ why not bravery again if it was this bravery to which Cicero was referring to before?

Sometimes Cicero himself is deliberately ambiguous. *Pro di immortales! Ubi est ille mos virtusque maiorum?*¹¹⁹ Or: *fuit ista quondam in hac re publica virtus, ut viri fortes acrioribus suppliciis civem perniciosum quam acerbissimum hostem coercerent.*¹²⁰ *Virtus* here implies the old Roman way of life, whose decline Cicero is hinting at in these speeches. Its meaning here is at the same time specific courage and virtue in general. When *virtus* means something rather vague related to the high moral standards of the ancestors and their expression of political freedom in courageously

¹¹³ Some times it is very difficult indeed to decide which meaning the word is conveying. See for example how both Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana*, 23 and Sarsila, ‘Some Aspects of the Concept of *Virtus*’, 23, agree that *virtus* in the Twelve Tables (table X) means ‘excellence’: *qui coronam parit ipse pecuniave eius virtutisve ergo arduitur ei...* (Cf. Pliny, *NH* 21.7; Cic, *De Leg*, 2.24.60). The Loeb edition (1998, translated by Warmington) gives ‘courage’ instead. In this case, I agree with the Loeb.

¹¹⁴ Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 4.10.

¹¹⁵ Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 8.20.

¹¹⁶ Cic. *Pro Mur*, 32.

¹¹⁷ Cic. *Pro Mur*, 33.

¹¹⁸ Cic. *Pro Mur*, 66. Transl. by C. MacDonald, Loeb edition, 1996.

¹¹⁹ Cic. *Phil*, 8.23. The Loeb edition 2001, transl. by W.C.A. Ker, has: ‘Where is the old-world spirit of your ancestors?’

¹²⁰ Cic. *Cat*, 1.3.

defending the *res publica*, it seems as if *virtus* is being used as a political slogan: *Virtus ... propria est Romana generis et seminis*.¹²¹

This political usage of *virtus* was not exclusive to Cicero. We will see how particularly the historians seized on this sense of the word which fitted very well for their purposes in historical writing. They took advantage of this ambiguity and worked towards presenting a distinct view of Rome and her past. The absence of another better word made *virtus* signify ‘traditionally-free, courageous, morally-good, Roman’. More difficult to discern is whether this notion was the result of a conscious decision or if it sprang up spontaneously, as an unintentional desire to project an image that could spur the Roman of the present day to action. I am inclined to the latter, though at some point they must have realised that they were using an idea and giving it a specific political content, but this did not affect the decision to use it all the more. The claims they were making were at the same time expedient and heartfelt, therefore a valid affirmation to put forward in history as it fulfilled the two main objectives of it, being truthful and useful.

Now, men did not regard *virtus* as its own reward. They expected a pay off for their display of courage in battle or virtuous behaviour. And this was honour and glory: ‘*virtus* clearly desires honour, and has no other reward’.¹²² ‘Glory follows virtue like a shadow’.¹²³ This is true regarding military *virtus* and any other moral virtue. Cicero is quite insistent in stressing the recompense for *virtus*: ‘Now the law that prescribes the worship of those of the human race who have been deified, such as Hercules, and the rest, makes it clear that while the souls of all men are immortal, those of good and brave men [*fortium bonorumque*] are divine’.¹²⁴ A special prize is deserved by all those who have shown *virtus* in the service of the state. This is for Cicero the highest calling and it brings the greatest rewards: ‘For all who have saved, defended or increased their fatherland, a special place in the heaven has been assigned, where they may enjoy an

¹²¹ Cic. *Phil*, 4.13. For other instances of the same usage see: *Verr*, 4.81: ‘No man should complain that *virtus* counts for more than anything in Rome, when it is *virtus* that makes Rome the mistress of the world’. See also *Pro Mil*, 105; *Verr*, 4.73.

¹²² Cic. *De Rep*, 3.28.40. See also Cic. *Brut*, 281: *cum honos sit praemium virtutis*. For the connections between *virtus* and *honos* in their cult, see Appendix, 1 a).

¹²³ Cf. Cic. *Tusc. Disp*. 1.45.109.

¹²⁴ Cic. *De Leg*, 2.11.28.

eternal life of happiness'.¹²⁵ Glory – as the natural reward and recognition of *virtus* – played a particularly important role in the understanding of how the social and political system worked. The social arrangements in republican Rome expressed the idea that the first Romans had achieved glory by performing deeds of *virtus* and thus had become known. These *nobiles* passed on their glory to their heirs and sons, who felt that this inherited *gloria* imposed a sort of duty on them to perform the same great deeds as their ancestors: there was a certain competition to maintain the high standards of *virtus* set up by their predecessors.¹²⁶ Deeds of *virtus* belonged to the Romans in a very special way: 'Virtus is the especial possession of the Roman race and seed. Hold on to this, citizens, which your ancestors have left you as an inheritance. All other things are false, uncertain, fleeting, fickle, only *virtus* is planted with deep roots and cannot be shaken by any violence nor moved from its place. By this did your ancestors first conquer the whole of Italy, then destroy Carthage, overthrow Numantia, bring powerful kings and warlike races into subjection to this empire'.¹²⁷ I understand this passage as if Cicero were urging his Roman audience to perform acts of *virtus*; they had inherited the glory of *virtus* from their ancestors, but that was not enough: they now had to show that they could win it by themselves.¹²⁸

Cicero addresses the risks of living or relying on the glory of one's predecessor without doing anything to achieve it personally in the *De Officiis*. In trying to reunite the *utile* with the *honestum*, Cicero insists that glory – which was certainly *utile* for the individual – should not be separated from the *honestum* – or virtuous conduct serving

¹²⁵ Cic. *De Rep*, 6.13.

¹²⁶ For of the role of the ancestors, see H.I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996) esp. 185-222.

¹²⁷ Cic. *Phil*, 4.13. The Latin here is significant: *Virtus ... propia est Romana generis et seminis. Hanc retinete, quaeso, quam vobis tamquam hereditatem maiores vestri relinquerunt. Nam cum alia omnia falsa, incerta sint, caduca, mobilia, virtus est una altissimis defixa radicibus, quae numquam vi ulla labefactari potest, numquam demoveri loco. Hac virtute maiores vestri primum universam Italiam devicerunt, deinde Karthaginem exciderunt, Numantiam everterunt, potentissimos reges, bellicossimas gentes in dicionem huius imperii redegerunt.*

¹²⁸ S. Treggiari, 'Ancestral Virtues and Vices: Cicero on Nature, Nurture and Presentation' in D. Braund and C. Gill (eds.), *Myth, History and Culture in Republican Rome, Studies in Honour of T.P. Wiseman* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2003) 144 says that 'virtus was the best possible inheritance from one's ancestors. Cicero can claim it for the whole Roman people'. I believe that Cicero in *Phil* 4.13 is referring to this 'call to *virtus*' or a certain passion for performing deeds of *virtus* proper to the Romans as to what is actually being inherited, but what one inherits is not *virtus* as such – as it is personal – but glory: 'the best inheritance which is handed down from fathers to children and one which is better than any patrimony is the glory of *virtus* [*gloria virtutis*] and worthy deeds', Cic. *De Off*, 1.121.

the state.¹²⁹ This separation, according to Cicero, had been one of the main causes of the ruin of the Republic.¹³⁰ The obsession with *dignitas*, political power, and riches became values in themselves. The risk of having a system in which *gloria* was a reward for having served the state by deeds of *virtus* was that the limits were blurred. To serve the state to achieve *gloria* was all right, in fact, it was a legitimate aspiration for a statesman, but the ‘passion’ for glory was to be avoided: *cavenda etiam est gloriae cupiditas... eripit enim libertatem*.¹³¹ One’s desire for glory could rob others of their freedom.¹³²

In his description of courage as one of the cardinal virtues in *De Officiis* – as well as in other philosophical treatises – Cicero is aware that the translation of *andreia* as *virtus* might create confusion in the readers, and to avoid what may seem a tautology saying something like: ‘*virtus* is a *virtus* ...’, he chooses the word *fortitudo* for *virtus*-courage. In the *De Republica* he says: ‘this virtue [*virtus*] is called bravery [*fortitudo*] which is made up of nobility of spirit and an entire contempt for pain and death’.¹³³ *Fortitudo* was not a common word before Cicero,¹³⁴ but he chose to use it so that he could reserve *virtus* to mean ‘virtue’ as both the sum total of all the good qualities and the term to identify any individual good quality.¹³⁵ *Virtus* in this general sense also implied strength, which is closely related to fortitude ‘*Magna vis est in virtutibus*: rouse them, if maybe they slumber. At once you will have the foremost of all, I mean *fortitudo*, which will compel you to assume a spirit that will make you despise and count as nothing all that can fall to the lot of men’.¹³⁶

One important aspect of Roman political thought is the doctrine that there is a practical connection between the morality of citizens and their leaders and the success of

¹²⁹ Cf. A. Long, ‘Cicero’s Politics in *De Officiis*’ in A. Lacks and M. Schofield (eds.), *Justice and Generosity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) 216-7: ‘The glory a Roman noble could achieve, however *honestum* its sphere of action might be, was supremely utile to his competitive life-style. An ideology of this kind is radically unstable, and that for two reasons. First, it conflates what is socially desirable and therefore deserving of honour with what is personally advantageous. Secondly, it is always at risk of sliding from praiseworthy to praise conferred, and to honourable to honour given’.

¹³⁰ Cf. also Sall, *BC*, 2.9-3.5 for the same idea that decay in morality brought the decline of the Republic.

¹³¹ Cic. *De Off*, 1.68.

¹³² I shall come back to this important topic of *virtus* and freedom when I deal with Tacitus.

¹³³ Cic. *De Rep*, 5.7.9.

¹³⁴ Although *fortis* was used as the adjective of someone possessing *virtus*. For this, see Hellegouarc’h, *Vocabulaire Latin*, 247-8 and T. Moore, *Artistry and Ideology: Livy’s Vocabulary of Virtue* (Frankfurt am Main, Athanäeum, 1989) 14-5.

¹³⁵ Cf. J. Sarsila, ‘Some Aspects of the Concept of *Virtus*’, 93.

¹³⁶ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3.17.37.

the state. Ennius had said it with his *moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque*.¹³⁷ And Cicero reaffirms that moral excellence must be the foundation of the successful state in several of his philosophical works.¹³⁸ Cicero's message can be summarised as: only if political leaders are men of *virtus*, can the Republic survive. This is what he tries to say in *De Officiis*, which has often been considered his political testament. Politics for Cicero meant a way of living and acting. The word *officium* was perhaps then, the best reflection of his main idea: the appropriate action, function, duty, obligation. They all point to acting in a fitting way. A society like this, oriented to action, conceives types of excellence or virtues as those qualities which enable an individual to *do* what his role requires. 'For the whole glory of virtue is in activity',¹³⁹ 'it is not enough to possess virtue [*virtus*] as if it were an art of some sort, unless you make use of it... and its noblest use is the government of the State, and the realization in facts, not in words, of those very things that the philosophers in their corners are continually dinning in our ears'.¹⁴⁰

The practice of *virtus* – in the twofold sense of courage or general virtue – is therefore very much a social ideal. There is something public in the definition of it. A person has courage for something, to defend or protect the weak, other men or his country. Good standards of behaviour implied behaving well towards the community. The individual had a social and public role to fulfil, it was not enough to be 'privately good' or 'privately brave' at least for the Roman aristocrats. They were the ones who had a mission towards the state, of supporting, maintaining and enlarging it; while others had a mission towards the aristocrats. The idea of *telos* appears in this Roman identification of the function of men. It becomes *telos* as such only when one makes the link with Greek philosophy, but that does not mean that it did not shape the Roman collective imagination before in a pre-philosophical manner.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ennius, *Ann.* 5.156.

¹³⁸ See *De Leg.* 1.62 and *Tusc. Disp.* 1.1.2.

¹³⁹ Cic. *De Off.* 1.19.

¹⁴⁰ Cic. *De Rep.* 1.2.1.

¹⁴¹ Cicero is cautious in attributing to Greek philosophy too much importance in defining what he considers Roman tradition, see e.g. *De Amic.* 6.21: 'There are those who place the chief good in virtue and that is really a noble view (...) To proceed then, let us interpret the word virtue by the familiar usage of our everyday life and speech, and not in pompous phrase apply to it the precise standards which certain philosophers use'.¹⁴¹

Cicero's contribution to the philosophical debate in Rome is difficult to estimate with justice. He not only showed the Romans a method to do philosophy – the dialogical-Platonic one –, but also provided them with the right precepts according to Roman standards. By using well-known conventional concepts and examples based on Roman traditions together with philosophical arguments he was informing ethical decision-making in a very forceful way. What he looked for in philosophy was not realistic compromises – he had enough of that in real life –, but inspiring ideals which could move people to act courageously. He wrote philosophy to encourage himself and others to be brave. He showed that philosophy was not only speculation, but also an arena for displaying courage. Writing about *virtus* in philosophical terms, Cicero was displaying his own *virtus* in the Roman way.¹⁴²

5. The 'Expansion' of *Virtus*

Virtus was a term primarily and originally concerned with the *nobilitas*.¹⁴³ The Republican *nobilitas* expressed its ideal in the concept of *virtus*. The Roman aristocrat was expected to show courage and wisdom – *virtus* and *ingenium* –, which were seen and accepted as the most needed and important qualities for a general or a magistrate. War or public offices were the two main ways – the only ways for an aristocrat – to serve the Republic. They were also the only ways for achieving true *gloria*. Glory and honour were the rewards of *virtus* shown in the public service of the state. In its strict application, *virtus* was a concept 'at once extrovert and exclusive: extrovert in its emphasis on action, on *facta*; exclusive in its concern for the family and in that the service of the *res publica* alone was regarded as a fit field for the exercise of a noble's talent'.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² A similar example of this was Brutus, who wrote a treatise on Virtue and displayed *virtus* in its double meaning of courage and virtuous behaviour. For more, see M.L. Clarke, *The Noblest Roman* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1981) 75-8.

¹⁴³ Cf. Earl, *Sallust*, 18-27; E. Badian, *Roman Imperialism in the Late Republic* (Pretoria, 1967) 13; W. Harris, *War and Imperialism*, 20; R. Alston, 'Arms and the Man: Soldiers, Masculinity and Power in Republican and Imperial Rome' in L. Foxhall and J. Salmon (eds.), *When Men were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity* (London and New York, Routledge, 1998) 205-23.

¹⁴⁴ Earl, *Sallust*, 27.

But this aristocratic ideal of *virtus* which involved the whole *gens* – past generations as well as the future ones – started gradually to shift its emphasis. Already with M. Porcius Cato at the beginning of the second century BC, the nobility was seriously attacked for the abandonment of the standards of public and private morality, for feminine luxury and for the decay of religious observation. More and more the stress was laid on the fact that true honour and glory did not come with birth or blood but through good deeds and *virtus*, which started to seem independent or disconnected from the *nobilitas*. The glory of the ancestors was now a weak support for the claim to possess *virtus*. What really mattered were the individual's achievements and his personal moral standards.

Cato, Marius and Cicero – all *novi* – in their speeches and writings appeared to have introduced the idea that *virtus* was the particular quality of the *homines novi*. *Virtus*, that vital energy proper to a man, seemed for them the unique quality of the *homo novus*, just as noble birth was the mark of the aristocrat. In his *Pro Sestio*, Cicero states: 'you, young Roman, who are nobles by birth, I will rouse to imitate the example of your ancestors; and you, who can win nobility by your talents and virtue, I will exhort you to follow that career in which many new men have covered themselves with honour and glory'.¹⁴⁵ Talking to the youth in this speech, Cicero distinguishes two kinds of *nobilitas*, the one obtained by birth and the one acquired by *virtus*.

This thought went clearly and openly against the traditional conception of *nobilitas*, which rested on birth and family, not on individual worth or *virtus*. He summarised this idea by his *moribus non maioribus*.¹⁴⁶ A noble like Catiline might be a complete scoundrel and inferior to the best *homines novi*: 'Regal powers and military commands, nobility of birth and political office, wealth and influence, and their opposites depend upon chance and are, therefore controlled by circumstances. But what role we ourselves may choose to sustain [*gerere quam personam velimus*] is decided by our own free choice'.¹⁴⁷ Being virtuous depends on oneself; it is related to personal freedom and choices, it is not something given by the gods or inherited. That is why it

¹⁴⁵ Cic. *Pro Sest*, 136.

¹⁴⁶ Cic. *Pis*, 2: 'When I was elected quaestor among the first, aedile ahead, praetor first, by all the votes of the Roman People, they gave the office to the man, not the family, to my character not my ancestors, to the *virtus* which they perceived not to a nobility of which they had heard'.

¹⁴⁷ Cic. *De Off.* 1.115.

becomes the main characteristic of the *homo novus*, the self-made man, who does not owe the gods their qualities, nor does he owe his parents a noble birth like the aristocrats. ‘We have right reason for our own pride, this would not be so if the gift of virtue came to us from a god and not from ourselves ... Did anyone ever render thanks to the gods because he was a good man? No, but because he was rich, honoured, secure’.¹⁴⁸ This is not to say that there was a strict polarity of claims: the *novi* claiming *virtus* and the *nobiles* claiming *genus*. Rather an interconnection of the two claims: the new men maintained that, because of their *virtus* they should be considered *nobiles*,¹⁴⁹ and the nobles, even if most of the evidence concentrates on status and the glory their ancestors had won, claimed that they also had *virtus* and were morally superior; the term belonged to them because they were the *boni*.¹⁵⁰

The perfect pair of qualities that could define the *homines novi* was *virtus* and *industria*.¹⁵¹ ‘Because although you were only the son of a Roman knight, by your *virtute industriaque* you made good your claim to the highest distinction’.¹⁵² And this we do not only find in Latin defence speeches used as a kind of political slogan, but also in some of his politico-philosophical works. In his *De Republica*, Cicero immediately after he has dealt with the republican heroes Metellus, Fabius Maximus and Marcellus, who had freed the Republic from the terror of Carthage, Cicero starts talking about the old Cato and how he should be the prototype for the Roman of his day: ‘Marcus Cato, an unknown man of no pedigree – a man who serves as a model of industry and virtue [*industriam virtutemque*] to all of us who share his goals.’¹⁵³ These were the qualities to

¹⁴⁸ Cic. *Nat. Deo*. 3.35.87.

¹⁴⁹ This is the new *nobilitas* which Sallust puts in Marius’ mouth in *BJ*, 85. For an expanded explanation of this, see chapter III.2 below.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition in Rome* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1967). 47-51 and A. Woodman, *Velleius Paterculus: The Tiberian Narrative* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977) 257. I see no contradiction between what these authors say and Treggiari, ‘Ancestral Virtues and Vices’, 140 even though she herself states that she does not agree with Earl and Woodman. What I see, is that Treggiari, Earl and Woodman are arguing that nobles claimed *virtus* and *genus*, but the emphasis of the *novi* in stressing their *virtus* made them champions of it in a more powerful way than the nobles.

¹⁵¹ We will see many examples of this when dealing individually with the historians. Of course, the one who makes this theory his own is Sallust, even though he says that even the *homines novi* have been corrupted and adopted the vices of the *nobilitas*. Cf. Sall, *BJ*, 63; 76.1.

¹⁵² Cic. *Pro Mur*, 16. For the same claim cf. Cato, *ORF*, 51.

¹⁵³ Cic. *De Rep*, 1.1.1. Zetzel’s translation in *Cicero on the Commonwealth and on the Laws* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999) 2.

be sought by the ordinary man. It was obvious that not everybody belonged to the *nobilitas*, but this was not a pre-requisite to being a man of *virtus* and *industria*.

With the *novi* aspiring to and achieving *virtus*, it could be said that the concept underwent a social expansion. *Virtus* belonged to whoever was committed enough to practise it. *Virtus* was now going to be displayed not only in military undertakings, but in any sphere of social life, precisely because there were many other ways – besides war – of serving the state, for example, writing history.¹⁵⁴ As the *homines novi* were gaining more and more prestige and offices, it seemed appropriate that they wanted to justify their position – as the aristocrats had done – saying that because they had *virtus*, they also deserved an important role in society.

John Dugan's recent study on Cicero is precisely concerned with this point.¹⁵⁵ Cicero in his speeches presents himself – and the other *novi* – as the possessor of true *virtus*, gained by his own merits and *industria* as opposed to the nobility, *quibus omnia populi Romani beneficia dormientibus deferentur*.¹⁵⁶ The new man attains his successes on account of his own *virtus* and does not hide himself behind the reputation of his predecessors, those smoked waxed *imagines*, but shows his well-deserved *imagines* with pride: in Cicero's case, his writings.¹⁵⁷ He wants to present himself as a new man, not only because he has achieved the consulate, but also because he represents a real 'new man' who by his cultural development and his intellectual work does good to the state in a way similar to that of the *maiores*. Dugan says that 'by challenging traditional Roman suspicions of intellectual activity and of the aesthetic realm, Cicero was able to construct himself as a 'new man' in a real sense, that is, an entity who had not previously existed within Rome: a politician whose claim on power rested solely on his intellectual and literary achievements'.¹⁵⁸ This statement, being true in some sense, needs to be moderated a little, otherwise why would Cicero have been so insistent in presenting

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Rawson, *Intellectual Life*, 91 'Historiography had long been seen almost as an extension of public life'. For the expansion of the activities with which men could gain glory through *virtus* see Sallust *BC*, 3.1. and *BJ*, 4.1.

¹⁵⁵ J. Dugan, *Making a New Man. Ciceronian Self-fashioning in the Rhetorical Works* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁵⁶ Cic. *Verr*, 2.5.180.

¹⁵⁷ In Marius' case, his wounds received in battle.

¹⁵⁸ J. Dugan, *Making a New Man*, 20.

himself also as a pre-eminent political figure, saviour of the Republic and model of a good provincial governor?

The presence of the overlapping meanings of *virtus*, as I have described it in Cicero, showed the real complexity of the term within the Roman tradition and at the same time expressed an ‘intellectualisation’ of the concept of manliness. Words – especially political words – are not fixed realities,¹⁵⁹ but on the contrary, usage means meaning, and the continuous development of a concept was expressed in its re-definition and re-interpretation. The imprecision of Roman political terminology, which does not help us to find one consistent translation, demonstrates that we are in the presence of an ‘evolving vocabulary’.¹⁶⁰ Roman political life was in constant expansion and transformation, and language – being a sign of reality – portrayed this phenomenon in a very powerful way. With all their emphasis on tradition and the *mores maiorum*, the Romans were incessantly adapting the old to the new. This, together with the process of cultural Hellenisation that Rome was undergoing during the mid-Republic, brought to real political life a kind of conflict by which the divergent meanings of *virtus* were publicly contested. Furthermore, the struggle played an ideological role in the crisis of the late Republic, which is evident in the literature of the period.¹⁶¹

These dissimilar kinds of *virtus* are portrayed in a masterly way in Sallust's monographs. The *virtus* of Marius is different from that of Metellus; the one of Cato, not the same as that of Caesar. In his article about Roman men and Greek virtue, Myles McDonnell addresses the interesting idea that the Roman *virtus* that Marius claimed was mainly military and opposed to that of Metellus Numidicus, which McDonnell identifies with a more Greek and ethico-philosophical one: ‘The *virtus* of Marius was a martial value, in essence social rather than ethical, and it was regarded as a divine entity that bestowed its power on its favourites. Numidicus’ ethical *virtus*, and his statement about the gods approving and not bestowing what is an innate human quality,¹⁶² expresses a

¹⁵⁹ See for example the case of the word ‘democracy’.

¹⁶⁰ Hellegouarc’h, *Vocabulaire Latin*, 569, talks about ‘un vocabulaire en pleine gestation’.

¹⁶¹ The best example is Sallust, but we also find interesting traces of this phenomenon in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*.

¹⁶² In a speech briefly after Marius’ victory and dedication of a temple to *Honos* and *Virtus*, Metellus is recorded to have said: *di immortals virtutem adprobare, non adhibere debent* (Gell, *Noct. Att.*, 1.6.8). The idea that the gods accept and do not confer *virtus* reflects another aspect of the difference between Greek and Roman ideas about virtue. In the Roman tradition, abstract qualities had been regarded as deities that

Greek view that is not only opposed to Marius' martial Roman *virtus*, but that seeks to redefine the traditional concept of manliness to fit the more Hellenized and less martial experiences and values of the men who dominated the senatorial establishment in the late second century'.¹⁶³ This seems to me an excessively coherent analysis: once again, the warrior Roman against the learned Greek. Sallust's Marius, certainly, shows no interest at all for Greek instruction: *neque litteras Graecas didici; parum placebat eas discere*,¹⁶⁴ but his insistence on his morally upright behaviour throughout his life makes his *virtus* hardly non-ethical. He relies on himself, his *virtus* and *innocentia*.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Metellus, the exponent of the Hellenised ethical *virtus* according to McDonnell, relies also on his courage. He treated his army in the fashion of old [*more maiorum*] and won the battles by his valour [*virtus*].¹⁶⁶ The same applies to Sallust's other characterisation of men of *virtus*: Caesar and Cato. McDonnell places the same polarity on the two; the same contrast between the Greek and Roman virtue, and to me the description appears more complicated than that.¹⁶⁷ In his comparison of Caesar and Cato, Sallust shows how *virtus* was expressed very differently in each case, although the two men were similar in *genus, aetas, eloquentia, magnitudo animi, gloria*. He admires them both: *Caesar beneficiis ac munificentia magnus habebatur, integritate vitae Cato*.¹⁶⁸ Caesar wanted to show his *virtus* in a new war, which could imply that he is talking about good old Roman courage, and 'there is nothing ethical about this *virtus*' says McDonnell.¹⁶⁹ However, there is also a broader ethical meaning in Caesar's *virtus*, that goes beyond valour, when Sallust stresses his *mansuetudo, misericordia* and

granted their specific power to men, they 'shall worship as gods both those who have always been regarded as dwellers in heaven, and also those whose merits have admitted them to heaven: Hercules, Liber, Aesculapius, Castor, Pollux, Quirinus; and those qualities through which an ascent to heaven is granted to mankind: Intellect (*mentem*), Virtue (*virtutem*), Piety (*pietatem*), Good Faith (*fidem*). To their praise there shall be shrines, but none for the vices' (Cic. *De Leg*, 2.8.19). *Virtus* had been recognised as a divine entity with public cult at least since the dedication of Claudius Marcellus in 205 BC. On the contrary, the Greeks did not have an official cult for *arête*, although it could be found personified in literature. Cf. J.R. Fears, 'The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology', *ANRW* II 17.2 (1981) 827-948.

¹⁶³ McDonnell, 'Roman Men and Greek Virtue', 255.

¹⁶⁴ Sall. *BJ*, 85.32.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 85.4. See also 85.7; 85.10; 85.14; 85.34; 85.47.

¹⁶⁶ Sall *BJ*, 55.1.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. McDonnell, 'Roman men and Greek virtue', 254; 256-8.

¹⁶⁸ Sall *BC*, 54.5.

¹⁶⁹ McDonnell, 'Roman men and Greek virtue', 256.

munificentia.¹⁷⁰ Cato, on the other hand, has the traditional *constantia*, *modestia*, *decorum*, and above all, the Roman *severitas*.¹⁷¹ His moral code was that of the *maiores*, which anticipated the philosophical (Stoic) one. Contrasting a *virtus* which is ethical, private and Greek with the Roman, public and ‘courageous’ one does not help us in the comprehensive understanding of the term, and we run the risk of not being able to engage with the complexities that the word conveys on the whole. The old generals of the Republic – Camillus, Marcellus, Fabius Maximus, etc. – were brave *and* honest, they displayed courage in battle *and* all the other virtues necessary to be regarded as men of *virtus*. The dichotomy then appears somewhat artificial.

Along our voyage through the ‘ethico-political’ understanding of the concept of *virtus* in the historians of the late Republic and early Empire we will see several cases in which these competing ideals of *virtus* appear expressed in opposing political figures, but more often we will witness that there were men in whom several kinds of *virtus* dwelt at the same time.¹⁷² On the other hand, I am conscious that the very classification of matters in ‘ethico-political’ pigeon-holes belongs to us and it is anachronistic; morality as something distinct from politics did not yet exist. The Romans thought of their lives, especially their political life, in terms of *virtus* in a way that we can perhaps imagine, but would not dare to express.

Virtus had been related to the Republic in a very forceful way. Their national heroes had been known for their *virtus* and the tradition – as every tradition in Rome – should be kept and encouraged. This had been the task of the historians. As we approach the definitive collapse of the Republican system and the establishment of the imperial order, we register that the Romans became more and more aware that they needed to justify and define what they thought was the essence of their Romanness and main quality: *virtus*. Philosophy came up with some help by providing the necessary

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 54.2.

¹⁷¹ Sall *BC*, 54.5. As Miriam Griffin pointed out to me, Sallust appears to be comparing the debate of Cato and Caesar with that of the Elder Cato and Scipio Aemilianus. Both Catos look very similar in character and manner of speech and the qualities that Sallust highlights on Caesar – above all generosity – are the same that Polybius (31.26.9) gives to Scipio.

¹⁷² E.g. the case of Velleius’ Tiberius, or Tacitus’ Agricola.

background and terminology with which they were going to be able to explain these concepts, it helped them to reflect in a deeper way on something very meaningful to every Roman. But *virtus* remained very much the same as it had always been, very much like the one any Roman would be able to recognise at any time in their history. A *virtus* that did not depend on external circumstances – which were basically bad during the principate – nor in the characters of its leaders – which were even worse –, but a *virtus* that relied on the free will and determination of the Stoic sage as much as in the traditional courage and fortitude that characterised Romans when facing difficulties, started to develop as a consequence of the changes. *Virtus*-courage was still very necessary, but not only to defend the state; courage was now vital also to defend oneself. Courage, then, continued to be the essential attribute of the Romans, only the emphasis had shifted. During the principate, more than ever before, the Roman had to make the decision to be brave enough to live a life of virtue.

Whereas *virilis-virtus* was specific and restricted, *humana-virtus* was general and open, but both formed part of *Virtus Romana*. *Virilis-virtus* worked as the quality which enabled the Romans to carry out their social role and helped them in the achievement of *humana-virtus*, which equipped individuals to move towards the realization of the specifically human *telos*. *Virtus* had to do with *telos* before the Greeks said it explicitly, it was the end and function of the aristocracy to defend their state courageously. *Telos* and social purpose were identified when Rome was an aristocratic and militaristic society and also later, when it ceased to be. Roman *virtus*, in its cooperative side, then, was related to the social function of men, mainly to serve the community or the state. At the same time, Roman *virtus* was also competitive, in the challenge to outdo in excellence not only other men, but also in measuring up to one's own nature. Together, they contributed to the comprehension of what men do and are.¹⁷³

I hope to have shown that *virtus*, in its narrower and broader meaning, was a Roman ethical concept. *Virtus*, in its origin the quality related to *vir*, came to mean courage, and as such, was from the beginning an ethical quality. *Virtus* developed and expanded to the other good qualities because as it had meant the 'ideal man' in a

¹⁷³ We shall see this phenomenon become clearer as we approach our analysis of Tacitus.

primarily militaristic society, later it became the idealisation of what a man should be in any society. *Virtus*, interpreted as virtue in general, owes to *arête* not so much its meaning as its rationalisation. *Virtus* – Roman *virtus* – will appear clearly as the constant protagonist, with an overwhelming presence, throughout the narratives of the Roman historians. It will be up to them now to show us *how* and *why* they made *virtus* played that leading role in history.

VIRTUS IN HISTORY

III Decadence of the Republic, Decadence of *Virtus*:

Sallust's darkness

So harsh was the spirit of the age,
so cynical towards virtue.

Tac. *Agr*, 1.4.

Sallust's works seem the natural starting point when one approaches the topic of *virtus* in Latin historiography. His insistent and almost obsessive treatment of a concept that was so central not only in historical writing, but also in the very self-definition of being Roman, was going to lead him into a serious analysis about causation in political decline. His study of crisis intended to take the reader to the understanding of what a complex concept *virtus* was, and what the dangers of these complexities were. I can see little or no contradiction at all in beginning our survey of '*Virtus* in History' with an author who denounces the lack of *virtus*, the debasement of the concept, and the need for a re-interpretation of it, because sometimes it is precisely in this contrast where we can find the more illuminating nuances for the definition of a term. And Sallust feels a special attraction for contrast. Thus, the monographs are investigations in which different and contrasting kinds of *virtus* – corrupted and pure, old and new, true and false – are put to the test in their interaction and serve as an explanation of political change.

The *Bellum Catilinae* (BC) and *Bellum Jugurthinum* (BJ) offer to us different levels of analysis. The first one is, of course, the topic itself. The choice of the Catilinarian conspiracy and the war against Jugurtha is at the same time important and minor to Sallust's objective. Important because as he himself says about the BC: 'I regard that event as worthy of special notice because of the extraordinary nature of the

crime and of the danger arising from it',¹ and about the *BJ*: 'because it was a long and cruel struggle in which fortune swung from side to side; secondly, because it was then for the first time that a stand was taken against the arrogance of the nobles'.² But incidental because he could have shown the same things by analysing other moments of political turmoil.

Sallust is determined to illustrate decay, and with a successful choice of words and phrases he will achieve not only a powerful exposition of the nature and propagation of political decline, but also the congruence between the sickly condition of the state and the *mores* of its citizens. Syme referred to Sallust as 'the historian of the decline and fall',³ and the invocation to Gibbon is certainly justified, because Sallust's focal subject is political corruption. In what we can identify as a second level of analysis we could place Sallust's interest in making us aware of the disconcerting impossibility of drawing a fine line between *vitium* as a product of decline or, on the contrary, as its origin.

But the author's main concern is to provide for his audience – the Romans of that time – a broader concept of *virtus*. On a deeper level we can discover the final meaning for the writing of history: *virtus* had become contaminated and polluted, it was necessary to find an alternative formulation if they wanted to prevent its total disintegration. This is clearly shown in many ways: in the prologues' philosophical discussion, throughout the narrative and especially in the speeches of the *BC* and the *BJ*. Sallust had to be careful in his task; *virtus* was such a key concept in Roman politics that, if he wanted to convince the readers of his new appraisal of the idea, he could not break off the deep-rooted understanding of the word in a superficial way. Not that he wanted to. He was interested in decline and causation and none of these terms reveal a shallow approach to the comprehension of political life. A persuasive definition of *virtus* is the unspoken purpose of Sallust and he will do so by negative comparisons. He emphasises the gap between ideal moral and political behaviour and the historical facts he is narrating. This method seems to him much more effective and compelling than giving all the answers already made. In describing the absence of *virtus* Sallust is at the same time warning the reader of great evils and leaving him to draw his own conclusions on the new ways the

¹ Sall. *BC*, 4.4.

² Sall. *BJ*, 5.1. For the *BJ* I have used Michael Comber's unpublished translation.

³ R. Syme, *Sallust* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964) 56.

author is proposing for the display of *virtus*. This more ‘descriptive style of moralism’ – as opposed to a protreptic one –⁴ suited him better to illustrate his main concerns: human nature, moral conduct and Roman politics. On the other hand, negative comparisons express that reality *was* negative and dark for Sallust, so he would not approach Roman history in any other way.

I will try to show in this chapter how these three levels of analysis interact and how Sallust not only broadens the concept of *virtus* by moving it away from a particular and enclosed social group – the *nobilitas* – to a more open one – the *homines novi*, but also how with his new definition, the traditional and aristocratic ‘idea’ of *virtus*, becomes a common ‘ideal’ for all Romans. Paradoxically, (and impressively) he will reinforce the need of this missing *virtus* by developing a ‘language of decline and *vitium*’.

1. The Prologues: Presenting the Theory and Setting the Tone

The prologues of the *BC* and *BJ* play a particularly important role in Sallust’s design to achieve his goal of proposing *virtus* as an ideal to aim at; and although they may seem simple commonplaces and quite straightforward, they have been the subject of a long discussion which started already in antiquity with Quintilian: *C. Sallustius in bello Iugurthino et Catilinae nihil ad historiam pertinentibus principiis orsus est*.⁵ Quintilian may have meant one of two things here: 1) that the prologues had nothing to do with the genre history, but were more appropriate to the manner of epideictic oratory, or 2) that they had nothing to do with Sallust’s history, i.e. his narrative of events.⁶

⁴ For a more detailed explanation of this distinction see Pelling, ‘The Moralism of Plutarch’s Lives’, 205-220.

⁵ Quint. *Inst. Orat*, 3.8.9.

⁶ Cf. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 5-17. This makes a certain amount of sense, but see G. M. Paul, *A historical commentary on Sallust's Bellum Jugurthinum*, (Liverpool, Francis Cairns, 1984) 9-11, who argues that Quintilian must be referring to irrelevance. For a more complete version of this debate see E. Tiffou, ‘Essai sur la Pensée Morale de Salluste a la Lumière de ses Prologues’, *Etudes et Commentaires* 83 (1974) chap. 1.

The debate has been summed up by Syme: ‘are the prologues necessary and relevant?’⁷ What does the consideration on the superiority of the mind over the body add to the particular cases of Jugurtha and Catiline? It seems at first sight that the answer is nothing at all.⁸ But they actually do; they provide weight and evidence to Sallust’s main point when writing history. Without saying so, with these general reflections on human nature, Sallust is taking for granted – and what is more important, he is making the reader take for granted too – that all men are equal and equipped with the same means, *ingenium* and *animus* to achieve *gloria*. *Nobiles* such as Metellus, Catiline or Sulla, *novi* like Marius or Cicero and even foreigners like Jugurtha⁹ are presented in an equivalent way regarding their actions and their consequences. All of them show their *virtus* at some point, all of them fall into different vices as well, and they are responsible for both. These considerations make us keep the prologues in our mind constantly and we are unconsciously referring to them in our comprehension of the narrative. ‘This technique of putting an idea into the reader’s mind only to return to it later, occurs frequently in the preface and constitutes one of the subtleties of Sallust’s style’.¹⁰

It is striking how general Sallust’s remarks are at the beginning of two prologues. *Omnis homines*¹¹ and *genus humanum*¹² are put in the very first sentence to set the tone of his considerations: he is talking to and about all mankind. ‘We employ the mind to rule, the body rather to serve; the one we have in common with the Gods, the other with the brutes’.¹³ It is probable that most of his readers would have agreed with Sallust; he was not saying anything particularly novel and the influence of Plato, Aristotle, Posidonius and the Stoics have been recognised in them.¹⁴ But being unoriginal and using beliefs that were commonly accepted at the time does not imply that he did not mean what he was saying, nor that these ideas were not applicable to the contemporary

⁷ Syme, *Sallust*, 240.

⁸ See, e.g. D.C. Earl, ‘Prologue-form in Ancient Historiography’, *Festschrift Vogt* I, 2 (1972) 855: ‘For what is beyond dispute is that, whether directly influenced by Aristotle’s works or not, he began ‘*Bellum Catilinae*’ and ‘*Bellum Iugurthinum*’ as though they were not works of history, but philosophical and ethical treatises’.

⁹ Jugurtha is in some sense a *novus* as well.

¹⁰ Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 122.

¹¹ Sall. *BC*, 1.1.

¹² Sall. *BJ*, 1.1.

¹³ Sall. *BC*, 1.2.

¹⁴ For a detailed account of this influence see: P. Perrochat, *Les Modèles Grecs de Salluste* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1949).

situation. To say that the proems are a collection of *topoi* that ‘non costituiscono nessun apporto nuovo nella storia del pensiero filosofico greco-romano o della semplice riflessione morale antica’,¹⁵ does not help us in our understanding of why then, Sallust bothered to write them. The importance of the prologues is precisely in that, although they convey ideas common to the philosophers and rhetoricians, they were useful for a historian to express *his own* ideas and give them the twist he wanted to prove his theory. In a sense we could say that Sallust was more anxious to express what he says in his prologues than in his narrative.

In the opening of the *BJ*, for example, the author takes us quickly and a little aggressively into the topic he wants to deal with: *falso quaeritur de natura sua genus humanum, quod imbecilla atque aevi brevis forte potius quam virtute regatur*.¹⁶ Because, Sallust continues, ‘what guides and rules human life is the mind. If this pursues glory by the path of virtue [*via virtutis*], it has power, might and fame in abundance, and is independent of fortune, which can neither give honesty, energy [*industriam*] and other good qualities [*artis bonas*] nor take them away’.¹⁷ The first thing that strikes us here is that for Sallust, *virtus* is presented as a more comprehensive term, not exclusive to a particular sector of society: any man can take the *via virtutis*. He seems to be giving a golden rule to achieve *gloria*, which he acknowledges as the main goal of human endeavour, and tries to create a ‘meritocratic system’ in which everybody starts from the same basis. And at the same time, the complaint of the opening sentence of the monograph appears – as Sallust says – to be fictitious: men are actually able to control fate [*casus*] if they have virtue. Fortuna only *saevire ac miscere omnia coepit*,¹⁸ when *virtus* is lacking.

This explanation contaminates the old concept of Roman *virtus* with the Greek concept of *arête*.¹⁹ According to the Stoic view, any change that happened in the exterior world did not affect the wise man because he found in his interior world values and strengths that could not be attacked from the outside: successes or failures, good or bad fortune did not touch the virtuous man. As we have shown in the previous chapter,

¹⁵ A. La Penna, *Sallustio e la ‘rivoluzione’ romana* (Milano, Feltrinelli Editore, 1968) 15.

¹⁶ Sall. *BJ*, 1.1.

¹⁷ Sall. *BJ*, 1.2.

¹⁸ Sall. *BC*, 10.2.

¹⁹ See chapter II.2 above.

Platonic dualism and Stoic wisdom of *apatheia* were concepts relatively familiar to the educated people of the time. Sallust was not trying to change the traditional Roman concept of *virtus* into the Greek idea of it, rather, he was using some of the latter's nuances in a persuasive way to expand the original meaning without losing the Roman flavour and emotive power attached to it. I will come back to this point, but first I would like to comment on Sallust's definition of *virtus*.

It seems that *virtus* for Sallust was something that anybody could have because it was, to put it in Earl's words, the 'functioning of the *ingenium* to achieve *egregia facinora* and thus to win *gloria* through *bonae artes*',²⁰ and in thinking so, he was clearly shifting the emphasis away from social status and putting it in something more internal and personal, although the manifestations of it were still very public and crucial to the well-being of the state. Traditionally, the idea of *virtus* had been attached to the nobles. They were the ones who had displayed *virtus* in the service of the state and through that they achieved *gloria* and became *nobiles*. '*Nobiles* derived from *noscere* and so means in essence 'notable'.²¹ It concerned not only the individual but the whole family and the insistence on this point was sometimes extreme.²² Thus, the nobles became more and more self-conscious of their status and prerogatives and as a consequence, their claims to *virtus* came to be almost as a complement attached to birth. It was this tradition which Sallust wanted to break off: to present *virtus* as a general *ideal* open to everybody who wanted to take the challenge of achieving great deeds by the exercise of the natural abilities and good qualities. The notion of this *virtus* based on *ingenium*, nature or inborn talent, will consequently lack the exclusiveness of the aristocratic idea, which was restricted to the *nobiles*.²³

The conventional understanding of *virtus* as courage in war and excellence in manliness serving the state that had been displayed by the *nobiles*, is now permeated with a rationalistic touch where the *ingenium* and *bonae artes* play a dynamic role in

²⁰ Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 11.

²¹ M. Gelzer, *The Roman Nobility* (orig. 1912, revised version translated by R. Seager, Oxford, Blackwell, 1969) 28.

²² See for example, the *Elogia Scipionum*, Appendix, 3.

²³ For the opposite view see J. Sarsila, 'Some aspects of the concept of *virtus*', 83: 'for Sallust, *virtus* is the characteristic of a select few. This implies that *virtus* cannot be simultaneously possessed by very many Romans'.

achieving this *virtus*.²⁴ Again, this has a very Stoic ring, but it is important not to over-emphasise it; Sallust was trying to give a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word without changing its essential significance. *Virtus* was and would always be a very Roman idea and thus, its attributes of being public and active were still present in this more intellectual presentation of it. Such a practical *virtus* had few of the theoretical characteristics of Platonic *virtus* and a lot of the *sapientia maiorum*. ‘Sa finalité est donc extérieur à l’homme. C’est précisément en cela que la *virtus* romaine nous semble essentiellement différent de la vertu stoïcienne. Extérieurement elles présentent de nombreux points communs, mais leur finalité n’est pas la même, puisque pour le Stoïcien la *virtus* est le moteur de la sagesse humaine, tandis que pour un Romain elle est celui de la cité’.²⁵ Sallustian *virtus* was then, ‘something solid, distinct and authentically native’.²⁶

The aim then was clear: to be a man of *virtus*, having won *gloria* through *bonae artes*. For to have *virtus*, the functioning of the *ingenium* demanded certain rules. Cicero called them *virtutes*, and they were mainly all good qualities such as *fides*, *probitas*, *industria* and others,²⁷ but Sallust chose not to use the term in plural, so that he could preserve the word *virtus* in singular, detached and clean for his main purpose: to present it not just as another virtue, but as *the* ideal to which every Roman could and should aspire.

As we have seen, the traditional idea of *virtus* was that one could show it only by serving the state. How was this going to be open to all? Sallust then had to show that there was more than one way of achieving *egregia facinora* and to include activities other than public offices in the pursuing of *gloria*. In this way ‘his concept of *virtus* is in itself applicable to each and every human occupation’.²⁸ War and politics were not the only paths to great achievements. Sallust was going to broaden this field not only with activities such as oratory and law, which were recognised and well appreciated in Rome, but by integrating others that may have been seen until then as accessories, but were going to become more and more important; among them, first and foremost: history. ‘It

²⁴ This, of course, is not Sallust's exclusive contribution, see chap. II above.

²⁵ Tiffou, ‘Essai sur la Pensée Morale de Salluste’, 137.

²⁶ Syme, *Sallust*, 242.

²⁷ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 10.4. Also *labor*, *aequitas*, *continentia*, etc.

²⁸ Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 16.

is glorious to serve one's own country by deeds, even to serve her by words is a thing not to be despised; one may become famous in peace as well as in war. Not only those who have acted, but those also who have recorded the acts of others often receive our approbation'.²⁹ He gives an example of this in the prologues, which is at the same time an *apologia pro vita sua*; writing history is a way of achieving *virtus*: 'among the intellectual pursuits, one of the most useful is the recording of the events of the past. As many others have already spoken of its virtue, I see no need to add anything more – especially as I might otherwise be suspected of wanting to sing the praises of my own favourite occupation out of vanity'.³⁰ It is quite significant that Sallust uses the word *virtus* to speak about the value, merit or worth of writing history. The choice is, of course, conscious and full of meaning. He, however, cannot resist the temptation and gives the reason for which he thinks that the writing of history is so high a task: 'although I am aware that by no means equal repute attends the narrator and the doer of deeds, yet I regard the writing of history as one the most difficult tasks: first, because the style and diction must be equal to the deeds recorded [*facta dictis exaequanda*]; and in second place, because such criticisms as you make of others' shortcomings are thought by most men to be due to malice and envy. Furthermore when you commemorate the distinguished merit [*virtus*] and fame of good men, while everyone is quite ready to believe you when you tell of things which he thinks he could easily do himself, everything beyond that he regards as fictitious, if not false'.³¹ It is important to bear in mind, however, that although Sallust gave this example of multifaceted *virtus* in the prologue, in his narrative he only portrays the typical personification of men of *virtus*, i.e. the ones who held public office or were brave in war. This could be another way for him of contrasting the theory of *virtus* and its practice at a particular time in Rome.

Writing history is just one illustration of the possibility of achieving glory outside politics, but there are many. Sallust's insistence on stressing the interrelation between *virtus* and *ingenium et industria* is precisely planned to validate that it is something not restricted to one particular field of activity and designed to suit not only

²⁹ Sall. *BC*, 3.1.

³⁰ Sall. *BJ*, 4.2.

³¹ Sall. *BC*, 3.2. It cannot be denied that, although the justification appears valid, there is also a tone of anxious self-defensiveness.

one category of men – the *nobiles* –, but the *novi* as well. There are two matrices here: both *nobiles* and *novi* can be virtuous and, at the same time, different types of activities may lead to *virtus*. The two matrices may coincide but they do not necessarily have to do so.

Coming back to Quintilian's remark and his *nihil ad historiam pertinentibus*, we can say that there is a certain amount of truth in what he says, but on the other hand, approaching with a broader scope what history is all about, we can see the prologues of the *BC* and *BJ* forming an indivisible union with the narrative that follows, perhaps not so much in the content of the topics as in the intention and purpose with which the author thought them there: the prologues explain Sallust's main concern and the narrative – in a quite peculiar way – will support his thesis.

2. Illustrating Decline: The Characters in the Monographs

As we have seen, one aspect of the traditional aristocratic Roman idea of *virtus* was the winning of *gloria* by serving the state. This service to the *res publica* worked harmoniously in times of *concordia* – which for Sallust was particularly important;³² people fought for freedom,³³ and the state grew stronger because of *libertas* and *disciplina*.³⁴ *virtus omnia domuerat*.³⁵ This is, of course, an idealisation of the author, but it is put there, and all the more exaggerated,³⁶ to present a real contrast with the times of decline that Sallust wants to describe.

It had all started with the fall of Carthage.³⁷ The end of the *metus hostilis* had in Rome such pernicious consequences that she would never be able to recover. It is

³² Cf. Sall. *BC*, 9.1.

³³ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 6.5.

³⁴ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 7.4.

³⁵ Sall. *BC*, 7.6.

³⁶ See, for example, the concept of the 'good old *virtus*' in *BC*, 7.6-7.

³⁷ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 10.1 and *BJ* 41.2. Sallust seems to have borrowed this idea from Posidonius. Cf. T. Wiedemann, 'Reflections of Roman political thought in Latin historical writing', in Ch. Rowe and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000) 527. On the significance of the fall of Carthage, see N. Purcell, 'On the Sacking of Carthage and Corinth' in D. Innes, H. Hine and C. Pelling (eds.), *Ethics and Rhetoric* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 133-48.

striking that Sallust, who had Cato the Elder as a model not only in style, but also in ideology, could disagree with him about such an important matter. The *metus hostilis* and *delenda est Carthago* seem quite irreconcilable approaches to one's enemies. Although in the end Cato had won in the debate against Scipio and Carthage was finally destroyed, Sallust shows in the monographs that perhaps this was not the right decision. Once the fear of the enemy had gone away and Rome had little incentive to keep her discipline and her *virtus*, everything was left to the mercy of fortune, *saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia cepit*.³⁸ In what was going to become the paradigmatic Sallustian way he sums up the state of the city: *igitur primo pecuniae, deinde imperi cupido crevit; ea quasi materies omnium malorum fuere. Namque avaritia fidem, probitatem, ceterasque artis bonas subvortit; pro his superbiam, crudelitatem, deos neglegere, omnia venalia habere edocuit*.³⁹ Glory was still the goal, but now it was won not through *bonae artes*, but *dolis atque fallaciis*,⁴⁰ and this was not a manifestation of *virtus*, but *ambitio*.⁴¹ Nobody escaped from this poison, 'even the new men, who formerly always used to outstrip the nobility by their virtue [*virtus*] alone, now force their way into commands and distinctions by underhand intrigue and open robbery, instead of by honourable means [*bonis artibus*]'.⁴² The ambition for *imperia* and *honores* had become so violent that the means for achieving them did not appear to be relevant any more.

Sallust's theory in presenting *virtus* as an ideal – and more specifically – as an ideal that brought *nobilitas* to the *homo novus*,⁴³ seems to collapse with the realization of the presence of *ambitio* at all levels of society. But it is in his own interest that he makes what he had sustained in the prologue fall down or give the impression of becoming meaningless, he has calculated every move. The more he has emphasised the universality of this call to *virtus*, the more dramatic and desperate the situation seems to be when everybody is failing at it. In choosing the monographic type of history, Sallust

³⁸ Sall. BC, 10.2.

³⁹ Sall. BC, 10.3-4.

⁴⁰ Sall. BC, 11.3.

⁴¹ Cf. Sall. BC, 11.1-3. A non-trivial objection can, however, weaken Sallust's argument, see Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 51: 'if Rome was kept in a state of *virtus* merely by the existence of an external threat and if this state of *virtus* automatically came to an end with the removal of this threat, this can hardly be regarded as true *virtus*'.

⁴² Sall. BJ, 4.7.

⁴³ Although it was a *nova nobilitas* (BJ, 85.25) opposed to the *vetus nobilitas* of the *nobiles* (BJ, 85.4). I will come back to this point when I deal with Marius' speech.

has decided that in this way he would hit his audience more strongly. Cicero had already described what a monograph should be: drama, surprise and suspense, change of fortune of outstanding individuals and theme of high politics.⁴⁴ Sallust has all this in abundance: the people involved were varied: aristocrats, *novi*, foreigners, and important: consuls, senators, generals, kings; fortune was certainly changeable and the topic interesting indeed. He will use all these elements to wake people up, providing joy and distress, hope and fear to stir them to react.

I shall not analyse every character in Sallust's works, but will only look at the ones who played a special role in the developing of his theory of *virtus*. Although he was exceptionally good at depicting character in such a way that the description worked sometimes as the narrative of events,⁴⁵ this has been considered by some as a literary mastery that on occasions damaged his historical rigour: Catiline has been considered a 'tragic hero' and the speeches very far from reality, because 'sometimes there is an overlap, even confusion, between description of individual traits of personality and exemplification of the predictable qualities of certain types of men in certain situations'.⁴⁶ In defence of Sallust it can be said that Catiline's life showed elements common to tragedy and if the speeches of Caesar and Cato were artificial, they probably captured a better feeling of the dispute and the atmosphere in the Senate than Cicero's *Catilinarians*. However, regarding Sallust as a literary artist should not undermine him as a historian. On the contrary, style, psychological insight and ethical approach to human nature may enhance narrative and provide the reader with a richer analysis; it does not necessarily mean obliterating historical truth.⁴⁷

One of Sallust's subtleties in this respect is his presentation of the villains. He tries not to oppose them to only one adversary, thus Cicero and Cato are against Catiline; and Metellus, Marius and Sulla against Jugurtha. This not only makes the narrative more dynamic and colourful – there is not one unique hero – but also the real sense of disorder and corruption that rules Rome, takes over from what could have been

⁴⁴ Cf. Cic. *Ad Fam*, 5.12.6.

⁴⁵ See e.g. Sall. *BC*, 14.4-7; 17.6

⁴⁶ F.R.D. Goodyear, 'Sallust' in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, Vol. II, part 2 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982) 103. See also S. Usher, *Historians of Greece and Rome*, 148: 'dramatic rather than historic' or 149: 'the Catiline is therefore not history, but a historical tableau, condensed, dramatised and spiced with detail'.

⁴⁷ See chap. I.2 above.

a simple and neat account of the struggle between good and evil. The situation is much more complicated and not completely under control: the ones who are supposed to behave like heroes show signs of weaknesses and even vices; the criminals, on the other hand, display noble virtues in several occasions.

Catiline, for example, described as the personification of wickedness and the worst influence for young men,⁴⁸ is at the same time so brave that Sallust cannot do anything else but admire him.⁴⁹ He possesses the finest martial qualities of the Republic and his army exhibits *prisca virtus*.⁵⁰ There are several paradoxes in this character: he is an aristocrat, and as such he had the mission of contributing to the Republic's welfare, yet he plans to destroy it 'overthrowing the government';⁵¹ he had many of the qualities belonging to *virtus*: *magna vi et animi et corporis*, but they were perverted by his *ingenio malo pravoque*.⁵² He is nothing else but a child of his age; 'he was spurred on, also by the corruption of the public morals which were being ruined by two great evils of an opposite character, extravagance and avarice'.⁵³ On the whole, Catiline was 'the typical product of degeneration which began with the destruction of Carthage'.⁵⁴ But he was also able to die in the most valiant way and as a true noble Roman: 'when Catiline saw that his army was routed and that he was left with a mere handful of men, mindful of his birth and former rank he plunged into the thickest of the enemy and there fell fighting, his body pierced through and through'.⁵⁵ The account of the end of Catiline's life makes his villainy very ambiguous.⁵⁶ In a sense, Catiline is what 'old *virtus*' must

⁴⁸ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 5.1-5: *Corpus patiens indediae, alioris, vigiliae supra quam cuiquam credibile est. Animus audax, subdolos, varius, cuius rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator, alieni appetens, sui profusus, ardens in cupiditatibus; satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum. Vastus animus immoderata, incredibilia, nimis alta semper cupiebat*. See also 16.1-3. Sallust's description of Catiline would mark literature in a very forceful way; see, for example, Livy's description of Hannibal (21.4) and Tacitus' Sejanus (*Ann*, 4.1).

⁴⁹ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 57.5; 60.4; 60.7.

⁵⁰ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 20.2; 60.3.

⁵¹ Sall. *BC*, 16.4.

⁵² Sall. *BC*, 5.1.

⁵³ Sall. *BC*, 5.8.

⁵⁴ Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 86.

⁵⁵ Sall. *BC*, 60.7.

⁵⁶ For a different view on this ambiguity, see A.T. Wilkins, *Villain or Hero: Sallust's Portrayal of Catiline* (New York, Lang Publishing, 1994) 137: 'I planned to refer to Sallust's characterization of Catiline as "ambiguous". I now replace that term with "complex", since I am convinced that our author intentionally presents a complex, not a misleading depiction of Catiline'. Not denying the complexity of Catiline's character, I also see how with his ambiguity between villainy and heroism he is once more exemplifying Sallust's shifting grounds of what was good and bad.

have been like in the nobility, but now appears corrupted and used towards the wrong end. Also ambiguous is the recognition of the vanquished by the victors, a remarkable detail on which to end. This expired community tells us not only to what pass Rome has come, but also of the indelible links there are between those who are branded as the carriers of decline, from whom society would be free, and those who remain within the pale. That Sallust should refrain from heaping execration on Catiline and his fellows is a tribute to his wise humanity.

Catiline's description shows us that 'there was something radically wrong with a state if a man like him could get so far with impunity, protected by consulars high in public repute, if armed insurrection could break out in Italy'.⁵⁷ The personal story reveals a sad diagnosis for the Roman Republic: *ambitio*, *avaritia* and *luxuria*, spread like a deadly plague, 'infecting the minds of many of our countrymen'.⁵⁸ The physicality in which the decline is described – we can almost see the muddy wave of corruption invading society – is a striking feature of the *Bellum Catilinae* which somehow serves to match *verba et facta*, and allows a close correspondence between the individual body and the social body, and also individual versus social *virtus*.⁵⁹ I will come back to this point later.

Decline of *virtus* brought the degeneration of the aristocracy and its role in politics. But Sallust has let us see that the corruption of public morals at Rome reaches far beyond the conspirators and it would be shallowly optimistic to render the *BC* by making the conspirators out to be unredeemably black: if the rot is constituted by a handful of men then the state can be easily purged.⁶⁰ Sallust wants us to see that the conspiracy is as much a product as an instigator of decline, and Catiline is at the same time a natural product of a diseased state and the very cause of its disease.

A corrupted Republic cannot produce anyone but wicked men like Catiline and it was precisely people like him who had brought the Republic into the present corrupted state. Catiline works for Sallust also as a proof of what he had suggested earlier on in the

⁵⁷ Syme, *Sallust*, 136.

⁵⁸ Sall. *BC*, 36.5.

⁵⁹ In this sense, it seems to me euphemism to translate the ablative nouns in 14.2 by such general terms as "play, feasting or debauchery" (Loeb, transl. by J.C. Rolfe, p.25). Cf. McGushin, *Bellum Catilinae, a Commentary* (Leiden, Brill, 1977) and E. Malcovati, *Sallustio: De Catilinae Coniuratione* (Torino, Paravia, 1971) *ad loc.*

⁶⁰ I owe this idea to Michael Comber.

prologue: true *virtus* was not unconditionally given with birth, but rather achieved by the way with which one exercised his *ingenium*.

In his opposition to Catiline, Cicero is presented by Sallust as the *homo novus* who could save the Republic from this imminent threat: there was a 'general desire to confer the consulate upon Marcus Tullius Cicero; for before that most of the nobles were consumed with jealousy and thought the office in a way prostituted if a new man, however excellent should obtain it. But when danger came, jealousy and pride fell into the background'.⁶¹ For those who disregard the conspiracy and think that it was just an exaggeration of Cicero to present himself as the saviour of the Republic,⁶² it is significant to see that for Sallust it also meant a real danger; he gives a pretty dark panorama of the state of the city at that point: 'at no other time has the condition of imperial Rome as it seems to me, been more pitiable',⁶³ and the adjectives he chooses for his description are very eloquent indeed: *quibus rebus permota civitas atque immutata urbis facies erat ... repente omnis tristitia invasit ... Ad hoc mulieres, quibus rei publicae magnitudine belli timor insolitus incesserat, afflictare sese*.⁶⁴ Therefore I cannot see Sallust's reference to Cicero as *optumo consuli* as an ironic remark.⁶⁵ It is true that he does not praise him to the skies,⁶⁶ but he says nothing condemning him either, he appears to be just the 'console che fa il suo dovere senza essere un eroe'.⁶⁷

Besides, the task of finishing off the job of the conspiracy was not a pleasant one. Cicero's dilemma after all was over seems to have been one which involved deep anxiety and great joy: 'for while he rejoiced in the knowledge that by the disclosure of the plot his country was saved from peril, he was also troubled and uncertain what ought to be done, when citizens of such standing were found guilty of a heinous crime. He realised that their punishment would be a load upon his shoulders; their impunity the ruin of the state'.⁶⁸ In the end, Cicero makes the decision taking into account the best for the Republic, not for himself. Sallust somehow acknowledges this *magnitudo animi*:

⁶¹ Sall. BC, 23.6.

⁶² See e.g. Z. Yavetz, 'The failure of Catiline's Conspiracy', *Historia* 12 (1963) 485-499; K.H. Waters, 'Cicero, Sallust and Catiline', *Historia* 19 (1970) 195-215.

⁶³ Sall. BC, 36.4.

⁶⁴ Sall. BC, 31.1-3.

⁶⁵ Sall. BC, 43.1.

⁶⁶ Although we can find subtle compliments in 31.6; 51.36.

⁶⁷ La Penna, *Sallustio e la Rivoluzione Romana*, 91.

⁶⁸ Sall. BC, 46.2.

imposing the capital penalty to the conspirators would involve future trouble for the consul, but present safety for the state.

After Cato's appealing speech is applauded in the senate, Sallust does not mention Cicero any more and he concentrates on Catiline's death and the final battle. It looks as though he is trying to tell us that, although Cicero played an important role in this affair, it was nevertheless a secondary one. Cicero is the good *homo novus*, but his hesitation makes him not completely up to standard and a bit weaker than he should have been for a man of true *virtus*.⁶⁹

Sallust's demanding view of *virtus* made him count only a pair of individuals who deserved the quality in its fullness: 'within my own memory there have appeared two men of towering virtue,⁷⁰ though of diverse character, Marcus Cato and Gaius Caesar'.⁷¹ He acknowledges their personalities were different, but presents them as equals in birth, years and eloquence. Why does he equate them? Caesar was an aristocrat and at least five years older than Cato, who belonged to a plebeian family, though the eminence of Cato the Censor had conferred a certain dignity to it. It would have been nearer to the truth and neater to back up the idea that all men of whatever background can achieve *virtus* if he had not stressed the similarities. But Sallust wants to present Caesar and Cato as equal to oppose both in the old agonistic way and thus show that this does not work in times of decline. The crisis of virtue involves an unsettling element, a non-traditional opposition: not just good against bad, but good against a different kind of good.

In eloquence they certainly did match, or perhaps Sallust makes them to do so. Both orations are a wonderful sample of the high rhetorical expertise of the speakers. Caesar's speech against putting the conspirators to death relies mainly on historical *exempla* and jurisprudence.⁷² He acknowledges the pressing situation that the consul and the senate were facing at that moment and 'that in the highest position there is the least

⁶⁹ Kraus and Woodman, *Latin Historians*, 19, have labelled this as 'the mystifying Sallust's treatment of Cicero'.

⁷⁰ The Loeb translation by J.C. Rolfe, gives here 'merit' for *virtus*. I preferred to translate it as 'virtue' and keep the literal meaning, which I think is more faithful to Sallust's design.

⁷¹ Sall. *BC*, 53.6.

⁷² Cf. Sall. *BC*, 51.

freedom of action'.⁷³ Caesar maintains his legal argument, and while acknowledging a long chain of Roman innovations, he insists in following the *exemplum* of the *maiores* who had already refused to give that penalty. In the end he proposes exile and not death. 'The young radical is portrayed as immersing himself in the Roman past, and seizing the very ground on which he might expect Cato to base his case later'.⁷⁴ Cato's speech instead, more dramatically favours the capital punishment, and gives the reason for so harsh a penalty: *libertas et anima nostra in dubio est*.⁷⁵ Answering back to Caesar, he claims that a truthful exegesis of the *maiores* would only give evidence of the need for more *severitas*.

Cato and Caesar were for Sallust the only men of great *virtus* after the state had become demoralised. He deeply admires them both,⁷⁶ 'but they were antithetic in behaviour, so Sallust explains in brief delineation. Caesar was splendid and lavish, clement and forgiving; but Cato austere and inflexible gave no favours. Men praised one for his *facilitas*, the other for *constantia*'.⁷⁷ *Caesar beneficiis ac munificentia magnus habebatur, integritate vitae Cato*.⁷⁸ Caesar wanted to show his *virtus* in a new war and longed for great power; Cato, on the contrary, cultivated self-control, propriety and above all austerity. Could Caesar and Cato together have saved the Republic? Some believe that although Sallust supplies no answer, he presents their qualities as complementary.⁷⁹ Others think that Sallust gives no evidence to suggest that an alliance could have rescued the Republic. That, on the contrary, he makes 'his readers experience both his conflict and its lack of resolution (...) the difficulties and suspicions readers feel as they read, and the formal and logical problems of the syncrisis itself becomes an image or emblem of this crisis of the late Republic'.⁸⁰

⁷³ Sall. *BC*, 51.13.

⁷⁴ C. Burnand, *Roman Representations of the Orator during the last century of the Republic* (Oxford, D.Phil thesis, 2000) 246.

⁷⁵ Sall. *BC*, 52.7.

⁷⁶ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 54.

⁷⁷ Syme, *Sallust*, 114.

⁷⁸ Sall. *BC*, 54.2.

⁷⁹ Cf. M. von Albrecht, *A History of Roman Literature*, vol. 1 (Leiden, Brill, 1997) 452. T. Wiedemann also supports the position that Sallust suggested that a cooperative effort would have been able to rescue the Republic, see Wiedemann, 'Reflections of Roman political thought in Latin historical writing' 527-8 and 'Sallust's Jugurtha: Concord, Discord, and the Digressions', *G&R* 40 (1993) 48-57.

⁸⁰ W. Batstone, 'The Antithesis of Virtue: Sallust's Syncrisis and the Crisis of the Late Republic', *Classical Antiquity* 7 (1988) 2-3.

The final conclusion of the comparison of these two men of *ingens virtus* has been another field for debatable opinions. 'For every reader who believes that he ranks Caesar over Cato there is another one who believes exactly the opposite'.⁸¹

In his illuminating article, Batstone illustrates how Sallust's opposition of Caesar and Cato does not always make sense. The problem is that they are not really opposites in the traditional sense. The qualities attached to them do not necessarily mean antagonism: why would Caesar's *mansuetudo* and *misericordia* be better or worse than Cato's *severitas*? It would be a little schematic to say that 'these two men are the representatives of the old and the new in the Roman politics and morality'.⁸² Trying to find Sallust's 'number one' appears to have been a false dilemma, 'the fact that the virtues do not and cannot work in concert and that the individuals themselves, abusing conceptual failures, thwart any complete virtue as well as each other's strengths have provoked the desire to take sides or to show Sallust took a side. But the problem was larger than Caesar and Cato, and Sallust knew that'.⁸³

However, even though they have been presented as having equal *virtus*, there is one final sentence that could throw some light regarding the author's preference between the two men. Cato *esse quam videri bonus malebat; ita quo minus petebat gloriam, eo magis illum sequebatur*.⁸⁴ His public and private *virtus* approached ontological perfection: to *be* rather than to appear good. 'Cato gives good example of the newcomer's claim, not only to *virtus*, but to *prisca virtus*, the ancient simplicity and honesty on which the greatness of Rome was reputedly founded, and which degenerated and luxurious nobility had thrown away'.⁸⁵ He could work then, as the embodiment of Sallustian *virtus* par excellence, even more than Marius, because he does not show signs of any vice. This view is, of course, influenced by intervening events. In 63 BC Cato did not yet enjoy the generalised opinion of being a 'republican hero'. Writing after his death, Sallust felt freer to colour and embellish Cato's undoubtedly good qualities. In his

⁸¹ Kraus and Woodman, *Latin Historians*, 19.

⁸² S. Usher, *Historians of Greece and Rome*, 149.

⁸³ W. Batstone, 'The Antithesis of Virtue', 17.

⁸⁴ Sall. *BC*, 54.6.

⁸⁵ T.P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971) 111.

pessimistic theory of decline, Cato appears as *the* one who was able to display true *virtus* in the gloomy present.⁸⁶

The villain of the second monograph of Sallust is a cunning foreigner who would be able to divide the opinion of senators and nobles at Rome. Jugurtha's description gives us the picture of a splendid young man: 'endowed as he was with a powerful physique, good looks and above all a superior intellect [*ingenio validus*], he did not allow himself to be spoiled by luxury or idleness (...) Although his success overshadowed his peers he was universally loved'.⁸⁷ King Micipsa thought that Jugurtha's *virtus* could contribute to the glory of his kingdom, but dreading the natural disposition of human nature and thinking that the next step of *virtus* and *gloria* was ambition of power, he feared and sent him to war in the hope that he would die displaying his valour.⁸⁸

However, the results of the king's plan were totally unexpected: Jugurtha, beside his generous nature and ready wit, displayed courage in war and wisdom in counsel and won over the intimate friendship of many Romans.⁸⁹ It is important to have this detailed account of young Jugurtha's character because to certain extent, Sallust hints that what happens next is not completely logical. In some way, Jugurtha is not absolutely responsible for his ambition. The venal Romans put in his head the idea of gaining supreme power illegally, since he himself stood first in *virtus* while 'money could buy anything at Rome',⁹⁰ meaning that his riches could perhaps buy the support of Rome to this felony. Rome, which should be the home of *virtus*, appears as the influence for its destruction. It is also interesting to note that Jugurtha's character was not corrupted from the beginning – as that of Catiline had been. The common idea in antiquity of attributing a fixed character from birth to individuals is missing here, perhaps to emphasise once again, the way corruption and vice are not completely separate from *virtus*, but on the contrary alarmingly proximate.⁹¹

⁸⁶ A status that he would retain during the Principate, see e.g. Lucan's or Seneca's writings, *passim*.

⁸⁷ Sall. *BJ*, 6.1.

⁸⁸ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 6.2-7.2.

⁸⁹ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 7.7.

⁹⁰ Sall. *BJ*, 8.1.

⁹¹ In this sense the *BJ* appears to be more complex than the *BC*. The idea of evolution of characters in the *BJ* could be seen portrayed in Marius, Jugurtha and Metellus, as opposed to the fixed ones in the *BC*, namely Catiline, Caesar, Cato, Sempronia. On the evolution of character, see chapter II, n.83.

Things started to go wrong for Jugurtha after the murder of Hiempsal. He ‘began to be afraid of the Roman people and to believe that his only hope of escaping their anger lay in the avarice of the Roman nobles and his own riches’.⁹² It is extremely difficult to know for certain what Jugurtha really felt, but Sallust seems to deal with feelings and intentions as if they were facts. Why should he be afraid of the *populus Romanus* and not the Senate, for example? Perhaps this is another of the many parallels between Jugurtha and Marius, being both concerned with popular approbation as *novi*. In any case, this comment was very ad hoc to Sallust’s theory of the decline of the nobles: in the end, it did not matter how scared of the Roman people Jugurtha was because he counted on the *avaritia nobilitatis*.

Sallust wanted to emphasise again and again that there was not one side of justice and righteousness fighting against another of injustice and corruption: ‘the appearance of the whole engagement was changeable [*varia*] and indecisive [*incerta*], arousing a combination of horror and pity’.⁹³ Jugurtha’s character is of importance as an example of the Sallustian concept of *virtus* and its decline, but so are the nobles; Jugurtha’s ‘*ambitio* finds its purpose served by the *avaritia* of the nobility’.⁹⁴ There is not only one person guilty for the outbreak of this war.

The war becomes long and tiresome, ‘the continuing and frustrating Roman failure to trap Jugurtha stems from his talent for producing seemingly endless difference and deferral between what the Romans perceive and reality (...) Throughout the central section of the narrative (43-83) Jugurtha combines delay, simulation, and rapid motion to throw the Roman offensive into disarray’.⁹⁵ Neither Metellus’ nor Marius’ strategies or *virtus* were able to put an end to it, only Sulla’s deal with Bocchus. It might seem quite shocking that the Romans were able to win the war through treachery. In fact, they appear to be victorious only because they use the same deceitful techniques the Numidian king had used before. The difference was just that the Romans have used

⁹² Sall. *BJ*, 13.5.

⁹³ Sall. *BJ*, 51.1.

⁹⁴ Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 66

⁹⁵ C. Kraus, ‘Jugurthine Disorder’, in C.S. Kraus (ed.) *The Limits of Historiography* (Leiden, Brill, 1999) 239.

these weapons – deception and bribery – all the more effectively.⁹⁶ Although it is Bocchus who in the end decides to hand over Jugurtha to the Romans, the latter's negotiations throughout the war have been marked by the same dishonesty and duplicity. Was this a virtuous triumph, could it be counted as a fair victory over the enemy? But the sense of confusion and corruption that had 'invaded' [*invaserat*] everything made it more difficult to distinguish honourable behaviour.

We can recognise a somewhat tragic element in Sallust's villains. In the same manner that Catiline – incarnation of wickedness – had attracted Sallust's and our admiration for his courage and good command of his troops, Jugurtha's noble personality moves us to sympathise with him, and even more when it appears that he has been seduced by the greedy Romans to behave as he did. Although Catiline and Jugurtha are put forward as undoubtedly 'bad', they are not completely repulsive. Moreover, Sallust himself chooses to speak out through this illegitimate and criminal Numidian king: 'the Romans, said Jugurtha, were without justice, of insatiable greed, the common enemies of all mankind. They had the same motive for a war with Bocchus as they had for a war with Jugurtha himself and other nations, namely their lust for empire [*lubidinem imperitandi*] which made them hostile to all monarchies'.⁹⁷ It is interesting to see how Sallust uses non-Romans as the mouthpiece for moral judgements and this raises huge questions over how culturally constructed *virtus* is.⁹⁸

The presence of Metellus in the *Bellum Iugurthinum* gives a wider overview of the scope of the Numidian war. He is placed neither on the side of Jugurtha nor on that of Marius, whom he disregards for his *novitas*. Sallust's description is very enthusiastic: 'a man of energy and, although an opponent of the popular party, of consistent and unblemished reputation';⁹⁹ 'he showed himself a great and prudent man [*magnum et sapientem*], so fine was the line he steered between popularity-seeking and excessive harshness',¹⁰⁰ 'he restored in his army the strict discipline of the past [*more maiorum*] and in spite of being in an unfavourable position, he nevertheless gained victory by his

⁹⁶ For reasons of the prominence of bribery in Sallust's narrative, see Paul, *A Historical Commentary*, appendix 1.

⁹⁷ Sall. *BJ*, 81.1.

⁹⁸ We will see the same kind of use in Calgacus' speech in Tacitus, *Agric.* 30.

⁹⁹ Sall. *BJ*, 43.1.

¹⁰⁰ Sall. *BJ*, 45.1.

virtus’,¹⁰¹ and some believed ‘that nothing was impossible for Metellus. For had not his energy overcome all obstacles, armour, weapons, places, seasons, even nature herself, the sovereign mistress of all other mortals?’¹⁰² The praise and approval of this member of the *nobilitas* is unequivocal.

Catiline had been the bad and corrupt aristocrat, who suited perfectly Sallust’s picture of nobles in decay. But Metellus is a more complex character, ‘although he enjoyed a rich share of *virtus*, glory and the other qualities good men wish for, had a haughty and arrogant spirit, a flaw common to the nobility’.¹⁰³ He is a man of *virtus*, but not true *virtus*, he had a principle within himself which worked almost as self-destruction: his *superbia*.¹⁰⁴

A large portion of the narrative in the *BJ* is devoted to Metellus’ achievements in the war against Jugurtha.¹⁰⁵ Victories and successes came in progression, and although the war was difficult and strenuous, he did not seem to have made a mistake in his advance towards the enemy and his fame increased non-stop.¹⁰⁶ His *superbia*, however, was going to spoil his brilliant career. He fell almost into desperation when he heard the news that the province of Numidia had fallen to Marius – he already knew about his election as consul –, and ‘he was more affected by this news than was right or proper. He neither held back his tears nor controlled his tongue; outstanding though he was in every other way, yet he was not man enough to endure his vexation’.¹⁰⁷ Sallust gives us his personal opinion about this setback: ‘for my part, I am convinced that he was tormented more by the honour conferred upon Marius than by the wrong done to himself, and that he would not have resented it so much if the province taken from him was being given to anyone other than Marius’.¹⁰⁸

Sallust gives the details of the feelings of Metellus – as he had done before with those of Marius –¹⁰⁹ precisely to emphasise the depth of the lack of *concordia* and sometimes even hatred between parties. Metellus seemed to have had many advantages

¹⁰¹ Sall. *BJ*, 55.1.

¹⁰² Sall. *BJ*, 76.1.

¹⁰³ Sall. *BJ*, 64.1.

¹⁰⁴ See especially *BJ*, 64.4.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 43-83.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 55.3.

¹⁰⁷ Sall. *BJ*, 82.2.

¹⁰⁸ Sall. *BJ*, 82.3.

¹⁰⁹ See especially *BJ*, 64.5.

over Marius, but in these times of confusion what was previously considered a privilege ceased to be so, and the order of things became upside down: ‘the general’s noble birth, until then a badge of distinction, now became a source of unpopularity, whereas the other’s [Marius] humble origin won him all the more favour. In both cases, however, it was party spirit that was the guiding influence rather than the good or bad qualities of the men themselves’.¹¹⁰

Metellus’ character and performance are subtly contrasted with those of Sulla. The whole of this successful aristocrat’s description is tainted with indecision: ‘he was equally knowledgeable in Greek and Latin literature, of huge ambition, fond of pleasures but even fonder of glory. His leisure time was given over to debauchery, but he never allowed enjoyment to get in way of his duties, except that his attitude towards his wife could have been more honourable. He was eloquent, quick-witted and always ready with friendship. He had an unbelievable mental capacity for pretence and concealment, but he was generous, particularly with money. Before his victory in the civil war he had enjoyed unparalleled good fortune, but it was never greater than his energy [*industria*] warranted’.¹¹¹ Ambiguity from beginning to end, many good qualities made him a great man, but not Sallust’s hero; Sulla’s *luxuria* appears as the vice preventing him from achieving *virtus*. This *luxuria* – like Metellus’ *superbia* – was one of the common defects of the nobility.¹¹²

Not only ambiguous, but also enigmatic is Sallust’s portrayal of Sulla. He describes his qualities, but not his actions; he does not tell us what Sulla did in his *otio luxurioso*, why his behaviour could have been *honestius* with his wife or what the purposes he wanted to disguise were. Sallust does not even want to give his final opinion about Sulla’s behaviour, although it was clear he did not like it: ‘As to his subsequent behaviour, I am not sure I should speak of it with shame or with sorrow’.¹¹³

It was Sulla, however, who brought the war to an end. The wit he displayed in the speech convincing king Bocchus to cooperate in Jugurtha’s capture,¹¹⁴ together with his characteristic good luck, seemed to have worked favourably towards the successful

¹¹⁰ Sall. *BJ*, 73.4.

¹¹¹ Sall. *BJ*, 95.3-4

¹¹² Cf. Sall. *BC*, 5.8 and 25.1-5.

¹¹³ Sall. *BJ*, 95.4.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 102.5-10.

completion of the war. 'Many have wondered whether he was braver or just luckier'.¹¹⁵ But, 'a bella posta Sallustio ha parlato d'*industria* e non de *virtus* a proposito di Sila; ed ora egli vuol mostrare che benché l'*industria* e la *felicitas* di Sila siano determinanti per la felice conclusione della guerra, il merito primo rimonta sempre al rappresentante della *virtus*: Mario'.¹¹⁶

With Marius, Sallust seems to achieve his peak in the complete exposition of his theory about *virtus*. In his somewhat idealised description of Marius' character, he confers on this *homo novus* all the qualities he would have liked him to have: *industria*, *probitas*, *militiae magna scientia*, *animus belli ingens*, *domi modicus*, *lubidinis et divitiarum victor tantum modo gloriae avidus*.¹¹⁷ He had no Grecian eloquence, no elegance of the city, things which were signs of corrupted *mores*. Marius' *virtus* was the old Roman *virtus* 'proclamata da Catone, fatta di operosità (*industria*), di resistenza alla fatiche, di valore militare, di frugalità e parsimonia, di *pudor* e *innocentia*'.¹¹⁸ In short, 'no new man was so famous or so illustrious for his deeds'.¹¹⁹

Marius' greatest achievement was undoubtedly to have won the consular election. He had succeeded over Metellus' humiliating comment,¹²⁰ partly because of his own merits, partly because his *ingenium*, inflamed by ambition and resentment, moved him in that direction.¹²¹ He had been chosen with the ardent support of the commons and once in power he began to attack the aristocrats making remarks to glorify himself and exasperate them.¹²² The antagonism between the aristocracy and the *populares* started to get heated. Both parties, as Sallust had mentioned earlier, were exercising the same techniques: 'it was not only the nobility which was corrupt after 146 BC. The *homines novi* had equally abandoned the path of *virtus*'.¹²³ And when *virtus* was not present, fortune or luck were the responsible for success. People exaggerated Marius' merits and

¹¹⁵ Sall. *BJ*, 95.4.

¹¹⁶ E. Paratore, 'Sallustio', *Quaderni della Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medievale* 12 (1973) 22.

¹¹⁷ Sall. *BJ*, 63.2.

¹¹⁸ La Penna, *Sallustio e la Rivoluzione Romana*, 215.

¹¹⁹ Sall. *BJ*, 63.7. Though it is worth noting that Sallust himself never says that Marius was a man of *virtus*, this assumption is either implicit or mentioned by Marius himself or his supporters.

¹²⁰ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 64.4.

¹²¹ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 64.5.

¹²² Sall. *BJ*, 84.1.

¹²³ Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 74.

‘every rash action of his was taken as a proof of his *virtus*’,¹²⁴ his incautiousness ‘was turned into a success by a lucky chance and won him glory instead of blame’.¹²⁵ On the one hand, Sallust emphasises the uniqueness of Marius, but at the same time he is making clear that his *virtus* too was tainted.

To encourage men to enrol and go to fight in Numidia, Marius delivered a speech full of fire, presenting himself as a man worthy to be followed and obeyed, not sparing self-praise and comparing his own qualities with the arrogance of the nobles: ‘for me who have spent all my life in exemplary pursuits, the habit of honourable service has become second nature’;¹²⁶ ‘what they have learned in books I have learned by service on the field of battle; judge for yourselves, which carry more weight, words or deeds’.¹²⁷ The main ideas put forth in this speech serve to define and formulate Sallust’s concept of *virtus*: one must trust only *virtus* and *innocentia*;¹²⁸ ‘that all men partake of one and the same nature, but it is the bravest who are the noblest’;¹²⁹ that nobility sprang from virtue,¹³⁰ and this cannot be inherited.¹³¹

Marius’ famous speech embodies the natural and final result of the Sallustian concept of *virtus* expressed in the prologue, namely, that *virtus* was possessed by the *nobilitas*, this being something personal, based in individual achievement and not birth. Sallust – through Marius – does not mind being insistent and repetitive about this. It seems as if he was trying to break forever the traditional concept of *nobilitas* even more than introducing a new *virtus*. He, however, notoriously fails to adopt a new terminology, because of his own anxiety of winning the traditional approval and good opinion of the *populus*. This, of course, raises questions about how much had really changed or how new this *nova nobilitas* really was.

Since *nobilitas* and *novitas* are such key ideas in Sallust’s works, I would like to dedicate some time to give a brief explanation of how they were understood during the late Republic. In doing so, one must be aware that there is no final definition for these

¹²⁴ Sall. *BJ*, 92.2.

¹²⁵ Sall. *BJ*, 94.6.

¹²⁶ Sall. *BJ*, 85.9.

¹²⁷ Sall. *BJ*, 85.14. Sallust is implicitly saying that deeds are greater than words (he had said it plainly in *BC* 3.2 and 8.5), but at the same time with his writing he is trying to prove that at least they can be equal.

¹²⁸ Sall. *BJ*, 85.5.

¹²⁹ Sall. *BJ*, 85.15.

¹³⁰ Sall. *BJ*, 85.17.

¹³¹ Sall. *BJ*, 85.38.

terms and that, in any case our approach will be not only philological, i.e. stating what the words meant, but mainly historical and therefore concerned with the role they played in political and social contexts.

As we have said above, the term *nobilis* appears to be related to the verb ‘to know’; a *nobilis* was *notum*, or better, because one was *notum*, one could be counted as a *nobilis*. This notability, expressed in *gloria*, had been acquired by serving the state by great deeds, or showing exceptional courage in its defence or enlargement. These achievements then had been performed by the *virtus* of certain individuals. *Virtus* had made them famous and glorious, and because of that they had become nobles: ‘la nobilitas est donc issue de la *virtus* et non le contraire’.¹³² This notability was transferred to the family and it manifested its most beneficial effects at magisterial elections. They were the descendants of the ‘great doers’, they were known for that, they seemed better equipped for holding office. ‘Because of notability the people preferred to other candidates those whose father and grandfathers they had seen as consuls’ says Gelzer,¹³³ and it is precisely here where the crux of the debate of nobility lies. Is *nobilitas* a term with more political or social implications? For some scholars – Gelzer among them – nobility demanded consular ancestors, and thus the notion, being intimately connected with public office, involved a more political shade.¹³⁴ But for Peter Brunt the concept required a more social understanding: ‘Gelzer is wrong in denying Mommsen’s view that all patricians were nobles (...) By limiting nobility to descendants of consuls, Gelzer excluded brothers and co-laterals. Perhaps this is over-rigid. In my judgement (contra Gelzer) patrician lineage would have entitled them to claim nobility’.¹³⁵ This may have significant implications in terms of who can aspire to the quality and to whom it is debarred.

We find the same vagueness in the definition of *homo novus*. It may be used in general of those who were the first of their families to reach the senate and in a more special sense to those who among this latter group were the first ones to achieve the

¹³² Tiffou, ‘Essai sur la Pensée Morale de Salluste’, 129.

¹³³ Gelzer, *Roman Nobility*, 28.

¹³⁴ Cf. Gelzer, *Roman Nobility*, 32. This general view – with more or less differences – is also held by Shackleton Bailey, ‘*Nobiles* and *novi* reconsidered’, *AJP* (1987) 255-60, E. Badian, *OCD* (1996) 1046-7 and P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate*, *passim*.

¹³⁵ P.A. Brunt, ‘*Nobilitas et Novitas*’, *JRS* 72 (1982) 6. Gelzer believed, against Mommsen, that patricians who held office for the first time were also called *homines novi*.

consulship.¹³⁶ The *homines novi* are better understood as individuals who rise politically, but they are not to be regarded as a political party as such. ‘Ni par sa fréquence, ni par le nombre des personajes concerné, ni par le lieu ou le mode, souvent allusif, de la mention, l’expression homo novus n’apparaît comme un slogan politique (...) Il semble bien, en effet, que la forte proportion de sources ciceroniennes a provoqué une déformation: le consul de 63 mit si souvent l’accent sur son origine, soulignant par là son mérite, que l’on a transposé de façon abusive cette préoccupation à toute la société politique romaine’.¹³⁷ Even though they do not form a party, they do, nevertheless, represent the aspiration of a social group which wants to establish a proper place in society and politics according to its social and economic importance.

Considering that there is no Roman definition of *nobilis* or *homo novus* and that these terms were determined more by usage than by legal definition, it seems difficult and meaningless to construct strict categories. What is relevant for our understanding of Sallust’s standpoint is that he seems to distinguish his judgements and attitudes between political groups and individuals belonging to a particular sector of society. Thus, he treats the *nobilitas* with severity,¹³⁸ but does not spare praise when a *nobilis* deserves it,¹³⁹ and it works in the same way regarding the *homines novi*. He expresses with bitter disappointment the reality that *etiam homines novi, qui antea per virtutem soliti erant nobilitatem antevenire, furtim et per latrocinia potius quam bonis artibus ad imperia et honores nituntur*.¹⁴⁰ But he is also eager to promote their individual virtues and qualities.¹⁴¹

Coming back to Marius’ speech, we can see some interesting parallels with Cicero’s thought. They may well be Sallust’s adaptation for the propaganda of the *homines novi*. ‘Since nobility is nothing but recognised virtue’, Cicero wrote to Hirtius, ‘who would demand antiquity of family in a man whose old age was seen to bring him

¹³⁶ Cf. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate*, 1.

¹³⁷ M. Dondin-Payre, ‘Homo novus, un slogan de Caton à Cesar?’, *Historia* 30 (1981) 52.

¹³⁸ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 64.1.

¹³⁹ E.g. Metellus, Sulla, Caesar, etc.

¹⁴⁰ Sall. *BJ*, 4.7.

¹⁴¹ The only ones that Sallust seems to be biased against as a group are the *pauci*, but this does not involve a social category, but a political one. *Nobilitas* does not identify itself with the *pauci*, but the *pauci* belonged to the *nobilitas*, of which they constituted a very politically active part.

fame?’¹⁴² ‘Cicero had developed an advanced form of the new man’s ideology, in which nobility was redefined in its moral sense to the exclusion of the technical Roman usage’.¹⁴³ And Marius put forward the same ideas: ‘I have no family portraits and my nobility is a new one. Yet surely it is better to have made oneself noble than to have inherited nobility and dishonoured it’,¹⁴⁴ and he continues: ‘I can show spears, a banner, trappings and other military honours, not to mention scars on the front of my body. These are my family portraits, these are my nobility, not bequeathed to me in inheritance, as theirs were to them, but won by dint of countless toils and perils on my part’.¹⁴⁵ The *imagines maiorum* played a remarkably important role in one’s election and ‘were perceived as the most enduring and familiar sign of the office-holding caste and of its value’.¹⁴⁶ Marius proposes new *imagines*, not his ancestor masks – because he had none – but his military decorations and wounds received in battle. The core of Marius’ point is that the first Roman *nobiles* had once been *novi homines* like himself, without ancestral *imagines*, and that showing their *virtus* they had achieved their *nobilitas*. Marius seems to denounce the inconceivable claim of a nobility justified by itself. But if *virtus* was their justification, the *novi* then, champions of *virtus*, could also reach *nobilitas*. ‘This new perspective on the past enables him to produce his radically new definition of the epithet *nobilis*, as one not exclusively open to the descendants of the notable *maiores*, but all those who are willing to follow their example of brave conduct’.¹⁴⁷

One particular expression of *virtus* was *labor et periculum*. These had been carried out by the nobility to justify their position; they had won their *virtus* by facing adversities and perils. These characteristics now would become something particularly linked with the *novi*. ‘En face du conformisme et du conservatisme désuet de la *nobilitas*, ils appuient un effort de révision des idées et des valeurs politique pour répondre aux nécessités du monde nouveau dans lequel ils vivent’.¹⁴⁸ This revision of

¹⁴² Cic. *Ad Fam*, 3.7.5.

¹⁴³ Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate*, 110.

¹⁴⁴ Sall. *BJ*, 85.25.

¹⁴⁵ Sall. *BJ*, 85.29-30.

¹⁴⁶ Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture*, 62. For the importance of the *imagines* in political elections, see esp. 60-90.

¹⁴⁷ Burnand, *Roman Representations of the Orator*, 254.

¹⁴⁸ Hellegouarc’h, *Le Vocabulaire Latin de Relations et des Partis Politiques sous la République*, 483.

political concepts involved the ‘appropriation’ of aristocratic ideas with the consequent ‘adaptation’ to the *homines novi* as Cicero and Sallust did in their works.¹⁴⁹ Marius says: ‘I have lived a life that is no stranger to every kind of hardship and danger’,¹⁵⁰ equating himself to the first Roman nobles in *virtus*. He can claim this with the *nobiles*’ terminology, because he had actually performed in the *nobiles*’ way.

But the presentation of Marius as a man of *virtus* was not just a Sallustian device to expound his theory of the *homo novus* and the new *nobilitas*. In fact, the historical Marius did consider himself a true representative of *virtus* and this is best illustrated in his dedication of a temple to *Honos et Virtus* with the spoils of the campaign against the Cimbri and Teutones in 102-1 BC.¹⁵¹ He was possibly emulating Fabius Maximus and Scipio Aemilianus who had done the same,¹⁵² but perhaps emphasising more the *industria* characteristic of the new men.

In spite of all we have said, we should not identify Marius as Sallust’s hero. He is led by *ambitio* in the same way as the nobility had been, and does not always use the *bonae artes* of his *ingenium* to achieve greater glory. The unmanly way Marius denigrates his commander, Metellus, and the unjustified risks he later runs in order to emulate him tarnish his original virtue, and upset the tentative division we had made between the decayed *nobiles* and the sound new men. The final evaluation of Marius is a combination of admiration for the man who opposed the arrogance of the *nobiles* and a somewhat less enthusiastic awareness of the responsibility Marius was to bear for the civil wars. ‘The enrollment of the *capite censi* throws a disturbing light on him. Sallust seems not to approve of this measure, in which, as was commonly believed, lay the origin of those personal professional armies that would destroy the Republic’.¹⁵³

Was there a safe exit for Rome? Could, for example, Metellus’ *virtus* together with Marius’ have done a better job if they had worked in *concordia* and

¹⁴⁹ This is particularly emphasised in his dealing with the Catilinarian conspiracy. The difference of Cicero’s and Marius’ personality, education, formation, above all the different political situation in which they were living and the different way they carried out their ascension explain the different way which each one deals with the topic.

¹⁵⁰ Sall. *BJ*, 85.7 and also 85.30.

¹⁵¹ It constituted the only monumental building of Marius’ political career. For more, see Appendix, 1.c).

¹⁵² 234 BC and 133 BC.

¹⁵³ G.B. Conte, *Latin Literature, a History* (John Hopkins University Press, 1994, translated by J. Solodow, original in Italian, Firenze, 1987) 240.

cooperatively?¹⁵⁴ Was the political recovery going to come through the nobles or the new men? Sallust's point is precisely to stress the corruption of the times: one could not trust the nobility and even more sadly for him, one could not count on the *novi* either. The *mos partium et factionum*¹⁵⁵ meant that there could be no unity, only disintegration.

In his monographs Sallust gives us an uneven treatment of the episodes of the *bella*, there are chronological and geographical mistakes and a biased view of the motives of the nobility in the war because he is too concentrated in his scheme.¹⁵⁶ There is a sort of anxiety to prove what he wants. 'Sallust's arrangement and treatment of facts, indeed his whole attitude to his subject, are largely determined by his general view of Roman history after the destruction of Carthage as a decline through definite stages from a state of personal and national *virtus* into *ambitio, avaritia et luxuria*'.¹⁵⁷ He seems more concerned with *virtus* and its decline than the narrative itself, and actually he pushes the narrative to fit his theory better.

The odd and open endings of the monographs suggest that this decline is still present in his own society; they are still in the same position: feeling happy for the enemies fallen and sad for the friends,¹⁵⁸ and their future is still in the hands of one man: whoever wins the civil wars.¹⁵⁹ Nothing has changed since Jugurtha, nothing has changed since Catiline. The republic is still going downhill. There are no boundaries for corruption, one can be sure when it starts, but one does not see the end. Rome 'by gradual changes has ceased to be the noblest and best, and has become the worst and most vicious'.¹⁶⁰

The sense of the unfinished, which keeps the reader between retrospection and anticipation, makes the monographs highly effective pieces for Sallust's purpose. Our

¹⁵⁴ The digression on the Philaeni (*BJ* 79-80) could suggest that cooperation within the community will bring success.

¹⁵⁵ Sall. *BJ*, 41.1.

¹⁵⁶ For these inaccuracies see Paul, *A Historical Commentary*, esp. 1-8; Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* and Syme, *Sallust*, *passim*.

¹⁵⁷ Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 81.

¹⁵⁸ Sall. *BC*, 61.9: 'Many too had gone from the camp to visit the field or to pillage, on turning over the bodies of the rebels found now a friend, now a guest or a kinsman; some also recognised their personal enemies. Thus the whole army was variously affected with sorrow and grief, rejoicing and lamentation'.

¹⁵⁹ Sall. *BJ*, 114.3-4: 'Marius was made consul in his absence and the province of Gaul was assigned to him. On the calends of January, amid great pomp and as consul, he celebrated a triumph. At that time all the hopes and resources of the state were in his hands'.

¹⁶⁰ Sall. *BC*, 5.9.

attention is at the same time on the present moment and on the future to come. ‘Certainly the clear moral logic of the prologues of both monographs contrasts starkly with their ominous, or at least ambiguous, endings’.¹⁶¹ And Sallust planned it that way. His prologues make perfect sense if we detach them from the following narrative: the distinction of mind and body, the supremacy of *virtus* (public and active) and the natural human goal placed in *gloria*. But when we get to the end of the story our final conclusion seems to be: ‘it does not work’, and we are left in darkness.

3. The Devaluation of Language

One final point I would like to touch on concerns the importance that Sallust gives to the devaluation of language. This was not a new topic for historians and Thucydidean influence is clearly present in Sallust’s presentation of it.¹⁶² Subversion of political vocabulary was something that the Greek historian had denounced as a inevitable feature of political struggle; the passage on stasis at Corcyra is for Thucydides an emblematic one to show that civil war and devaluation of language mutually reinforced one another: ‘they exchanged their usual evaluations of deeds for new ones, in the light of what they now thought justified’.¹⁶³

In Sallust, the debasement of language was also a sign of decline, but the origins were different. For Thucydides it was civil war, the *biaios disdaskalos*,¹⁶⁴ that was responsible for this devaluation, whereas for Sallust decline depended precisely on the absence of foreign threat. The end of the *metus hostilis* had brought all bad things: ‘the terms good or bad were applied to citizens, not on the yardstick of services rendered or injuries inflicted on the state, since all were equally corrupt; any individual of outstanding wealth and irresistible in his lawlessness was considered good because he

¹⁶¹ T.F. Scanlon, *Spes Frustrata: A Reading of Sallust* (Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1987) 63.

¹⁶² For the influence of this Greek historian on Sallust, see T.F. Scanlon, *The Influence of Thucydides on Sallust* (Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1980).

¹⁶³ Thuc, 3.82.4 with J. Wilson’s translation in ‘The customary meanings of words were changed – or were they? A note on Thucydides 3.82.4’, *CQ* N.S. 32 (1982) 18-20.

¹⁶⁴ Thuc, 3.82.2.

was the preserver of the existing conditions'.¹⁶⁵ The word *boni* now was susceptible to wilful misunderstanding, 'here it is applied to the so-called defenders of the status quo, and is simply a false label to screen their facts of oppression'.¹⁶⁶

It had not seemed necessary before to define concepts such as *virtus*, *libertas*, *auctoritas*. Their meanings were clear enough to those who needed to use them, or to those they were applied to: the *nobilitas*. This political vocabulary had been designed by a few for a few, and the significant role of these important terms was kept 'in family', so to speak, so that if anything was changed, everybody knew what they were meaning by it. It was when the *novi* began to gain more and more economic and social influence and started to demand their political rights, when it seemed appropriate to look for a definition of these key words that meant so much for political and social life in Rome. 'L'importance de plus en plus grande prise par les *homines novi* dans la vie publique de l'époque devait assurer la renaissance de l'antique *virtus*. Née de la lutte contre la *nobilitas*, cette régénération rappelle au Romain que la *virtus* n'est plus ce qu'elle était à l'origine, car c'est elle que l'*homo novus* prétend restaurer, et c'est sur elle qu'il s'appuie pour justifier ses aspirations au pouvoir'.¹⁶⁷

The theoretical high standard implied in the explanation of all these concepts was contrasted with the reality of the actors, and it was precisely the awareness of this contrast that devalued the actual significance of the notions involved. The insistence on having *libertas* as the cause for any rebellion, or describing any man as possessing *virtus* started to make these attributes rather meaningless. Language progressively loses its character as communication, as it more and more tries to influence while it less and less says anything.

With Cato's speech, Sallust introduces the theme of debasement of language, with all its dramatic implications, quite explicitly into the narrative: *iam pridem equidem nos vera vocabula rerum amisimus*: 'in very truth we have long since lost the true names for things. It is precisely because to give away the property of others is called 'generosity', destructive temerity becomes 'bravery' that the Republic is reduced to

¹⁶⁵ Sall. *Hist.* 1.12.

¹⁶⁶ P. McGushin, *Sallust, The Histories*, vol. I (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992) 82. For a more comprehensive study of Sallust's political concepts see: U. Paananen, *Sallust's Politico-Social Terminology* (Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1972).

¹⁶⁷ Tiffou, E., 'Essai sur la Pensée Morale de Salluste', 140.

extremities'.¹⁶⁸ It is quite striking how Sallust gives the subversion of some words as the direct cause of decadence. Change of language affects everybody at all levels of society, words and language are the means that sustain communication in society. 'The reality of the word in eminent ways makes existential interaction happen. And so, if the word becomes corrupted, human existence itself will not remain unaffected and untainted'.¹⁶⁹ If man reshapes the evaluation of what he considers generosity or courage, he will unconsciously start changing the grounds on which he operates and in the end his conduct. Meanings can move the boundaries of behaviour.

The very word *amisimus* in Cato's speech suggests that in some way men were not totally aware of these changes, but that it was the force of the decadent state of affairs in Rome which had drawn them to these new evaluations. On the other hand, the Romans themselves were the only ones responsible for this decadence: they had fallen into *ambitio*, *avaritia* and *luxuria* as a result of the wealth and peace after the fall of Carthage and nobody seemed ashamed of working for their own benefit instead of the state's.¹⁷⁰ 'As soon as riches came to be held in honour, when glory, dominion and power followed in their train, virtue began to lose its lustre'.¹⁷¹ *Hebescere virtus* seemed to have been the problem for the introduction of new vices: *rapere, consumere, sua parvi pendere, aliena cupere, pudorem, pudicitiam, divina atque humana promiscua, nihil pensi neque moderati habere*'.¹⁷² The insistent use of infinitives here suggest process, and that perhaps all those things were still going on in Sallust's time.¹⁷³

The danger was that ambition *vitium propius virtutem erat*.¹⁷⁴ Both *virtus* and *ambitio* long for glory, honour and power, the first by *bonae artes*, the latter by *dolis atque fallaciis*.¹⁷⁵ Sallust acknowledges the disturbing proximity of *vitium* and *virtus* as another feature of political decline. The language of *vitium* appropriates the words that

¹⁶⁸ Sall. BC, 52.11.

¹⁶⁹ J. Pieper, *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1992, original title and first edition, *Missbrauch der Sprache, Missbrauch der Macht*, Munich, Kösel-Verlag, 1974) 15.

¹⁷⁰ And even more, they were corrupting others, e.g. Jugurtha.

¹⁷¹ Sall. BC, 12.1.

¹⁷² Sall. BC, 12.1.

¹⁷³ For other uses of the historical infinitive see M. von Albrecht, *Masters of Roman Prose* (Leeds, Francis Cairns, 1989, orig. in German, 1979) 71-2 and B. Hessen, *Der Historische Infinitiv im Wandel der Darstellungstechnik Sallusts* (Frankfurt, P. Lang, 1984).

¹⁷⁴ Sall. BC, 11.2.

¹⁷⁵ Sall. BC, 11.2.

had been connected only with *virtus* before, ‘the *boni* were so styled because they stood for the existing order, and *amicitia* can have another name, *factio*. It is to be regretted that the historian did not go further in exemplification. He might have declared *potentia* to be the pejorative synonym of *auctoritas*. And according to persons and circumstances, *dignitas* and *superbia* could be interchangeable’.¹⁷⁶ ‘Senate’ and ‘people’ were honourable pretexts for lust for personal power.¹⁷⁷ Sallust also warns us against using fine words such as tranquillity [*otium*] for what in reality is slavery [*servitium*],¹⁷⁸ and he even attacks the misuse of *dignitas* and *libertas* to cover caprice and selfishness.¹⁷⁹ All the honours reserved for *virtus* are now claimed by *ambitio*.¹⁸⁰ And thus, the language of *virtus* of the beginning of the monograph is at some point replaced by the language of decline, with its particular vocabulary of *vitium*, till we reach a stage where language is used with a frightening promiscuity.

This devaluation of language is part of Sallust’s *omnia venalia*.¹⁸¹ There was corruption in the city in the broadest sense of the word: *corrupti civitatis mores*,¹⁸² [*civitas*] *pessuma ac flagitiosissima facta sit*,¹⁸³ *civitas immutata imperium ex iustissimo atque optumo crudele intolerandumque factum*.¹⁸⁴ The idea of disorder and disruption was omnipresent and in some way it was overwhelming: ‘I pray you consider how the order of things is inverted; formerly public mischief was planned secretly, public defence openly; and hence the good easily forestalled the wicked. Nowadays peace and harmony [*concordia*] are disturbed openly, defended secretly; those who desire disorder are in arms, you are in fear’.¹⁸⁵ Because ‘under pretence of the public welfare each in reality was working for his own advancement. Such men showed neither self-restraint nor moderation in their strife, and both parties used their victory

¹⁷⁶ Syme, *Sallust*, 255.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Sall. *Hist.* 3.38.11

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Sall. *Hist.* 3.48.13

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 41.5

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 52.22. This thought is developed further in the *Histories* 1.12.

¹⁸¹ Cf. *BC*, 10.4 and *BJ* 8.1; 20.1; 35.10.

¹⁸² Sall. *BC*, 5.8.

¹⁸³ Sall. *BC*, 5.9.

¹⁸⁴ Sall. *BC*, 10.6.

¹⁸⁵ Sall. *Hist.* 1.67.13.

ruthlessly'.¹⁸⁶ And all this 'had spread like a deadly plague'.¹⁸⁷ The word 'spread' is a poor reflection of the original *invasit*. Sallust's insistence on using this particular verb is related to one notable aspect of his obsession with corruption and decline: namely, the way it spreads.¹⁸⁸

Military imagery runs through the language of *vitium* and when, keeping with this train of images, Sallust wishes to depict an access of violent emotion, he uses the same verb *invado*: *hunc [Catilina] post dominationem L. Sullae libido maxuma invaserat rei publicae capiundae*,¹⁸⁹ or *igitur ex divitiis iuventutem luxuria atque avaritia cum superbia invasere*,¹⁹⁰ and *tanta vis morbi aequae uti tabes plerosque civium invaserat*.¹⁹¹ The equivalent in the language of *virtus* is the verb *incedo*, and he uses it when speaking of the summit of *virtus*: *tanta cupido gloriae incesserat*.¹⁹² The similarity of the two verbs is disturbing. But we know that something is going seriously wrong when Sallust chooses the following words to announce the depths of corruption: *sed libido stupri, ganeae ceterique cultus non minor incesserat*.¹⁹³ The verb that had previously described *virtus* is now illustrating *vitium*. This same phenomenon is present when he describes the hardy Romans of the past in *BC* 7.5: we can see a great parallelism with Catiline's description in 5.4. Sallust shows not simply the transition from virtue to vice: he also insists on the impossibility of circumscribing corruption, and on the permeability of its boundaries.¹⁹⁴

We see Sallust achieving what he had set in his prologue as the arduous labour of history; he has satisfied his own criterion: *facta dictis exaequanda*. Shocking facts are presented with shocking words and this vocabulary of decline becomes so powerful that will mark literature henceforward. Matching words and deeds involved mimesis, it dealt with the difficulty of conforming actions and actors with style. For this, he had to create

¹⁸⁶ Sall. *BC*, 38.4.

¹⁸⁷ Sall. *BC*, 10.6.

¹⁸⁸ This has, of course, a Thucydidean ring and his parallel of corrupting stasis and corrupting plague.

¹⁸⁹ Sall. *BC*, 5.6.

¹⁹⁰ Sall. *BC*, 12.2.

¹⁹¹ Sall. *BC*, 36.5. See also Thucydides' use of *epepese* in 3.82.2: together with the military meaning of 'falling upon an enemy', there is the other meaning of 'falling down', being ruined. This is what the plague and the stasis produced in Corcyra.

¹⁹² Sall. *BC*, 7.3.

¹⁹³ Sall. *BC*, 13.3.

¹⁹⁴ I owe this idea to Michael Comber.

his own: contorted, abrupt. 'Style reflects a way of seeing the world (...), a crabbed, difficult, elliptical style may reinforce a critical view of war or of behaviour of political factions, and can create a linguistic atmosphere imitating the contradictions and hypocrisies in the 'real' world. Style reflects ideology'.¹⁹⁵

It seems quite striking that at the same time that Sallust was so concerned in denouncing and condemning the change in the evaluation of the meanings of some significant words, this is precisely what he wants to do with the concept of *virtus*. He had attacked the *devaluation* of some traditional good Roman qualities and given it as the cause of the change in moral behaviour, and then he daringly proposes a new *re-evaluation* of *virtus*, precisely because he wants to move people to act and behave differently and thus, perhaps save the Republic from its dreadful state.

Sallust's redefinition of *virtus* is a fine balance between reinforcing the concept's essence and changing it: an old value dressed in a new sensibility. The imprecision of the boundaries of the concept of *virtus* had put the term in a risky situation of devaluation, but this same imprecision was going to save it and make it much richer. *Virtus* as a political 'idea' – and political meant moral in Rome – had become in the late Republic a notion traditionally attached to a certain sector of society; a mental image thought as a quality or attribute possessed by the *nobilitas*. In his monographs, Sallust was going to challenge this conception. *Virtus* as a political 'ideal' was presented as a model at its highest perfection, a standard or principle to aim, a value to be achieved. This ideal, meant for everyone,¹⁹⁶ involved that one had to 'strive' for it and this struggle for *virtus* carried out through *bonae artes* gained *gloria*.

The *nobiles* had certainly been the class which most closely had identified with the *res publica*, and they had won their prestige and glory by serving it. When this tradition started fading away, when ambition and avarice took over service, the Republic was destroyed not by external forces, not by some abstract process of economic or historical development, but *primo pecuniae, deinde imperi cupido* of its citizens.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Kraus and Woodman, *Latin Historians*, 12.

¹⁹⁶ Hence the importance of the prologues, see section 1 of this chapter.

¹⁹⁷ Sall. *BC*, 10.3.4.

For Sallust, the discussion of political decline came in the end down to a discussion of persons. Political decline does not automatically occur, but results from conscious decisions made by individuals: and the hopeful corollary of this firm judgement is that decline can be halted and reversed by the resolute efforts of each one of these individuals. The moral responsibility for the health of a nation rests with its citizens. Sallust will not allow us the ease of shifting the blame for decline away from ourselves and onto our circumstances or the course of history. It is this comfortable self-deceit that is rebuked in the opening chapter of the *BJ* 1.4: *falso queritur...* Power itself does not instigate decline, and men cannot shift their responsibilities onto any general cause.

It looks as if Sallust stresses the individual *virtus* not because of a Stoic or foreign influence, but because in the time he was writing the sense of serving the Republic was lost; political interest was confused with individual interest and, if always the needs of the State had been subordinated to those of the individuals, now, even with the *homines novi*, this order seemed upside down. Sallust tries to speak a language that his contemporaries would understand : claiming at the same time tradition and novelty. Placing all the responsibility in the individual's *virtus* and *industria* entailed above all an active conception that corresponded faithfully to the demands of Roman thought.

What about the validity of approaching history as he did? For Sallust asking and explaining history through moral standards was unquestionably valid; the analysis of the connection between the collapse of the Republic and the failure of *virtus* is not without merit: the apparent moral commonplaces disguised the political reality by which personal power and position were sought not to serve, but at the expense of the state. It seems reasonable to analyse the breakdown of the Republic with regard to the distortion and corruption of its ideal. Moral questions, as social or economic ones, are indeed valid in history, although their answers can be harder to find.

Sallust does not seem to solve the problem of the decadence of the Republic, he does not provide an answer to his reader, because he himself does not have it. The old *virtus* had gone downhill; he denounces the need of a new one: Marius? Caesar? Cato? The theory that *virtus* was something personal, which brought nobility to its owner was perfectly coherent and logic, but it was doomed to failure. In the dark panorama of the

late Republic, where decline had invaded the very basis of politics, Sallust's appropriation of the language that traditionally had belonged to the corrupted nobles did not work as an escape to safety. But in one sense Sallust was right, *virtus* would stay alive and would bring nobility to some: he, at least, did what he could with his *facta dictis exaequare*, and he continued serving the state by writing history.

IV Recording *Virtus*, Preserving *Libertas*: Livy's hope

Virtus, knows nothing of humiliation at the polls
 but shines with honours untarnished.
 It does not take up or lay down the axes
 at the whim of the wind of popular opinion.
Virtus opens a way to heaven for those
 who deserve not to die.

Horace, *Od.* 3.2.17-21.¹

Not many years after Sallust's monographs, Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (*AUC*) showed to its contemporaries that the annalistic tradition had still a role to play in Roman historical writing, and at the same time, that the development of this tradition had matured in such a way that it almost meant an altogether different approach to history. The choice of Livy as my second step in '*Virtus* in History' represents how change and continuity interact not only at the 'real-historical' level, but also how this interaction is mirrored in the writing of history itself. Livy's awareness of change contrasts with his presentation of insistent continuity.

I will argue in this chapter that in recording deeds of past *virtus* Livy was constructing – and somehow also fixing – Rome's memory so as to protect and safeguard her true identity in an age of changes. More than any other writer, Livy was able to give a persuasive illustration of Romanness in such a manner that it became canonical to posterity. To say that the author's intention was – as he explicitly says in the preface – to provide 'lessons of every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument',² and from those lessons to choose what to imitate and what to avoid is, of course, to say the truth and to say a lot. But Livy not only wants to provide *exempla*, first and foremost he wants his readers to identify themselves with the Romans of past times; *exempla* can only be perceived as such if there is something in common, if – to some extent – the situation, the circumstance or the actors appear to be familiar.

¹ West's translation in D. West, *Horace Odes III: Dulce Periculum* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002) 25.

² Livy, *praef.* 10.

Only in recognising what is presented as truly Roman will the Romans of Livy's times be able to draw the continuous line that links the Romans of the past with themselves. And Livy is anxious not to cut that line.

Many factors have shaped the production and interpretation of the *AUC*, and while a valuable thing we can do as readers and critics is to deal with those factors, it is important also not to overemphasise them. Is Livy an Augustan author? Does he subscribe to the Stoic concept of determinism? Can we consider Livy as a tragic historian? These and other questions – although valid – are not going to take us very far in our understanding of the *AUC* as a record of the past. What would perhaps be more helpful in achieving this is the analysis and comprehension of Livy's role of memory as a means to conquer identity. He presents this Roman identity as being intimately connected with *virtus* and *libertas*. *AUC* is, on the whole, the history of the gradual acquisition of *libertas* for the Roman people: first, with the consulate, an aristocratic *libertas* and then, with the tribunes of the plebs and the right to be elected for all the other magistracies, a plebeian one. We could expand the title without losing Livy's original meaning: '*Historia libertatis populi Romani ab urbe condita*'. Recording deeds of *prisca virtus* of old Romans bravely defending *libertas*, Livy is encouraging the Romans of his time to preserve their freedom – perhaps then under threat – in the same way.

Livian scholarship has started to move forward from the two main avenues that dominated the analysis of *AUC* till the 60s or 70s in the last century: source criticism on the one hand, and the influence of Hellenistic historiography on the other. Quellenforschung, although interesting and necessary, does not explain the motives of why Livy wrote his history or why he wrote it in that particular way; it tells us more than anything else, Livy's failures and limitations as a historian, a topic to which an enormous amount of material has been dedicated.³ This approach has led the critics to

³ For a more detailed account and critique on Quellenforschung see T.J. Luce, *Livy: The Composition of his History* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977) xv-xviii; J.E. Phillips, 'Current Research in Livy's First Decade', *ANRW* II, 30.2 (1982) 998-1057 and G.B. Miles, *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1995) 1-7.

consider Livy as a ‘second-class historian’,⁴ who appeared to have chosen his sources more or less randomly and then followed them without any critical sense. Livy’s talents seemed to have been more in the field of literary artistry than historical accuracy. Approaching Livy in a more thematic manner, on the other hand, others have claimed that the influence of Hellenistic historians, with their so-called ‘tragic history’, provided Livy with the style he was going to develop in his work and become a master of: the rhetorical presentation of characters and episodes capable of arousing emotions to *delectare* and *movere* the audience.⁵

Leaving aside both of these tendencies, I would like to approach the *AUC* as a whole, and try to move away from pigeon-holing the individual passages to see how the complete entity works towards the author’s main aim. I am, of course, aware that I will be unable to treat every aspect of so vast a text in one chapter, but I will be focusing on the topic which is germane to my task. Developing the idea that Rome worked as a theatre for Livy’s historical narrative I will try to show how memory was going to ‘act’ for Livy as a guardian and shelter of Roman identity, expressed for him in *virtus* and *libertas*.

1. Rome: Theatre of *Virtus*

Looking at the first book of *AUC* we can discover the intentions and preoccupations of the author for the whole work. The introduction of those early characters, surrounded by the mist of myth, but nonetheless vivid and alive, are put there to present right ‘from the foundation of the city’ what Roman history was going to be

⁴ P.G. Walsh, ‘Livy’ in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Latin Historians* (London, Routledge, 1966) 137.

⁵ As I will not engage with either of these approaches to Livian historiography, see E. Burck, *Die Erzählungskunst des T. Livius* (Berlin, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1934); A. Klotz, *Livius und seine Vorgänger* (Amsterdam, 1964); P.G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961); E. Burck (ed.), *Wege zu Livius* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967). Criticizing both methods (but acknowledging their contributions) see T.J. Luce, *Livy: The Composition of his History* and G.B. Miles, *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome*. Finally, for a more comprehensive and updated bibliography on Livy see J.D. Chaplin, *Livy’s Exemplary History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000) 215-29.

like.⁶ The first book is the history of Rome in miniature. In no other book do we have such a variety of people or situations: war abroad and civil discord, peace and enlargement of the boundaries, heroism and ignominy of her leaders and people... all of these factors working together will give us a foretaste of Roman history. It was to Livy's benefit that the first book had the right combination of action and setting; the readers were going to go back to Book 1 – reading or remembering – many times because the following narrative encouraged them to do so: it was Livy's purpose in constructing memory to have the present interacting with the distant past in a genuine dialogue of identity.

From the foundation of the city we see the assistance of the gods and good fortune. The god Mars was the father of the twins, and although Livy does not mention *virtus* explicitly, we can assume that courage was certainly one of the main features of this warrior-god. Fortune had also helped: 'the fates were resolved upon the founding of this great City, and the beginning of the mightiest of empires, next after that of Heaven'.⁷ This must have given the post-civil war Romans some reassurance: Rome would survive any political turmoil because the gods were with her. Rome had been founded by civil discord and brothers killing each other; what the Romans of the first century BC were witnessing, although sad, was not new to their history.

One of the first acts of Romulus as a king was to worship the gods and only after that he gathered the people and gave them the laws, 'since nothing else but law could unite them into a single body politic'.⁸ From the very beginning Rome is the empire of law. Later, the functioning and organisation of the city was decided by her king and the hundred senators he had appointed, and whose descendants were the patricians.⁹

The story of Sabines tells us how Romulus, who had previously been *pious* towards the gods, is now the promoter of the breaking of *fides* towards his neighbours.¹⁰ The end of this war, which brought the harmony and union of the two peoples and a

⁶ On this topic, see M. Fox, *The Roman Historical Myths: The Regal Period in Augustan Literature*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996) and G. Forsythe, *Livy and Early Rome: A Study in Historical Method and Judgment* (Stuttgart, Steiner, 1999).

⁷ Livy 1.4.1. See also 1.4.2; 1.4.4.

⁸ Livy, 1.8.1. Cf. Cic. *De Rep*, 1.25.39: *populus autem non omnis hominum coetus quoquo modo congregatus, sed coetus multitudinis iuris consensus et utilitatis communione sociatus*.

⁹ Livy, 1.8.7.

¹⁰ Livy, 1.9.13.

significant increase of the population, made the whole affair transform into a happy and fortunate event for Rome.¹¹

Livy gives us a detailed account of Romulus' deeds as king and leader of the Roman army, and by the end of the section we have a pretty clear idea of what his character must have been like: 'for it was to him, assuredly, that Rome owed the vigour [*viribus*] which enabled her to enjoy an untroubled peace for the next forty years'.¹² Without doubt, Rome owed her *animus* and *vis* to her first king. But Romulus fulfils also another role, not only is he the founder, first legislator and conqueror, but also the herald of the mission of Rome designed by the gods: 'Go and declare to the Romans the will of Heaven that my Rome shall be the capital of the world; so let them cherish the art of war and let them know and teach their children that no human strength can resist Roman arms'.¹³ With this very sentence, Livy has summarised Rome's calling and purpose – at least as they saw it in the first century BC – and justified her martial character, appropriately proclaimed by the son of Mars himself. Rome has been chosen by the gods to rule over the world and they have given to her people the necessary qualities to do so: courage, valour and strength. An interesting parallel can be drawn with Virgil, whose prophecy of the greatness of Rome in the *Aeneid* has the same novelty touch of history told in advance rather than in retrospect: 'Yet in truth she had heard that a race was springing from Trojan blood to overthrow some day the Tyrian towers; that from it a people, kings of broad realms and proud in war, should come forth for Libya's downfall'.¹⁴

The gods, however, did not provide everything: liberty was to be sought and fought for many years; it was something they had to attain by their own means, and they had *virtus* to achieve it. The struggle for freedom was going to be another main feature of the Roman character, so much so that 'through *virtus* to *libertas*' became for Livy an indivisible idea with concepts which were almost transferable.¹⁵

¹¹ Livy, 1.13.5.

¹² Livy, 1.15.7.

¹³ Livy, 1.16.7.

¹⁴ Virg. *Aen.* 1.16-22. See also Anchises' prophecy in 6.851: *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento.*

¹⁵ Or: '*libertas* by *virtus*'.

Liberty was an aspiration, something sweet to look forward to, which would be only really appreciated if they had been before under the yoke of tyranny. Livy is quite clear about this; they wished to have a king, *libertatis dulcedine nondum experta*.¹⁶ The only explanation for desiring monarchy was the ignorance of something better: freedom.

After choosing Numa Pompilius, a man of great reputation for justice and piety,¹⁷ he decided that the gods should be consulted on the matter. The ceremony with the augur and the auspices was held satisfactorily and Numa was declared king. The first closing of the doors of the temple of Janus, was a mark of peace in the kingdom and the need of softening this *ferocem populum*, who lived in a city *condita vi et armis*.¹⁸ But at the same time he feared that the behaviour of his men always vigilant under the *metus hostilium* and kept under control by the military discipline might degenerate into extravagance and idleness, so Numa thought that ‘the very first thing to do, as being the most efficacious with a populace which was ignorant and, in those days uncivilized, was to imbue them with the fear of Heaven [*metus deorum*]’.¹⁹ It is very significant to see that according to Livy – and the Roman tradition, because here it was Numa speaking – men had to fear something to behave properly and be pious: either the gods or the enemy.²⁰ Is this really true *virtus*? Courage has to be free to be meritorious and the same can be said about good qualities. Perhaps in this ‘primitive stage’ of *virtus*, there was a need for some external encouragement to trigger virtuous actions and king Numa was planting the seed in the Roman soul on how to behave: the enemies had to be courageously fought and the gods piously worshipped. Several centuries later, this tradition was going to evolve and be influenced by the Stoic ideas, by which one behaves himself for one’s own good and expediency, not fearing anything, and in that sense there is a freer and more perfect concept of *virtus*.

The idea of piety became thus engraved in Romans’ hearts. Even the neighbouring peoples did not dare to attack and thought it sacrilege to injure a nation so wholly bent upon the worship of the gods.²¹ Numa’s measures in religious matters were

¹⁶ Livy, 1.17.4. See also 2.9.3: ‘Liberty was sweet enough itself’.

¹⁷ Livy, 1.18.1.

¹⁸ Livy, 1.19.1.

¹⁹ Livy, 1.19.4.

²⁰ Again this is an interesting prophecy for post 146 BC. For *metus hostilium*, cf. Sall. *BC*, 10.1 ff.

²¹ Livy, 1.21.2.

not only established and sanctioned, but were rewarded by the deities with their care for human affairs.²² ‘Their [the Romans]’ constant preoccupation with the gods (...) had so tinged the hearts of all with piety, that the nation was governed by its regard for promises and oaths [*fides ac ius iurandum*], rather than by dread of laws and penalties’.²³ I would like to draw attention to Livy’s comment on how the people ‘were spontaneously imitating the character of their king, as their unique exemplar’.²⁴ The idea could be seen as a simply exaggerated idealisation of the author of Numa’s reign, but there is no doubt that it also stresses the importance of the example of the leader on his people and the responsibility that he bore on his shoulders. ‘The political system was judged not with reference to a constitution or constitutional ideal, but with reference to the *exempla* provided by its greater player’.²⁵ Livy’s history is a clear demonstration of this affirmation; for good or for bad, it was the head who had to respond to the people’s behaviour, and Livy thought that perhaps Augustus should be gently reminded of this.

Numa’s successor, however, *ferocior etiam quam Romulus fuit*, and had the idea that the nation was growing decrepit from inaction,²⁶ and so the wars started again. In this first phase of Roman history, *virtus*-courage could be claimed even for dubious motives and almost opposed to justice – which would be unthinkable in the philosophical version – as in the case of one of the Horatii. He killed his sister who was crying for her dead betrothed, Horatius’ own enemy. Condemned for treason, his father appeals and saves him, and the jury ‘acquitted him more in admiration of his valour than from justice of his cause’ [*absolveruntque admiratione magis virtutis quam iure causae*].²⁷ *Virtus* produces such admiration that under its shadow many unjustifiable things become justified.

Livy then devotes some time to dealing with the *novitas* of Rome. He refers to the Romans as *novus populus*;²⁸ and stresses the characteristics of the self-made man. The case of L. Tarquinius Priscus is paradigmatic, but not an isolated one: ‘he was not

²² Livy, 1.21.1. This was very different from Tacitus’ view, times had obviously changed: see *Hist.* 1.3: ‘the gods care not for our safety but for our punishment’.

²³ Livy, 1.21.1

²⁴ Livy, 1.22.2.

²⁵ Wiedemann, ‘Reflections of Roman political thought in Latin historical writing’, 521.

²⁶ Livy, 1.22.2.

²⁷ Livy, 1.26.12.

²⁸ Livy, 1.34.6.

the first outsider to aim at the sovereignty in Rome... but the third',²⁹ after Tatius and Numa. The reason why he should aim is because of his merits; Rome could have a place for him because being 'a new people where all nobility was sudden and founded on *virtus*, there would be room for a brave and vigorous man'.³⁰ This was exactly the claim put forward by the *homines novi* centuries later. They argued that precisely because they were self-made they were closer to the traditional source of Roman excellence. 'The characterisation of Rome's 'best kings' as *homines novi*, then, provides the strongest kind of sanction for the new men's arguments'.³¹

The real *nobilitas Romana* had sprung from personal effort and according to one's deeds, not inheritance or blood; talents and *virtus*, not birth had won positions of respect at Rome.³² Livy had developed this idea from the beginning of his work, but he chooses Tanaquil, a non-Roman and a woman to reveal it to us more explicitly: 'Consider what you are, not whence you are born' [*qui sis, non unde natus sis reputa*],³³ says the queen to Servius Tullius. These statements about the *novitas* of the people and self-made men are very relevant at the time Livy was writing. Not only Sallust and Cicero had enlarged the 'Catonian tradition' of the merits of the *homo novus* in speeches, but Augustus was putting it into practice promoting their rise and appointing prominent *novi homines* as helpers and collaborators in the government. Was Livy trying to justify or support Augustus' decision to include new men in high posts of the administration of the empire?

King Servius was a great reformer and organiser for he instituted the census and distributed the people into classes and centuries, he expanded the *pomerium* and did many public works in the City.³⁴ Livy then says: 'Servius had by this time a definite prescriptive right to supreme power'.³⁵ It is impossible here not to think of Augustus.

²⁹ Livy, 1.35.3.

³⁰ Livy, 1.34.6. My translation

³¹ Miles, *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome*, 151. See also 4.3.17: *optimis regum, novis hominibus*. For the same idea see R. Syme, *Tacitus*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1958) 350 and 'Livy and Augustus', *HSCP* 64 (1959) 55.

³² Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 85.

³³ Livy, 1.41.3.

³⁴ Livy, 1.42-3.

³⁵ Livy, 1.46.1.

Renovator and conqueror, with a massive urbanistic plan for Rome, the *princeps* had certainly *usu regnum possederat*.³⁶

We have seen *virtus* displayed by all of Rome's kings. In one way or another, and each one with his own personal characteristics, they ruled the city and enlarged the empire by bravely fighting the neighbours. But this manly expression of *virtus* was also going to be shown by women. The first example of woman's *virtus* happens at the death of Tarquinius. Tanaquil's command of the situation after the king's murder was extraordinary; she not only immediately foresaw the consequences the act could have, but also with cold blood and bravery gave the appropriate orders to protect herself, secured the heir and addressed the populace asking for calm.³⁷ While Tanaquil is the first example of woman's *virtus*, Tullia's ambition is the first of woman's *vitia*.³⁸ She not only proposes the crime, but 'takes the lead in all the mischief'.³⁹ It is striking how Livy suggests that it was under Tanaquil's example that Tullia was inspired to the transgression: 'nor could she herself submit with patience to the thought that Tanaquil, a foreign woman, had exerted her spirit to such purpose as twice in succession to confer the royal power – upon her husband first, and again upon her son in law – if Tullia, the daughter of a king, were to count for nothing in bestowing and withdrawing a throne'.⁴⁰ We have here an example recognised by the internal audience –people inside the text–⁴¹ but only one generation after Livy, also the external audience could draw parallels: did Livia remember Tanaquil when Augustus died?⁴² As we will see clearly later on, in Livy women's virtues and vices can be more intense than those of men.

³⁶ Livy, 1.46.1.

³⁷ The account of Tarquinius' death is strikingly similar to that of Augustus (cf. Livy 1.41.1-7 and Tac. *Ann*, 1.5): the summoning of the mother (or mother-in-law), the concealment of the death for some time, protecting the palace and securing the heir. A difference of the two accounts is that Tanaquil's deeds are given under a positive light and are worthy of admiration, whereas Livia's are obscure and doubtful. Of course Livy could not have known what was going to happen with Augustus, but is Tacitus' account of his death consciously alike? Was he trying to say that Augustus died like a king?

³⁸ Tullia has been seen as another lady Macbeth, see e.g. T.P. Wiseman, *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter, Exeter, University Press, 1998) 180. R.M. Ogilvie instead, sees her as a 'less noble Electra', in *A Commentary on Livy, Books 1 to 5* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965) 186.

³⁹ Livy, 1.46.7. See also 1.48.7.

⁴⁰ Livy, 1.47.6.

⁴¹ For internal and external audience see Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History*, *passim*, but esp. p. 4.

⁴² See Tac. *Ann*, 1.5.

Book 1 ends with the spectacular story of Lucretia.⁴³ This could be regarded as the *exemplum* par excellence of women's *virtus*. In the same way as courage was considered as the main *virtus* for men, chastity was for women. Livy feels the need to finish the book off with a case for admiration. The story here works also as a kind of encouragement for the reader to continue with the history of the brave Roman people. The vividness with which the scene is set helps us to get into the atmosphere with a formidable touch of reality: the time at night, the way in which Tarquinius held Lucretia down, her fear, his lust, her tears, his joy, etc. The whole scene is presented as Lucretia – the heroine – might have seen and lived it. Having her as the focaliser, Livy makes his audience sympathise with her feelings rather than with those of Tarquinius. It does not matter if her husband, father and faithful friends tried to comfort her, there is no consolation and only one solution: death. Heroism has to be lived to the last consequences, heroism is more 'heroic' when the innocent does not escape punishment, but accepts it.

There is, of course, no way of knowing all the details that Livy gives us in this account and it is precisely for this kind of narrative that he has been labelled as 'tragic historian'. The story of Lucretia has all the characteristics of a good tragedy and the end of the heroine cannot be more tragic indeed.⁴⁴ But, there is something more: Lucretia, possessor of the Roman womanly virtues such as *castitas*, *modestia* and *pudicitia*, together with her being busily engaged working with wool, is representing here feminine Romanness incarnate, thus the rape by Tarquinius can symbolise the assault of the tyrant upon Rome herself and that is why the consequences of the act are not only personal, but also political.

Brutus in a brave way swears that he will get rid of the tyrant. The speech that Livy records is full of desires of freedom and revenge: 'I swear and I take you, gods, to witness that I will suffer neither them [Tarquinius and his wicked wife] nor any other to be king in Rome'.⁴⁵ Patriotism is what is moving Brutus to fight against monarchy: 'The

⁴³ Livy, 1.57.7-58.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ogilvie, *Commentary on Livy*, 186, who regarded this episode as Livy 'writing his own tragedy', opposing the views of H. Wright, *The Recovery of a Lost Roman Tragedy* (New Haven, 1910) and A. Michels, 'The Drama of the Tarquins', *Latomus* 10 (1951), for whom Livy must have had the plots of one or more tragedies in mind.

⁴⁵ Livy, 1.59.1.

men of Rome, he said, the conquerors of all nations round about, had been transformed from warriors into artisans and stone-cutters'.⁴⁶ Wonderful speech, but it seems that once again Livy has got carried away by his prophetic enthusiasm: which were all the nations conquered round about by 509 BC?

I would like to comment here on Livy's so-called 'rhetorical history'. The concept, no doubt, has uncomplimentary connotations and it was probably associated with the Hellenistic historiographical tradition of people like Ephorus, Duris and Phylarchus of whom it was said that in their histories the investigation of the truth was not the primary end and became more of a rhetorical activity with its own rules and thus belonged to a literary genre, namely oratory or poetry. This kind of history was also called Peripatetic for the influence of Aristotelian theoretical model: tragedy.⁴⁷ These connections of drama and historical writing are not at all surprising for Wiseman, for example, as he sees the birth of Roman historiography intimately linked with theatrical performances.⁴⁸ But such connections were, however, acknowledged by some in a pejorative way regarding Livy's history: 'It must be understood that Livy is willing to waive accuracy of detail to achieve enhanced literary effects. To this extent his basic attitude is unhistorical'.⁴⁹

These literary effects are related to the emotions he is able to arouse in his audience because of his powerful descriptions. We have seen this with Lucretia's story and it is present throughout the narrative: the scenes of Horatius and the bridge,⁵⁰ Cloelia in the river,⁵¹ Verginia's death,⁵² Hannibal's crossing of the Alps,⁵³ as well as the descriptions of 'heroes' such as Marcellus, Fabius, Cincinnatus, Cato the Elder and the Scipiones, stay vividly engraved in the memories of the readers, and yet it is precisely this feature of his writing which has been most severely criticised: 'it is this conception

⁴⁶ Livy, 1.59.9.

⁴⁷ For a more detailed account on 'tragic history' see: A.H. McDonald, 'Theme and Style in Roman Historiography', *JRS* 65 (1975) 1-10; Conte, *Latin Literature, a History*, 372-3; Marincola, 'Beyond Pity and Fear: the Emotions of History', 285-315.

⁴⁸ For this argument, see his 'trilogy': *Historiography and Imagination*; *Remus: A Roman Myth* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *Roman Drama and Roman History*. See also F.W. Walbank, 'History and Tragedy', *Historia* 9 (1960) 216-234.

⁴⁹ Walsh, *Livy: his Historical Aims and Methods*, 218.

⁵⁰ Cf. Livy, 2.10.12.

⁵¹ Cf. Livy, 2.13.11.

⁵² Cf. Livy, 3.48.5.

⁵³ Cf. Livy, 21.35.

of history, dominated by idealised heroes and denigrated villains, which is ultimately responsible for the most serious defect in Livy's work. He has falsified history not by error but by design'.⁵⁴ He has been accused of deliberate changes and omissions, which 'however worthy in intention, should make us hesitate before attributing to Livy the virtues of impartiality and intellectual integrity... He has idealized the characters of Roman leaders and of the Roman people; and in so doing has neglected the obligations which Antonius asserts are accepted by all historians',⁵⁵ namely 'that an author must not dare to tell anything but the truth'.⁵⁶

In the end we could come to the conclusion that if Livy obliterated the basic law of truth as established by Cicero, it was mainly because he was following Cicero's own definition of history as *opus oratorium maxime*.⁵⁷ 'Livy's aim was to construct a meaningful series of scenes. To understand how he does this it is necessary to remember that he, like his contemporaries, had been educated along almost exclusively rhetorical lines'.⁵⁸ And this has been more or less the verdict of Livian scholarship regarding his writing: 'we become aware that many of his defects are the fault of the Roman tradition'.⁵⁹ His 'faults' were, then, product of the Roman historiographical tradition influenced by the Hellenistic historians and the training historians had had in schools of rhetoric. There was nothing Livy could do about it. Thus, they are prepared to 'forgive' his failures, inaccuracies, exaggerations, etc. because of his artistry of expression.⁶⁰ This

⁵⁴ Walsh, *Livy, his historical aims and methods*, 109. For an even harsher critique see, of course, R. Syme and his almost 'tragic' remarks: 'The original sin of Livy is darker and more detestable. The word Patavinitas sums up elegantly and finally, the whole moral and romantic view of history. Pollio knew what history was. It was not like Livy', in *Roman Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1939) 485 and 'Livy and Augustus', *passim*.

⁵⁵ P.G. Walsh, 'Livy's Preface and the Distortion of History', *AJP* 76 (1955) 383.

⁵⁶ Cic. *De Or.* 2.15.62.

⁵⁷ Cic. *De Leg.* 1.5.

⁵⁸ R.M. Ogilvie, 'Livy' in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. II, part 3 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982) 165.

⁵⁹ P.G. Walsh, 'Livy and the Aims of Historia', *ANRW* II 30.2 (1982) 1069.

⁶⁰ See for example: A.H. McDonald, 'The Style of Livy', *JRS* 47 (1957) 163: 'Livy set out to elaborate and interpret major episodes, not to provide the discussion of political and strategical questions which Polybius regarded as the chief function of a historian. He will explain time and place with only enough detail to clarify the scene itself, and often abbreviates the introductory details in Polybius so drastically that he misrepresents them. In fact the rhetorical rules were directed merely towards immediate understanding by superficial clarity, and literary presentation might gain effect at the expense of genuine historical interpretation', or Syme, *Tacitus*, 148: 'Admirable as Livy is in the eloquence of a speech, in descriptive colouring, and in narrative movement, he shows no comparable skill when events have to be grouped and interrelated – and no instinct for historical structure'.

acknowledgement, though little, is a step forward from Quellenforschung, and many of these scholars do also appreciate Livy's contribution to historiography: 'Livy's imaginative insight has recaptured authentic human suffering. Such explicit awareness recreates for us the spirit, the Geisteswelt of the Romans more revealingly than any other writer'.⁶¹

But it is also possible that if Livy did use tragic and rhetorical elements it was not only because all these influences and traditions were wholly dominant in his writing, but for something more personal: perhaps for him life – and history was life – *was* like being on stage and that is why he represents Rome as a great theatre where good and bad things happened. Rome was the theatre of *virtus* and *vitium*, but he was more concerned in showing the virtue than the vice because that was his way of engaging with the present. He did not deny vice but stressed, with a vocabulary of praise, the real Roman qualities. For him, recording *virtus* was a way of preserving it. In some sense, by recording *virtus* and not vice, he makes it more likely that contemporary Romans will see good models and follow them. That is why we see hope in Livy. His task was not going to be to denounce, as Sallust had done, but to remind Romans what they were. We can see it clearly throughout the narrative, but specially in the speeches, as in this example of Roman *fides*: 'The Carthaginians are reputed to be [men] among whom no sanctity attaches to a pledge of alliance, ... *but you are Romans*, men who hold treaties to be the most sacred of divinely-established institution, and a pledge to be the most sacred of human ties'.⁶² That is the power of Livy's speeches, they work as reminders of what they are and how they should behave. It seems theatrical, and it is, because he is concerned mainly with the actors. 'Livy conceives history not as a political study that explains attitudes and events and takes into account strategies of parties and factions, ideologies and material interests, but rather as a narrative that is conducted in terms of human personalities and representative individuals'.⁶³ Actors were what counted, and certainly their morals and their passions. And Livy believes that he, with his history, can move the actors of the present.

⁶¹ Walsh, *Livy: his Historical Aims and Methods*, 172.

⁶² Livy, 34.31.4. My italics.

⁶³ Conte, *Latin Literature, a History*, 372.

This vocabulary of praise, where each and every virtue played a particularly important role, created a 'language of honour' which was going to be key for the understanding of Roman historical identity. There is a personal and independent decision when attributing the specific virtues to the Romans of the past. Livy has not just copied or adapted these praises from his sources, each one has its purpose within the whole narrative and the result is an original work of history with an emphasis on traditional ideals.

I shall deal later on with the notion of the development of change in Livy's history and how it relates to his traditionalism, but now I would like to illustrate how the language of honour works towards identifying Romanness and creates a coherent account of its history.

Virtues such as *pietas*, *magnitudo animi*, *constantia*, *moderatio*, *fortitudo* are spread throughout Livy's work and they all convey an emotionally charged meaning when describing a Roman. I, of course, will not be able to point out all of them; my choice instead is to be mainly concerned with descriptions of *virtus* as courage, which is by far the most common word of praise in Livy.⁶⁴ Possessed by armies in general or individual soldiers and leaders, *virtus* in Livy is above all bravery, determination and energy in overcoming obstacles and enduring hardship in performing military duties.⁶⁵ *Virtus* is what leads to success in battle, and war is omnipresent in Roman history.

In the capture of Veii, for example, Camillus is, of course, the main individual figure who is praised for his *virtus*,⁶⁶ but he is not the only one. In describing Roman qualities Livy was as concerned to characterize her leaders as her people forming a united body. The soldiers are admired for their valour,⁶⁷ the generosity of the matrons, who supplied the treasury with the gold of their ornaments, is greatly honoured by the

⁶⁴ For the occurrences of *virtus* and the other virtues see Moore, *Artistry and Ideology*, appendix 2.

⁶⁵ In more than three quarters of the occurrences, *virtus* is used in the most basic traditional Roman meaning of bravery. Moore, *Artistry and Ideology*, 5, has a little less dramatic proportion (two thirds), and I suppose the difference is due to varying interpretation in translating the word. For an altogether contrasting opinion see Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana*, 126, who argues that Livy uses *virtus* in a non-Roman way, but follows the more Greek meaning of it: *arête*.

⁶⁶ Cf. Livy, 5.23.1; 5.26.8; 5.26.10; 5.27.8; 6.27.1; 7.25.12.

⁶⁷ Cf. Livy, 5.6.6.

senate;⁶⁸ and the *fides* and *iustitia* with which the peace came about was praised by the Falisci themselves.⁶⁹

The same scenario occurs in the war against the Carthaginians. Although there are many excellent and admirable leaders applauded by their courage, such as Fabius,⁷⁰ Marcellus,⁷¹ Scipio Africanus⁷² whose many other virtues are also duly acknowledged by Livy, there are even more scenes where the real ‘hero’ is the Roman army. The examples of *virtus militum Romanorum* are too numerous to be listed here and as Livy himself says: *claram satis et insignem virtutem esse nec dubiam libertatem futuram strenuis viris*.⁷³ He wants to emphasise that this courage, was not merely something physical connected with simple boldness expressed in *audacia* or *ferocitas*, but was a quality of the soul: ‘But the spirit [*animus*] of the soldiers was far from being matched. For the Romans, although fighting far from their country, had been easily persuaded by their generals that they were fighting in defence of Italy and the city of Rome. And so, as men whose return to their native land would depend upon the issue of that battle, they made up their minds to win or die’.⁷⁴

Livy is, by no means, blinded so as to deny Roman defeat, but even then his description has such a touch of admiration that the reader cannot do anything else but respect these soldiers all the more. In the war against the Samnites, long and disastrous, the enemy managed to triumph over the Romans in the Caudine Forks battle in 321 BC. Roman courage was defeated and that was the real tragedy: ‘the old Roman spirit was quite dashed; they had lost their courage with their arms; being saluted, they returned not the salutation; they responded to no questions; not a man of them had been able to open his mouth for shame, as if they still bore on their necks the yoke under which they had been sent; the Samnites had won not only a famous but a lasting victory, for they had conquered, not Rome – as the Gauls had done before – but a thing that demanded far greatest prowess – the Roman valour and independence’.⁷⁵ But from the very fact of

⁶⁸ Livy, 5.25.8.

⁶⁹ Cf. Livy, 5.27.11-14.

⁷⁰ Cf. Livy, 27.20.9.

⁷¹ Cf. Livy, 25.23.1.

⁷² Cf. Livy, 28.17.2.

⁷³ Livy, 24.15.6.

⁷⁴ Livy, 23.29.7. *Virtus*-courage appears then as a spiritual quality.

⁷⁵ Livy, 9.6.12-13.

being vanquished they were going to gain new strength: ‘that obstinate silence, those eyes fixed on the ground and ears deaf to every consolation, that shame at looking on the light, were signs – he argued [Aulus Calavius] – of bosoms bursting with passionate resentment; either he knew nothing of the Roman character, or that silence was destined ere long to draw from the Samnites cries and groans of anguish, and the Caudine Peace to become a far more bitter memory to the Samnites than to Romans’.⁷⁶

Livy was also generous in attributing *virtus* to foreigners. Many are described in *AUC*, Ambigatus, king of the Gauls,⁷⁷ Massinisa,⁷⁸ Attalus,⁷⁹ etc. but the first and foremost was, of course, Hannibal.⁸⁰ Hannibal’s courage is such, that even a Roman general feels quite overpowered by it: *Fabio aequatus imperio Hannibalem et virtute et fortuna superiorem videt*.⁸¹ Bravery was not something exclusive to the Roman people; the difference was that they had it and expressed it overwhelmingly more times than their enemies. Characterising a foreign enemy as possessor of *virtus* played an important part in the creation of the historical tradition of a ‘worthy enemy’.

He also delights in narrating cases of womanly *virtus*. It is something that strikes him and he expresses his admiration in all the cases. Cloelia swimming in the river under a rain of hostile darts immediately comes to our mind: ‘her feat was a greater one than those of Cocles and Mucius’,⁸² and for that ‘the Romans rewarded this new valour in a woman with a new kind of honour’.⁸³ Livy has no reservations about admitting that women are as important as men in saving the city and they have done it so many times: ‘Since the swords of the men could not defend the City, the women should defend it with their prayers and tears’.⁸⁴ And not only from war, but also from the pestilences with which Rome was frequently attacked: ‘Everywhere were prostrate matrons, sweeping the floors of the temples with their hair, while they besought the angry gods to grant

⁷⁶ Livy, 9.7.3-4.

⁷⁷ Cf. Livy 5.34.2.

⁷⁸ Cf. Livy, 29.31.3

⁷⁹ Cf. Livy, 38.23.11.

⁸⁰ Cf. Livy, 22.58.3; 23.42.4; 23.43.10; 30.35.10; 31.1.6; 35.43.1.

⁸¹ Livy, 22.29.2.

⁸² Livy, 2.13.8.

⁸³ Livy, 2.13.11. Other examples of women’s *virtus* are Veturia’s (2.40.1-9) and Sophonisba’s (30.15.7).

⁸⁴ Livy, 2.40.1.

them pardon and end the pestilence'.⁸⁵ We have already referred to their generosity,⁸⁶ and chastity was also always commended.⁸⁷

It is possible, then, to talk about 'tragic history' in Livy, though in a different sense from how it had been done before. Rome, first City, then empire was a real stage where virtues performed their role better and more abundantly than anywhere else. Tanaquil's prophecy had become true: Roma, *ubi omnis repentina atque ex virtute nobilitas fuit*.⁸⁸

2. Memory of *Libertas*

Livy's theme after the monarchy has finished is liberty. Right from the beginning he identifies the new order – the Republic – with freedom. 'This liberty was the more grateful as the last king had been so great a tyrant'.⁸⁹ But Livy acknowledges that monarchy had been necessary to establish Rome as a city, without it 'the nation would have crumbled away with dissension before it had matured'.⁹⁰ Is he also trying to say that the rule of one is necessary to have order in the first place? It is impossible here not to think of Augustus after Actium.⁹¹

The real liberty – according to Livy – had nothing to do with the diminution of the consuls' powers compared with that which the kings had exercised, but only with the limitation of their authority to a year;⁹² the offices were set and defined according to the needs and having liberty as their chief concern.⁹³ After swearing an oath that they would suffer no king in Rome, nor any man who might be dangerous to liberty, they regarded

⁸⁵ Livy, 3.7.8. See also 26.9.8; 27.50.5.

⁸⁶ See also Livy, 22.52.7; 34.5.9.

⁸⁷ Cf. Livy, 38.24.10. For punishments of unchaste women see Livy, 4.44.12; 8.15.7-8.

⁸⁸ Livy, 1.34.6.

⁸⁹ Livy, 2.1.2.

⁹⁰ Livy, 2.1.6.

⁹¹ Cf. Tac. *Hist*, 1.1: 'But after the battle of Actium, when the interests of peace required that all power should be concentrated in the hands of one man'. See also Strabo 6.4.2: 'but it were a difficult thing to administer so great a dominion otherwise than by turning it over to one man, as to a father'.

⁹² Cf. Livy, 2.1.7.

⁹³ Cf. Livy, 2.2.2. *prima cura*.

freedom as the treasure they had to protect and look after, and they would employ all their *virtus* to do so.⁹⁴ The effort and energy to preserve it was so enormous that soon monarchy became synonymous with slavery: ‘The Roman people were not living under a monarchy but were free ... They were all united, that the day which saw the end of liberty in their City might also see the City’s end’.⁹⁵ *Libertas* had been won by *virtus*, now it was preserved by it.

But to live in liberty was not always easy. Dissensions between the plebs and the senators arrived very soon. In 495 BC the trigger of the dispute was slavery for debt. Men complained that while they were ‘fighting abroad for liberty and dominion they had been enslaved and oppressed at home by fellow citizens, and that freedom for plebeians was more secure in war than in peace, amongst enemies than amongst citizens’.⁹⁶ Livy reports the injustice done to those who were at war and came back and, because they had lost their land and got into debt, had to go under slavery. The end of the conflict came when the commons put the consuls under threat and say that they ‘would never have a single soldier unless public guarantee were given: liberty must first be restored to every man before arms were given him, that he might fight for his country and his fellow-citizens, not for a master’.⁹⁷ Divisions and quarrels continued until the dramatic secession of the plebeians to the Aventine. ‘There was great panic in the City’.⁹⁸ And as a result of that, it was decided that the plebeians were to have magistrates of their own, who should be inviolable, and in them should lie the right to aid the people against the consuls, nor should any senator be permitted to take this magistracy’.⁹⁹

From 493, year of the creation of the tribunes of the plebs, Livy is consistent in presenting them as the cause and instigators of most of the dissensions and madness

⁹⁴ See the suppression of the plot that ‘almost cost Rome her liberty’ in 2.3.1.

⁹⁵ Livy, 2.15.3. *Non in regno populum Romanum sed in libertate esse.*

⁹⁶ Livy, 2.23.2. I am aware that in dealing with Livy’s work many comments on historical points could be brought into consideration, but I will restrict myself to drawing attention only to some. For a more detailed account on Rome’s early history, see for example T. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome. Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1995) and *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., vol. VII, part 2: ‘The Rise of Rome to 220 BC’ (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989). For mid and late republican themes, see H.H. Scullard, *Roman Politics 220-150 BC* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951) and *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., vol. VIII: ‘Rome and the Mediterranean to 133 BC’ (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁹⁷ Livy, 2.28.2.

⁹⁸ Livy, 2.32.5.

⁹⁹ Livy, 2.33.2.

[*furia*] of the plebs against the Senate. With their ‘usual poison’,¹⁰⁰ the tribunes put subversive ideas in the plebs against the consuls and authority; they argued, for example that ‘in reality the consulship was crueller than monarchy because instead of one master they had now got two’.¹⁰¹

Already in the preface, Livy had suggested that Rome would fall by her own power: Rome was ‘now labouring under its own size’ [*iam magnitudine labore sua*] and ‘the might of an imperial people is beginning to work its own ruin’ [*praevalentis populi vires se ipsae conficiunt*].¹⁰² But now, Livy puts this idea even more powerfully in the enemies’ mouth, which worked in literature as a tacit agreement to express one’s thoughts about one’s own country:¹⁰³ ‘there would be no end to the power of the Romans unless factional quarrels should set them to fighting amongst themselves. They asserted that this was the only poison, the only decay which had been found to work upon opulent states so as to make great empires transitory.’¹⁰⁴ For a long time the Romans had withstood this evil, thanks partly to the prudence of the senate, partly to the patience of the plebs; but they had now come to a crisis’.¹⁰⁵ There were two factions in the city and no discipline in the army. This difficult situation found a violent end: the *sacrosanctitas* of the tribunes had been violated and one of them was found dead.¹⁰⁶ After the generalised fear of the commons, they came to the conclusion that the tribunes had to be chosen from plebeians by plebeians. This was an important move towards the acquisition of political rights and Livy realises that: ‘[measure] which at first sight appeared harmless, but one that completely deprived the patricians of the power of using their clients’ vote to select what tribunes they liked’.¹⁰⁷ This was undoubtedly a step forward in the path of acquisition of plebeian *libertas*.

¹⁰⁰ Livy, 2.52.2: *suo veneno*.

¹⁰¹ Livy, 3.9.4.

¹⁰² Livy, *praef.* 4. It became later a kind of literary *topos*, see Horace *Epodes*, 7.10: *urbs haec periret dextera* (this city might perish by its own right hand) and 16.2: *suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit* (and Rome through her own strength is tottering), also Propertius 3.13.60: *frangitur ipsa suis Roma superba bonis* (Proud Rome is being destroyed by its own prosperity).

¹⁰³ Cf. Sall. *BJ*, 81.1 and Tac. *Agric*, 30.

¹⁰⁴ The themes of decay, decline, poison, sound enormously Sallustian.

¹⁰⁵ Livy, 2.44.9. See also Livy 2.45.1.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Livy, 2.54.9.

¹⁰⁷ Livy, 2.56.3.

Rejection of honours and glory was a very Roman idea from the early days: ‘No triumph ever celebrated was more famous than was his refusal to accept a triumph, so true is it that a seasonable rejection of glory sometimes but increases it’.¹⁰⁸ In this context of austerity we find Cincinnatus, the true Roman of old ages par excellence. Absolutely everything in him is virtuous;¹⁰⁹ and he will set up an example for posterity of detachment from offices and post, but at the same time readiness to serve his country. He was not idly waiting to be called to help the state, nor was he ever a candidate, but he was found working in the fields, ‘whether bending over his spade as he dug a ditch, or ploughing, he was, at all events, as everybody agrees, intent upon some rustic task’.¹¹⁰ The vivid description of the simplicity and unceremonious procedure of Cincinnatus’ acclamation as dictator gives to the narrative an invincibly realistic tone: ‘He bade his wife Racilia to quickly fetch out his toga from the hut. When he had put it on, after wiping off the dust and sweat, and came forth to the envoys, they hailed him Dictator, congratulated him, and summoned him to the City, explaining the alarming situation of the army’.¹¹¹ Of course, Livy ‘was fully aware that the details of Rome’s early history lay beyond his ability to discern – as they lie beyond ours’,¹¹² but that was not an obstacle to recreating the ‘possible situations’ altogether. And more importantly, he was perfectly conscious as well that his audience knew this.¹¹³

In 451 the power was transferred from the consuls to the decemvirs to establish the laws in a code.¹¹⁴ Livy acknowledges the significance of the Ten – later twelve – Tables, ‘which even now in this great welter of statutes piled one upon another, are the fountain-head of all public and private law’.¹¹⁵ But after the decemvirs had coded the

¹⁰⁸ Livy, 2.47.11. Augustus too would refuse offices (cf. *Res Gestae*, 4.1; 5.1; 5.3; 10.2), and later also Tiberius in the ‘accession debate’ (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.11-13). For A. Wallace Hadrill it almost became an imperial *topos*; cf. ‘Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King’, *JRS* 72 (1982) section on *recusatio*, 136-7.

¹⁰⁹ See description in 3.26.7-8.

¹¹⁰ Livy, 3.26.9. It appears to be an important link between land and native *virtus*. It seems to emphasise the authentic and original Roman character.

¹¹¹ Cf. Livy, 3.26.10.

¹¹² J. Lipovsky, *A Historiographical Study of Livy books VI to X* (Salem, Ayer Company Publishers, 1984) 172.

¹¹³ It appears sometimes that scholarship blames Livy for making these stories up and for presenting them to be believed by his audience as ‘revealed truth’. This, of course, undermines both Livy’s real opinion of his readership and the abilities of discernment of the Romans of the first century.

¹¹⁴ Livy, 3.31.1.

¹¹⁵ Livy, 3.34.6.

laws, unmistakable demonstrations of tyranny were seen in the city: they dared to appear in public without the external expressions of their office. ‘Men mourned for liberty as for ever lost ... they had begun to be despised by neighbouring nations, who could ill brook the existence of imperial power where there was no liberty’.¹¹⁶ There were some attempts to recover the original freedom, ‘but liberty went no further than speech’.¹¹⁷ Were the Romans of the fifth century BC so obsessed with liberty as Livy seems to be? Is he trying to express some hidden fear and he does not dare to do so clearly? We can speculate endlessly, but will never know for sure to what extent Livy formulates his narrative in the light of the new principate.

The decemvirs’ period ends in a very similar way to that of the monarchy. Lust seems to be a characteristic of tyrants. Appius’ story is given here to strengthen once again the idea of how people suffer when they are under the oppression of one man.¹¹⁸ Nothing is safe, not only the political rights are at risk, but also the citizens’ welfare: justice for the plebs, chastity for women, everything goes according to the tyrant’s will. The whole affair is presented as a violation of liberty, an assault upon the republican rights: the decemvir threatened with abuse of his power over an innocent victim.¹¹⁹ The end of Verginia is sad only because it meant her death, but happy because vice did not triumph over righteousness. A father was prepared to give up his daughter’s life, but not her liberty: ‘Thus, my daughter, in the only way I can, do I assert your freedom!’¹²⁰ Again we see that *libertas* and *virtus* are closely related: one cannot be virtuous without liberty. Killing his daughter, Verginia’s father saved at the same time her freedom and her virtue, because her corruption if she had lived would have been certain under Appius’ hands. It does not seem that Livy gives this example of courage so much to be imitated, but to show to what extent virtue was important to old Romans and a value for which it was worth acting even as harshly as Verginius did. Livy is moved by the story,¹²¹ and then he feels compelled to justify the father’s action: ‘To him the life of his daughter had been dearer than his own, if she had been permitted to live pure and chaste;

¹¹⁶ Livy 3.38.2.

¹¹⁷ Livy, 3.41.5. *Libertas non ultra vocem excessisset.*

¹¹⁸ Cf. Livy, 3.36.

¹¹⁹ Striking similarities with Tarquinius’ and Lucretia’s story at the end of book 1.

¹²⁰ Livy, 3.48.5.

¹²¹ Cf. Livy, 3.50.4.

when he saw her being carried off like a slave to be dishonoured, thinking it better to lose his children by death than by outrage, he had been impelled by pity to an act of seeming cruelty'.¹²²

Rome was engaged with uninterrupted wars abroad and with the constant disagreements and disputes among patricians and plebeians. Livy tries to be fair in his political account, and does not always blame the tribunes of the plebs, but also the nobles if they deserve it: 'Their administration [consuls in 449 BC] was favourable to the people, without in anyway wronging the patricians, though not without offending them: for whatever was done to protect the liberty of the plebs they regarded as a diminution of their own strength'.¹²³ He also reports the patricians' stubbornness to accede to any laws giving benefits to the plebs as somehow ridiculous: when Canuleius proposes the intermarriage of patricians and plebeians, 'the patricians looked upon as involving the debasement of their blood and the subversion of the principles inheriting in the *gentes*, or families'.¹²⁴ He continues ironically: 'the son of such marriage would be ignorant to what blood and to what worship he belonged; he would pertain half to the patricians, half to the plebs, and be at a strife with himself'.¹²⁵ Elections of plebeian tribunes are eventually allowed and the plebs rejoiced in their victory. At the following election, however, only patricians were chosen and Livy cannot resist the temptation of giving his personal opinion: 'The outcome of this election showed how different are men's minds when struggling for liberty and station from what they are when they have laid aside their animosities and their judgement is unbiased; for the people chose all the tribunes from among the patricians, quite satisfied that plebeians should have been allowed to stand'.¹²⁶ The same happens when the plebeians were allowed to be chosen as quaestors; the *nobilitas* thought that the way to consulships and triumphs was thrown open to new men. 'The patricians were as angry as though they had not merely shared their offices with the plebs but had lost them'.¹²⁷

¹²² Livy, 3.50.6.

¹²³ Livy, 3.55.2.

¹²⁴ Livy, 4.1.2.

¹²⁵ Livy, 4.2.6.

¹²⁶ Livy, 4.6.11-12.

¹²⁷ Livy, 4.54.6.

On the whole, however, it had been ‘the tribunes of the commons [who] have always encouraged sedition’,¹²⁸ sometimes having ridiculous motives. Livy illustrates this once again. With so many wars being fought abroad, there came the time when it was not possible to go back to Rome in winter and the generals decided to set up winter quarters, a complete novelty to the Roman soldier. The tribunes, ‘who had now for a long time been unable to hit upon any pretext for agitation’,¹²⁹ complained about this measure. Always jealous of the freedom of the soldiers they thought that ‘the liberty of the commons had been sold. The young men having been permanently removed from the City and from the state, were no longer free, even in winter and the stormy season, to see their homes and their affairs’.¹³⁰ But Roman *virtus* was again at stake and manly endurance [*virilis patientia*] was one of them: ‘Do we think the bodies of our soldiers so effeminate, their hearts so faint, that they cannot endure to be one winter camp away from home?’¹³¹

What we see in this long fight for the achievement of plebeian *libertas* is, in some ways, similar to the acquisition of patrician *libertas*. The struggle for it made the people display *virtus* in a radical way: they undertook courageous measures and risked important things, and once they had moved one step forward they kept protecting this freedom by more acts of *virtus*.

Around 391 the Gauls entered the scene.¹³² And when in 390 they destroyed the City and burned it, the Roman pride suffered a deep blow, especially when they had to pay a ransom.¹³³ Livy feels humiliated by having to acknowledge that Rome had to give money to be freed, and that the Romans, who were the conquerors of the world, had to hear for themselves: *vae victis!* ‘But neither the gods nor men would suffer the Romans to live ransomed’.¹³⁴ Camillus, *maximum imperatorum omnium*,¹³⁵ reverted the situation: ‘now fortune had turned; now the might of Heaven and human wisdom were

¹²⁸ Livy, 5.3.2.

¹²⁹ Livy, 5.2.2.

¹³⁰ Livy, 5.2.5.

¹³¹ Livy, 5.6.4.

¹³² Cf. Livy, 5.33.

¹³³ Cf. Livy, 5.48.9.

¹³⁴ Livy, 5.49.1.

¹³⁵ Livy, 5.23.1.

engaged in the cause of Rome',¹³⁶ and delivered a speech with which he lit the flame of Roman courage: 'they must win their country back with iron instead of gold'.¹³⁷ To fight and not to pay was the Roman way to deal with their enemies. After the victory, Camillus was praised as another Romulus, Father of the Country and second Founder of the City.¹³⁸ The similarities with Augustus are too striking to be overlooked. The title of *Pater Patriae*, officially given to Augustus had similar connotations to that conferred on Camillus,¹³⁹ and the notion of new Founder was particularly linked with the idea of renewal in all aspects, especially turning the clock back on decline. However, it seems a little bit too far fetched to state that 'we are left to infer what Livy thought about Augustus from what Livy wrote about other great Romans such as Romulus and Camillus'.¹⁴⁰

Livy starts a new pentad with the summary of the previous one, he has given a complete account from the founding of the City to the capture of the same; the history of Rome under the kings, the consuls, the dictators, decemvirs and consular tribunes, her foreign wars and domestic dissensions. He now reminds us again of the difficulty of his task: he is dealing with matters which are obscure not only by reason of their great antiquity, but also because 'in those days there was but slight and scanty use of writing the sole trustworthy guardian of the memory of past events, and because even such records as existed in the commentaries of the pontiffs and in other public and private documents nearly all perished in the conflagration of the city'.¹⁴¹ This insistence on expressing the difficulty of being a good and exact historian reveals not so much Livy's limitation and incompetence as such, but his honesty in acknowledging no more accuracy for his narrative than he can actually provide from the evidence he has. Contrary to the criticism for his lack of care when dealing with the sources, Livy appears to be an interesting case of historiographical self-awareness and concerned with the *virtus* of the historian: 'It is not easy to choose between the accounts or the authorities.

¹³⁶ Livy, 5.49.5.

¹³⁷ Livy, 5.49.3.

¹³⁸ Cf. Livy, 5.49.7.

¹³⁹ *Res Gestae*, 35: *senatus, et equester ordo populusque Romanus universus appellavit me patrem patriae*. See also P. Brunt, and J. Moore, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967) comm. *ad loc.*

¹⁴⁰ M. Jaeger, *Livy's Written Rome* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997) 183.

¹⁴¹ Livy, 6.1.2.

The records have been vitiated, I think, by funeral eulogies and by lying inscriptions under portraits, every family endeavouring mendaciously to appropriate victories and magistracies to itself – a practice which has certainly wrought confusion in the achievements of individuals and in the public memorial of events. Nor is there extant any writer contemporary with that period, on whose authority we may safely take our stand'.¹⁴²

Signs of demagogy were shown by this time in the city and Manlius was responsible for it; he 'was the first of all the patricians to turn to demagogy and to cast in his lot with the plebeian magistrates. He abused the nobles, he courted the favour of the plebs; and swept along by the breath of popularity and not by good counsel chose rather to be reputed great than virtuous'.¹⁴³ Although the Latin does not mention the word *virtus*, the concept is implicit: *famaeque magnae malle quam bonae esse*. So, his main defect was to have wanted 'to be seen' as great and famous rather than 'to be' a good person.¹⁴⁴ Not only the speeches of Marcus Manlius, but his actions as well, 'ostensibly democratic, were really revolutionary, considering the purpose which inspired them'.¹⁴⁵ He met with the plebs night and day and promoted seditious ideas, he asked them to give him *magnum imperium*, the most striking title of authority; and it was thus that the 'agitation for kingly powers was begun, but there is no very clear tradition with whom or to what length his plans were matured'.¹⁴⁶ The story ended sadly: he was thrown from the Tarpeian rock. A Caesarian reminder perhaps given here to work as a warning for Livy's own times?

Tribunes had now begun to be elected from the plebeians, and also quaestors and military tribunes, and the Roman people had not regretted a single case. 'The consulship remained for the commons to achieve; this was the citadel of liberty, this its pillar. If they attained to this, then would the Roman people hold that the kings had been really driven from the City, and their freedom firmly based; for the commons would thenceforward be partakers in all that made the patricians now surpass them, authority

¹⁴² Livy, 8.40.4-5.

¹⁴³ Livy, 6.11.7.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Sallust's description of Cato in *BC*, 54.6: *esse quam videri bonus malebat; ita quo minus petebat gloriam, eo magis illum sequebatur*.¹⁴⁴ The emphasis of true *virtus* is placed in the 'being'.

¹⁴⁵ Livy, 6.14.2.

¹⁴⁶ Livy, 6.18.16.

and honour, martial renown, birth and nobility, great things for themselves to enjoy, but even greater to bequeath to their children'.¹⁴⁷ Did liberty mean having the power to rule themselves and not having masters? Liberty for the patricians meant getting rid of the kings and rejecting even the thought of monarchy; liberty for the plebeians appears to mean being able to obtain the same political rights and privileges as the nobility. But that the consuls had to be chosen from the patricians and not the plebeians involved also a religious consideration: the City had been founded under auspices, and these were controlled by patricians by tradition, no plebeian magistrate is elected under auspices.¹⁴⁸ There is, however, the possibility that a question might arise: in the beginning, had the patricians been granted the auspices because of their *virtus* or their blood? Was it then not possible for the plebeians to aspire to it?

In 367 a plebeian consul – Lucius Sextius – was elected, he was first one to attain that honour.¹⁴⁹ This was not conceded without dispute, but in the end concord prevailed and Livy closes the chapter in a rather optimistic tone: 'Thus after their long quarrel the orders were reconciled at last. The senate decided that this was a fitting occasion to honour the immortal gods – who deserved it then, if ever at any time – by celebrating the Great Games'.¹⁵⁰ Important political reforms followed in 342 BC: no one might hold the same office twice within ten years, nor two offices in one year, and that it should be legal for both consuls to be chosen from the plebs.¹⁵¹

*Quanta rerum moles!*¹⁵² Livy seems amazed at the many wars and sufferings Rome had to overcome to get to the point where she is now: 'After the Samnite war which was waged with varying success came the war with Pyrrhus, and that with the Carthaginians. How vast a series of events! How many times the extremity of danger was incurred, in order that our empire might be exalted to its present greatness, hardly to

¹⁴⁷ Livy, 6.37.10. *Imperium atque honorem, gloriam belli, genus, nobilitatem.*

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Livy, 6.41.5.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Livy, 6.42.9.

¹⁵⁰ Livy, 6.42.12.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Livy, 7.42.2. For these reforms in more detail, see T. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 333-40 and T. Cornell, 'The Recovery of Rome' in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., vol. VII, part 2, 334-47.

¹⁵² Livy, 7.29.2. Cf. Virg. *Aen.*, 1.33: *Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem!*

be maintained!’¹⁵³ Was it worth all the effort and the blood of the Roman people to have an empire that can scarcely be preserved because of its own magnitude?¹⁵⁴

But indeed, all the wars Rome had to wage had given her the opportunity of displaying the Roman *virtus* and also to set an example of *disciplina militaris*, a value that they were proud to transmit to all the peoples who became their allies. A very hard one was given by Manlius, who killed his own son for not obeying orders.¹⁵⁵ ‘And the “orders of Manlius” not only caused men shudder at the time, but became a type of severity with succeeding ages’.¹⁵⁶ Livy judges the strong act as a good one: ‘Nevertheless the brutality of the punishment made the soldiers more obedient to their general ... that stern act did much good’.¹⁵⁷ This can also be an example that when the state was at stake, family should be placed second.¹⁵⁸

But together with this discipline, cruelty was also developing and Livy gives us accounts of it more often.¹⁵⁹ Already in 326 BC some of the customs were changing and Livy, particularly sensitive to all these, reports: ‘How great was the difference betwixt the moderation of the ancients and this new-fangled arrogance and ruthlessness [*novam superbiam crudelitatemque*]!’¹⁶⁰

The interval of peace between patricians and plebeians was only a short one. Soon new rivalries would appear, always concerning offices, as in 300 BC with the priesthood.¹⁶¹ Plebeians could now become priests, but patricians were not equalled at least in one privilege: the auspices. They were the only noble ones, and so the only who could have them.¹⁶² The plebeians, on the other hand, argued once again about the origin of *nobilitas* as something not granted by the gods, but achieved. ‘Has it ever been wafted to your ears that those who were first appointed to be patricians were not beings descended from celestial regions, but were such as could name their fathers – were free-

¹⁵³ Livy, 7.29.3.

¹⁵⁴ See above n.102.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Livy, 8.7.20-22. See also 28.27-29.

¹⁵⁶ Livy, 8.7.22.

¹⁵⁷ Livy, 8.8.1.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Cic. *De Off*, 1.160: ‘Our first duty is to the immortal gods; our second to country, our third to our parents and so on in a descending scale to the rest’.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Livy, 8.27.8; 8.28.2.

¹⁶⁰ Livy, 8.33.13. With a very Sallustian touch.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Livy, 10.8.5.

¹⁶² Cf. Livy, 10.8.9.

born men, that is and nothing more?’¹⁶³ And so they felt confident that they would attain even that one day: ‘In truth the matter is simply, Quirites, that we must always be first denied and yet have our own way in the end’.¹⁶⁴ In the path towards *libertas*, each step counted, the important thing was not to move backwards.

At the beginning of the fifth pentad, Livy gives a small introduction for the topic in which he will be busily engaged for more than fifteen books. ‘In this preface to a part of my history I may properly assert what many a historian has declared at the outset of his entire work, to wit, that the war which I am to describe was the most memorable of all wars ever waged – the war, that is, which under the leadership of Hannibal, the Carthaginians waged with the Roman people’.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps with Thucydides and Sallust this sort of prologue was becoming more and more popular,¹⁶⁶ but it is also possible that Livy – not trying to diminish the rest of the work – showed his real discernment on the matter: the Punic War was going to be after all the *bellum maxime omnium memorabile quae unquam gesta sint*.¹⁶⁷

It has been already mentioned that *crudelitas* became a more common exercise among the Romans, but now Livy wants to stress also the importance that greed and arrogance [*superbia et avaritia*], together with cruelty, had in this war.¹⁶⁸ Sallustian words start appearing more often when we get nearer Livy’s times: *Poenis quod superbe avareque crederent imperitatum victis esse*.¹⁶⁹ The crossing of the Alps, the march through the Apennines and the hostilities between the two armies are magnificently described and the speeches before the battles are ‘created’ with such artistry that is almost impossible to imagine that they were delivered in a different way.¹⁷⁰ The speech of Scipio, or that of Manlius Torquatus, are all concerned with *Romana virtus* and *disciplina militaris*. ‘To win or die’ could be the motto that the generals wanted to transmit to their soldiers.¹⁷¹

¹⁶³ Livy, 10.8.10.

¹⁶⁴ Livy, 10.8.11.

¹⁶⁵ Livy, 21.1.1.

¹⁶⁶ See Thucydides, 1.1 and Sall. *BC*, 1.4.2.

¹⁶⁷ Livy, 21.1.1.

¹⁶⁸ Livy, 21.1.3. See also 22.50.6; 22.59.8; 24.32.1.

¹⁶⁹ Livy, 21.1.3.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Livy, 21.35; 21.40; 21.55.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Livy, 21.43.5; 22.60.6; 23.29.7.

After the disasters of Cannae, Trebia and Trasumennus, Beneventum came as the great Roman victory in 214 BC.¹⁷² But the war with the Carthaginians was leaving the finances in a very bad position, so much so that the censors ‘freed from the charge of contracting for public works on account of the emptiness of the treasury, turned their attention to the control of morals and the punishment of vices which had sprung from that war, just as bodies suffering from long illnesses of themselves produce defects’.¹⁷³ This seems to be an uncommon idea, traditionally vices had not sprung from war, but from the idleness of peace.¹⁷⁴

The concept of liberty in Livy progresses with the narrative from political freedom to the freedom of the virtuous man, who is not a slave of himself. *Libertas* is not only related to *virtus* in an exterior and public way, but also an internal and personal one. Describing Gnaeus Fulvius, Livy says: ‘having an army of Roman citizens, men well born and brought up as free men, had steeped them in the vices of slaves’.¹⁷⁵ Freedom appears, then, to be intimately related to moral behaviour: a truly free man is virtuous. In contrast to Fulvius and his army, Scipio was the incarnation of Roman *virtus*, and freedom in him was total and complete; even more, he seemed to be the guardian of other people’s liberty as well.¹⁷⁶ He also had the mission – as every good general – to encourage and praise his soldiers’ *virtus* as he does in the speech at Tarraco: ‘When possession of the province had been lost by so great a disaster, you, by your courage [*virtus*] have held it intact both for me as their successor and for the Roman people’,¹⁷⁷ because, he continues, ‘in this general crash the one thing left standing, intact and immovable, was the courage of the Roman people [*virtus populi Romani*]’.¹⁷⁸ The aims and goals of Publius Scipio were great indeed: he had conquered Spain, everybody rejoiced and praised him, but he had hopes for the conquest of Africa and great

¹⁷² Cf. J. Briscoe, ‘The Second Punic War’ in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., vol. VIII, 44-80.

¹⁷³ Livy, 24.18.2.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Livy, 2.52.2. See also Tac. *Ann*, 1.2: *cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit*.

¹⁷⁵ Livy, 26.2.11. Again the influence of the leader appears to be most relevant for the behaviour of the subordinates. Livy expresses the same idea with regard to the senate with the following remark in 26.36.3: ‘as the senate is superior to the people, so ought they to be leaders in shouldering all that was hard and drastic. If there is a duty which you wish to lay upon an inferior, and you first set up the same obligation as against yourself and your family, you more readily find everyone submitting. And the outlay is not burdensome, when they see every prominent man taking upon himself more than his share in it’.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Livy, 26.49.11. Also guardian of women’s *virtus*, e.g. 26.50.

¹⁷⁷ Livy, 26.41.5-6

¹⁷⁸ Livy, 26.41.12.

Carthage.¹⁷⁹ These hopes, however, could be described more as *magnitudo animi* than *ambitio* because he was virtuous, he wanted to conquer not just for his own *gloria*, but for the welfare of the state.¹⁸⁰ To display *virtus* with a view to the enlargement and glory of the empire it was always commendable, the problem was going to be knowing when to stop. *Ambitio*, as Sallust had said,¹⁸¹ was very near *virtus*; it was only a matter of degree.

In the year 202, Hannibal finally decided to go back to Africa after sixteen years in Italy, but the Romans thought that only the place had changed, not the danger.¹⁸² Livy acknowledges Hannibal's mastery as a general and thinks he deserves at least a short tribute: 'born at the headquarters of his father, the bravest of generals, had been reared and brought up in the midst of arms; who even in boyhood was a soldier, in earliest manhood a general; who ageing as a victor, had filled the Spanish and Gallic lands and Italy from the Alps to the Straits with the evidence of his mighty deeds'.¹⁸³ The war against the Carthaginians had produced great soldiers and great generals because the enemy was great. Roman *virtus* has shone with all its splendour and the glory of Scipio having as his surname 'Africanus' is for the first time won, for there had been not a previous war so extraordinarily long and strenuous. Livy affirms that later, much less successful generals have been given the same glory.¹⁸⁴

By the beginning of the sixth pentad Livy confesses to being tired. He realises the huge disproportion of his work and tries to justify himself before the reader. The citation is long, but so telling that is worth quoting it complete: 'I also am relieved, just as if I myself had shared the labour and the peril, that I have come to the end of the Punic War. For while it is not at all fitting that one who has ventured to promise to write the whole history of Rome should grow wearied in dealing with the single portions of so

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Livy, 28.17.1.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. section II.4 above on the role of *gloria*.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 11.2

¹⁸² Cf. Livy, 30.28.1.

¹⁸³ Livy, 30.28.4.

¹⁸⁴ Livy, 30.45.6-7: 'As for the surname Africanus, whether his popularity among the soldiers, or fickle favour of the people first gave it currency I am unable to state, or whether it began with the flattery of his intimates, as did the surname of Felix for Sulla and Magnus for Pompey in the times of our fathers. What is certain is that he was the first general to be distinguished by the name of a nation conquered by him. Later following his example men who were by no means his equals in their victories gained outstanding inscriptions for their masks and glorious surnames for their families'.

great a task, nevertheless, when I reflect that sixty-three years – the space between the outbreak of the First and the end of the Second Punic War – have filled as many books for me as were required for the four hundred and eighty-seven years from the founding of the city to the consulship of Appius Claudius, already I see in my mind's eye that, like men who, attracted by the shallow water near the shore, wade out into the sea, I am being carried on, whatever progress I make, into the depths more vast and, as it were, into the abyss, and that the task almost waxes greater which, as I finished each of the earlier portions seemed to be growing smaller'.¹⁸⁵ Interesting reflection regarding the nature of historical writing; it seems on the one hand that history and historiography move at different paces, and on the other that the historian feels the same exhaustion for the *labor et periculum* of the actors in his task of *facta dictis exaequare*. Is there also a possibility for the historian, then, to display his own *virtus* when writing history?

The Punic war was followed by the Macedonian. The Romans defeated Philip and his army and they declared to have freed the Greek cities.¹⁸⁶ Around this time (195 BC) Cato appeared in the scene. More than an example of Roman *virtus* as courage – which he was anyway – Cato represented the 'old', the 'traditional' Roman qualities, for which the Romans were known, or at least how they would have liked to have been known: *dignitas*, *moderatio*, *severitas*, etc. His unyielding opposition to the luxury of women and the speech he delivered showed him as a man deeply imbued with the customs of the ancestors.¹⁸⁷ He also argues that together with *luxuria*, *avaritia* appears and interestingly enough, the combination of 'these two opposing evils had been the destruction of every great empire'.¹⁸⁸ We can recall this pair of vices as the ones that Livy names in his preface as having been introduced later in Rome than anywhere else. Cato, then, would have contributed to the preservation of Romanness and the original Roman qualities in a triple approach: with his offices, his *eloquentia* and his own personality. Towards the end of Cato's section, the remark a tribune gives in a speech, is

¹⁸⁵ Livy, 31.1.1-5.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Livy, 33.32.5.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Livy 34.2 ff.

¹⁸⁸ Livy, 34.4.1.

probably what Livy himself thought of Cato: 'We all know that Marcus Cato is an orator not only powerful but sometimes even savage, though he is kind of heart'.¹⁸⁹

The end of the two Scipios was a sad event for Livy to narrate, it did not do justice to their lives and achievements for the aggrandisement of the Roman Empire.¹⁹⁰ Publius Africanus Scipio himself, 'foresaw unpopularity and quarrels with the tribunes, obtaining a longer adjournment he retired to his country place at Liternum, with definite intention of not being present to plead his cause. His soul and character were too lofty, and too much accustomed to a greater fortune, to know how to be a defendant and to come down the lowly position of men who must plead their cause'.¹⁹¹ Very much was said about Scipio's trial, death, funeral and tomb, 'all so contradictory that I find no tradition, no written documents, which I can accept'.¹⁹² Lucius Scipio, for his part, was accused and convicted of receiving money from the enemy. But afterwards, he was released from his charge and Tiberius Gracchus decreed that: 'Lucius Scipio himself, who had conquered the richest king in the world, extended the empire of the Roman people to the most distant limits of the earth, bound king Eumenes, the Rhodians, and so many cities of Asia by obligations to the Roman people, had led in his triumph and thrown into prison so many leaders of the enemy, he would not permit to lie in prison and in chains among the enemies of the Roman people, and he ordered to released him'.¹⁹³ It looks as if past *virtus* could still count to redeem the present. Would this also work in Livy's own times?

The year 187 BC was for Livy as important and crucial as 146 BC had been to Sallust. His description of *luxuria* is graphic and detailed and he enumerates all the aspects that were affected by this new illness: 'For the beginnings of foreign luxury were introduced into the City by the army from Asia. They for the first time imported into Rome couches of bronze, valuable robes for coverlets, tapestries, and other products of the loom, and what at that time was considered luxurious furniture – tables with one pedestal and sideboards. Then female players of the lute and the harp and other festival delights of entertainments were made adjunct to banquets, the banquets themselves,

¹⁸⁹ Livy, 34.5.7.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Astin, *Scipio Aemilianus*, 227-41.

¹⁹¹ Livy, 38.52.1-3.

¹⁹² Livy, 38.56.1.

¹⁹³ Livy, 38.60.5-7.

moreover, began to be planned with both greater care and greater expense. At that time the cook, to the ancient Romans the most worthless of slaves, both in their judgement of value and in the use they made of him, began to have value, and what been merely a necessary service came to be regarded as an art. Yet those things which were then looked upon as remarkable were hardly even the germs of the luxury to come'.¹⁹⁴ The impact of the riches coming from the East must have had a deep effect in Roman *moderatio*, changing it forever into that lavish *munificentia* which was later characteristic of the Roman empire.

In this same context of evils coming from the East, Livy gives us an account of the Bacchanalian conspiracy in 186 BC, and he devotes several chapters of book 39 to it.¹⁹⁵ The description of the Bacchic rite is given by Livy with great censure: 'There was not one form of vice alone, the promiscuous mating of free men and women, but perjured witnesses, forged seals and wills and evidence, all issued from this same workshop: likewise poisoning and secret murders, so that at times not even the bodies were found for burial ... This violence was concealed because amid the howlings and the crash of drums and cymbals no cry of sufferers could be heard as the debauchery and murderers proceeded'.¹⁹⁶ The cult was so spread that the extirpation of it not only included Rome, but the whole of Italy.¹⁹⁷ Rome seemed to recover her religious and moral health after the strong persecution of all those who did not practise a traditional cult according to the forefathers. In 184 BC, as a kind of measure to prevent that anything like the Bacchanalian conspiracy would happen again, Cato was chosen censor and his office was exercised sternly and harshly towards all ranks.¹⁹⁸ In 181 BC, a public clerk discovered the books of Numa.¹⁹⁹ 'The seven Latin books dealt with pontifical law, the seven Greek books with a system of philosophy which might have been current at that time'.²⁰⁰ The content of the books was found subversive of religion and the praetor

¹⁹⁴ Livy, 39.6.7-9.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Livy, 39.8-19.

¹⁹⁶ Livy, 39.8.3-8.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Livy, 39.18.7.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Livy, 39.44.1. At the same time, Cato appears not only as an efficient and thorough censor, but also one who was truly concerned with important matters: on these, see Astin, *Cato the Censor*, 78-103.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Livy, 40.29.2.

²⁰⁰ Livy, 40.29.7-8.

decided to burn them. The senate agreed and they did so.²⁰¹ After the Bacchanalian, the Romans were left extremely sensitive to the preservation of their own religious traditions. For how long was this going to last? We perceive some changes: Rome was now not only the heroic stage for the display of Roman *virtus*, but also a platform where new influences – especially from the luxurious East – could find room and be exhibited shamelessly. Thus, the appeal to the *mos maiorum* was becoming ever more urgent to maintain their Romanness.

There were also signs of change *domi militiaeque*: the Macedonian war was fought with a powerful army, but diplomacy and money were taking over. Perhaps as a significant and revealing proof that the battles were not the same as before, Livy does not mention the word *virtus* at all in books 43 and 44. The provincials start complaining in Rome, before the senate, about ‘the greed and arrogance of Roman officials’;²⁰² and at Rome, public men behave with arrogance, greed and cruelty.²⁰³ The vocabulary changes, because the circumstances have changed: the frequency with which Livy reports deeds with the words *crudelitas* and *avaritia* towards the end of his work is very meaningful. Moreover, it is not just cruelty and avarice, it is: *crudelius et avarius*.²⁰⁴ This has little of the language of honour and virtue of the early books and more of the Sallustian language of decline. The word *clementia* also starts appearing more often, was it not so necessary before? Is *clementia* more needed just because there is a possibility of being cruel? Or is it important to start promoting it as one of the imperial virtues?²⁰⁵ Besides, a sort of servility towards the Romans is now recognisable in the speeches of the vanquished: ‘The good fortune of the Roman people had been kind to the Rhodians in giving them the opportunity, now that the war had been brought to an end by other means, of

²⁰¹ Cf. Livy, 40.29.13-14.

²⁰² Livy, 43.2.1.

²⁰³ Cf. Livy, 43.7.8.

²⁰⁴ Livy, 43.4.5.

²⁰⁵ Seneca in his *De Clementia* (1.21.2), gives a clear explanation of the political consequences of exercising clemency towards one’s enemies: ‘for that man has lost his life who owes it to another, and whosoever, having been cast down from high estate at his enemy’s feet, has awaited the verdict of another upon his life and throne, *lives on to the glory of his preserver*, and by being saved confers more upon the other’s name than if he had been removed from the eyes of men. For he is a *lasting spectacle of another’s prowess*; in a triumph he would have passed quickly out of sight’. My italics.

congratulating the Romans on their glorious victory.’²⁰⁶ What was the kindness in letting somebody congratulate you for your deeds?²⁰⁷

In 168 BC, King Perseus was captured in Samothrace by Aemilius Paulus, the victorious Roman general, who urged Perseus to ‘entrust himself and all he had to the discretion and mercy [*fidem et clementiam*] of the Roman people’.²⁰⁸ We can certainly doubt of the sincerity of this advice when a few paragraphs down Livy affirms: ‘A decree was therefore passed at once that anyone convicted of saying or doing anything against the Romans in behalf of Perseus should be put to death. Some had left the city on the arrival of the Romans, others committed suicide’.²⁰⁹ The Romans had already gained their ‘reputation’, and some people preferred to die than to live under their dominion. What kind of freedom was Rome bringing to the peoples she conquered? Was this the *libertas* that had been achieved and preserved by Roman *virtus*? Rome had always been a warrior-like nation, but this was developing into something different.

The conquest of Macedonia was much celebrated by the Romans and it certainly was an achievement of the greatest importance. Rome had now to decide what she was going to do with it and ‘first of all it was voted that the Macedonians and Illyrians should be given their independence, so that it should be clear to all nations that the forces of the Roman people, brought not slavery to free peoples, but on the contrary, freedom to the enslaved. The senate wished nations which were free to consider that their freedom was assured and lasting under the protection of the Roman people, and that those who lived under kings should feel for the time being that their rulers were milder and more just under the eye of the Roman people, and, if at any time their kings should make war on the Roman people, that the outcome of the war would bring victory to the Romans, but freedom to themselves’.²¹⁰ The senate voted to divide Macedonia into four sections, so that each might have its own legislature. It was further resolved that Macedonia should pay to the Roman people half the taxes which they had been accustomed to pay their kings.²¹¹ Surely with regard to this latter point, the Romans felt

²⁰⁶ Livy, 45.3.6.

²⁰⁷ This is very similar to the rhetoric of the *Res Gestae*.

²⁰⁸ Livy, 45.4.7.

²⁰⁹ Livy, 45.10.14.

²¹⁰ Livy, 45.18.1-2.

²¹¹ Cf. Livy, 45.18.6-7.

they were being very ‘kind’ and freeing the Macedonians from the tyranny of the kings. It appears here an interesting twisted logic that to be associated with the ‘free Republic’, even as a subject, somehow made one free. Again and again *libertas* is the cause, objective and justification of all the wars fought by the Roman people at home and abroad.

Rome had changed so much. There was nothing left from that small village of farmers; for now all was power and might. Even the Greeks felt rather overwhelmed with Roman ceremonies and pageantry and ‘although the Macedonians were used to a royal court, yet the ceremonial of a new master was frightening as it met their eyes – the consul’s bench, his entrance after the way had been cleared, the herald and the orderly, all things novel to their eyes and ears, which might have inspired terror in allies, to say nothing of the conquered enemies. After the herald had commanded silence, Paulus announced in Latin the decisions of the senate, as well as his own, made by the advice of his council. This announcement was translated into Greek and repeated by Gnaeus Octavius the praetor, for he too was present’.²¹² It seems impossible not to recall the customs of Rome under the emperors with many of these practices.

The beginnings for future problems in the race for personal power were already noticeable and present in the Roman mind. Moreover, its cause was what had made Rome great: the army. ‘Men with authority would be made aware that not everything was under the control of the leader, but something also under that of the soldiers [...] The generals were being helplessly subjected to the insubordination and greed [*licentia atque avaritia*] of their men. Even now wrong action was all too often taken for the sake of currying favour; what would happen if soldiers were made masters of their generals?’²¹³ But also, what would happen if a charismatic general were to command the army and use the strength of the soldiers for his own expediency?²¹⁴ Would that be the end of liberty and, with it, of *virtus*?

Roman *virtus*, as all powerful things, had the seed of its own destruction within it. According to Livy, courage, bravery, valour, manliness were all noble values in good hands and when there was freedom for each and everyone to fight for himself. With time

²¹² Livy, 45.29.2-3

²¹³ Livy, 45.36.5-8.

²¹⁴ Unfortunately for this topic, we do not have the narrative on Marius, Pompey or Caesar.

and conquests, the very same values were to be transformed into dominance, greed and cruelty.²¹⁵ When liberty had been the aim, Roman *virtus* was the most excellent and only means to achieve it. When ambition started leading the way to power and glory, Roman *virtus* became somewhat old and faded. And thus, *libertas* too suffered a transformation. Livy's mission appears to be not only to place the *virtus* and *libertas* of the past before the eyes of the Romans of his time, but to make these Romans identify themselves with that old and perhaps a little forgotten *virtus* and *libertas*. Livy seems to be reminding his contemporaries almost with a Ciceronian touch: *ad altiora quaedam et magnificentiora... nati sumus*.²¹⁶

3. The Value of Recording the Past

In this section I will approach Livy's concept of history as a record of change within a framework of continuity. As a historian, Livy was conscious that what made historical writing beneficial was to bring about the awareness of the changes occurred in time. Such awareness comes to mind only if one is able to 'engage with the past'; it is only from the dialogue between present and past, reader and history, that one becomes conscious of these changes. There is something intrinsically active in history, but is up to the historian's analysis to make it more or less evident for the reader. Livy wrote his *AUC* to encourage action and he stressed it even more by choosing to address his audience using the second person singular: there could be no mistake that he was telling 'me' to 'do' something: 'What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that you behold the lessons of every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument; from these you may choose for yourself and for your own state what to imitate, from these mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result'.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Cf. Thuc. 3.82.3.

²¹⁶ Cic. *De Fin*, 2.34.113.

²¹⁷ Livy, *praef* 10: *Hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitare capias, inde foedum inceptu, foedum exitu, quod vitas*.

It is precisely Livy's awareness of change which makes him write his history in the way he does. He was able to see and appreciate the transformation and reordering of his own country, how much had been reshaped from the republican past and the problems and effects this reshaping was having in his own generation. To look at the past, to see how their predecessors had reacted to change and draw *exempla* from them, thus, became an especially valuable task to help the Romans in their definition of behaviour and identity towards the uncertain future. 'The *Ab Urbe Condita* is not the past preserved in amber, it is a record of deeds that you must use, imitating the good and avoiding the bad. In turn, if you get it right, this imitations and avoidance will provide a cure for the current evils of your state. History is effective only when it becomes present'.²¹⁸ But it is also more than that, a deeper effectiveness of history lies in what one gains in the process of learning to engage with the past.

It is to this process, I think, that Livy is referring at the beginning of the preface. 'Whether I am likely to accomplish anything worthy of the labour, if I record the achievements of the Roman people from the foundation of the city, I do not really know'.²¹⁹ The first sentence of *Ab Urbe Condita* could, of course, be interpreted just as the conventional words to win over the empathy of the reader and to approach the work with *benignitas* – just as nowadays eminent authors ask for forgiveness if after many corrections mistakes remain.²²⁰ He knew that he did not have the background of the retired politician who wrote history as the noblest occupation he could dedicate the rest of his life, and he 'manages, however, by a skilful and unique construction to pass over completely the issue of his experience and qualifications... The diffidence that seems so puzzling has a purpose'.²²¹ But above all the doubt of the author is mainly concerned with the impact the work will have on his contemporaries, and the service it will be for the present. And this, of course, Livy cannot know.

²¹⁸ Kraus and Woodman, *Latin Historians*, 55-56.

²¹⁹ Livy, *praef.* 1.

²²⁰ Although Livy's *captatio benevolentiae* has not worked well with all his readers, see Syme, *Tacitus*, 148: 'Gracious and engaging though the modesty may be with which he excuses his undertaking, it is a feeble exordium when a historian in his first sentence conveys not facts or confidence but a doubt'.

²²¹ Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography*, 140.

In projecting an idea of Rome, Livy chose *virtus* and *vitium* as the key to understand *quae vita, qui mores fuerint*,²²² putting the stress especially on the *virtutes* of the past rather than the *vitia* of the present. This emphasis has generated an equivocal understanding of Livy's approach to Roman history. His patriotism has been seen as the mark of his naïveté and the creation of an immovable image of Rome.²²³ 'Si tende a considerare la storiografia liviana come un blocco statico, non soggetto ad una possibile – anzi probabilissima – evoluzione ideologica'.²²⁴ Collingwood placed here his main criticism of Livy: 'Rome is the heroine of his narrative. Rome is the agent whose actions he is describing. Therefore Rome is a substance, changeless and eternal. From the beginning of the narrative Rome is ready-made and complete'.²²⁵ Denying the development and evolution in the creation of Rome's identity shows some sort of misreading of the preface, where after saying that life and morals of the Romans will be the topic of the work, Livy adds: 'then let him note how, with the gradual relaxation of discipline, morals first gave way, as it were, then sank lower and lower, and finally began the downward plunge which has brought us to the present time, when we can endure neither our vices nor their cure'. *Primo, deinde, tum* and *donec* are in preface 9 reinforcing the temporal evolution of Rome. But Collingwood's remark left a profound mark in modern appreciation of Livy, who for a long time has been considered as a writer with indisputable literary skills, but unable to appreciate change.²²⁶

However, Livy's preface is all about change and continuity. He had to maintain a fine balance between what he was recording as Rome's identity and the transformations she had undergone precisely to acquire and defend this identity. 'He was not writing simply to praise Rome, but to illustrate where she went wrong ... Livy was constructing

²²² Livy, *praef.* 9.

²²³ See especially Walsh, *Livy: his Historical Aims and Methods*, 66

²²⁴ M. Mazza, *Storia e Ideologia in Tito Livio* (Catania, Bonanno Editore, 1966) 200.

²²⁵ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 43.

²²⁶ See, for example, Walsh, 'Livy and the aims of Historia', 1069: 'This concentration on human manners blinds him to any other form of historical causation. Hence instead of a linked narrative in which a pattern of change or progress becomes manifest, there is a series of separate incidents, often brilliantly and memorably described, but not coherently connected'. For a more developed account of this idea and its limitations see Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History*, chapter 5: Precedents and Change, with n. 68, where she gives Walsh and Ogilvie as the primary exponents of this view of Livy in English scholarship; also Luce, *Livy: The Composition of his History*, introduction and pp. 232-249 and Miles, *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome*, chapter 1: History and Memory.

a Rome to save the real one'.²²⁷ For on the whole, Livy's prologue, does not seem to give a warm welcome to the new order of things; the intriguing *ad haec tempora quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus*,²²⁸ has been object of much discussion,²²⁹ and somewhat simplistically this statement has been traditionally understood in the light of his moralising concept of history, 'which had to hold up the image of a great past to a miserable and degenerated present'.²³⁰ Which were those *vitia*? What was the cure they could not endure? It was very clever of Livy not to say it explicitly. Thus, he cannot be accused of anything, but he expresses what he is thinking inwardly: are those vices related to immorality? Probably, and their cure was heavy and difficult to bear because it was at everybody's sight that Augustus' moral legislation – if there was such a thing at all – had not been welcome and was, in the long term, condemned to fail. But those vices could also be related to civil war. Civil war in itself is a vice,²³¹ *virtus* could not flourish in it; and was the burdensome and oppressive cure, autocracy? It was safer for Livy to leave these questions unanswered. In the end, it looks as if he was at the same time not opposed to the Augustan regime, but not uncritical either. He, in fact, emerges as exceedingly sensitive to the main concern that Augustan Rome was facing at that time, namely the ratification of the new order and the exchange of *libertas* for *pax*.

Livy's *salubre ac frugiferum* exercise of drawing lessons from the past worked in a twofold way: providing *exempla* to imitate or avoid adapting it to one's own situation on the one hand, and giving the possibility of reinterpreting and scrutinising the past in a new way so as to understand and make more sense of the present. 'The reason why *exempla* were attractive to triumviral and Augustan Rome is that they were not only a sophisticated vehicle for creating political stability and for ordering a complicated history, but also a reassuring reminder that all was not lost and that the interpretation of that complex past could lead to a more secure future'.²³²

In the construction of this future, religion will play an important role. It has been said that Livy's moral and religious principles coincided with those of Augustus, and

²²⁷ C. Kraus, *Ab Urbe Condita VI* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994) 18.

²²⁸ Livy, *praef.* 9.

²²⁹ See especially J. Moles, 'Livy's Preface', *PCPS* 39 (1993) 141-68; Walsh, 'Livy's Preface and the Distortion of History', 369-83 and 'Livy and the Aims of Historia', 1058-74.

²³⁰ A.D. Leeman, *Orationis Ratio* (Amsterdam, Adolf M. Hakkert Publisher, 1986) 194.

²³¹ Cf. Lucan 1.667-8: *Scelerique nefando nomen erit virtus*. See also: 1.366; 1.682; 2.3.

²³² Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History*, 202.

that 'he bases himself in the same fundamental ideology: the reconstruction of a distinctively Roman religion centred around links between national morality and the divine, and he explores and extends this in his own way'.²³³ He can be placed, however, somewhere in between scepticism and belief. In giving the detailed account 'from' and especially 'of' the founding of the city, he says, that even though 'these traditions are rather adorned with poetic legends than based upon trustworthy historical proofs',²³⁴ he will not leave them aside, he will keep the record of everything and include the prodigies and the supernatural. Because, as he himself states, it is really a 'privilege of antiquity to mingle divine things with human and so to add dignity to the beginnings of cities'.²³⁵ With great sensitivity and tact he did not wipe off those legends, he incorporated them, but warned the reader to take them with precautions. This incorporation acknowledges the role they played in the Roman historical conscience and how they saw the power of mystery in the beginnings of anything. It was difficult to explain the step of coming into existence, from the 'not-being' to the 'being', and Livy – with many others before and after him – had to resort to the divine to help him to fill that gap.²³⁶

We see Livy sharing with Augustus some religious, social and above all some moral standards, but labelling as an 'Augustan historian' may not help us all that much. A long debate – not wholly conclusive – has taken place on the subject and it appears mainly to be related to the charged meaning of the word 'Augustan'. Different opinions will depend, of course, of the dimension which they attribute to the adjective. For Syme, Livy emerges as the last of the Republican writers because he 'seems comparatively untouched by the era of tribulation. The Ciceronian features of his style make him something of a stranger in his own generation. His mind was formed before the battle of Actium, his history begun before *pax et princeps* was firmly established'.²³⁷ Walsh describes him as 'not an Augustan in any significantly political sense'.²³⁸ And for Woodman, who thinks that Livy started writing as early as before the battle of

²³³ D.S. Levene, *Religion in Livy* (Leiden, Brill, 1993) 247.

²³⁴ Livy, *praef.* 6.

²³⁵ Livy, *praef.* 7.

²³⁶ I see little reason to undermine the importance of these legends. See e.g. Walsh, 'Livy', 124: 'But almost all these fables occur in the first pentad, which is no more than a prologue to Livy's serious history, and which only occupies a thirtieth of the whole area'.

²³⁷ Syme, 'Livy and Augustus', 57.

²³⁸ Walsh, *Livy: his Historical Aims and Methods*, 287. But he does consider Livy an Augustan author in terms of style, cf. 58.

Actium,²³⁹ he ‘cannot have had Augustus in mind when he wrote his early books. He was simply putting forward a series of ideals with which Augustus late came to identify himself’.²⁴⁰ Is Livy ‘Augustan’ in style then? He must have written in a style that would be acceptable under the canons of Augustan refinement; ‘even if it took a little time to gain control of his style, it must – all in all – have proved fashionable in Augustan Rome’.²⁴¹ The issue of Livy as an Augustan author can, of course, be developed much more extensively, but that would take me beyond the boundaries of my research on *virtus*. I have, however, tried to place him within this Augustan literary tradition by making a few parallels and references to other writers of the same period – Virgil, Horace, Propertius –²⁴² to see not only how much they have in common in their approaches, but also to be more aware of the reality of a specific set of themes and topics present in what is called the ‘Augustan age’.

But the question is not so much whether Livy with his writings supported Augustus in his comprehensive programme, but what makes them coincide in their appreciation of and needs for their own times. What perhaps makes Livy and Augustus have a similar approach towards the present Rome is their common discernment of the need of change, without breaking with traditional values. They both put forward – one with his history, the other with his government – a combination of the new and the old: novelty within tradition. ‘What makes Livy an Augustan author ... is not a fixed ideology, but his constant formulation and reformulation of some of the central ideas of his age’:²⁴³ a decided preoccupation with moral decline, the need for patriotism and peace,²⁴⁴ and the consideration that the interpretation of the past was effective for transforming the present. Livy and Augustus believed in the exemplary value of history and both of them used all the means they could to give the ‘right’ examples.²⁴⁵ Both of

²³⁹ Question of an interminable debate as well.

²⁴⁰ Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 137.

²⁴¹ McDonald, ‘The Style of Livy’, 171.

²⁴² See n.14: Virg. *Aen*, 1.16-22 and 6.851; n.152: Virg. *Aen*, 1.33; n.102: Hor. *Epodes*, 7.10; 16.2 and Propertius, 3.13.60.

²⁴³ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996) 283.

²⁴⁴ See e.g. Livy, 7.40.8: ‘Peace is the goal desired even by those who are able to conquer’. Is this not a brilliant support to the *Pax Augusta*?

²⁴⁵ See, for example, T.J. Luce, ‘Livy, Augustus and the Forum Romanum’ in A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (eds.), *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1990) 123-38.

them were trying to promote the same traditional standards and were concerned with keeping the Roman identity in spite of the evident change.

Livy's *exempla* are malleable and flexible, they involve the participation of the speaker and the audience, and assume their capacity for change over time. 'By their very nature exempla involve two time-frames: either the past is recollected and applied to the present or the present is envisioned as a source of models for the future'.²⁴⁶ And it is the very application of the past to the present and the present to the future which creates the links that are necessary to define identity. *Exempla* unify Roman history, *exempla* show change and continuity – in Livy and in Rome.

The record of this history in Livy's narrative characterises Romans as actively providing material for creating the collective memory that will shape the Roman identity and character. Livy constructs this memory because he believes that attitudes towards the past have an impact in the present and that is why, in spite of everything, there is hope. The value of recording *virtus* maintains its very existence. The account of the struggle for *libertas* keeps the fight alive. Livy reflects on present reality in the light of the past, seeking the roots of what is happening now, so as to offer his contemporaries, both individual and nation, the opportunity to arrive through memory at a keener awareness of their identity.

²⁴⁶ J. Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History*, 197.

V Things have changed for the better: Velleius' optimism

When you commemorate the distinguished *virtus* and fame of good men, while everybody is ready to believe you when you tell things which he thinks he could easily do himself, everything beyond that he regards as fictitious, if not false.

Sall. *BC*, 2.3.

The two-book summary history of Velleius Paterculus has been 'a work often relegated to the problem drawer'.¹ For some scholars, the panegyric tone with which Velleius refers to Augustus and especially Tiberius, has seemed to permeate the whole work destroying every possibility of getting anything good or interesting from it. The rashness of these judgements about Velleius as a historian could be explained by a personal animosity against the author, a particular hostility which comes out almost fiercely.² But it can also be explained because his style seems to modern historians the example par excellence of servility towards power and lack of freedom of speech, vices considered of the worst kind when one is aiming to write proper history. In this section I will not give an 'apologia pro Velleio', but I will try to show how by his condemnation historians have failed to see the importance of the change that occurred in historiography with the advent of the principate. By insisting on looking for the same characteristics that dominated historical writing during the Republic in an era where not only the main actors had changed, but also the rules of the political game, historians apply to Velleius standards that are not his. Kraus and Woodman have rightly summarised this somehow short-sighted view of early imperial historiography: 'Velleius' history, though naturally no less rhetorical or partial than that of any other ancient historiographer, should be prized rather than proscribed by modern historians; but his fault is that he puts forward a

¹ J. Marincola, 'Genre convention and innovation in Greco-Roman historiography' in C.S. Kraus (ed.), *The limits of historiography* (Leiden, Brill, 1997) 317.

² See, for example, R. Syme, Velleius' most powerful enemy: 'Mendacious as well as misleading' in 'M. Vinicius cos. 19 BC' in *CQ* 27 (1933) 147 n.3; 'fraudulent' in *The Roman Revolution*, 393, n.1.; 'an uneasy amalgam of adulation and mendacity' in 'Livy and Augustus', 69; 'adulatory and dishonest' in *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970) 47. Also A.D. Leeman, *Oratoris Ratio*, 248: '*miles sapiens* turned into a *historicus insipiens*' and M.L. Paladini, 'Studi su Velleio Patercolo', *ACME* 6 (1953) 71: 'Velleio è un storico di non troppi scrupoli e di nessuna profondità'.

different kind of view from that of the cynical Tacitus. Tacitus himself acknowledged that malice masquerades as free speech, and, since we are all in favour of free speech, any contrary view to Tacitus' must be damned as servile panegyric'.³ It is, in fact, to our own advantage when reconstructing the history of the early empire that we should have a text like Velleius', otherwise we would be left *only* with the equally biased account of Tacitus to recreate Tiberius' reign. However much inclined we might feel to identify with one or the other version, there is no need to choose between Tacitus and Velleius: neither of them is – or rather, can be – wholly impartial.

Velleius constitutes my third choice to exemplify '*Virtus* in History' since he represents a twofold phenomenon during the early years of the principate. On the one hand, he incarnates the spirit of his time: a man of action, a soldier and then, one who was rewarded for his years of service with political posts in Rome. Velleius feels free not to conceal his recent origin; he, like many other *homines novi*, is aware of the possibility of climbing to the highest levels of the Roman society of the time. He does not idealize the past; he is fully satisfied with the new regime, which he firmly believes to be the dawning of a much better era. Disciplined, courageous and proud of the empire that he has contributed to make great, Velleius highlights in some of his contemporaries such qualities as had been placed in the service of the political system of the moment, which he considered to be the most fair and adequate. On the other hand, Velleius represents a change in historical writing. Being part of the Roman historiographical tradition, he is able to express the new attitudes towards history in a very original way. The writing about the events of 27 BC and after brought new challenges to historians as Cassius Dio recognises: 'The events occurring after this time cannot be recorded in the same manner as those of previous times ... Most things that happened began to be kept in secret and concealed ... and much that happens beyond doubt is unknown'.⁴ Tacitus, no doubt, tried to tell his audience precisely these secrets and all the *arcana imperii*. Velleius, instead, decided to tell us what was known and the things people could see. 'The writing of history is an interpretation of various items of evidence... What objection can there be to a historian who recognised the benefits inherent in the imperial

³ Kraus and Woodman, *Latin Historians*, 83.

⁴ Dio, 53.19.2-4.

system and who devoted his rhetorical skills to the production of a corresponding interpretation of events?’⁵ The emperor Tiberius has been assigned a leading role: he is presented as the individual figure who embodies not only the virtues, but also the increasing power of Rome. Velleius displays the natural disproportion of someone who is too near to judge or give an unbiased account of the events.

There is, I think, some reason to believe that there is something ‘refreshing’ in Velleius’ Histories. Even if one does not agree with his point of view or does not like his much criticised style, there is an element of freshness in his work, perhaps related precisely to that particular view and style. The remembrances of a soldier, developed, embellished, but also meditated and pondered upon are a valid testimony of his time that can provide not only useful information that one does not find anywhere else, but also, and most importantly the feelings and emotions felt by a large number of people during the period.

Analysing Velleius’ ‘mini-universal history’,⁶ I will try to show that in his positive portrayal of *virtus*, which is by no means confined only to the republican past, he emphasised the idea of the coming of a new and better era, the Principate. I will stress how Velleius adds and highlights that the Principate had come not just to re-establish peace and order, but to bring back something very important to the Romans: *virtus*. Velleius is hopeful and optimistic. The confidence and optimism of his approach appears all the more valid and justified for him since this era belonged to people like Velleius himself. The *princeps* and the *novi* are the main actors in the principate. It is the *virtus* of the *princeps* and the *novi* which would save the empire from falling and would be able to ‘re-establish’ the Republic. According to him, the principate’s aim was to restore the original place of *virtus* in Roman life. Following and using Augustus’ language of restoration, Velleius is able to create the necessary bridge between republicanism and empire for the achievement of this aim. The reader perhaps will wonder why I devote a summary history of Rome as much space as, say, the *Ab Urbe Condita*, but in terms of my question of transforming *virtus*, they appear both equally interesting.

⁵ Woodman, *Velleius Paterculus: The Tiberian Narrative*, 53.

⁶ I have borrowed this concept from G.V. Sumner, ‘The truth about Velleius Paterculus: Prolegomena’, *HSCP* 74 (1970) 257-97.

1. The *Historiae* and Velleius

The composition and structure of the work reveal the genuine desire of the author to write history and not something else. If Velleius wanted to write Tiberian propaganda – as some have suggested –⁷ it was a bit exaggerated to begin with the Trojan war and the murder of Agamemnon; and there was no actual need to deal with literary geniuses of Greece and Rome. Even though the second book is entirely dedicated to Roman affairs, it is clear that Velleius aimed at a broader scope than the typical approach to Roman history.

The excursuses are another proof that he was not only interested in Roman undertakings. At the end of book one, Velleius considers why genius flourishes so briefly in history and he points out the different achievements in both Greek and Roman literature trying to give in addition an explanation for these events.⁸ Greek philosophers, chronologies, foundation of colonies and constitutional changes in Athens found space in Velleius' work and it is precisely in this combination of elements where we can recognise the desire to write a universal history.

The blend of universal history with literary and cultural history was somewhat original. It is possible to find models for the details of Velleius' work, but not for the overall design. On the one hand, there were some works which touched on literary history but did not deal with the foreign as well as the internal affairs, such as the 'Chronographies' of Erathostenes or the writings of Apollodorus. And on the other, we can find works which dealt with Roman and foreign chronology, but said nothing about literary history like Varro's *De gente populi Romani*. Diodorus Siculus could appear as a possible precursor, although his is a massive work in more than forty books.⁹ As a universal historian, Velleius could be compared only with later authors such as Florus,

⁷ For this view see I. Lana, *Velleio Patercolo o della Propaganda* (Torino, Università di Torino Editrice, 1952) and for the discussion of Velleius as a propagandist, see A.J. Woodman, 'Question of date, genre and style in Velleius: some literary answers', *CQ* 25 (1975) 288-96 and 'Velleius Paterculus' in T.A. Dorey, *Empire and Aftermath: Silver Latin II* (London, Routledge, 1975) 8-13.

⁸ Cf. Vell, 1.16-8.

⁹ For the characteristics of 'universal history' and Diodorus' universalism, see K. Clarke, 'Universal Perspectives in Historiography', in C.S. Kraus (ed.), *The Limits of Historiography* (Leiden, Brill, 1999) 251-79.

Sulpicius Severus, Eutropius and Orosius.¹⁰ Regarding the genre, Velleius did not follow just one model, he got ideas and inspiration from several and he is original in inaugurating his 'own' genre.

An interesting point about this universal history is that it is not just an ordinary summary or compendium hastily collected by an army officer; the actual result goes beyond the work written to commemorate the elevation of M. Vinicius as consul in AD 30. In spite of the defects that scholarship has stressed, Velleius' work is surprisingly successful as a very readable abridgement of Roman history. Summaries or synopsis are usually little more than a framework or a skeleton, but he has managed to give life to the events through his enthusiasm and interest in the human side of the characters and his personal outlook to judge history.

Most probably Velleius knew that he was not writing a literary masterpiece but a book that would contain an account of the history of the ancient world. This history is rather practical in nature, for 'daily use', written for people who had neither the patience nor the curiosity nor the time to read, say, Livy. This history is addressed to a different type of reader, who has different needs. Probably the highly educated Romans had no need for Velleius' history, but perhaps there was a need for this kind of work among those who, like him, because of the war, had been stationed in remote lands with no access to books, or among people from the provinces and *homines novi*, who were gradually acquiring more political weight in Rome and were interested in knowing its history.

To say that 'the traditional environment of Roman historiography was long lost', and that 'it would be almost another century before Tacitus, would reconcile in a skilful way the problems that the new age presented for Roman historiography',¹¹ is indeed very misleading. Rome did produce new answers for the new challenges of historical writing, and that response, even if it does not coincide with our modern taste, was a valid one.

¹⁰ For a comparison of these authors and Velleius see Woodman, 'Question of date, genre, style in Velleius', 284-286.

¹¹ M. Toher, 'Augustus and the Evolution of Roman Historiography' in K.A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (eds.), *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1990) 153.

Velleius gave an answer to the question of how to write history under the principate. General history, cultural history, contemporary history: all wrapped up in what was going to develop as the imperial rhetoric. He included an excursus about colonisation in and outside Italy,¹² literary digressions, and cultural remarks, almost all in the same stroke of the pen.¹³ But what is perhaps his main achievement is the realisation and consequent implementation of the idea that the history of the principate and the life of its head constituted a unity. In the years after AD 14, it was not easy to separate the life and the personality of the ruler from the development of the state and the processes of government. And if the characters of individuals had always appeared to be the causes of historical events,¹⁴ it was all the more necessary for the historian now to provide a full illustration of such characters in order to make sense of those events.

Thus, for the latter part of his research, in which he dealt mainly with the deeds of the princeps, Velleius not only consulted the official documents such as the *acta senatus*, *acta publica* and imperial archives, but also the current biographies that were available. He was certainly not short of material for Augustus' life, and it is quite likely that he had read the autobiography of the *princeps* – *Commentarii de vita sua* –¹⁵ and Nicolaus of Damascus' biography – *bios Kaisaros* – but perhaps in the first place the *Res Gestae*. This text, engraved on big bronze tablets in front of the Mausoleum of Augustus was difficult to avoid. The description of the new buildings and restorations of old ones – given in all detail by Augustus in the *Res Gestae* –,¹⁶ the games,¹⁷ the wars in

¹² Cf. Vell, 1.14 and 2.7.7-8. For provinces annexed later to the empire see 2.38-9. For a detailed chronology of the colonisation see J. De Wever, 'Recherches sur la chronologie de Velleius Paterculus pour la fin du IV siècle avant notre ère', *Latomus* 28 (1969) 380-385.

¹³ Cf. Vell, 2.9 and 2.36. In the latter, there is a list of these talented men in the different branches of literature: historians, poets, orators, etc., only one man is omitted: Horace. This silence is difficult to explain; on the one hand, Horace was too famous to have been forgotten and on the other, it cannot be said that Velleius had been careless in this kind of details. R. J. Goar, 'Horace, Velleius and Tiberius Caesar', *Latomus* 25 (1976) 45-53, postulates that Tiberius may have looked with displeasure on two poems of Horace composed many years before Velleius wrote his history, in which Tiberius and his brother Drusus were the subject: *Odes* 4.4 and 4.14. He suggests that Tiberius in his old age was extremely jealous of his reputation and very sensitive to unflattering remarks and could have felt offended by Horace's odes. Perhaps we can say that the omission of Horace is as inexplicable as that of Plautus and Ennius in the first literary excursus of the second book.

¹⁴ As Cicero suggests in *De Or*, 2.63.

¹⁵ The existence of this work is attested by Suet. *Aug*, 85.1.

¹⁶ Cf. *Res Gestae*, 19-21.

¹⁷ Cf. *Res Gestae*, 23.

Dalmatia, Pannonia and Germania,¹⁸ find a faithful echo in Velleius' account of Augustus' principate.¹⁹ We can also find similitude of vocabulary for the expression of key ideas, for example, for the definition of the function of the triumvirate: *populus autem ... me ... triumvirum rei publicae constituendae creavit*.²⁰ The Augustan sentence is almost the same as the one in Velleius and it seemed quite practical for describing this complex political arrangement: *qui triumvir fuerat rei publicae constituendae*.²¹

Regarding the style, Velleius' work displays the typical Ciceronian *abundantia*, but there is also a renewal and transformation in the vocabulary. He incorporates Hellenisms²² and words that have not been recorded in works prior to his usage.²³ The abundance of superlatives²⁴ along with the hyperboles²⁵ give to the narrative a tragic tone, which was common in declamatory practice. A very significant example of this emphatic and rhetorical style is when Velleius addresses Antony after Cicero's death: *Nihil tamen egisti, M. Antoni (cogit enim excedere propositi formam operas erumpens animo ac pectore indignatio), nihil, inquam, egisti*.²⁶

There are many Livian words and expressions in Velleius' work. The classical tradition pointed to Cicero and Livy. But it is Sallust to whom he turns for help not only

¹⁸ Cf. *Res Gestae*, 25-33.

¹⁹ Cf. Vell, 2.81.3; 2.93.1; 2.90; 2.96-7 respectively. For a more detailed account of the parallels with the *Res Gestae* see Hellegouarc'h – Jodry, 'Les Res Gestae d'Auguste et l'Historia Romana de Velleius Paterculus', *Latomus* 31 (1980) 803-16.

²⁰ *Res Gestae*, 1.4.

²¹ Vell, 2.88.1. The first chapter of the *Res Gestae* shows remarkable parallels as well: R.G.1: *Annos undeviginti natus exercitum privato consilio et privata impensa comparavi, per quem rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi. Eo nomine senatus ... me adlegit C. Pansa et A. Hirtio ... et imperium mihi dedit. Res publica ne quid detrimenti caperet me pro pretore simul cum consulibus providere iussit*. Vell, 2.61: *Torpebat oppressa dominatione Antonii civitas ... cum C. Caesar undevicesimum annum ingressus ... Privato consilio maiorem senatu pro re publica animum habuit. Eum senatus ... pro praetore una cum consulibus designates Hirtio et Pansa bellum cum Antonio iussit*.

²² E.g. *tetrarchs* 2.51.1; *naumachia* 2.56.1; *acanthus* 2.56.2; *tyrannus* 2.58.2; *thyrsus* and *cothurnus* 2.82.4; *aspis* 2.87.1; *balineum* 2.114.2; *athleta* 2.123.1.

²³ E.g. *celsitudo* 2.94.2; *favorabilis* 2.34.2, and 2.40.2; *praedatio* 2.73.2; *patratio* 2.98.2 and *transcursus* 2.55.1; 2.86.1; 2.99.4. This affirmation, of course, can only be relative if we have in mind how much of Sallust or Livy is lost.

²⁴ E.g. in Pompey's description: *cupidissimus... peritissimus... modestissimus... fidelissimus... facillimus* 2.29.3. And also: *cruentissimus* 2.52.3; *distractissimus* 2.114.1; *fulgentissimus* 2.71.1; *perfectissimus* 1.5.2.

²⁵ E.g. the frequent use of adjective such as *atrox* 2.15.2; 2.16.14; 2.21.3; 2.46.2; 2.55.3 or the phrases like: *super humanam et naturam et fidem evectu* 2.41.1; *excedente humanam fidem temeritate* 2.51.3; *eminetissima et per omnia deis quam hominibus similior femina* 2.130.5.

²⁶ Vell, 2.66.3-5. Leeman has harshly commented about this chapter: 'I know no better example of the abominable Asianistic deviations of the New Style in its most corrupt form', in *Orationis Ratio*, 250.

in expressing some key ideas – such as the *metus hostilis*,²⁷ or his thoughts about theory of history–,²⁸ but also in the expression of some sentences which are in noticeably Sallustian style.²⁹ With his *aemulumque Thucydidis Sallustium*,³⁰ Velleius is presenting Sallust as the great master of historical writing in Roman letters as Thucydides had been in the Greek ones. His admiration is clear, even though both historians were very dissimilar in temperament and technique.

One feature that does appear in both authors is *brevitas*. Velleius repeatedly refers to the haste and the speed with which he writes: *in hac tam praecipiti festinatione* or *quamlibet festinantem*.³¹ This is not just a rhetorical device; what a historian had in mind when he talked about speed was something very precise and it was certainly a ‘virtue’. In Greek criticism Dionysius of Halicarnassus praises Thucydides for his speed and his brevity.³² Quintilian does exactly the same with Sallust: *immortalem Sallusti velocitatem* and *illa Sallustiana brevitatis*.³³ Considering that neither Thucydides nor Sallust wrote in any physical haste, it seems more likely that this speed and brevity are more related to ‘the technical ways of describing the selection of material or the pruning down of subject-matter, and Velleius’ references to precisely these two features of his work need not imply fast writing in the literal sense at all’.³⁴ Speed was also advised by Lucian when the information and data were too extensive.³⁵ Brevity consisted more in the ability to say everything that was required but in as few words as possible than in leaving some events out in order to cut down one’s narrative. For this purpose, Velleius acquired the habit of narrating an event in a single unit – sometimes even in a single

²⁷ Cf. Vell, 2.1.1 = Sall. *Hist*, 1.12.

²⁸ Cf. Vell, 2.92.5 = Sall. *BC*, 3.2.

²⁹ E.g. Vell, 2.4.4: *fugaret ac funderet* = Sall. *BJ*, 21, 2: *fugant funduntque*; 2.112.7: *dignum furore suo habuit exitum* = Sall. *BC*, 55.6: *dignum moribus factisque suis exitum*.

³⁰ Vell, 2.36.2.

³¹ Vell, 1.16.1 and 2.41.1 respectively. Also 2.108.2: *nulla festinatio huius viri metionem transgredi debet*; 2.124.1: *neque mihi tam festinanti exprimere vacat*.

³² Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Thucydides*, especially 24 and 53.

³³ Quint. *Inst*, 10.1.2 and 4.2.45 respectively.

³⁴ Woodman, ‘Questions of date, genre and style in Velleius’, 280. For Hellegouarc’h, however, haste and rush are interpreted literally, because Velleius had to finish before the consulship of Vinicius was over: ‘l’hâte est un élément fondamental de l’établissement et de l’interprétation du texte’, in ‘Lire et comprendre. Quelques remarques sur le texte de l’Histoire Romaine de Velleius Paterculus’, *REL* 54 (1976) 241.

³⁵ Lucian, *How to write History* 56: ‘Rapidity is everywhere useful, especially if there is no lack of material’.

sentence.³⁶ The technique responds to the desire of the author to cover as much as possible within the smallest possible space. ‘It is also probably related to the Romans’ fondness for brief, self-contained exempla’.³⁷

Velleius’ style is most criticised when dealing with the emperor Tiberius. There is an undeniably panegyric tone in this part of the narrative. Our notion of panegyric has been affected by the fact that the concept has changed from the literary genre widely cultivated in Rome at that time which followed certain well-defined rules, to the political pamphlet – often of mediocre quality – praising somebody exaggeratedly. But the panegyric understood in its original meaning could be traced to the old institution of the *laudatio funebris* and in the custom by which the consuls entering their office thanked the people for having voted for them. Also, it is possible to find in some of Cicero’s speeches the development and extent of the eulogy in honour of people who were dead or still alive, for example *De Imp. Cn Pompei* in praise of Pompey and of Caesar in the *Pro Marcello*. By Velleius’ time, the praise was coming to be exclusively reserved for the emperor.

In the brief synopsis of Tiberius’ reign, Velleius is trying to list the various good qualities which Tiberius has restored: ‘*revocata in forum fides ... sepultaeque ac situ obsitae iustitia, aequitas, industria civitati redditae; accessit magistratibus auctoritas, senatui maiestas, iudiciis gravitas*’.³⁸ The key word here is *revocata*. Restoration is the main achievement of Tiberius as it had been his predecessor’s as well. The almost identical statement given some chapters before confirms that Tiberius was being faithful to the wishes of his political father: ‘*revocata pax ... restituta vis legibus, iudiciis auctoritas, senatui maiestas, imperium magistratum ad pristinum redactum modum ... prisca illa et antiqua rei publicae forma revocata*’.³⁹

It seemed quite normal for Velleius to praise Tiberius acknowledging his ‘continuation policy’. If Augustus’ reign had been a model of peace and prosperity, what else could Roman people desire than the prolongation of it? But also, can we really say that Velleius was making things up in his compliments to the emperor? Was it not true

³⁶ Cf. especially 2.89.3; 2.126.2.

³⁷ J. R. Starr, ‘Velleius’ literary techniques in the organization of his history’, *TAPA* 110 (1980) 295.

³⁸ Vell, 2.126.

³⁹ Vell, 2.89.

that strife had been banished from the forum and the senate, that the magistrates had regained their authority and the courts their dignity after years of instability, civil wars and anomalous leadership with the triumvirs? After Augustus' death, Rome could have gone back to all this, instead peace and normality was the inheritance of the *princeps*' reign.⁴⁰ The panegyric element is then, more than the facts, the tone in which these facts are presented. It is that amplified note, those highly coloured descriptions and the melodramatic scenes that make the 'Tiberian narrative' appear to be a panegyric.

Thus, when Velleius' critical appraisals describe this section as a panegyric of Tiberius Caesar, they are in some sense correct. It is the term used in literary criticism for this kind of style. 'Once we know that Velleius set out to write a miniature panegyric, we should not be surprised that he has expressed himself in a manner appropriate to panegyric. We must not be annoyed that he issues a rhetorical question ... or praises Tiberius for being an example... These are the rules of the game'.⁴¹

The work finishes with a prayer: *voto finiendum volumen est*.⁴² In it, Velleius has captured the language and style of the public and political prayers, common in the panegyric tradition, but also manifests his anxiety towards the future; he asks the gods with insistence to look after Rome: *custodite, servate, protegite hunc statum, hanc pacem, hunc principem*.⁴³ It appears evident that this invocation to Jupiter and Mars, which could also be interpreted as the natural final point for the Tiberian section, is a testimony of Velleius' feelings of the awareness of a certain crisis to come: hostility arising from different sectors had made the political situation deteriorate, there were signs of disquiet which Velleius does not refrain from acknowledging.⁴⁴ In this ending *votum*, Velleius has in mind not just the emperor, but above all the *salus populi Romani*. The final objective of the prayer, within the sincere praise to the emperor Tiberius, is the

⁴⁰ E. Gabba, 'The Historians and Augustus', in Millar, F. and Segal, E. (eds.), *Augustus, seven aspects* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984) 82, believes that 'at the cost of contradicting Sir Ronald Syme, Velleius gives us a better idea than Tacitus of the atmosphere in Rome at the moment of the death of Augustus; it was a moment of fear and confusion. It was the *maiestas* of Tiberius, admitted even by Tacitus (*Ann*, 1.46.2; 1.47.2), which calmed men's fears and evaporated the dangers'.

⁴¹ Woodman, 'Questions of date, genre and style in Velleius', 293, and for a full argumentation on panegyric especially against Syme and Velleius' other critics cf. 288-303.

⁴² Vell, 2.131.1. For more on the *votum*, see E. Noè, 'Il *votum* in Velleio Patercolo', *Athenaeum* N.S. 61 (1983) 272-5.

⁴³ Vell, 2.131.2

⁴⁴ The emperor's retirement to Capri, the increasing influence of Sejanus, etc.

Roman empire, which assumes the central and teleological point in the historian's perspective.

I have dealt with the style and special features of the *Historiae* at greater length than I have done with other works in previous chapters, because I believe that with these singular characteristics the author is trying to express the tricky balance of change and continuity. On the one hand, he was the successor of the classical tradition, transmitted by the schools of rhetoric with a mainly Ciceronian formation, and on the other, he can also be placed as a predecessor of Seneca, Tacitus and the Silver Latin authors. He is situated 'à l'orée d'un style nouveau qui porte la marque du stoïcisme et favorise la fragmentation de la phrase et la *brevitas*'.⁴⁵

2. The Role of *Virtus* in Velleius

Velleius shares some of his hope with Livy. But the former has a more pronounced optimism in the present, which expresses itself in an enthusiastic eagerness to describe all the benefits of the regime he is experiencing. 'Velleio è il rappresentante di quelle classi emergenti dell'impero che si identificano con la politica imperiale che ne ha garantito e ne salvaguarda il successo'.⁴⁶ He did not see the end of the Republic as the end of the most glorious time of Rome; in the principate, he found the maximum expression of power of the Roman empire. The battle for political *libertas* as the aristocrats understood it was not Velleius' problem. He, of course, praises Cicero's fight against Antony and speaks with respect of Brutus and Cassius, but he appears somehow more alien to the *libertas senatus* as a conception possibly elaborated in the most traditionalist circles of the senate. It is this group, 'who identified republican freedom with their own pre-eminent position; it is they who linked playing a part in decision-making with freedom of opinion and the ability to write history truthfully; these were men, in fact, accustomed to make and to write history'.⁴⁷ Velleius appeared as part of a

⁴⁵ J. Hellegouarc'h, *Velleius Paterculus: Histoire Romaine* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1982) lxiii.

⁴⁶ E. Noè, *Storiografia imperiale pretacitiana: Linee di svolgimento* (Firenze, La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1984) 95.

⁴⁷ Gabba, 'The historians and Augustus', 79.

new generation who would also be – or at least aim to be – responsible for this double mission.

I will try to show how the praises of men of *virtus* in Velleius have an ‘ideological’ element. Velleius talks about the achievements of the Roman people, which tend towards the justification of the regime ‘in una prospettiva di continuità rispetto alla tradizione della res publica e di rottura con il modello degenerato di essa’.⁴⁸ The people must be understood as the *nobilitas* and the *homines novi*. To these latter Velleius devotes most of his energies trying to describe the role they have played in the Roman expansion and the consolidation of the new political system. The significance of the important responsibility that Velleius attributes to the *homines novi* was part of his political understanding of the mission of the principate. Thus, the antithesis *nobiles* – *homines novi* becomes evident when this new emergent group is the one which displays the fidelity to Roman values and the *mos maiorum* that the *nobiles* had traditionally claimed, and in which the principate had established its ideological foundation. This appears then, to be very much in line with the combination of traditionalism and innovation which characterises the principate.

For I. Lana, the exaltation of the *homines novi* was the main feature of Velleius’ work. With this technique the historian would have been putting all his effort in validating and supporting Tiberius’ chief policy.⁴⁹ But the praise for the *homines novi* should not be understood in complete and absolute opposition to his view of the *nobilitas*. In fact, there are moments when the compliments are for the aristocrats, as families such as the Domitii,⁵⁰ and the Caecilii,⁵¹ or as individuals such as Metellus,⁵² Scipio Nasica⁵³ and Pompey.⁵⁴ Velleius is interested in merits and these noble men are praised for their real *virtus*; their nobility or high birth is given as an extra reference.

The characters in Velleius’ history are evaluated according neither to their social class nor to their political position, but solely and uniquely according to their *virtus* or

⁴⁸ De Vivo, ‘Luxuria et mos maiorum indirizzi programmatici della storiografia velleiana’, *Vichiana* 13 (1984) 260.

⁴⁹ Cf. Lana, *Velleio Patercolo*, especially chap. II: ‘Tiberio favorisce gli uomini nuovi’ and chap. IV: ‘Velleio esalta gli uomini nuovi’.

⁵⁰ Vell, 2.10.2.

⁵¹ Vell, 2.11.3.

⁵² Vell, 1.11.2.

⁵³ Vell, 2.3.2.

⁵⁴ Vell, 2.29.1-5.

vitium. Thus, Quinctilius Varus suffers the disaster in Germany for his incapacity and lack of *virtus*: ‘more accustomed to the leisure of the camp than to actual service in war (...) he entered the rich province a poor man, but he left it a rich man and the province poor’.⁵⁵ The same can be said about M. Lollius, who was defeated in Pannonia because of his multiple *vitia*: ‘a man who was ever more eager for money than for honest action and of vicious habits in spite of his excessive efforts at concealment’.⁵⁶ Therefore, he had to be replaced by Drusus, whose *virtus* was remarkable: ‘a young man endowed with as many great virtues as men’s nature is capable of receiving or application of developing’.⁵⁷

Members of the *nobilitas* such as Perpenna, Clodius or Curio are criticized not because Velleius wanted only to praise *homines novi*, but for their actual lack of *virtus*. Thus, Perpenna was ‘more distinguished for his birth than for his character’,⁵⁸ Clodius was described as a ‘man of noble birth, who recognized no limits either in speech or in action except his own caprice, energetic in the execution of his wicked projects, of ill-repute and accused of adulterous profanation of the most sacred rites of the Roman people’,⁵⁹ and Curio was blamed for his *ambitio*: ‘no wealth and no pleasures sufficed to satiate his appetites’.⁶⁰

It is true that praise for the *homines novi* is more frequent than that for the aristocrats. This could be seen as support for the imperial policies of Augustus and Tiberius, but also because Velleius himself, being a *homo novus*, was more aware of the great men who appeared within his own group and were elevated to high position because of their *virtus*. In his general tribute to these *homines novi*, Velleius strongly affirms that the real nobles are the best people, and this had nothing to do with birth: ‘the senate and the Roman people regard as most noble that which is best’.⁶¹ This idea had

⁵⁵ Vell, 2.117.2: For I. Lana, Velleius is harsher with the members of the nobility, looking for excuses to criticise them: ‘Si presentava pertanto un’occasione opportuna per mostrare la decadenza dell’antico patriziato: quest’uomo, Quintilio Varo’, *Velleio Patercolo*, 116.

⁵⁶ Vell, 2.97.1.

⁵⁷ Vell, 2.97.2.

⁵⁸ Vell, 2.30.1.

⁵⁹ Vell, 2.45.1.

⁶⁰ Vell, 2.48.3. It is striking the way Velleius describes Clodius and Curio, using the same words for both. Clodius: *homo nobilis, disertus, audax*, and Curio: *vir nobilis, eloquens, audax*.

⁶¹ Vell, 2.128.1: *senatus populusque Romani es putandi, quod optimum sit, esse nobilissimum*.

already been said in similar terms by Cicero and Sallust.⁶² Once again we see that *virtus* was something personal, not a prerogative or attribute of a social class. The examples of prominent and distinguished *homines novi* are numerous: Laelius, Agrippa, Statilius Taurus, Tiberius Coruncarius, Spurius Carvilius, Marcus Cato, Mummius, Gaius Marius, Cicero, Asinius Pollio.⁶³ Among all these Velleius points out his favourites: Cato and Cicero. His eloquence in their description is at its best; about the latter he says: ‘the conspiracy was detected by the extraordinary courage,⁶⁴ firmness and careful vigilance of the consul Marcus Cicero, a man who owed his elevation wholly to himself, who had ennobled his lowly birth, who was as distinguished in his life as he was great in genius, and who saved us from being vanquished in intellectual accomplishments by those whom we had vanquished in arms’.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Cato ‘resembled Virtue herself (...) he never did a right action solely for the sake of seeming to do the right, but because he could not do otherwise’.⁶⁶

A very striking point in Velleius’ illustration of characters is his presentation of Julius Caesar and the avoidance of the word *virtus*. A long description is given to us and it appears as if Velleius was consciously evading the use of it; other qualities are mentioned, but we do not find *virtus* anywhere: ‘sprung from the noble family of the Julii, and tracing his descent from Venus and Anchises (...) he surpassed all his fellow-citizens in beauty of person. He was exceedingly keen and vigorous of mind, lavish in his generosity, and possessed a courage exceeding the nature, and even the credence of man’.⁶⁷ Even when he talks about his courage, a Caesarian quality indeed, Velleius does not mention the word *virtus* and prefers *animus*.⁶⁸ The name of Caesar is in Velleius always associated with *fortuna*, not with *virtus*.⁶⁹ In nine different situations the author points out his *fortuna*,⁷⁰ and he also stresses the main quality of it: *sua*.⁷¹ It was Caesar’s

⁶² Cf. Cic. *Pro Sest.*, 138 and Sall. *BJ*, 85.15.

⁶³ Cf. Vell, 2.12-8.

⁶⁴ *Singulari virtute*.

⁶⁵ Vell, 2.34.3. The similarity of the last sentence with Horace’s *Graecia capta...* is remarkable, and it is even more so if we remember that Velleius did not mention Horace in his list of poets (cf. 2.36.3).

⁶⁶ Vell, 2.35.2. Cf. Sall. *BC*, 54.6.

⁶⁷ Vell, 2.41.1: *hic nobilissima Iuliorum genitus familia (...) forma omnium civium excellentissimus, vigore animi acerrimus, munificentia effusissimus, animo super humanam et naturam et fidem evectus*.

⁶⁸ Cf. OLD, *animus* 13.

⁶⁹ This reminds us of Sallust and his use of *fortuna* rather than *virtus* to characterise Marius. As I have mentioned above, Sallust himself never attributes *virtus* to Marius, but always through others.

⁷⁰ Cf. 2.43.2; 2.47.2; 2.51.2; 2.55.1; 2.55.2; 2.55.3; 2.55.4; 2.57.3; 2.60.1.

habitual good luck which arose envy and jealousy in his enemies, and it was also by *sua fortuna* that he triumphed over the Gauls, in Spain and against Pompey.⁷² It can be concluded that on this occasion the silence of the author tells us even more than if he had said openly what he really thought.

The approach to Sejanus is another interesting case. The eulogy with which Velleius presents the prefect of the praetorian cohorts, has been used to demonstrate the historian's servility towards the emperor and his *adiutor*.⁷³ But Velleius' portrayal is far from straightforward praise: 'he combined with loyalty to his master great capacity for labour, and possessed a well-knit body to match the energy of his mind; stern but yet gay, cheerful but yet strict; busy, yet always seeming to be at leisure (...) calm in expression and in his life, though his mind is sleeplessly alert'.⁷⁴ It is worth pointing out that some of these characteristics given by Velleius are also found in Tacitus.⁷⁵ Of course the attitude with which the two authors deal with this *homo novus* is very different, but the reference in both to his vigorous mind which did not rest,⁷⁶ and the sharp allusion to his dissimulation,⁷⁷ show that the two descriptions coincide in the main ideas. The endurance of the man also finds parallels in Livy's portrait of Hannibal and Sallust's Catiline.⁷⁸ Woodman and Sumner agree about the little attraction that Velleius would have had to Sejanus, and the evidence these authors give to sustain the affirmation that Velleius was not 'Sejanus' toady,⁷⁹ is subtle but real. According to them, Velleius was not so interested in praising Sejanus, but in justifying Tiberius' treatment of him. If we look carefully at his description we can read between the lines a certain ambiguity in the compliments the historian makes. *Simplicitas*, a very Roman *virtus*, is found nowhere. Sejanus is a complex man and so we have a complex portrait

⁷¹ Different places: *fortunam suam*, *sua fortuna*, etc.

⁷² Cf. Vell, 2.41-58.

⁷³ See especially Syme, *Tacitus*, 368. Hellegouarc'h, 'L'éloge de Séjan dans L'Histoire Romaine de Velleius Paterculus', *Colloques Histoire et Historiographie, Clio* (1980) 152, instead, rejects the use of terms like panegyric or eulogy because for him 'c'est Tibère, et lui seul, qui est loué; l'éloge de Séjan se rattache au discours que tenaient depuis longtemps déjà les *homines novi* pour assurer leur promotion'.⁷³ For further discussion on this point see Sumner, 'The truth about Velleius Paterculus', 295-6.

⁷⁴ Vell, 2.127.3-4.

⁷⁵ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 4.1.

⁷⁶ Cf. 2.127.4: *vigori animi ... animo exsomnem* = Tac. *Ann*, 4.1: *animus audax ... saepius vigilans*;

⁷⁷ Cf. 2.127.4 = Tac. *Ann*, 4.1: *palam compositus pudor, intus summa aspiciendi libido*.

⁷⁸ Cf. Livy, 21.4 and Sall. *BC*, 5.1-5.

⁷⁹ Cf. Sumner, 'The Truth about Velleius Paterculus', 296.

of him. The contrasts and antithesis in his personality should be a warning of the man himself and his projects: *virum severitatis laetissimae, hilaritatis priscae, actu otiosis simillimum ... vultu vitaeque tranquillum, animo exsomnia*.⁸⁰ Velleius could not have written something openly against the man who was climbing up so swiftly and whose power and influence could do anything to defeat his enemies. 'But the historian's tone is tense, uneasy and ambivalent'.⁸¹ We have not met in his narrative any ambiguous or uncertain characterization; in all of them we find a clear moral judgement: *virtus* and *vitium* had been the clear parameters. But when we get to Sejanus we start to doubt: where is the *virtus* of a man who seems to be something that he is not? Even if the qualities he is hiding are good ones, real *virtus* has nothing to do with concealment.⁸²

Sumner has still more arguments to prove Velleius' distaste for the prefect. If Velleius really wanted to praise Sejanus, why was the work not dedicated to him? Why did he not wait to celebrate Sejanus' consulship? And above all, why does the historian finish his work with that plea for caution particularly concerning succession? 'Grant him [Tiberius] successors until the latest time, but successors whose shoulders may be as capable of sustaining bravely the empire of the world as we have found his to be: foster the pious plans of all good citizens and crush the impious designs of the wicked'.⁸³ These words could be interpreted as a clear and direct hint about Sejanus' intentions, or his fears for the system of inherited power, but this would be no more than speculation. What we can say for sure is that Velleius shows a certain ambivalence in Sejanus' portrayal. He could not say something unsympathetic about the second man of the empire; he had to say that he possessed *virtus* – that was the rule if he wanted to praise somebody – but the results are atypical: too much justification of the emperor's decision to promote Sejanus, too many contradictory terms to describe one man: perhaps it is the first time that Velleius is not absolutely sure about his own judgement and he cannot avoid transmitting this feeling.

The concept of *virtus* plays a key role in Velleius' history. It is placed always in the centre of the narrative; it is the constant, the unchanging factor of Roman history to

⁸⁰ Vell, 2.127.4.

⁸¹ Sumner, 'The Truth about Velleius Paterculus', 294.

⁸² As we will see in Tacitus' account of the emperor Tiberius.

⁸³ Vell, 2.131.2.

which all the characters converge. Nobody can escape from this judgement, because it is the only valid description. Nobody can deceive it, because it sees through the individual's life and discovers everything. *Virtus*, being somewhat asleep in the late Republic, wakes up with more vigour with the advent of the Principate.

a) The Struggle between *virtus* and *fortuna*

Virtus in Velleius – as in other Roman writers – seems to have a dangerous adversary in *fortuna*. All the more treacherous because of its complexity. They work together, helping one another, and they work against, mutually destroying their projects. To some extent, *virtus* appears as independent of *fortuna*, but on the other hand they are deeply related since no one can triumph having *virtus* but lacking *fortuna*.

One of the most interesting views of the relationship *virtus* – *fortuna* was the one given by Sallust. As a champion of the old morality he proposed that if a man had pure *virtus*, he did not need *fortuna* at all, for he could reverse its dominion by the power of the qualities he possessed: *neque fortuna eget!*⁸⁴ A man 'needs no fortune, since fortune can neither give to any man honesty, diligence, and other good qualities, nor can she take them away'.⁸⁵ *Virtus* seemed to characterise the potency of very few men who could successfully control any circumstance in their lives. This was the main feature of former times; for the genuine republicans 'no labour was unfamiliar, nor region too rough or too steep, no armed foeman was terrible: *virtus omnia domuerat*'.⁸⁶

For Cicero however, a successful man needed both *virtus* and *fortuna*, for this latter gave support to the former. Pompey's success cannot be explained only on the basis of his *virtus*, *fortuna* had also its share.⁸⁷ And in the *Pro Marcello* he goes even further and states that fortune had more influence on the course of the events at war.⁸⁸

In Livy's work *virtus* is frequently associated with *fortuna*. For him the determinant factors at war would be the *virtus* of the soldiers, the *ingenium* of the

⁸⁴ Sall, *BJ*, 1.3.

⁸⁵ Sall. *BJ*, 1.3.

⁸⁶ Sall. *BC*, 7.5.

⁸⁷ Cic. *De Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 64.

⁸⁸ Cic. *Pro Marc.* 6.

commanders and finally *fortuna*. But this hierarchy was not immutable; *fortuna* could at times come in the first place and in this way be unfair to man because it does not differentiate between good men and bad men in carrying out its design or it could be associated with the gods, whose favour could be won.

A different view – not very flattering to the Roman *virtus* – was the one held by Pompeius Trogus and Plutarch. In his *Historiae Philippicae*, Trogus affirms: *sed Macedonas Romana fortuna vicit*.⁸⁹ Thus, he declares that the conquest of Macedonia was not a consequence of the Roman *virtus*.⁹⁰ For Plutarch, it was also *fortuna* which prevailed more than *virtus* in the Roman expansion, but he concludes by acknowledging the role of both *virtus* and *fortuna* in the consolidation of the empire.⁹¹

The association of these two concepts in Velleius happens quite frequently.⁹² This rate of occurrence is not a coincidence; it expresses the historian's particular interpretation of events. For him, *fortuna*, as an irrational force, may turn out to be unfair in the distribution of favours; *virtus*, on the contrary, complies with the laws of fairness, and can sometimes rectify *fortuna*, but is insufficient by nature to serve as a valid barrier to adverse fortune. For instance in the case of the death of Pompey: *discordante fortuna*⁹³ or the failures of Aelius Lamia and Aulus Licinius: 'would that it had not been demonstrated by greater proofs how mighty an influence fortune wields in all things',⁹⁴ the results are not according to the *virtus* of the individuals, and their defeats are explained just by *fortuna*. The example of the end of Brutus offers to us a different type of situation in which *fortuna* disappears because *virtus* was abandoned before: 'this was the end reserved by fortune for the party of Marcus Brutus, he (...) had kept his soul free from corruption until this day, which through the rashness of a single act, bereft him

⁸⁹ Pomp. Trogus, *Hist Phil*, 30, 4, 16.

⁹⁰ Cf. J.M. Alonso-Núñez, *La Historia Universal de Pompeyo Trogo* (Madrid, Ediciones Clásicas S.A., 1992) 107: 'Fue la *fortuna*, no la *virtus* la que decidió este cambio político, lo que revela una interpretación no muy halagadora para Roma'.

⁹¹ Cf. A. Momigliano, 'Livio, Plutarco e Giustino su virtù e fortuna dei Romani', *Athenaeum* n.s. 12.1 (1934) 501-12. For the role of *fortuna* in Tacitus, see J. Lacroix, 'Fatum et Fortuna dans l'oeuvre de Tacite', *REL* 29 (1951) 247-64.

⁹² There are some references of both concepts together, *virtus* and *fortuna*: 2.4.2; 2.18.1; 2.35.1-2; 2.74.4; 2.79.5; 2.80.1; 2.97.4; 2.121.1. The word *fortuna* appears in total more than 70 times in the *Historiae*.

⁹³ Vell, 2.53.3.

⁹⁴ Vell, 2.116.3: *utinam non maioribus experimentis testatum esset, quantum in omni re fortuna posset*.

together with his life, of all his virtuous qualities'.⁹⁵ A causal connection appears then: he, who had forsaken *virtus*, did not have the right to *fortuna* anymore.

On the other hand, Velleius considered that *fortuna* could experience some sort of modification or correction through *virtus*: *sed ancipitis fortuna temporis mature virtute correcta*.⁹⁶ Moreover, in some individuals the possession of *virtus* is so perfect that they can control *fortuna*. Such is the case of Cato: 'free from all the failings of mankind he always kept fortune subject to his control'⁹⁷. Of course, this is rather difficult and exceptional. Even Augustus was subject to *fortuna*,⁹⁸ although most of the times he matched good *fortuna* with his *virtus*: *usus Caesar virtute et fortuna sua*.⁹⁹

Throughout the whole of Velleius' work it is possible to observe the practice of diverse virtues by the protagonists of the history of Rome. Velleius' moral interpretation reaches its climax in his account of Tiberius' government, which is presented as the ideal conclusion of the evolution of Roman history because he possessed each and every *virtus*. And so, *fortuna* always accompanied him: *quod is sua et virtute et fortuna administravit*.¹⁰⁰

Thus, according to Velleius, if a man or an empire is everlastingly happy, this is not only due to fortune but also to *virtus*, which is acquired through determination and perseverance. For Velleius, the empire was justified not by the mere fact of its existence or because of its being even a gift of fortune. According to him, because the very foundation of the Roman empire was *virtus*, it had preserved the gods' favour. 'Dans cette perspective, l'histoire de Rome se présente comme un perpétuel combat entre le vice et la vertu'.¹⁰¹

According to M.L. Paladini, it is very risky to conclude that Velleius intended to explain the success of the Roman empire by the possession of *virtus* and not by *fortuna*. For Paladini the frequency with which Velleius uses the terms *virtus* and *fortuna* proves nothing more than his familiarity with a rhetorical *topos*. 'Si tratta di un puro e semplice

⁹⁵ Vell, 2.72.1.

⁹⁶ Vell, 2.79.5.

⁹⁷ Vell, 2.35.2.

⁹⁸ For example when Augustus loses a great part of his fleet near Sicily in 38 BC (2.79.3) or the slaughter of three legions in Germania in AD 9 (2.117.1).

⁹⁹ Vell, 2.74.4. Caesar is here Augustus.

¹⁰⁰ Vell, 2.117.4.

¹⁰¹ J. Hellegouarc'h, 'Le but de l'oeuvre historique de Velleius Paterculus', *Latomus* 23 (1964) 678.

fioretto di retorica che richiama un tema epigrammatico variamente sfruttato, non vi è nessun significato particolarmente profondo, non si può sostenere che l'autore intenda dire come la fortuna da sola non basti ad assicurare il sicuro possesso del potere nè ad un uomo nè ad un impero. Le riflessioni di natura retorica non sono affatto riscattate da un significato politico: esse sono e rimangono tali'.¹⁰²

For I. Lana on the contrary, Velleius would have felt compelled to write a kind of justification of the reality and strength of the empire to refute certain anti-Roman arguments which attributed its *raison d'être* to *fortuna* more than *virtus*.¹⁰³

But the role of *fortuna* explaining the cause of the grandeur of the Roman empire was not something new in the literature and political thought of Rome. Cicero had said something about it before Velleius and perhaps even before those 'anti-Roman arguments'.¹⁰⁴ The doublet *virtus-fortuna* as an explanatory pair had been present in Rome for a long time, but I have dedicated some time to explaining their function in the collective imagination when talking about Velleius precisely to point out that these concepts were not relegated to the narrowest élite who dealt with them as philosophical terms, but on the contrary, these views appeared to be accepted by a broader section of society.¹⁰⁵

Accepted views, but not without contradictions. How was it that *fortuna* had so much power to avenge, to break plans, to do what she wants,¹⁰⁶ and at the same time sometimes she seemed to coincide with and strengthen the power of *virtus*?¹⁰⁷ There was something inexplicable in the development of the events in human life. It was easy to understand the bad fortune of someone wicked and the good fortune of someone virtuous. It seemed perfectly logical. It was a bit more difficult to tackle the problem of the bad men with good fortune. The historians solved it by giving the vicious man if not a bad end, at least a bad reputation after death, which was seen as a well-deserved punishment. But it was virtually impossible to find a solution for the good men having bad luck. It appears as an insoluble mystery of evil. It went beyond Roman rationality,

¹⁰² Paladini, *Studi su Velleio Patercolo*, 454.

¹⁰³ Cf. Lana, *Velleio Patercolo*, 221-7.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Cic. especially *De Imp. Cn. Pomp*, 47; *Ad Fam*, 5.17.5; 10.3.2.

¹⁰⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the topic, see Sarsila, 'Some aspects of the concept of *Virtus*', 45-129.

¹⁰⁶ Vell, 2.119.4 and 2.110.1: *rumpit interdum moratur proposita hominum fortuna*.

¹⁰⁷ Vell, 2.97.4; 2.103.1.

so Romans had to turn to *fortuna*; she is blind and does not look where she hits.¹⁰⁸ Even the power of the gods seemed not to count when fortune was around. Velleius, very much an exponent of this Roman thought, is aware of the difficulty, but his answer does not illuminate the obscurity of this point and he expresses once again the traditional solution.

b) Parallels with Valerius Maximus

It is, of course, with Valerius Maximus that the comparison of Velleius arises naturally. Being contemporaries and writing under Tiberius both were influenced by the spirit of their time.¹⁰⁹ The way they present the events – each one in his own particular genre – shows that they have been searching the same sources, and the most obvious to have influenced both is in this case Livy.¹¹⁰ The style of the two authors shows signs of a novel approach to writing related to the change in the political situation: the panegyrical tone, enthusiastic praises and highly rhetorical expressions are found in both Velleius and Valerius and they reflect the advent of a system and the presence of a man whom they saw as most advantageous and therefore they did not spare their fervour in recognising these merits.

Although Valerius is not a historian in the manner of Sallust or Livy, his purpose is similar to that of the historian; he does not just recount or record memorable deeds and sayings so that whoever needed an example of anything could take it from there, as he with the characteristic modesty *topos* states in the preface,¹¹¹ but he also wants to teach and give practical guidance for his contemporaries. And above all he shared with Velleius the interest in being useful to an all-embracing audience, perhaps to all those who did not have the time to read Livy nor the philosophical instruction to follow

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Vell, 2.15.2; 2.53.3; 2.57.3.

¹⁰⁹ For parallels between Valerius Maximus and Velleius see Hellegouarc'h, *Velleius Paterculus*, xxxix, n. 4, and J.M. André, 'L'otium chez Valère Maxime et Velleius Paterculus, ou la réaction morale au début du principat', *REL* 43 (1965) 294-315. See also G. Maslakov, 'Valerius Maximus and Roman Historiography: A Study of the Exempla Tradition', *ANRW* II 32. 1 (1984) 437-96.

¹¹⁰ For the sources of Velleius and Valerius, see M.L. Paladini, 'Rapporti tra Velleio Patercolo e Valerio Massimo', *Latomus* 16 (1957) 232-51.

¹¹¹ *Ut documenta sumere volentibus.*

Cicero. Saying that Valerius' work 'was clearly meant for specific audiences and uses'¹¹² could be limiting his real intentions. There is no actual evidence so as to claim that it was only written 'for students and practitioners of declamation',¹¹³ we cannot find in the whole work one hint that could make us believe he wrote a kind of handbook for apprentices of rhetoric. On the contrary, the word *exempla* is used here in a broader meaning: to provide a concrete ideal, a model who would act as the personification of the values one wishes – or at least should wish – to imitate and perhaps even excel, including aristocrats and *homines novi*, men and women, young and old. He wants to write useful anecdotes and the result is a collection of historical examples put together under a common topic to give the work some reasonable unity. A 'dictionary of quotations'¹¹⁴ could be perhaps the nearest approximation to our modern world; in fact such a dictionary is precisely, if not *facta*, at least *dicta memorabilia*.

The grandiloquent style of the work also contributes to the presentation of *virtus* from a particular viewpoint. Examples of this 'rhetorical style' are scattered throughout the work and are too many to quote them all,¹¹⁵ but on the other hand we can affirm that the work is not full of panegyric expressions; he rarely embellishes what he has lived or seen as an eyewitness;¹¹⁶ panegyric is not spread throughout the work, but localised. Augustus and Tiberius could have headed every list as the incarnation of every virtue, but they do not. In fact, Tiberius gets only one mention and his example is not very impressive either: he rushes to his brother's deathbed.¹¹⁷

But what seems more interesting than judging Valerius' oratorical techniques or panegyric expressions is to be able to grasp the depth of the change brought about in only few years. The most flattering remarks one reads in Livy are 'Augustus Caesar, the founder or renewer of all the temples',¹¹⁸ or 'the emperor Caesar Augustus had brought

¹¹² W. M. Bloomer, *Valerius Maximus and the Rhetoric of the New Nobility* (London, Duckworth, 1992) 1.

¹¹³ Bloomer, *Valerius Maximus*, 1.

¹¹⁴ C.J. Carter, 'Valerius Maximus' in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Empire and Aftermath: Silver Latin II* (London, Routledge, 1975) 36.

¹¹⁵ See e.g. Val. Max, 3.2.19; 4.2, *praef*; 8.7, *praef*. Especially his treatment of the Catos, see for instance 6.2.5: *Quid ergo? Libertas sine Catone? Non magis quam Cato sine libertate*, and also 2.9.3; 3.4.6; 4.3.2; 4.3.12.

¹¹⁶ Velleius is less careful in this respect, cf. 2.94; 2.103.4; 2.126.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Val. Max, 5.5.3.

¹¹⁸ Livy, 4.20.7.

peace to land and sea'¹¹⁹ which are more probably stated facts than praise. Livy is not attributing Augustus deeds he did not do. Not many decades later we come across Velleius, who has been censured in the same way as Valerius. Sons of a time of happiness and peace – the civil wars were gone and almost removed from people's memories – they have no reason whatsoever to be discrete and moderate in praising the givers of this wonderful new order of things: *nam facere recte civis suos princeps optimus faciendo docet, cumque sit imperio maximus, exemplo maior est.*¹²⁰

Like Velleius, Valerius seems to be in a hurry; he repeatedly refers to the haste and the speed with which he writes: '*Vellem quidem placidius*' [I wish I could write more calmly].¹²¹ He, as Velleius, expresses that he has no time for explaining things in a more detailed way: 'these examples did not deserve so brief a treatment were I not under pressure from others more important',¹²² or 'since I have to tell in brief so many tales of greatness...';¹²³ and 'my time will run out'.¹²⁴ Valerius was probably not in a real hurry; brevity and haste appear as particular features of this age.¹²⁵ Brevity was another stylistic *topos*, of course very suitable to an anthology like this since 'all compilations aim at brevity, accessibility and comprehensiveness'.¹²⁶

Another interesting aspect in Valerius' work is his treatment of the Roman examples versus the external ones. The author seems more concerned with giving a fair number in both categories rather than overwhelming the reader with national cases and in this way he avoids showing a pejorative viewpoint towards the foreign peoples. As one might expect, the Roman examples are more numerous and emphasised perhaps with more grandiloquent words, but certainly *imperium sine fine* had broadened their minds and horizons, they became tolerant and capable of drawing the good models even from the barbarians. This feature can be compared with Velleius' interest in writing a universal history.

¹¹⁹ Livy, 1.19.5.

¹²⁰ Vell, 2.126.4.

¹²¹ Val. Max, 1.6.11.

¹²² Val. Max, 2.7.5.

¹²³ Val. Max, 4.1.11.

¹²⁴ Val. Max, 7.2.ext 1a.

¹²⁵ Cf. Woodman, 'Questions of date, genre and style in Velleius', 280

¹²⁶ C. Skidmore, *Practical Ethics for Roman Gentlemen: The Work of Valerius Maximus* (Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1996) 33.

Having said this, Romanness is the motive that moves Valerius to write his work. It is Roman *virtus* that he wants to stress and make clear to his audience; there is no possibility of getting confused about this. 'But our city, that has filled the entire globe with every kind of marvellous examples...' ¹²⁷ The principle of religious belief is of supreme importance for the effectiveness of Valerius' moral message, and it is precisely for this reason that he starts off the book with religious matters. No other nation was as pious and faithful to the gods as Rome. 'No wonder therefore if the indulgence of the gods has persisted, ever watchful to augment and protect an imperial power by which even minor items of religious significance are seen to be weighed with such scrupulous care; for never should our community be thought to have averted its eyes from the most meticulous practice of religious observance'. ¹²⁸ The link between *pietas* and political success is unambiguous: 'So holders of state power never hesitated to minister to holy things in the belief that theirs would be the governance of human affairs only if they gave good and faithful service to the power of the gods'. ¹²⁹ But there is also another interesting connection between the gods and human behaviour. The traditional Roman thought was that the gods cared for human affairs, and it explains Valerius' insertion of miracles and divine intervention, for this is to 'believe that the gods are concerned with the world of humans, that they take note of moral excellence, and its opposite, and reward and punish accordingly'. ¹³⁰ The exercise of *virtus* was rewarded by the gods and this was an incentive for upright moral conduct. Moreover, the identification of the good of the state with the morality of the individual is fundamental to Valerius' moral project and 'combines patriotic traditionalism with self-interest'. ¹³¹

Military discipline, moderation, self-restraint appear as themes very dear to Valerius, he recalls them with a sort of nostalgia: 'they [old Romans] guarded their health with the most certain and reliable protection of careful living, and frugality was a kind of mother to their well-being; inimical to luxurious banquets, a stranger to excess of

¹²⁷ Val. Max, 2.7.6.

¹²⁸ Val. Max, 1.1.8. Cf. section V.2.a, above, *fortuna* as a gift of the gods.

¹²⁹ Val. Max, 1.1.9.

¹³⁰ T.P. Wiseman, 'History, Poetry and Annales' in D.S. Levene and D.P. Nelis (eds.), *Clio and the Poets : Augustan Poetry and the Traditions of Ancient Historiography* (Leiden, Brill, 2002) 353.

¹³¹ Skidmore, *Practical Ethics for Roman Gentlemen*, 68.

wine, averse to immoderate sexual indulgence'.¹³² In contrast with these very Roman *virtutes*, in accordance with the traditional view, Valerius sets in Greece and Asia the cradle of luxury: 'Greece and Asia whose luxury could corrupt Austerity herself'.¹³³ If *moderatio*, *severitas* and *disciplina militaris* were the base of Roman greatness, it was precisely the lack of them which brought the decline: the vices of *avaritia luxuriaque* invaded the city and started eroding its foundations.¹³⁴

Some of the *exempla* may seem very small or insignificant, but it is clear that the message that Valerius wants to put across is this: regarding Romanness nothing is little. So for instance, 'it was laid down by senatorial decree that no one in Rome should set up benches or make to watch a show sitting down, no doubt with the intent that mental relaxation should go together with the virility of a standing posture proper to the Roman nation'.¹³⁵ These instances can be paralleled with Velleius' detailed description of Tiberius travelling in the saddle (and not in a litter), or sitting (not reclined) at the table when dining with invited guests.¹³⁶ Severity and austerity were the proper Roman qualities and both authors were eager to emphasise their importance.

Valerius' treatment of *fortuna* is as ambiguous as that of Velleius, but with a stress on her unfairness. Unpredictable and capricious, the only safe dealings one can have with her is to take her as it comes, with wisdom and serenity: 'Recognition of change of character and fortune in famous men can add much confidence to our minds and take away much anxiety, whether we look at our own situation or those of our neighbours. For when in watching the fortunes of others we see how brilliance emerged from abjection and contempt, why shall we too not always have better thoughts about ourselves, mindful that it is foolish to sentence oneself in advance to perpetual infelicity and in the meantime convert hope, which it is right to foster even if uncertain, to certain despair'.¹³⁷ For Valerius fortune seems to be something that you cannot trust at all, always playing tricks on men, she does not seem to bear correspondence with *virtus*:

¹³² Val. Max, 2.5.6.

¹³³ Val. Max, 9.1.5.

¹³⁴ Cf. Sall. *BC*, 5 and Livy, *praef*, 11.

¹³⁵ Val. Max, 2.4.2. For more examples see 4.3.1; 8.8.1-2.

¹³⁶ Cf. Vell. 2.114.3.

¹³⁷ Val. Max, 6.9. *praef*.

‘malignant Fortune’s cloudy face’.¹³⁸ Thus, the conclusion Valerius draws after giving the reader enough examples of her whims is not very optimistic: ‘we have recounted many examples of Fortune’s volatility; of her steady favour very few can be narrated, from which it is evident that she loves to inflict adversity but only grudgingly vouchsafes prosperity’.¹³⁹

To maintain the view of the history of Rome as a smooth continuum from the late Republic to the incipient empire under the guidance of the Caesars required an extreme obliqueness of treatment, and Valerius managed this with silences and omissions. The end of the Republic and its ‘restitution’ by Augustus is treated very cautiously in the handling of political factions and their motivations.¹⁴⁰ Even the view of the emperor as *optimus princeps* or the person by whom ‘the virtues [...] are most kindly fostered and the vices most sternly punished’¹⁴¹ does not relate totally to a political outlook. The emperor is seen more as a father who praises and blames, who gives rewards and punishments to his subjects according to their virtue or lack of it. To a certain extent, this view weakens the power of *virtus* during the principate. The prestige of having won *gloria* by deeds of *virtus* recognised unanimously by the whole community of citizenry – SPQR – as in the republican days, was certainly diminished if this *gloria* and honour could be attained when only one man, the *princeps*, decided who had merited them. There was a somewhat arbitrary element in the definition of *virtus* under the principate; serving the state became identified with serving the *princeps*, therefore true *virtus* was difficult to express outside the limits of pleasing him. The question of being truly and freely virtuous under one man would remain unanswered for some time and it is probably testimony to how deeply the political change affected men of the first century AD.

Valerius encourages ‘more humble readers to attain virtue and also prevents more noble readers from complacently thinking that social position is a sufficient qualification for virtue’.¹⁴² He aligns himself in this view first and foremost with Sallust

¹³⁸ Val. Max, 6.9.1.

¹³⁹ Val. Max, 6.9.praef.

¹⁴⁰ So much so that we would not know at all that Octavian was a triumvir if we followed only Valerius’ account.

¹⁴¹ Val. Max, praef.

¹⁴² E. Eyben, ‘The Concrete Ideal in the Life of the Young Roman’, *L’Antiquité Classique* 41 (1972) 89.

and then with Velleius, with whom he also shares the same motivations for writing his account of historical *exempla*. Worth and not privilege is what counts, actions and not blood. Valerius' own explanation of this fact is very powerfully expressed: 'Virtue's access is not fastidious. She suffers lively dispositions stirred to action to enter her presence and gives them a draught of herself that is not generous or grudging from discrimination of persons. Equally available to all, she assesses the desire you bring, not your station, and in the taking on of her good things she leaves the weight for you yourself to determine, so that you carry away with you just so much as you can bring your mind to sustain. So it happens on the one hand that persons born in humble circumstances rise to the highest dignity and on the other that offshoots of the noblest family tree fall back into some disgrace and turn the light they received from their ancestors to darkness'.¹⁴³

If *virtus* were the property only of a certain group in society, what would be the purpose of recording its achievements? *Virtus* is contagious, that is the whole point of giving all these examples. *Exempla virtutis* create a sense of tradition of vital importance for the Romans of the first century AD; it was the way of connecting the imperial present with the republican past. In a time of changes, of new political regimes, Romans needed self-identification ardently, and *virtus* becomes through these authors self-identified with the Romannes they are trying to promote. This shows that the way of writing history is so influenced by the time in which the historian lived, that despite all their efforts in declaring their impartiality, it is very difficult not to reveal the internal hopes and fears, wishes or expectations.

3. The *Virtus* and *Virtutes* of Tiberius: *optimus princeps* in Velleius

According to Lana, 'nell'analisi dell'opera velleiana dobbiamo nettamente affermare, dunque, ed integralmente applicare questo principio: Velleio, tutto Velleio, si deve spiegare per mezzo di Tiberio: la chiave per intendere Velleio ci è fornita da

¹⁴³ Val. Max, 3.3.ext 7.

Tiberio, e soltanto da Tiberio'.¹⁴⁴ These kinds of statements are the ones which have done so much harm to Velleius' work and its reception in history. It is a disproportionate declaration. And it is not completely true. The study of history from the fall of Troy till the year AD 30 cannot be explained through one person, even if that person is the Roman emperor.

Any attempt to give an account of the significance of Velleius' perception of the Tiberian period entails distancing ourselves from what we might term the 'traditional history of Rome' – known to us mainly through Tacitus' *Annals* – and being introduced to a first person version of history, in which experience is the source of knowledge. This raises questions about the type of document that we are dealing with and the validity of this work as a historical source of information on the Tiberian period.

Velleius was a soldier serving under Tiberius before the latter became emperor of Rome. His perception of Tiberius is totally different from that of the court. He was neither an aristocrat nor had he been harmed by the arrival of the imperial regime – unlike most of the aristocrats and senators. Whatever he had become, he had Tiberius to be grateful for: soldiers' tribune in Thracia and Macedonia; *praefectus equitum* in Tiberius' army in Germany in the year AD 4; *quaestor*, in the year AD 6 Tiberius' legate (who was his leader in the wars of Dalmatia, Pannonia and in the successive Rhine campaigns), and *praetor* in the year AD 15, together with his brother.¹⁴⁵ At least two questions immediately come to mind: how many such men did the Empire have, and why should we set more store by the vision of a republican like Tacitus, than by that of a soldier who, like so many others, has benefited from the principate?

However, the richness and liveliness of a text written by an eyewitness is impaired by the unconditional admiration of the author for Tiberius, as Velleius' critics have duly noted. Criticism has centred mainly on the fact that Velleius' eulogistic depiction of Tiberius drifts into overt and undisguised propaganda. However, it should be borne in mind that the term propaganda could be applicable to Tiberius' political aspect and not to his military accomplishments, since with respect to the latter aspect, the sources agree that Augustus' successor was an excellent general.¹⁴⁶ The principal

¹⁴⁴ Lana, *Velleio Patercolo*, 168.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Vell, 2.124.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 1.4; Suet. *Tib*, 8-9.

commander in the battlefield was without question Tiberius. And after Agrippa's death, 'Tiberius was the empire's leading general, the only man who could step into Agrippa's shoes as the princeps' deputy'.¹⁴⁷ Conversely, in the political sphere we know that Velleius' account does not quite correspond to reality. In several passages he insists on Tiberius filial relationship with Augustus, whom he describes as a happy man on the day that he adopted Tiberius: 'The rejoicing of that day, the concourse of the citizens, their vows as they stretched their hands almost to the very heavens, and the hopes which they entertained for the perpetual security and the eternal existence of the Roman empire, I shall hardly be able to describe to the full'.¹⁴⁸ Such assertion is overtly misleading because, even for Tiberius himself, his adoption marked the beginning of a difficult and traumatic relationship with power, and Augustus and Rome were fully aware of this.¹⁴⁹ Neither does Velleius hesitate to assign his subject all the virtues inherent to a *princeps*, which, according to him, Tiberius had clearly shown prior to his adoption.¹⁵⁰

Undoubtedly, Velleius' eulogy of Tiberius leads us into doubt and uncertainty with regard to the work of this soldier-writer who, nevertheless, sheds light on the arguments most frequently resorted to by Tiberius' contemporary supporters. For the *homines novi*, the main issue did not centre on the republican crisis and the decline of the Senate, but on the positive aspects implied by the birth of a new order. The imperial regime brought for them new opportunities and did not imply the loss of anything.

Whereas Tacitus mirrors the feelings of the senators in the last period of the sovereign, Velleius is not to be ignored as a witness of the early years. His perspective is that of an army officer, whose unconditional support resulted in a rather skilful idealization.¹⁵¹ Velleius' work aims at the defence, not so much of Tiberius, the man, but of Tiberius, the prince, in the eyes of his contemporaries. This was probably due to the fact that there was still a need to reinforce the concept of the principate as the natural evolution of the republican phase, which was overtly opposed by the sectors of the longest standing aristocracy in the Senate.

¹⁴⁷ R. Seager, *Tiberius* (London, The Trinity Press, 1972) 25.

¹⁴⁸ Vell, 2.103.4.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.3; Suet. *Tib.* 17 and 21.

¹⁵⁰ Vell, 2.94: *innutritus caelestium praeceptorum disciplinis, iuvenis genere, forma, celsitudine corporis, optimis studiis maximoque ingenio instructissimus, qui protinus quantus est, sperari potuerat visuque praetulerat principem.*

¹⁵¹ Cf. Vell, 2.126.

With no attempt at justifying the partiality of Velleius' vision, it should be pointed out that he refers only to the first part of Tiberius' reign. In other words, he restricts himself to the period that, in general, has been considered as enjoying a good government, even by his detractors.¹⁵² It is only around AD 26 when there were signs that indicated a change: Tiberius retired to Capri and the domination of Sejanus became evident. Between that moment and the beginning of AD 30, the time at which Velleius had stopped writing, there were unmistakable manifestations of anxiety which Velleius allows himself to express in a fervent prayer to ask the gods to guard the state of Rome and Tiberius, Rome's *optimus princeps*: *Voto finiendum volumen est (...) custodite, servate, protegite hunc statum, hanc pacem, hunc principem*.¹⁵³

With respect to Velleius' political position, his work makes us assume that he sees the principate as the only possible form of government because it is the form best suited not only to the times, but to the size and greatness of the Roman Empire.¹⁵⁴ It is possible to observe an unconditional adherence to the prince's programmes and guidelines, obedience to his dicta, loyal compliance with his laws. Only by the observance of these principles would it be possible to keep alive and consolidate the peace and calm that were the basis and primary objective of the policy of Augustus and of his successor, Tiberius, who, in the eyes of Velleius, represented the embodiment of all the military and human virtues permanently expressed throughout his life. The principate restored to Rome and the whole world the peace that everybody hungered for, after the long civil wars of the last century of the Republic: *Revocata in forum fides, summota e foro seditio, ambitio campo, discordia curia, sepultaeque ac situ obsitae iustitia, aequitas, industria civitate redditae; accessit magistratibus auctoritas, senatui maiestas, iudicii gravitas; compressa theatralis seditio, recte faciendi omnibus aut incussa voluntas aut imposita necessitas: honorantur recta, prava puniuntur, suspicit potentem humilis, non timet, antecedit, non contemnit humiliores potens*.¹⁵⁵

Velleius Paterculus' motives and his interest in highlighting Tiberius' figure in such a way are therefore clear to see. He has been a soldier under his orders, he has

¹⁵² Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 1.72; 4.6 and Suet. *Tib*, 26.

¹⁵³ Vell, 2.131.

¹⁵⁴ Vell, 2.103: *spemque conceptam perpetuae securitatis aeternitatisque Romani imperii*.

¹⁵⁵ Vell, 2.126.

witnessed the general's concern for the soldiers, he has been a victor alongside him and a close bond of affection, a combination of comradeship and admiration, has been formed. And there is more. They share a vision, a political idea: their faith in the principate and in its head, the emperor. By means of his writings, Velleius defends the emperor and, through him, the institution of the principate, from every possible attack by those who accuse the prince of having repressed freedom and suppressed any authentically republican form. The regime created by Augustus and continued by Tiberius has a reparation mission: it guarantees *pax* abroad and civil *pax*.¹⁵⁶

The image of Tiberius conveyed by Velleius' *Historiae* is perfectly defined in his description of *optimus princeps*: *nam facere recte civis suos princeps optimus faciendo docet, cumque sit imperio maximus, exemplo maior est*.¹⁵⁷ From the very beginning he insists on presenting him as a prince, both as regards physical aspects and his successful performance of tasks.¹⁵⁸

There are, however, some aspects that stand out among others, which Velleius uses to show his prince to advantage and to give him an outstanding place in the Empire because of his qualities even before taking over power as a *princeps*. In fact, the text refers to Tiberius before he became an emperor and gives a full account of the deeds of young Tiberius, specifically, from the year 22 BC, i.e. the period in which he held office as Rome's Caesar.¹⁵⁹ The imperial period is touched upon very cursorily by Velleius. He refers only to the first sixteen years of Tiberius' government¹⁶⁰ in very general terms and overlooks a series of rather complex events such as Germanicus' death, Sejanus' promotion and others.

In fact, Tiberius' central merits, according to this account, have to do with his military accomplishments, which provided fertile ground for the development of a series of virtues. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that Velleius pays little or no attention to the political posts – as a matter of fact, not many – held by Tiberius. His military capability and his being widely acknowledged by Roman society at the time are

¹⁵⁶ Vell, 2.126.3.

¹⁵⁷ Vell, 2.126.4.

¹⁵⁸ Vell, 2.94.2-3.

¹⁵⁹ Vell, 2.94.3: *Quaestor undevicesimum annum agens capessere coepit rem publicam maximamque difficultatem annonae ac rei frumentariae inopiam ita Ostiae atque in urbe mandatu vitrici moderatus est, ut per id, quod agebat, quantus evasurus esset, eluceret.*

¹⁶⁰ From the year AD 14 to the year AD 30.

the aspects that are most stressed in his work. Thus, *virtus*-courage appears as the first and foremost virtue of the *princeps* from the very beginning of the Tiberian narrative.¹⁶¹

Tiberius' victories come one after the other in endless succession: he beat the Raeti and the Vindelici,¹⁶² the Pannonians,¹⁶³ the Germans.¹⁶⁴ The Romans knew about Tiberius' military competence: they trusted him and thought that his prestige as a good general was well deserved. Besides, in terms of actual fighting, he was the kind of general who went along with his soldiers and fought in the battlefield. He did not restrict himself to giving the relevant orders from the protection of his tent, without exposing himself to the same danger as his soldiers: *non iam ductu, sed manibus atque armis ipsius Caesaris tum demum pacati sunt, cum paene funditus eversi forent*.¹⁶⁵ Velleius appreciates this attitude of equality on the part of a superior officer towards his subordinates, and this generates in the soldiers a deep affection for their commander.¹⁶⁶ There was something of the old fashioned generals of the Republic in Tiberius' way of conducting wars, something that people had seen in Livy's Marcellus or Fabius and they had liked.

With the success of his campaigns, Tiberius can be said to have contributed to spreading the Roman *pax*. He took an active part in the negotiation of such *pax* both in his capacity as commander in charge in the battlefields, but also because of his inner conviction that peace was a governmental need.¹⁶⁷ The ideal of Tiberius' empire, like that of his step-father, Augustus, was peace.¹⁶⁸ The peace that Velleius describes is complete and applicable not only to matters military, but also to civil society.¹⁶⁹ It was this peace that made the actual restoration of the republican regime possible. The emperor praised peace; his opponents praised freedom: both sides declared their wish to restore the old Republic.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Vell. 2.97.4; 2.104.3; 2.114.1; 2.116.1; 2.121.1; 2.129.3.

¹⁶² 22 BC, cf. 2.95.

¹⁶³ 19 BC, cf. 2.96.

¹⁶⁴ AD 5, cf. 2.106.

¹⁶⁵ Vell, 2.115.

¹⁶⁶ Vell, 2.104: *At vero militum conspectu eius elicita gaudio lacrimae alacritasque et salutationis nova quaedam exultatio et contingendi manum cupiditas non continentium protinus quin adiicerent, 'videmus te, imperator? Salvum recepimus?'* For the equality, see Vell, 2.114.2.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Suet, *Tib*, 37.4.

¹⁶⁸ For Augustus' programme of peace, see Suet, *Aug*, 21; Dio 54.9.1; *Res Gestae*, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Vell, 2.126-31.

For Tacitus and, together with him, for all the old-style republicans, the principate had indeed restored peace,¹⁷⁰ but it was also true that Rome was taken up with unhappy events and that the prince showed little interest in extending the Empire: *igitur verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris: omnes exuta aequilitate iussa principis aspectare, nulla in praesens formidine, dum Augustus aetate validus seque et domum et pacem sustentavit.*¹⁷¹ The deprivation of political freedom had been an important loss for the senators and they were not entirely sure that they had paid a fair price for it: the cost of peace had been their freedom.

Peace was in fact one of the projects of Tiberius' government and most certainly one of his achievements. For a republican like Tacitus, it was hard to understand that this meant the end of the exclusively expansionist wars that the aristocracy wished to carry on, as it had been through such conquests that Rome had found power and wealth. Peace, on the other hand, was necessary to set up a solid administrative base for the running of the vast Empire.

Such *pax*, as a broad programme, related all the aspects of the life of the Empire. Peace abroad and civil peace, social classes at peace, peace and quiet in the spheres of government and peace for one and all in the recruitment of new soldiers.¹⁷² However, Tiberius was unable to keep up the good relations that Augustus had had with the oldest and most powerful republican institution: the Senate. Its members obstinately continued to oppose and mistrust him despite what Tacitus – and Tiberius himself –¹⁷³ calls its permanent show of adulation.¹⁷⁴

Apart from his military merits, Velleius attributes to his general and emperor a character which combines keeping a certain distance from power and not shirking public service; being unwilling to receive honours and above such manifestations,¹⁷⁵ yet ready

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 4.32.

¹⁷¹ Tac. *Ann*, 1.4.

¹⁷² Cf. Vell, 2.130.2.

¹⁷³ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 3.65: *O homines ad servitutem paratos!*

¹⁷⁴ Tac. *Ann*, 1.7: *At Romae ruere in servitium consules, patres, eques. Quanto quis inlustrior, tanto magis falsi ac festinantes vultuque composito, ne laeti excessu principis neu tristiores primordio, lacrimas gaudium, quaestus adulationem miscebant.*

¹⁷⁵ Vell, 2.124: *ut potius aequalem civem quam eminentem liceret agere principem.*

to show himself available to do whatever should be needed.¹⁷⁶ What Tiberius does is precisely what an *optimus princeps* should do for his countrymen.

Another characteristic that Velleius attributes to the new *princeps* was his remarkable political loyalty to Augustus. He presents both of them as an example of father-son relationship. But Velleius could not have ignored the doubts that Augustus had had before adopting Tiberius. He had to wait several years before Augustus recognised publicly the power he possessed as successful general. But the *princeps* had had other choices before turning to Tiberius: first, Marcellus – son of Octavia, the emperor's sister –, and next, Gaius and Lucius – sons of Agrippa and Julia;¹⁷⁷ and, finally, in the year AD 4, he had adopted Agrippa Postumus at the same time as he adopted Tiberius, whom in turn he forced to adopt Germanicus. Tiberius, perhaps because of envy – if we are to believe Tacitus – or because of an exacerbated susceptibility, had undergone moments in which his relations with Augustus had been somewhat strained.¹⁷⁸ Their friendship would be mended later mainly through the death of all the other possible successors. However, Velleius seems to have overlooked this situation and to have opted for the solid theory of *faits accomplis*: Augustus chooses Tiberius as his successor and, among many others, adopts him as his son. He does not question whether Augustus had doubts before taking this step.¹⁷⁹

Velleius sees Tiberius as a faithful and loyal general who acted just like the emperor himself would have done. There are numerous passages that demonstrate this, not only and mainly in the battlefields but also in civil action: *primum principium eius operum fuit ordinatio comitiorum, quam manu sua scriptam divus Augustus reliquerat*.¹⁸⁰ However, according to Tacitus, the events developed otherwise: *primum facinus novi principatus fuit Postumi Agrippae caedes*.¹⁸¹ Velleius does not or cannot

¹⁷⁶ Vell, 2.120: So at the mention that Augustus was about to die: *revolat ad patrem Caesar; perpetuus patronus Romanii imperii adsuetam sibi causam suscipit*.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 1.3.

¹⁷⁸ His retirement to Rhodes is an example. Cf. Suet. *Tib*, 10-11. See B. Levick, 'Tiberius' retirement to Rhodes in 6 BC', *Latomus* 31 (1972) 779 ff.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Vell, 2.103.4. For Tiberius' adoption and relationship with Augustus, see B. Levick, *Tiberius the politician* (London and New York, Routledge, 2nd ed., 1999) 31-67; Seager, *Tiberius*, 14-47; R. Marsh, *The reign of Tiberius* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1931) 39-41; R.A. Birch, 'The settlement of 26th June AD 4 and its aftermath', *CQ* 31 (1972) 443-50.

¹⁸⁰ Vell, 2.124.

¹⁸¹ Tac. *Ann*, 1.6.

see things in the same way as Tacitus. For him, the new *princeps* follows in the steps of his predecessor as closely as he can: he restores justice, equality, laboriousness; he spreads *pax augusta*; he liberates the provinces from the magistrates' oppression.¹⁸²

This is the political *fidelitas* that a ruler should observe in a hereditary regime with respect to his predecessor and his projects. However, according to Velleius, in the case of Tiberius, *fidelitas* goes even further since it not only represents an unbreakable loyalty in matters political and military and in his idea of the principate, but also can be likened to the typical *pietas* of a good son towards his father, a concept that acquired much strength in the times of Augustus.

What Velleius is attempting to demonstrate and confirm throughout his work is that because of Tiberius' characteristics and attitudes, he already enjoyed great personal prestige even before being a *princeps* and because of this, for the author of the *Historiae*, the question of Augustus' succession was the natural consequence of Tiberius' merits. The choice had already been made, Augustus should be succeeded by whoever had the most merits, which, according to Velleius, no doubt, pointed to Tiberius: 'Caesar Augustus did not long hesitate, for he had no need to search for one to choose as his successor but merely to choose the one who towered above the others'.¹⁸³ Velleius becomes insistent in his attempts to present Tiberius as a prince in fact before he became a prince by right.¹⁸⁴

The author asserts that Tiberius has demonstrated that he is endowed with every virtue: *praecipuis omnium virtutum experimentis in eo tractu editis*.¹⁸⁵ He is the *optimus princeps* who, like Augustus, proceeds with the restoration of *mores maiorum* as a remedy against corruption.¹⁸⁶ This display of virtues by Tiberius is what leads him to acquire his very own personal prestige, which is not dependent on Augustus but has been earned by him alone; thus he seems to answer the question of how an institution based on personal *auctoritas* could be handed on.

¹⁸² Vell, 2.126: *Revocata in foro fides ...*

¹⁸³ Cf. Vell, 2.103

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Vell, 2.94 and 2.99. Some could link *fortuna* with Tiberius' accession through the loss of rivals, but for Velleius it is deserved by *virtus*.

¹⁸⁵ Vell, 2.94.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Vell, 2.126.

Which were the virtues with which Tiberius was endowed, and which gave him the prestige that made him become *aequatus Augusto, civium post unum, et hoc quia volebat, eminentissimus, ducum maximus, fama fortunaque celeberrimus et vere alterum rei publicae lumen et caput?*¹⁸⁷

The first of the virtues that can be detected in Tiberius is *prudentia* or *providentia*, as manifested in his behaviour as a military chief.¹⁸⁸ A prudent general is he who foresees situations and can thus find a solution, a prudent and judicious man who does not let himself be carried away by the passions of the moment. Tiberius' *prudentia* became evident not only in his military campaigns: *Quantis prudentia ducis opportunitatibus furentes eorum vires universas elusimus, fudimus partibus*,¹⁸⁹ but also in the adequate provision of grain supply: 'he skilfully regulated the difficulties of the grain supply and relieved the scarcity of corn at Ostia and in the city'.¹⁹⁰ As the greatest mission of the principate was to maintain peace and order after the chaos of the civil wars, Tiberius quickly and adeptly suppressed the mutinies and threats from internal or external enemies.¹⁹¹ Evidence for this is given by Velleius scattered all over the Tiberian narrative,¹⁹² but has its supreme expression in: *pax augusta omnis terrarum orbis angulos*.¹⁹³

Tiberius had shown 'imperial generosity' with his troops, with the citizens of Rome and the other cities of the empire. He maintained order and preserved peace, he provided an adequate supply of grain, and he suppressed conspiracies against the state. He showed that he, as well as his predecessor, possessed *providentia*, that fatherly care for his people, which is inherent to the good ruler.

Prudentia is close to *clementia* as is evident in Tiberius in his cautious and reflexive application of military discipline. *Clementia*, as the compassion and clemency

¹⁸⁷ Vell, 2.99.

¹⁸⁸ For a detailed account of Tiberius' virtues, see R.S. Rogers, *Studies in the reign of Tiberius* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1943) 3-88.

¹⁸⁹ Vell, 2.111: *qua prudentia hiberna disposita sunt*, as well as in 2.129: *Qua ille prudentia Rhascupolim interemptorem fratri sui filii Cotyis consortisque eiusdem imperii, Romam evocavit!*

¹⁹⁰ Vell, 2.94.3.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 1.46; 3.47.

¹⁹² Cf. Vell, 2.94.4; 2.97.4; 2.105.1; 2.106-9; 2.112.3; 2.113.1; 2.114.4.

¹⁹³ Vell, 2.126.3.

shown by the victor towards the vanquished,¹⁹⁴ already had antecedents in Rome and the best example was that of Julius Caesar.¹⁹⁵ But Augustus also exploited his *clementia* for publicity purposes.¹⁹⁶ Tiberius, according to Velleius, did not lag behind his enemies in terms of this virtue: 'he often admonished, sometimes gave verbal reproof, but rarely punishment, and pursued the moderate course of pretending in most cases not to see things, and of administering only occasionally a reprimand'.¹⁹⁷ But Velleius is not the only source for this virtue; *clementia* appears also on the coinage of Tiberius.¹⁹⁸ In addition, in AD 28 an altar was erected to *Clementia*: convicted of conspiracy Agrippina and Nero were not put to death but banished. Five years later when Agrippina died, Tiberius boasted of his clemency in not having executed her and the senate passed a vote of thanks for that clemency.¹⁹⁹

Another virtue displayed by Tiberius is *munificentia*, which towards the end of his work, Velleius qualifies as *pia*, and which also takes the shape of *liberalitas*, a virtue of which the author gives numerous examples: *quotiens populum congiariis honoravit senatorumque censum, cum id senatu auctore facere potuit, quam libenter explevit, ut neque luxuriam invitaret neque honestam paupertatem pateretur dignitate destitui!; quam pia munificentia superque humanam evecta fidem templum patri molitur*.²⁰⁰ *Liberalitas* does not occur infrequently in the sources, and perhaps if Tiberius' enemies were forced to name one of his virtues they would point out his generosity.²⁰¹ Tacitus

¹⁹⁴ For Rogers, Tiberius' *clementia* was related more to *maiestas* trials than clemency with the defeated. The original meaning of this virtue was the latter, but as the concept of emperor grew in importance, the offence of his person required to take action. The forgiveness of the punishment for the case of *laesae maiestatis*, was therefore this other aspect of *clementia*. See Rogers, *Studies in the reign of Tiberius*, 35-59.

¹⁹⁵ Although 'it was Cicero, not Caesar, who made *clementia* the standard word for Caesar's policy', in M. Griffin, 'Clementia after Caesar' in F. Cairns and E. Fantham (eds.), *Caesar against Liberty?* (Chippenhams, Francis Cairns, 2003) 163. Cf. also S. Weinstock, *Divus Iulius* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971) 233-43.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *Res Gestae*, 3.2.

¹⁹⁷ Vell., 2.114.3.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. C.H.V. Sutherland, 'Two virtues of Tiberius: a numismatic contribution to the history of his reign', *JRS* 28 (1938) 129-40 and C.H.V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy. 31 BC-AD 68* (London, Methuen & Co., 1951) 79-104. For a more general overview of the imperial virtues in coins, see C.F. Noreña, 'The Communication of the Emperor's Virtues', *JRS* 91 (2001) 146-68.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Tac. *Ann.*, 6.25. See also W. Eck, A. Caballos and F. Fernández, *Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (Munich, C.H. Beck, 1996) 38-51 and M. Griffin, 'The Senate's Story' in *JRS* 87 (1997) 349-63.

²⁰⁰ Vell., 2.129 and 2.130.

²⁰¹ Cf. Tac. *Ann.*, 1.8.3; 2.42.1; 3.29.3; 4.4.1; Suet. *Tib.*, 48.2; 54.1; 76; Dio 55.10.1; 57.10.4; 58.18.2; 59.2.1-2.

expresses this with a pungent remark: ‘he was eager to spend money for honourable purposes – a virtue which he long retained, even when he abandoned all others’.²⁰² This *munificentia*, far from luxury or splendour, was related to prodigality with respect to others and sumptuousness as regards whatever might contribute to the aggrandisement of the State. He restored buildings that had been damaged, completed the ones that Augustus had begun but not finished, and ornamented public works.²⁰³

Tacitus, Suetonius and Velleius are in particular agreement about a virtue that the three of them consider as remaining constant from the start of Tiberius’ career to his being promoted prince, which they think is his prevailing quality: *moderatio*. From the very beginning of his reign Tiberius had opportunities to exercise this virtue. Immediately after his accession he had to deal with senatorial flattery towards Livia; he rejected all the honours and proposed titles for her.²⁰⁴ Such sobriety and moderation characterised Tiberius in terms of his government actions: over Asinius Gallus’ proposal about elections,²⁰⁵ over provincial taxation,²⁰⁶ regarding the funerals of the imperial family,²⁰⁷ and in the application of the *lex maiestatis*.²⁰⁸ And also *moderatio* with the honours that the senate wanted to confer upon him and when people called him *dominus* and spoke of his *sacrae* or *divinae* occupations, he replied: ‘I am *dominus* to my slaves, *imperator* of my soldiers and first citizen to the rest’²⁰⁹ and suggested that his activities were rather laborious than divine.²¹⁰ Velleius summarises all these examples in: *Quis non inter reliqua, quibus singularis moderatio Ti. Caesaris elucet atque eminet, hoc quoque miretur, quod cum sine ulla dubitatione septem triumphos meruerit, tribus contentus fuit? Nam in hoc viro nescias utrum magis mireris quod laborum periculorumque semper excessit modum an quod honorum temperavit.*²¹¹

²⁰² Tac. *Ann*, 1.75.

²⁰³ Cf. Dio, 57.10.2.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 1.14 and Suet. *Tib*, 50.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 2.36.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Suet. *Tib*, 32.2; Dio 57.10.5; Tac. *Ann*, 1.76.4; 2.42.7; 2.56.4; 4.6.7.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 1.8.6; 3.5; 3.6.1; 4.8.2; 4.13.1; 5.1.6; 5.2.1; Suet. *Tib*, 52.1; Dio 57.14.6; 57.22.3; 58.2.1.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Suet. *Tib*, 28; Tac. *Ann*, 3.25.1; 3.28.6; 3.56.1.

²⁰⁹ Dio 57.8.2.

²¹⁰ Cf. Suet. *Tib*, 27.

²¹¹ Vell, 2.122.

Probably one of the most striking manifestations of Tiberius' *moderatio* was his hatred of flattery. Suetonius dedicates a whole chapter to exemplifying it,²¹² and Tacitus has a sharp remark about it: 'speech was constricted and risky under an emperor who feared freedom and hated flattery'.²¹³ More than once Tiberius felt the need to complain of the servility of the senators and he used to exclaim in Greek after leaving the curia: *O homines ad servitutem paratos*.²¹⁴

Prudentia, clementia, munificentia and *moderatio* are Tiberius' virtues that we can find not only in Velleius, but also in the anti-Tiberian sources and coins of the period, as has been shown. Among these, perhaps *moderatio* is the one which appears as authentically inherent to Tiberius and is confirmed by different sources as part of his personality. However, it should be noted that, according to Velleius, whoever succeeded Augustus should be endowed with all the virtues and, consequently, the author does not omit any of them and tries to illustrate one and all. There is no doubt that for Velleius, Tiberius' appellation, *optimus princeps*, was fully deserved.²¹⁵

There is a passage that is of great significance for the main idea that Velleius wants to convey in his work: *Ti. Nero duobus consulatibus totidemque triumphis actis tribuniciae potestatis consortione aequatus Augusto, civium post unum, et hoc, quia volebat, eminentissimus, ducum maximus, fama fortunaque celeberrimus et vere alterum rei publicae lumen et caput*.²¹⁶ With this, Velleius makes an attempt to liken Tiberius to Augustus and to bestow on the second *princeps* the same *auctoritas* that the first had held. *Auctoritas*, that moral prestige that had made Augustus become the first citizen of Rome, had placed him at the head of the government, not so much because of the positions that he held – which were numerous – but because of his credit, influence and ascendancy for having been the man who achieved the pacification of Rome. Could the *auctor* of a new order possibly be compared to Tiberius? Tiberius had undeniable qualities, but not even he himself would have been capable of saying that he could be at

²¹² Suet. *Tib*, 27: 'he would not allow any senator to approach his litter (...) when an ex-consul in apologizing to him attempted to embrace his knees, he drew back in such haste that he fell over backward. In fact, if anyone in conversation or in a set speech spoke of him in too flattering terms, he did not hesitate to interrupt him (...) and correct his language on the spot'.

²¹³ Tac. *Ann*, 2.87.2.

²¹⁴ Tac. *Ann*, 3.65.

²¹⁵ And so it was for Valerius Maximus, cf. 2 *praef*.

²¹⁶ Vell, 2.99.

the same level with Augustus in terms of *auctoritas*. Yet, Velleius makes the comparison and, what is more, does not hesitate to say *aequatus Augusto*.

What Velleius makes clear is that before Tiberius took over the government of Rome as *princeps*, and even before his adoption by Augustus, he had already built up a prestige that could not be compared with that of any other citizen, and such prestige had been earned because of his personal merits.

Everything that Velleius has seen and lived through provides him with more than enough evidence to state that the principate is and shall be the best possible form of government that Rome may have. It cannot be denied that in order to arrive at this conclusion, Velleius has also been influenced by his own political ideas and his personal experience that have led to his promotion from plain *homo novus* to high administrative and military positions.

This perspective can also account for his praise of Tiberius. The second emperor of Rome had provided examples of all the civil and military virtues that had given him the necessary prestige to govern and become a true *princeps*, who was not only accepted but also most wanted and needed. Augustus' government had been a miracle of order, and it passed on to a successor who opted for proving that it was not a transient remedy of contingent ills – the return of order after decades of violence – but a political need.

According to Velleius, because of his military capabilities, his dedication to public service and his loyalty to his father, Tiberius enjoyed an *auctoritas* of his own, which preceded his accession to power. Why should Tiberius give assurance of security and continuity of the political system that was started by Augustus? Because he embodied all the characteristics of a *princeps* even before becoming one. A new political culture was developing quickly, the importance and qualities of the successor were going to be intimately related with the functioning of the government, 'princes were seen to incarnate the future stability of the regime'.²¹⁷

Caution and a watchful critical sense are needed to gain insights into Tiberius' personality and to value the work of his devoted admirer: caution, but not preconceived mistrust even if we are aware that the source is so close. Whatever failings the author

²¹⁷ G. Rowe, *Princes and Political Cultures: The New Tiberian Senatorial Decrees* (Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 2002) 2.

may have, they are due to his limitations in making a historical assessment of the contemporary actions he is narrating. Exaggeration combined with the rhetoric of the time is not quite the same as conscious and opportunistic manipulation of the truth.²¹⁸ His work, partial as it is, constitutes a contribution to the understanding of the person and government of Tiberius because of the wealth of personal experiences and the value of the discovery of an interpretation that differs from such traditional ones as the anti-Tiberius views expressed by Tacitus and Suetonius. In opposition to them, Velleius' work acquires standing at least as an irreplaceable source of confrontation. There is some truth in Velleius. He was writing in Tiberius' time, he could not have lied shamelessly, there were lots of witnesses for what he was saying, and maybe lots of other soldiers or *homines novi* who thought in the same way as he did. The principate did bring good things to some people who clearly benefited from it. Tacitus' account is also a partial one.

The Tiberian narrative is definitely something different within the *Historiae*, but at the same time, it fits perfectly well with the rest of the work. The need to begin with the remotest past plays an important role in this account; the tensions that Velleius tries to explain make it necessary to start with the deeds of the first Romans. The Tiberian section is not a simple eulogy or panegyric of the emperor. It is placed in the work with a key role: Tiberius represents not only the summit of the Roman history, but also the epitome of Roman virtue. But it would have been impossible to reach this pinnacle if there were not a past full of *exempla* to follow, if *virtus* had not been the eternal companion of men. Velleius is stressing by every possible means the continuity in Roman history. With the same strength with which Tacitus highlights the breakdowns with the Republic, Velleius underlines the steady course of the Roman people towards progress, moral and social. The chain of virtuous men from the beginning has not been broken, on the contrary, it seems to have been reinforced with the emperor Tiberius.

Velleius is consistent in his analysis and approach to history. He has been repeating the same idea all the time. Writing history during the principate implied for him change and continuity. Change because historiography tended now to be more

²¹⁸ Cf. n. 2

biographical, more personal: the rule of one man required him to take this perspective.²¹⁹ Change because the greatness of the Roman empire made it necessary to deal with universal themes. But there was also continuity because the treatment of the past had not been altered. The same *virtus* had to be more and more emphasized, and this for two motives: it was a feature of the past, and it was also the main attribute of the present emperor. Virtues in Tiberius are exceptional in the way that he had them all, but not in the sense of a novelty. Velleius is aware that he is presenting the emperor as a good old Roman, as part of an overall scheme, and thus he achieves a certain coherence for his line of argument with the totality of the work.

4. Velleius' conception of History

Velleius is an optimist and he has his reasons. Prosperity has grown for him in every possible aspect. He does not see the end of the Republic as the conclusion of the most glorious times for Rome. Rather, he presents Roman history as a continuum where the advent of the principate was the natural effect after the civil wars, not in a nostalgic or bitter tone, but trying to convince the reader that Rome is definitely marching forward, in an endless progression which, despite all vicissitudes, is leading the Roman people to the culmination of the *felicitas* of Tiberius' reign.²²⁰ He has witnessed the end of turbulent and violent times, he has experienced the restoration of laws, order and peace.

The concept of *pax* – and particularly *pax augusta* – is part of his ideological position. The idea of peace as something positive had appeared with real strength only with Augustus.²²¹ It came to represent one of the most important factors which made the principate both strong and popular: calm and tranquillity at home and abroad. Without doubt peace had been one of the most powerful messages in the *Res Gestae*: 'it was the

²¹⁹ For the biographical approach to history under the principate and the concept of 'biostructure', see C. Pelling, 'Biographical History? Cassius Dio on the Early Principate, in M.J. Edwards and S. Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature or the Roman Empire* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997) 117-44

²²⁰ Cf. Vell, 2.89.2 and 2.126.3.

²²¹ Peace was seen by the Romans as a negative concept: the absence of war implied no expansion, no wealth, less power.

will of our ancestors that the gateway of Janus Quirinus should be shut when the victories had secured peace by land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman people; from the foundation of the city down to my birth, tradition records that it was shut only twice, but while I was the leading citizen the senate resolved that it should be shut on three occasions'.²²² Velleius reinforces this idea in his fervent description of Augustus' rule: 'he restored peace ... To tell of the wars waged under his command, of the pacification of the world by his victories ... would weary a writer intending to devote his whole life to this one task'.²²³ This is his characteristically exaggerated way of expressing the achievements of Augustus, but it cannot be denied that the fact was real, so real that Tacitus complains about it: [Augustus] 'seduced everyone with the sweetness of peace'.²²⁴ Augustus was the culmination of a process which was continued by Tiberius and was spread stronger and further: 'the *pax augusta*, which has spread to the regions of the east and of the west and to the bounds of the north and of the south, preserves every corner of the world safe from fear and brigandage'.²²⁵ *Pax augusta* was seen by him as the consummation or climax of the Roman empire: after so many wars, Rome had achieved the goal which she was fighting for: the universal dominion under one head. For Velleius the pacification of the world was absolutely essential and it was also the result of something deeper: this peace was not obtained only by those who had more power, but by the nation which had individuals with more personal virtue. Hence his prayer at the end of his work: *custodite, servate, protegite hunc statum, hanc pacem, hunc principem*.²²⁶

To a certain extent Velleius' conception of history is different from that of other Roman historians. His perception is teleological. Everything is moving towards an end, which appears to him as the summit achieved with Augustus and continued by Tiberius. Therefore, his view of history is positive, though not without risks: human nature, being as it is, needs to be watched over, and for this purpose, there can be nothing better than an *optimus princeps*.

²²² *Res Gestae*, 13. See also 25; 26; 34.

²²³ Vell, 2.89.3ff.

²²⁴ Tac. *Ann.*, 1.2.1. And also 1.3.6: *bellum ea tempestate nullum ... domi res tranquilla*; 1.4.1: *Augustus aetate validus, seque et domum et pacem sustentavit*. The dedication of the *Ara Pacis* in 13 BC was also important.

²²⁵ Vell, 2.126.3.

²²⁶ Vell, 2.131.1.

Thus, for Velleius the history of Rome is seen as an indefinite progression, as something that flows continually and finds its end in the new regime, and particularly in its *optimus princeps*: Tiberius. *Virtus* is then the strand which works as the unifying link in the development of this succession. It is absolutely necessary to reinforce this concept after the vicissitudes that occurred in the previous age. *Virtus* was somehow hidden during the late Republic and shone every now and then in individual cases. Now, when peace is spread throughout the empire and its head is a model of *virtus*, Romans – aristocrats and *homines novi* – can practise it openly and without fear. Rome has recovered her essence and history can continue advancing to perfection.

Velleius is not more selective, biased and fallible than other historians. It becomes a challenge to discover the many aspects through which the truth can be revealed, and therefore, it does not really matter if Velleius does not rank among the great Roman historians such as Sallust, Livy or Tacitus. His work has thrown light, its mission has been to be a witness of a new era which tried to recover old principles.

The advent of the principate – and especially with its two first rulers – brought unknown problems for the writing of history. There was not absolute despotism, so in theory they could write with sincerity, and silence could be seen as cowardice. However, there was not absolute freedom either, so complete honesty was risky and it could be dangerous. In the prefaces of the *Annals* and the *Histories* Tacitus is emphatic about this point. History previous to Actium was written with eloquence and freedom but after it, historians of that category utterly disappeared. Writers of that age developed, according to Tacitus, special techniques of ambiguity and insincerity. Hatred and flattery were the main motives to write history and so ‘between the hostility of the one class and the servility of the other, posterity was disregarded’.²²⁷

Conventional scholarship has situated Velleius in this second group. Labelled and sealed as a flatterer his name was bound to fall into oblivion. But it has not. Velleius’ work forms part of a historiographical tradition. As a follower of this tradition, Velleius presents Roman history as a chain of events, interconnected with one another. The main cause for explaining them was for Velleius – as it had been for other historians as well – human initiative. The individual was the one who decided. For if everything

²²⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 1.1.

happened by fate, for what reason would historians have striven so hard to fit the *exempla* into the narrative if man could not do anything to alter his destiny?

Sallust, Cicero and, to certain extent, Livy thought that *virtus* in Rome had had its day. It was in the glorious past of the Republic where they saw *virtus* realized. *Virtus* was inseparably associated with the Republic: the decline of this latter had implied inevitably that of *virtus*. Velleius also portrayed the history of *virtus*, but he did it in a positive way. Even though the term was used from one century to the next one, or the meaning was somehow altered by different generations, *virtus* was not worn out: the concept had an emotional power that went beyond transient aspects. If he emphasised the coming of a new and better era, he had in mind – and said it explicitly – that it was better precisely because people could live according to the *mores maiorum*. Hence, his stress on the recovery: *revocata in foro fides...* Restitution and novelty: Velleius restores the belief of the empire as a place where *virtus* could reign, and at the same time he helps to consolidate the ways in which autocracy was going to be seen and shaped henceforward.

VI A new version of old Romanness: *virtus* and *libertas* in Tacitus

But it behoves a man to live a life
 inspired by true *virtus*, to stand steadfast
 with guiltless bravery in the face of the foes.
 The man who bears himself both pure and staunch—
 that is true liberty. All conduct else
 lies lurking in dim darkness, fraught with guilt.

Ennius, *Phoen*, 308-11.

I have been arguing throughout this thesis that *virtus* was a key concept for the understanding of Roman history. Regardless of the period, the style, the author, *virtus* occupied a central role in the development of Roman historiography. The historians present different perspectives and viewpoints which respond to a double stimulus. On the one hand they write ‘about’ a period of history in which *virtus* appears to be especially important – for its presence or its absence –, but also the same historians cannot escape finding themselves writing ‘within’ a precise moment of history. Being at the same time an outsider of the story one is telling and an insider of time, makes history difficult to grasp in its totality and universality. There will be as many versions as historians are willing to write, but this cannot take us to despair, on the contrary, the subjectivity of history is what enriches the discovery of truth.

I have been trying to show how *virtus* was intimately connected to *libertas* and Romanness. The defence of freedom through courage and virtue constituted a very important part of the definition of what it meant to be Roman. Historians of the late Republic became particularly insistent and repetitive about *virtus* at this time. The transitional period they were living made them aware that Rome was unconsciously redefining her values in the fight for survival. Was she going to give in and forget precisely what had made her great: the freedom of her people? Was it possible to transfer the ‘Romanness’ of a small city into a huge empire?

Historians tried desperately to give some answers. Sallust shows the decline of *virtus* and predicts that if Romans continue to behave with *saevitia, superbia et ambitio*, it will be the end of the empire. Livy, with a more hopeful outlook, decides that the solution is to look at the past and, from there, take lessons for the present situation. Livy encourages his readers to be heroes, whereas Sallust scares them with the prospect of a dark future if they do not change. For Velleius Paterculus, who thought he was experiencing the climax of history, the way to progress was to look at and obey the model of the most virtuous prince: Tiberius. Velleius places the stress on the continuity from the Republic to the Empire, this being a time in which the conditions were even better to exercise *virtus*. In all cases *virtus* appears to be not only playing a very central role, but also one which was very dear to the authors themselves; *virtus* shows the values in which they most deeply believed and the ideal for which it was worthwhile writing a new interpretation of the history of Rome.

I will argue in this chapter that with Tacitus we come to a different level in the understanding of *virtus*, *libertas* and Romanness. The depth of his insight gives these concepts a new definition. Tacitus' superiority as a historian is not just a matter of style, nor his use of psychology in describing people, nor his genius in the art of innuendo. All this is certainly present and alive, and so many pages have been cleverly written about it, but what I will try to demonstrate here is how much all these things can prevent us from grasping what Tacitus is trying to say at a much deeper level. In my view, his concern for human nature is not only the 'normal' interest of a historian. In his approach to history he not only searches for causes and explanations of the events occurred, but proposes a redefinition of Roman values in an original and demanding way, which not everybody in his time was prepared to follow nor all of his readership able to understand.

Tacitus invites us to look underneath the surface of the events: *introspicere illa primo aspectu levia*.¹ The surface of the Principate was crime, slavery, cruelty and fear under bad emperors; but behind all that there was an even more dramatic reality: the decline of personal *virtus* because of the failure to acknowledge that not all liberty was suppressed under the Principate; that there were still opportunities to be brave, to behave

¹ Tac. *Ann*, 4.32.

like a true Roman, but this choice was taken by few only. We will see how Tacitus in all of his works shows that political freedom was lost, but that some could still exercise an 'interior freedom' which could give them the courage to be virtuous. It is in this concept of interior freedom that I would like to centre my discussion of Tacitus' concept of *virtus*.

1.-The Minor Works: Unity in the Diversity

a) *Agricola*:²

The life of his father-in-law was for Tacitus a source of inspiration for how men should behave under a *princeps*. The question of the genre of the *Agricola* has been debated at length and it has not reached a definitive conclusion.³ But classifying a work in strictly defined categories, although sometimes helpful, may not always be the best way to understand its content. Tacitus has combined his purpose of writing a biography with some elements of the historical monograph,⁴ and he achieved an original piece of work which is at the same time the record of *clarorum virorum facta moresque*,⁵ and the detailed description of a particular province of the empire and its inhabitants during a period of time.

What strikes us in the first place in the *Agricola* is Tacitus' boldness in denouncing the evils of the times he has lived in: an age which has been at its best *incuriosa* to its own affairs.⁶ Envy and loss of freedom appear quickly on scene, but at the same time, the author uses the word *virtus* four times in the first paragraph and this

² I have used the Loeb translation for the quotes, except in the word *virtus* which I preferred to keep in Latin or to translate it into its main meanings: virtue or courage, instead of giving several – as the Loeb does – just for stylistic reasons, e.g. 'ardour', 'quality', 'prowess', 'heroism', 'character', etc.

³ For the complex identification of definitive genre for the *Agricola*, see Marincola, 'Genre, Convention and Innovation in Greco-Roman Historiography', esp. 318. See also Ogilvie and Richmond, *Tacitus: Agricola, Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967) 11; and T.A. Dorey, 'Agricola and Germania' in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Tacitus* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 1-4.

⁴ For example ethnographical literature in a Caesarean way, the typical historiographical excursus (cf. Sall, *BJ* on Africa), traces of *laudatio funebris*, etc.

⁵ Tac. *Agr*, 1.1.

⁶ Tac. *Agr*, 1.1.

combination sets the tone of the work: he is interested in *memoria virtutis* even if the spirit of the age is *saeva* and *infesta* towards it.⁷ Illustrious men have been prosecuted, books praising the good have been burnt, and people have witnessed the extremes of slavery. The panorama could not be darker, but perhaps what Tacitus has felt most is silence.⁸ It would have been better to have lost memory altogether. The tacit prohibition to record the truth about history is a sore point for him, and when he sees some hopes of change – *nunc demum redit animus* –⁹ he decides to break this silence and write history. It is quite revealing that he did not do it before; he was not prepared to be another flatterer, cowardly acquiescing with the emperor of the moment. He waited – a painful interval – until he could say what he thought. On the other hand, this silence could have been interpreted contrarily to the author's intention: was Tacitus not brave enough to face a destiny like the one of Cremutius Cordus?¹⁰ I will try to show in this section that Tacitus is as interested to illustrate that Agricola had managed to live an honourable life under a bad emperor as he was keen on giving an *apologia pro vita sua* (Tacitus') with regard to his silence.¹¹ Agricola had opted for the *via media*, the path of collaboration rather than intransigence. So had Tacitus. He had chosen not to write if he was prevented from telling the facts as he saw them. The theme of *libertas*, then, lies at the very heart of Tacitus' first work known to us.¹² Not only the obvious freedom of speech, one of the many meanings of *libertas* in the Republic, but also the freedom of a man when keeping his *dignitas* by serving the state without complying with the emperor's cruelty [*saevitia principis*],¹³ and the freedom lived outside Rome by peoples other than Romans.

The opening of a new era where principate and liberty have been reconciled is a stimulus to record how the really brave could still be brave even in the times when these concepts were *dissociabiles*.¹⁴ It was true: autocracy and political freedom were incompatible, the evidence was before everybody's eyes, but at the same time, some

⁷ Tac. *Agr*, 1.2; 1.4.

⁸ Cf. Tac. *Agr*, 2.3; 3.3.

⁹ Tac. *Agr*, 3.1.

¹⁰ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 4.34.

¹¹ But see Ogilvie and Richmond, *Agricola*, 19.

¹² Cf. M. Morford, 'How Tacitus defined Liberty', *ANRW* II, 33.5 (1991) 3420-50, esp. 3422-5 and W. Liebeschuetz, 'The Theme of Liberty in the *Agricola* of Tacitus', *CQ* 16 (1966) 126-39.

¹³ Tac. *Agr*, 3.3.

¹⁴ Cf. Tac. *Agr* 3.1.

exercised another kind of liberty which made possible to behave as a true Roman and a virtuous man. One of these men was Tacitus' father-in-law.

Agricola's father and mother had been examples of virtues themselves,¹⁵ and the life lived with refinement and simplicity was a good ground for the virtues of his son too. Agricola's martial virtues are given in the first place: he kept a strict discipline without falling into the self-indulgence typical of young soldiers, he made himself known to the army and learned from the expert to follow the best men.¹⁶ In this respect, Tacitus follows a traditional Roman approach – the best and foremost Roman quality is *militaris virtus* – and describes him as the perfect balance of conduct between 'aspiring nothing in bravado, yet shrinking from nothing in fear'.¹⁷ The desire for military distinction was present in young Agricola's heart, regardless of the unwelcoming attitude of the age towards any kind of eminence. The struggle to achieve this *gloria* serving the state was another of Agricola's old-fashioned and very characteristically Roman traits.

All other virtues are given in a long and exhaustive list:¹⁸ his *pietas* (7.2), *moderatio* (7.3); *temperantia* (8.1); *modestia* (8.3); *verecundia* (8.3); *prudentia* (9.2); *iustitia* (9.3); *gravitas*, *severitas*, *misericordia*, *integritas*, *abstinentia* (9.4) were all Agricola's very personal achievements: he could find neither the encouragement nor the models under Domitian. This, of course, made his *virtus* all the more admirable. It implied not being overcome by the circumstances, fighting all the battles to maintain one's principles and being convinced that even with a bad ruler one still had an interior freedom which enabled men to 'choose how' they would behave under tyranny. The bad emperor, the difficult circumstances, the lack of freedom to express one's ideas and opinions together with the fear of injustice and the indolence of the good did not determine one's conduct. It made it more difficult and challenging, it involved a deeper and stronger commitment to the ideals and Roman values, but the last resource was not lost. The sure knowledge that no matter 'what' the circumstances are, one has the

¹⁵ Cf. Tac. *Agr*, 4.1 and 4.2 respectively.

¹⁶ Cf. Tac. *Agr*, 5.1.

¹⁷ Tac. *Agr* 5.1.

¹⁸ Tac. *Agr*, 6-9.

personal capacity to decide 'how' to live them, made Tacitus' conclusion appear very clear: 'that great men can live even under bad rulers'.¹⁹

There were lots of things that Agricola 'could have done' with the justification that 'everybody did them', but he chose not to. His office in Asia did not corrupt him, even though 'the province was rich and an easy prey for the unscrupulous';²⁰ he could have punished the soldiers harshly,²¹ boasted of his military exploits,²² or even his virtues.²³ To fall into these temptations meant to follow the common way of behaviour of the powerful men. It was probably easier and less likely to provoke enmity. But Agricola's choice is the difficult one, the less common, the brave one.

Agricola carried out the conquest and Romanisation of Britain successfully and began 'to be regarded as a brilliant and a great man'.²⁴ He seemed to have made always the right decision: 'he put order in his own house (...) he transacted no public business through freedmen or slaves (...) he gave his confidence only to the best'.²⁵ He restored discipline in the army,²⁶ and his attitude towards the vanquished went beyond simple *clementia* when he began to train the sons of the chieftains in a liberal education and to give preference to the native talents of the Briton as against the trained abilities of the Gaul.²⁷

To serve the state with all these triumphs and his honest behaviour had been Agricola's goal, but in *tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora*,²⁸ this series of achievements were greeted by Domitian with uneasiness. The emperor received the news 'as his manner was, with affected pleasure and secret disquiet: in his heart was the consciousness that his recent counterfeit triumph over the Germans was a laughing-

¹⁹ Tac. *Agr*, 42.4.

²⁰ Tac. *Agr*, 6.2.

²¹ Tac. *Agr*, 7.3.

²² Tac. *Agr*, 8.3.

²³ Tac. *Agr*, 9.4. All this is part of Agricola's *moderatio*, which for Tacitus, would play a particularly important role in his career. For this, see C.J. Classen, 'Tacitus-Historian between Republic and Principate', *Mnemosyne* 41, fasc. 1-2 (1988) esp. 95-104.

²⁴ Tac. *Agr*, 18.5. Cf. A.R. Burn, 'Tacitus on Britain', in T.A. Dorey, *Tacitus*, 35-61. For the historical conquest of Britain, see for example, W.S. Hanson, *Agricola and the Conquest of the North* (London, Batsford Ltd, 1987) and W.S. Hanson, 'Tacitus' Agricola: an Archaeological and Historical Study', *ANRW* II, 33.3 (1991) 1741-84.

²⁵ Tac. *Agr*, 19.1-3.

²⁶ Tac. *Agr*, 20.2.

²⁷ Tac. *Agr* 21.2.

²⁸ Tac. *Agr*, 1.4.

stock: he had in fact purchased, in the way of trade, persons whose clothes and hair could be adapted to look like that of prisoners. But here was a veritable, a decisive victory, with enemies slain in thousands, widely canvassed and advertised: this was what he dreaded most, that the name of a commoner (*privati*) should be exalted above his prince: it was all in vain that the practice of public speaking and the glamour of the arts of peace had been silenced, if another was to usurp military glory'.²⁹ This latter was still the main source of honour by Roman standards, or at least the most valued one. It was a different matter to achieve a certain kind of glory under the principate, one did not need to show extraordinary courage or merit, just win the emperor's favour; as Tacitus would say later, these were 'the empty honours of the principate'.³⁰ But real glory was still won in the battlefield and Domitian felt the defeat.

Even if Agricola did not look for it, this was not a safe situation to be in. He returned to Rome and lived quietly and in complete moderation, not to excite more jealousy; he probably realised that 'qualities of other kinds could be more easily overlooked, but good generalship was the emperor's virtue'.³¹ Domitian could not bear that a successful general should have the qualities that were proper to an emperor.³² The fear of being outdone by anyone in any aspect, but especially *virtus*, became an obsession under the principate; the *princeps* kept a keen eye on good men and consequently the mere existence of anyone who excelled in any kind of *virtus* became dangerous. I take *virtus* to mean here both *virilis-virtus* and *humana-virtus*, but with a slight stress on the former especially because of the military context.³³

It was not necessary to have been accused by somebody, not even a complaint from a victim, 'merely an emperor unfriendly to virtues, merely the glory of the man, and those worst of enemies, the people who praised you',³⁴ were enough to be under

²⁹ Tac. *Agr* 39.1-2.

³⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 4.11.

³¹ *Ducis boni imperatoriam virtutem esse*: Tac. *Agr* 39.1-2. Ogilvie and Richmond's translation. The Loeb edition (transl. by Hutton, revised by Ogilvie) has *virtus* translated into the plural 'virtues', which of course alters the meaning.

³² For the special relationship between Domitian and *virtus*, see H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum, Volume 2: Vespasian to Domitian* (London, Spink and Son, 1930) xci. Cf. also Appendix 1.a; 2., and S.L. Tuck, 'The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Redefinition of *Virtus* under the Principate', *G&R* 52, n° 2 (2005) 221-245.

³³ Here, therefore, we can see that the development of *virtus* is not completely temporal. *Virtus*-courage in military context is still in Tacitus' time relevant and important.

³⁴ Tac. *Agr*, 41.1.

suspicion. No matter how Agricola tried to pass unnoticed with his moderation and discretion, both by his own virtues and by the faults of others,³⁵ he pushed headlong to that very prominence which he had tried to avoid.

After this, the story ran quickly; Agricola died surrounded by mystery, real illness or poisoned by the emperor's design?³⁶ Tacitus – as would become paradigmatic in his style – does not give a definitive answer or a personal opinion in this matter; he is as usual more concerned to illustrate what were the feelings and the reaction of the people at the news of Agricola's death: 'the end of his life brought mourning to us, melancholy to his friends, anxiety even to the bystander and those who knew him not'.³⁷

Even in Agricola's last act, he was misunderstood by Domitian. Agricola left the emperor co-heir with his wife and daughter; 'he [Domitian] was delighted (...) so blinded, so perverted was his intelligence by unremitting flattery that he did not see that it is the bad prince who is made heir by good fathers'.³⁸ His whole life had been misinterpreted by the twisted mind of the emperor, who saw in Agricola's achievements a risk to his own reputation, instead of a true Roman willing to serve his country. Now, in the moment of death, Agricola, who did not fear Domitian when he was alive, fears for his beloved and tries to protect them by leaving the emperor as an heir so as not to arise more envy, jealousy and hatred.

Tacitus' prayer for his father-in-law is an expression of filial piety and at the same time a beautiful piece of eloquence: 'If there be any habitation for the spirits of the just; if, as wise men will have it, the soul that is great perish not with the body, may you rest in peace, and summon us, your household, from weak repining and womanish tears to the contemplation of those virtues which it were impiety to lament or mourn. Let reverence rather, let thankfulness, let imitation even, if our strength permit be our tribute to your memory'.³⁹ But this prayer, however final it may seem, it is not in any case the last tribute that Tacitus would be paying to Agricola; he has done something that would

³⁵ Tac. *Agr*, 41.4.

³⁶ Parallel to Germanicus, who also displayed excessive *virtus* in the provinces and came to a similarly suspicious end. Cf. C. Pelling, 'Tacitus and Germanicus' in T.J. Luce and A.J. Woodman (eds.), *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993) 59-85. For the rumours on Agricola's death and that of Germanicus, see I. Shatzman, 'Tacitean Rumours', *Latomus* 33 (1974) 549-78.

³⁷ Tac. *Agr*, 43.1. Cf. *Ann*, 2.72 on the similar reaction to Germanicus' death.

³⁸ Tac. *Agr*, 43.4.

³⁹ Tac. *Agr*, 46.

never end, he has recorded his life for posterity: the *memoria virtutis* will start living an independent life from its author and will stay forever. This is his final tribute, this is what history is all about: ‘whatever we have loved in Agricola, whatever we have admired, abides and is destined to abide, in the hearts of men, through the endless courses of ages, by the fame of his achievements’.⁴⁰

This reading of the *Agricola* seems quite simple and straightforward, the author himself gives us his conclusion with a rare clarity and unambiguous words: ‘that great men can live even under bad rulers; and that submission and moderation, if animation and energy go with them, reach the same pinnacle of fame, whither more often men have climbed by perilous courses, but with no profit to the state, have earned their glory by an ostentatious death’.⁴¹ Agricola’s life, with wisdom and common sense, lies in between those poles that Tacitus would later on describe in the *Annals*: on the one hand *deforme obsequium* and on the other, *abrupta contumacia*.⁴²

However, we know that Tacitus is not a simple and straightforward author. Where, then, is the trick of the *Agricola*? Perhaps the answer lies in that Agricola is not the only one who is praised and admired in the work; there are other characters, who in some respects represent the opposite to Agricola’s values, but they deserve Tacitus’ compliment and applause as well. These are the barbarian Britons.

Tacitus was not only concerned with Roman *libertas*, he cared most of all for the nature of freedom itself, even if its purest form was going to be found outside Rome. The noblest virtue of the inhabitants of Britain is for him their freedom of spirit; for even though they have been subjected, ‘completely enough to involve obedience, [this subjection] does not involve slavery’.⁴³ *Libertas* is therefore given as the first quality of these peoples. Their geographical condition helps to secure this freedom of movements and ideals; they are surrounded by the ocean and this meant protection from outsiders and, at the same time, opportunities to explore and go freely where they wanted.

⁴⁰ Tac. *Agr*, 46.4. Ogilvie and Richmond’s translation, *Agricola*, 315.

⁴¹ Tac. *Agr*, 42.4.

⁴² Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 4.20.

⁴³ Tac. *Agr* 13.1.

Britain had many geographical advantages: the location of the island, its wealth, even its weather had worked in its favour in different occasions.⁴⁴ The warriors were brave and wild – Tacitus feels the need to compare them with other barbarians, such as Gauls and Germans,⁴⁵ and they gave the Romans a tough time. Britons display a higher spirit than the Gauls because they have not been weakened by long years of peace. ‘The Gauls also according to history, once shone in war: afterwards indolence made its appearance hand in hand with peace, and courage and liberty have been lost together [*amissa virtute pariter ac libertate*].’⁴⁶ We see *libertas* and *virtus* working together for Tacitus: freedom was a prerequisite for virtue and at the same time, courage was necessary for maintaining one’s freedom: the invaders ‘would withdraw, as Julius of happy memory had withdrawn, if Britons would but emulate the valour of their fathers’.⁴⁷

Freedom is also related to keeping safe and alive one’s own traditions. Not to be led to somebody else’s way of being or living. With time and ceaseless conquests, Britons who ‘used to reject the Latin language began to aspire to rhetoric: further, the wearing of our dress became a distinction, and the toga came into fashion, and little by little the Britons went astray into alluring vices: to the promenade, the bath, the well-appointed dinner table. The simple natives gave the name of culture [*humanitas*] to this factor of their slavery’.⁴⁸ The effects of romanisation are not always positive; complete imitation is seen here as a kind of enslavement, and Tacitus seems keen on illustrating the stages and phases of the loss of liberty in Britain. Ambiguity starts appearing; the times of the Virgilian euphoria of *imperium sine fine* and *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento*⁴⁹ about Rome’s mission have passed and Tacitus is not sure whether they can transmit to other peoples the values that made Rome great any more.

In the speech given by Calgacus, the Briton leader, we can perceive some of Tacitus’ own ideas about the changes of values in Roman expansion: ‘these deadly Romans, whose arrogance [*superbia*] you cannot escape by obedience and self-restraint.

⁴⁴ Cf. Tac. *Agr*, 22.1-2.

⁴⁵ Cf. Tac. *Agr*, 11.2; 15.3.

⁴⁶ Tac. *Agr*, 11.4.

⁴⁷ Tac. *Agr*, 15.4.

⁴⁸ Tac. *Agr*, 21.2.

⁴⁹ Virg. *Aen*, 1.278; 6.851. Although the end of the *Aeneid* throws a rather different idea into question.

Robbers of the world, now that earth fails their all-devastating hands, they probe even the sea: if their enemy have wealth, they have greed [*avaritia*]; if he be poor, they are ambitious [*ambitio*] ... To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and they call it peace'.⁵⁰ The possibility that a barbarian had delivered such an elegant speech full of Roman oratory elements is quite uncertain,⁵¹ but it reveals Tacitus' flexibility and broadmindedness to be able to think and to feel as the enemy would have done towards Rome, and perhaps more than that, his personal view about the conquests carried out in his own times. The three Sallustian vices give a negative tone to the process: the expansion of Rome carried out by Tacitus' *maiores* had little to do with the race of avarice and cruelty Tacitus was witnessing.

The Britons themselves had experienced this,⁵² and it is precisely what the chieftain reminds his army of: the Roman army they are fighting is not the same as that which had conquered Carthage: 'Do you imagine that the Romans have as much *virtus* in war as wantonness in peace? It is our dissensions and feuds that bring them fame: their enemy's mistake becomes their army's glory'.⁵³ He urges them to 'fight as men uncorrupted and unconquered, men who have been trained for freedom not for regrets'.⁵⁴ The adjectives *integri* and *indomiti* are given here to emphasise once again the contrast between the Britons and the Romans.

Calgacus' appeal to *virtus* and freedom somehow expresses all that Romanness is about and it is interesting that Tacitus should have put it on barbarians' lips. His idea was perhaps to make people think of where the true values were kept in those times and how little was needed to see them disappearing under new vices that became new values. For, how long would Britain be able to resist the Roman 'temptation' and with it, lose her *virtus* and *libertas* as the Gauls had done?⁵⁵

It could be said, then, that with the introduction of these brave and still free barbarians, Tacitus wanted to introduce the idea of multiple *virtus* and multiple *libertas*.

⁵⁰ Tac. Agr, 30. 4-5.

⁵¹ Cf. Ogilvie and Richmond, *Agricola*, ad loc., who insert this type of speeches within a historiographical tradition. For the rhetorical elements of the speech, see K. Clarke, 'An Island Nation: Re-reading Tacitus' *Agricola*', *JRS* (2001) 105.

⁵² Cf. the Boudicca revolt in *Ann*, 14.31, clearly set off by the abuses of the Romans and focused around the *arx aeternae dominationis*.

⁵³ Tac. Agr, 32.1.

⁵⁴ Tac. Agr, 31.4.

⁵⁵ Cf. Tac. Agr, 11.4.

There was a political freedom, the one which senators in the Republic used to exercise and was now lost and had been *olim dissociabiles* with the advent of the principate, namely the right to express one's own opinion on political matters; the liberty of the *indomiti*, the peoples which had not been yet conquered by the Romans and together with this one as well, the one which subjected nations still had regarding their behaviour towards their masters avoiding slavery. Another type of freedom was the interior one which I have portrayed in *Agricola*, meaning more not feeling forced to act in a particular way because of the circumstances, than doing what one wished. A difficult and demanding one, which required more inner strength than the others and whose rewards were immaterial.

To be able to exercise one or many of these freedoms one needed the essential *virtus* or courage to put up with the consequences of such exercise. Freedom was a privilege, but paradoxically you could not get it for free.

Romanitas, *virtus* and *libertas* are the main topics of the *Agricola*. With the pretext of writing the biography of his father-in-law, Tacitus gives us a more complex account of liberty and virtue not only under bad rulers, but also in a non-Roman society. His conclusion is that these terms are not completely out-dated, even though they represent the values of the Republican period, it is still possible to find them; it may be necessary to look for them from a new angle or under a new light perhaps because we are before a new *virtus* and a new *libertas*, but their main meaning and – more importantly – their main role are still valuable and very much an ideal to define Romanness.

b) *Germania*:

From the very beginning in the *Germania* we are reminded of Caesar's *Gallic Wars*.⁵⁶ The geographical and spatial description is powerful and precise: *Germania omnis a Gallis Raetisque et Pannoniis Rheno et Danuvio fluminibus, a Sarmatis*

⁵⁶ Caes. BG, 1.1: *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres, quarum unam incolunt Belgae, aliam Aquitani, tertiam qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Gallia appellantur.*

Dacisque mutuo metu aut montibus separatur, the rest is surrounded by the ocean, which enfolds wide peninsulas and islands'.⁵⁷ By trying to illustrate and explain *de origine et situ Germanorum*, the author is somehow aiming to achieve a certain control of the land and its people. It seems as if Tacitus wants to 'conquer' Germania through his writing as Caesar had done with Gaul through his wars. With this work of 'ethnography',⁵⁸ Tacitus once again wants to express something deeper than just the description of a powerful barbarian nation. To say that 'no moral teaching was intended, nor any political purpose involved except perhaps one: Tacitus stresses the seriousness of a German menace',⁵⁹ seems to me a little overhasty. One can argue that the *Germania* was not a historical work 'proper',⁶⁰ but it certainly aimed at identification and self-definition, and these categories in Roman writing were indeed moral and political.

On the other hand, the view that Tacitus idealised the German tribes and put them as a mirror of morals for the corrupted Romans of his time, has by now lost some of its validity and appears an oversimplification in the reading of Tacitus.⁶¹ What I will argue in this section is that again Tacitus breaks and shatters our preconceptions and proposes something much richer for the understanding of his key concepts of *virtus* and *libertas* when interpreting human nature – and in particular the Roman one.

A categorical definition of the *Germania* as an ethnographical monograph could somehow reduce the possibilities of being able to see 'beneath the surface' as Tacitus invites us to do in the *Annals*.⁶² It is true that the whole of the second part of the work is dedicated to the description of individual tribes, and we see many ethnic groups with similarities and differences among them, but Tacitus may be trying not just to give an exhaustive account of the German peoples with encyclopaedic exactness and precision, but to widen the Roman mind. He is concerned on the one hand with the 'otherness' of German tribes as opposed to the Romans, and on the other, in transmitting this idea to the Romans. The assimilation of it would imply a profit in political understanding which

⁵⁷ Tac. *Germ.*, 1.1. For the importance of geographical descriptions in Tacitus, see M.A. Giua, 'Paesaggio, Natura, Ambiente come elementi strutturali nella storiografia di Tacito', *ANRW* II 33.4 (1991) 2879-2902.

⁵⁸ Cf. Marincola, 'Genre, Convention and Innovation', 296.

⁵⁹ E.H. Warmington, introduction to the *Germania*, Loeb edition, 2000, p. 120.

⁶⁰ For the specific characteristics of the ethnographic tradition, see J.B. Rives, *Tacitus: Germania* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999) 11-21.

⁶¹ Cf. Dorey, 'Agricola and Germania', 12-13.

⁶² Cf. *Ann.*, 4.32.

could be useful, not only regarding the ‘future threat’, but also for the present situation: to learn about the people who live beyond the *limes* would help the Romans in dealing with them. At the same time, Tacitus not only emphasises the ethnic and spatial differences between the Romans and the Germans, but also a temporal one. The Germans appear to behave as the Romans had done in earlier times; in some sense, although contemporaries, they are living a different time. ‘In the description of the German as an unspoiled primitive there is evident a temporal distancing of Germany, as the primitive Roman is evoked’.⁶³ To redefine Romanness in his own times, Tacitus had to go back in time to identify the original *Romanitas*.

The author approaches his topic with various techniques. Most of the time Tacitus records the data with little or no personal comment at all, it seems that he does not want to give his opinion approving or condemning the Germans’ customs and ways: ‘their ancient hymns are the only style of record or history which they possess’;⁶⁴ ‘they conceive that in women is a certain uncanny and prophetic sense’.⁶⁵ We can certainly guess what Tacitus’ sentiments were towards these examples of German idiosyncrasy. Some other times, he feels the need to say what he thinks, and we receive the information filtered through Tacitus’ own values: ‘the marriage tie with them is strict: you will find nothing in their character to praise more highly’;⁶⁶ ‘good habits have more force with them than good laws elsewhere’.⁶⁷

The Germanic concept of *virtus* is given by Tacitus with silent admiration, he restrains the praise and leaves us free to form our own opinion: ‘when the battlefield is reached it is a reproach for a chief to be surpassed in courage [*virtus*]; a reproach for his retinue not to equal the courage [*virtus*] of its chief: but to have left the field and survived one’s chief, this means lifelong infamy and shame’.⁶⁸ It is clear that for Tacitus these practices were highly commendable as well as the election of kings and generals:

⁶³ E. O’Gorman, ‘No Place like Rome: Identity and Difference in the *Germania* of Tacitus’, *Ramus* 22 n.2 (1993) 146.

⁶⁴ Tac. *Germ*, 2.3

⁶⁵ Tac. *Germ*, 8.2.

⁶⁶ Tac. *Germ*, 18.1

⁶⁷ Tac. *Germ*, 19.5.

⁶⁸ Tac. *Germ*, 14.1. The Loeb translation (Hutton, revised by Warmington) uses for these cases of *virtus* the word ‘prowess’, again I think that the more literal meaning of ‘courage’ does a better job.

*reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt.*⁶⁹ Germanic tribes seemed to have put their hopes in war upon firm and reliable foundations, they did not count too much on luck, but relied on courage: *fortunam inter dubia, virtutem inter certa numerare.*⁷⁰

In describing the tribes one by one in the second part of the *Germania*,⁷¹ the key word is *virtus*. The valour of the Germans receives the highest praise. The Batavi are *virtute praecipui*,⁷² the Chatti have their name linked with *virtus* at least on three occasions,⁷³ the Chauci are *praecipui virtute* as well,⁷⁴ and the Cimbri have proved their *virtus* against the Roman army since the end of the second century BC.⁷⁵ All the peoples described by Tacitus excel in *virtus* in one way or another. The Romans had experienced this fact and Tacitus recalls: 'neither the Samnites, nor the Carthaginians, neither Spain nor Gaul, not even the Parthians have taught us more lessons. The German fighting for liberty has been a keener enemy than the absolutism of Arsaces'.⁷⁶ They become more dangerous than any other nation because their freedom is more vigorous. In Tacitus' mind '*libertas*, political freedom, is almost a prerequisite for the exercise of *virtus*'.⁷⁷ The German *virtus* was practised everywhere because they lived free, and at the same time, with their *virtus* they fought for and saved their *libertas*.

But courage is not the only virtue to be praised in the Germans. Even though the traditional view that defined *Germania* as the land of the 'bon sauvage' has changed, there are certainly enough elements to show the high moral standards of the German tribes. They do not have ambition for gold or silver, 'they are not affected as much as one would expect by the use and possession of such things',⁷⁸ 'their generals control the people by example rather than command',⁷⁹ 'their life is one of fenced-in chastity',⁸⁰ they do not limit the number of their children,⁸¹ they have a simple diet,⁸² and in their

⁶⁹ Tac. *Germ*, 7.1.

⁷⁰ Tac. *Germ*, 30.2.

⁷¹ From chapter 28 to 37.

⁷² Tac. *Germ*, 29.1.

⁷³ Cf. Tac. *Germ*, 30.2; 31.1; 31.3

⁷⁴ Tac. *Germ*, 35.4.

⁷⁵ Cf. Tac. *Germ*, 37.2.

⁷⁶ Tac. *Germ*, 37.3.

⁷⁷ R. Martin, *Tacitus* (London, Batsford Ltd., 1981) 53.

⁷⁸ Tac. *Germ*, 5.4.

⁷⁹ Tac. *Germ*, 7.2.

⁸⁰ Tac. *Germ*, 19.1.

⁸¹ Cf. Tac. *Germ*, 19.5.

burials there is no ostentation.⁸³ *Moderatio*, *gravitas*, *severitas*, *verecundia* were very much old Roman virtues, the ones someone like Cato commended, and were perhaps seen as particularly necessary in times of Domitian.⁸⁴

Sometimes Tacitus describes the Germanic customs in a way relevant to his own times, and although he does not make explicit allusion to Rome, it is evident that the comparison should arise in the reader's mind: 'there is no arena with its seductions, no dinner-tables with their provocations to corrupt them. Of the exchange of secret letters men and women alike are innocent; adulteries are very few for the number of people (...) For prostituted chastity there is no pardon. No one laughs at vice there; no one calls seduction, suffered or wrought, the spirit of the age'.⁸⁵ The references could not be clearer.

As in historical writings, we find in *Germania* occasion for praise and blame. Tacitus does not idealise the barbaric life in itself and shows as many vices as virtues in the German people: 'when they are not entering on war, they spend much time in hunting, but more in idleness – creatures who eat and sleep – the best and bravest warriors doing nothing, having handed over the charge of their home, hearth and estate to the women and the old men and the weakest members of the family: for themselves they lounge about, by that curious incongruity of temperament which makes of the same men such lovers of laziness and such haters of quiet'.⁸⁶ Also drunkenness together with revelry are the constant characteristics of this nation when they are not in war.⁸⁷

Thus, their failings and their successes are placed in the reader's sight and 'everyone according to his temperament may minimise or magnify their credibility'.⁸⁸ But even if one is inclined to minimise the good and magnify the bad, two values in particular stand out: *virtus* and *libertas*. 'Circumstances alter the meaning of those two concepts, but they retain a core that is valid, whatever society the author is talking

⁸² Cf. Tac. *Germ*, 23.

⁸³ Cf. Tac. *Germ*, 27.

⁸⁴ Cf. Classen, 'Tacitus-Historian between Republic and Principate', 116.

⁸⁵ Tac. *Germ*, 19.

⁸⁶ Tac. *Germ*, 15.1.

⁸⁷ Cf. Tac. *Germ*, 23-24.

⁸⁸ Tac. *Germ*, 3.4.

about'.⁸⁹ The Germans' *libertas*, as that of the Britons, depended very much on the *virtus* of their leaders, in fact this acted as a guarantee of their freedom.

In the *Germania* we are confronted with a more basic courage and freedom. In a warrior society, the courage is shown in war, and liberty means the freedom of not being subjected to anybody's power. This *prisca virtus* and *libertas* were at some point the privileges of the Romans, but now they needed to move with more care and caution in the cloudy waters of the principate, which meant that these values required a redefinition. Agricola was going to appear as the perfect symbol of this more sophisticated way of being free and brave under the rule of one.⁹⁰ The *Germania* shows that other societies with simpler versions of politics could keep *prisca virtus Romana*, and, in this sense, it is only Rome herself with her changes in the political regime that has to adjust and transform this *virtus* to the new system.

Tacitus' motivation for writing a piece of work like the *Germania* is multifaceted: a historical one could be that he felt stimulated by the accession of Trajan and his expected campaigns, and in a more personal level, he was interested in the German people, their power and organisation puzzled him – especially having in mind the disaster of AD 9 – and he wanted to make the Romans aware of the threat, but also because the freshness of their virtues was an incentive for him to spur the virtues of his own country fellows, to wake them up from the disappointing condition they were in and lead them through his work to higher contests.⁹¹ Tacitus was again proposing a great challenge to the Romans: they should be able to keep the advantages of civilisation at the same time as maintaining the inner strength that had made them great. The new and old *virtus* were necessary, because the new and old *libertas* were at stake.

c) *Dialogus*:

A great amount of scholarship on the *Dialogus* has been centred on the problem of style and authorship of the work. It seems that after reading the *Annals*, scholars did

⁸⁹ Martin, *Tacitus*, 57.

⁹⁰ We will see also more examples of this in the *Histories* and the *Annals*.

⁹¹ For the purpose of the *Germania*, see Rives, *Tacitus: Germania*, 48-56.

not find it easy to believe that the same author could have written in such a different way. I am not going to deal with the ‘Ciceronian fashion’ of the *Dialogus*, nor with its fascinating literary discussion.⁹² My main concern will be to show that, in spite of the difference of style and genre regarding the other historical writings of Tacitus, his work is still focused on showing political change at various levels and the cause of the decline of morals. Therefore, we can say that even if the *Dialogus* is definitely a non-historical work, its aims and goals correspond to those of historiographical writing. As a piece of oratory, and history being *opus oratorium maxime*,⁹³ this should not surprise us; what is certainly striking in the *Dialogus* is its insistent discussion about the ancient and modern and their relation with *libertas* and *eloquentia*. Although the word *virtus* as such does not appear very frequently in this dialogue, its presence in the debate is very real and it works as the backdrop for the understanding of it.

There are three major discussions in the dialogue. In the first, M. Aper and Maternus argue about the merits of poetry and oratory. One is for the power and glory oratory brings with it, and the other defends the peace and freedom one enjoys with poetry. For Aper oratory is without any doubt superior to poetry: ‘everyone who is not competent at the bar, sets his heart on the pursuit of poetry and on making himself famous by verse’.⁹⁴ The pursuit of *gloria* – in an almost Sallustian way – is for Aper all that counts, and thus oratory ends up being even more valuable than offices: ‘Where is there a profession whose name and fame are to be compared with renown in oratory? What class of men enjoys greater prestige here in Rome than our public speakers?’⁹⁵ The Roman practical mind and approach to knowledge arises here through the words of Aper: who profits from poetry?⁹⁶ Maternus’ reply, calmer and gentler than his contender’s, argues for the purity and innocence of poetry, its religious importance – it was the language of oracles – and the immortal fame it brings to the poet.⁹⁷

⁹² For these, see for example, C.D.N. Costa, ‘The Dialogus’ in Dorey, *Tacitus*, 19-34 and R. Mayer, *Tacitus: Dialogus de Oratoribus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) 16-50.

⁹³ Cic. *De Leg*, 1.5.

⁹⁴ Tac. *Dial*, 5.3.

⁹⁵ Tac. *Dial*, 7.

⁹⁶ Cf. Tac. *Dial*, 9.

⁹⁷ Cf. Tac. *Dial*, 12.

A second debate is held on the merits of modern and ancient oratory. After deciding how arbitrary the division between ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ orators is,⁹⁸ they give a one-by-one description of the main orators.⁹⁹ Particularly interesting is the criticism of Cicero, and it is not difficult to guess how much Tacitus himself – perhaps more than Aper – was expressing his judgment.¹⁰⁰

The interlocutors of the dialogue appear to fulfil the qualities of the ideal definition of oratory, which was present in former days: Messalla uses all the finest characteristics of the eloquence of the past, whereas Maternus and Secundus ‘have such a happy combination of deep thinking with beauty and elegance of expression ... taste in the selection and arrangement of your subject-matter, such copiousness where necessary, such brevity where possible, such grace of construction, such perspicuity of thought, so well do you give expression to deep emotion, so restrained are you in your outspokenness...’¹⁰¹ This idealised eloquence was hard to find in the present time, all agreed on that, but they wanted to know the causes for this phenomenon, and this gives occasion for Messalla and Maternus to lead the third discussion on why the ancients excelled in oratory or what has motivated its decline in the present day.¹⁰²

For Messalla the reason is simple: ‘because of the laziness of our young men, the carelessness of parents, the ignorance of teachers, and the decay of the *moris antiqui*’.¹⁰³ Bringing up children had changed so much from the ‘good old days’ that it was not surprising that in this new fashion youth grew up ‘in an atmosphere of laxity and pertness, in which they come gradually to lose all sense of shame, and all respect both for themselves and for other people’.¹⁰⁴ Strict discipline and self-control have changed to passion for plays, gladiatorial shows and horse-racing.

Messalla’s response to the question represents a somewhat old-fashioned ready-made answer. It was easier, and certainly a commonplace, to say that education had been better in past times, but as Tacitus himself says: ‘Nor, indeed, were all things better in

⁹⁸ Cf. Tac. *Dial*, 16-18.1.

⁹⁹ Cf. Tac. *Dial*, 18.2-21.

¹⁰⁰ For Cicero’s criticism see ch. 22 and 23. Although it may be complex and risky to identify totally the author with one of the speakers of the dialogue.

¹⁰¹ Tac. *Dial*, 23.6.

¹⁰² Cf. Tac. *Dial*, 28 ff.

¹⁰³ Tac. *Dial*, 28.2.

¹⁰⁴ Tac. *Dial*, 29.2.

the old time before us'.¹⁰⁵ It cannot be denied that all these things were true and there was also a lack of preparation in the knowledge of *scientia omnium rerum*,¹⁰⁶ but the causes for the decline of oratory did not lie only there. According to Tacitus, Messalla had *incohasse tantum* the real problem.¹⁰⁷ Maternus seems to add a new variable worthy of consideration: political change.

Oratory – he says – is better in times of trouble and unrest, it has more strength and meaning: 'the art which is the subject of our discourse is not a quiet and peaceable art, or one that finds satisfaction in moral worth and good behaviour'.¹⁰⁸ 'We all know that the blessings of peace bring more profit and greater happiness than the horrors of war; yet war produces a larger number of good fighters than peace. It is the same with eloquence. The more numerous the strokes it receives and gives, the more powerful the opponents and the more keenly contested'.¹⁰⁹ Oratory had fallen silent in Augustan times as a consequence of the long period of peace and inactivity of the senate and the people.¹¹⁰ Tacitus, once again and almost in an obsessive way, blames peace as the cause of the advent of all sorts of negative things. But this seems to throw out some problematic ideas: if oratory flourishes and reaches its climax in difficult circumstances and times of unrest, and oratory had prospered and developed in the highest quality before the principate, does this mean that the Republic was a difficult period of political turbulence in Roman history? Is the Principate so stable and peaceful that oratory is finding it hard to grow and make progress in the present time? And moving beyond oratory, could this affirmation extend to *virtus* more generally as well? There is some contradiction in this argument.¹¹¹ If that was the case, Nero's and Domitian's reigns should then have provided the ideal circumstances for brilliant oratory,¹¹² but they did not. Had they imposed different kinds of restraints, then?

¹⁰⁵ Tac. *Ann*, 3.55.

¹⁰⁶ Tac. *Dial*, 30.5. For the topic of education, see J.P. Murphy, 'Tacitus on the Education of the Orator', *ANRW* II 33.3 (1991) 2284-97.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Tac. *Dial*, 33.1.

¹⁰⁸ Tac. *Dial*, 40.2.

¹⁰⁹ Tac. *Dial*, 37.7.

¹¹⁰ Tac. *Dial*, 38.2. For a similar argument with regard to historiography, see Toher, 'Augustus and the Evolution of Roman Historiography', 139-54.

¹¹¹ Cf. J.T. Luce, 'Reading and Response in the *Dialogus*' in Luce and Woodman, *Tacitus and the Tacitean tradition*, 33: 'Paradoxically put, Maternus is being consistent in his inconsistency'.

¹¹² Or *virtus*.

Tacitus' main message in the *Dialogus* is that political change affects more than it may appear at first sight. Politics were not only related to the exercise of one's citizenship, but implied a much wider field of action. Change had an impact on freedom itself – and freedom of speech in a particular way – which was essential for good oratory. Not without irony Tacitus puts in Maternus' lips this cry: 'really great and famous oratory is a foster child of licence, which foolish men called liberty, an associate of sedition, a goad for the unbridled populace (...) It is a plant that does not grow under a well-regulated constitution'.¹¹³ There had been no great orators in the strong governments of Sparta, Macedonia or Persia, many in Athens, where there was an untutored democracy and all the power was in the hands of the populace. 'Likewise at Rome, so long as the constitution was unsettled, so long as the country kept wearing itself out with factions and dissensions and disagreements, so long as there was no peace in the forum, no harmony in the senate, no restraint in the courts of law, no respect for authority, no sense of propriety in the part of the officers of state, the growth of eloquence was doubtless sturdier'.¹¹⁴

This leads us to infer that with all the power in the hands of the emperor, there is little room for controversial oratory. It may seem tempting to identify Tacitus' own view with that of Maternus, but part of the richness of the *Dialogus* is that it is possible to find Tacitus' opinion in all speakers. The discussion becomes more interesting if there is not one single person defending orthodoxy; the more complex the truth is, the more people are needed to illuminate it. As Luce has observed, 'the case Tacitus has created for each speaker is a good case, one that he might have written for himself if asked to defend a given point of view'.¹¹⁵ The discussion finishes with an open ending, there is no definitive conclusion, and in the end we have to decide by ourselves. Following the fashion when writing dialogues – in this sense here genre has determined style – the author invites the reader to think by himself and to form an opinion. He is keener to develop a proper argument than to provide the definitive answer about oratory in Rome.

¹¹³ Tac. *Dial*, 40.2.

¹¹⁴ Tac. *Dial*, 40.4.

¹¹⁵ Luce, 'Reading and Response in the *Dialogus*', 35.

Eloquentia was considered as one of the political virtues and a very Roman one,¹¹⁶ the cause of its decline then should be sought within the same framework of *virtus* and *libertas*. Together with these two, oratory played an important role in defining Romanness, this Romanness which had been seriously shaken with the political changes of the last century.

Tacitus' subtle irony, political insight and deep knowledge of human nature provide an excellent background to the analysis of the cause of decline. And in the same way that he suggests the exercise of a new type of liberty and virtue – more demanding because of the circumstances – he also proposes a higher kind of eloquence, which required a more challenging procedure for the orator, a more open-minded approach and a deeper understanding not only of the topic, but especially the people: 'it is impossible for any speaker to treat them with fullness, and variety, and elegance, unless he has made a study of human nature, of the meaning of goodness and wickedness of vice, and unless he has learnt to appreciate the significance of what ranks neither on the side of virtue nor on that of vice'.¹¹⁷

Maternus' important message on political decline bringing about with it other types of decline, such as eloquence, could be seen as Tacitus' way of telling us that political changes – for good or for bad – often have more and deeper consequences than only in the political sphere. To be Roman meant to believe in the Republic, and when one has placed one's own identity partly in the political system, to change it can involve a fracture in the foundations of that very self.

Tacitus' so-called minor works reveal the author's main concerns in a less dramatic and more direct language and expression than the 'Annals' or the 'Histories', but the fact that they have been considered 'less Tacitean' refers specifically to the style and not the content; it does not mean that their author has changed his perception of the key Roman concepts from the *Agricola* to the *Annales*. Even though the *Agricola*, *Germania* and *Dialogus* represent three different literary genres their central preoccupation and objectives are very similar. His message – somewhat hidden under

¹¹⁶ Cf. Tac. *Agr*, 4.1. and *Hist*, 1.1.

¹¹⁷ Tac. *Dial*, 31.2.

the surface of biographical, ethnographical and analytical elements – is developed emphasising the same idea in three distinctive ways: it is still possible to exercise *virtus* and *libertas* under the principate, because there is not only one static way of being Roman, they should look around them, not to imitate others, but to strengthen what is theirs and take the political changes into account instead of letting themselves be overcome by them.

2. The ‘Histories’ and the ‘Annals’: in Search of Meaning

In dealing with Tacitus’ major historical works, we need to emphasise again and again that the power of his speech allows him to develop all sorts of special effects to fulfil his purpose: ‘that we may understand not only the incidents and the issues of events, which for the most part are due to chance, but also their reasons and causes’ [*sed ratio etiam causaeque noscantur*].¹¹⁸ The manipulation is evident; he makes us believe all his explanations, the reasons he gives seem in the end always the most plausible ones, the sharp descriptions of individuals and groups paint a convincing black panorama, everything works towards one and only goal: to shatter the reader’s illusions about the greatness of the Roman Empire. And he nearly does so.

The traditional view that for Tacitus freedom was lost because of autocracy and courage because of peace is, without any doubt, true in the Histories and the Annals, but I see this as the ‘surface’.¹¹⁹ I will try to show here that when Tacitus says that the first and most important duty of history is ‘to ensure that virtue shall not lack its record and to hold before the vicious word and deed the terrors of posterity and infamy’,¹²⁰ he is mainly concerned with revealing a new kind of *virtus*, which he does not want to be silenced and a new type of *libertas* which did not imply less freedom than the political liberty Romans were used to exercise. It was only a question of being able to recognise them as such.

¹¹⁸ Tac. *Hist*, 1.4.

¹¹⁹ For this traditional view, see esp. R. Mellor, *Tacitus* (Routledge, London, 1993) 48ff.

¹²⁰ Tac. *Ann*, 3.65.

a) The *Historiae*:

In Tacitus' *Historiae* there is not even the chance to fight for freedom. Chaos prevented it. What we have now are a few isolated examples of virtue, but quite useless for the state. After the Julio-Claudian experience Romans had become indolent in the struggle for *libertas*, and *virtus*, on the other hand, did not seem to achieve anything. What did it matter in the end if one behaved like a slave or a brave man under an emperor who could destroy or exalt you for nothing?

For Tacitus it did matter. This was his whole point in writing history. It was always worthwhile fighting for liberty, there was always a reward for those who were virtuous.¹²¹ So much has been said about Tacitus' pessimism and gloominess and I will not contradict it, but just try to show that within this darkness – present and real – we can find some light coming through: the challenge of discovering that there is a way out: demanding, arduous and difficult, but possible.

As we read the 'Histories' of Tacitus we get more and more involved with the story, we follow the thread with anxiety and we want to get to the end quickly. We are not mere observers; we have become almost an eye witness of the action that is taking place: it is a narrative that gives no respite to the reader. This phenomenon – however alluring it may seem – could become an obstacle in our understanding of the main strand of the work, especially when at some points the narrative does not support the analysis, but on the contrary, it makes it more complex or when the style is so rich and abrasive that the content is absorbed by it.

We experience Tacitus' powerful style from the very beginning of his work. The prologue of the Histories is written with care and elaboration, it produces a complex overture which gives the pitch of the work. In the preface there are three clearly defined sections: first Tacitus declares the scope of the work and his own impartiality,¹²² secondly he announces the content with which he is going to deal: 'The history on which

¹²¹ See for example, Momigliano's remark: 'It is part of the insoluble conflict in Tacitus' mind that he never forgets that human nature is capable of true courage, true frankness, true liberty' in *Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, 119.

¹²² Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 1.1.

I am entering is that ...',¹²³ and thirdly, from chapter 4 to 11, he gives a retrospective survey of June – December AD 68.¹²⁴

One striking feature of the preface, which has not passed unnoticed by scholars, is the very sentence where Tacitus declares that his starting point is 1st January 69 and not, as might perhaps have been expected, the death of Nero in June 68: 'I begin my work with the second consulship of Servius Galba, when Titus Vinius was his colleague'.¹²⁵ According to Chilver, he 'was surely influenced by his determination to open his work on the lines laid down by his main model'.¹²⁶ The reference is to Sallust, whose 'Histories' had begun with the names of the consuls for 78 BC.¹²⁷ 'Like Sallust too', adds Chilver, 'he proceeds straight to a comparison between himself and earlier historians, and then to an assertion of his own impartiality'.¹²⁸ Syme's account on this very point is more dramatic and less calculated 'No: January 1, 69 is vital and inevitable. That day starts the action on the Rhine'.¹²⁹ Identifying himself – once again – with Tacitus' thoughts, Syme concludes that there was no other convenient date to begin with.

In the second part of the preface (2-4.1), Tacitus introduces the contents of the Histories in a way that recalls Cicero's principles for writing history.¹³⁰ The topics of the work, as well as their handling in an expressive and some times poignant way, are in exact agreement with the guidance for pleasurable historiography: to describe geographical regions and battles, deal with important and memorable events, acknowledge the role played by chance in human affairs, explain the reasons behind the actions.¹³¹ Tacitus seems to have done all this abundantly.

But the need of the author to announce in the most general terms the subject matter of the whole of the *Historiae* is not only to move the audience to read a good

¹²³ Tac. *Hist.* 1.2-3.

¹²⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 1.4: 'Before, however, I begin the work that I have planned, I think we should turn back'.

¹²⁵ *Hist.* 1.1.

¹²⁶ G.E.F. Chilver, *A historical commentary on Tacitus' Histories* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979) 34.

¹²⁷ And also in the *Bellum Catilinae* (cf. *BC*, 8)

¹²⁸ Chilver, *Commentary of Tacitus' Histories*, 33. For the role of Tacitus' prefaces, see J. Marincola, 'Tacitus' Prefaces and the Decline of Imperial Historiography', *Latomus* 58 (1999) 391-404.

¹²⁹ Syme, *Tacitus*, 145

¹³⁰ Particularly in *De Or.* 2.63 and *Ad Fam.* 5.12.

¹³¹ Cf. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 165-7.

story, but somehow to prepare the reader to be ready to face terrible things.¹³² ‘The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword, there were three civil wars, still more against foreigners and often both at the same time’.¹³³ It is difficult to imagine the actual feelings of the people of those times. Without realising it throughout the centuries, we have become somewhat impervious towards the real situation and have swallowed Tacitus’ version impersonally. Tacitus’ panorama of the Roman empire, cruel wars and endless conquests in the provinces, and in the city, disorder and murder is certainly fixed in our minds, but in a sort of ‘matter-of-fact way’ that does not touch us very deeply. We are not wholly shocked when we read that four emperors have been savagely assassinated, we think that almost all of them died like that anyway.¹³⁴ Tacitus’ narrative and style have been in some sense ‘counterproductive’; we have read and studied them so much, that now they seem familiar and we have got used to them.

For Tacitus instead, the days were so turbulent that not even heaven missed the opportunity to contribute to darken the scenery: ‘there were prodigies in the sky and on earth, warnings given by thunderbolts, and prophecies of the future’.¹³⁵ The vicissitudes of human affairs were matched by strange signs and portents in nature. Never was it so powerfully demonstrated that the gods intended, not that men should be happy, but that they should be punished: *non esse curae deis securitatem nostram, esse ultionem*.¹³⁶

And yet, in the midst of all this, ‘mothers accompanied their children in flight; wives followed their husbands into exile; relatives displayed courage, sons-in-law firmness, slaves a fidelity which defied even torture. Eminent men met the last necessity with fortitude, rivalling in their end the glorious deaths of antiquity’.¹³⁷ There was some

¹³² Thus, C. Damon, *Tacitus, Histories: Book 1* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) 6, says alluding to Woodman’s comment: ‘to say that “his interest in the disasters centres primarily on their capacity to furnish gripping narrative material” (Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, 167) is to ignore the note of moral seriousness first sounded in *cura posteritatis* and heard on every page of T.’s historical work’.

¹³³ Tac. *Hist*, 1.2.

¹³⁴ To get a more authentic sensation of the atmosphere we would have to imagine that the Queen has been murdered, and after her, Prince Charles and then Prince William and his successor. What then would be our approaches to power, to safety and in the end, to the whole system?

¹³⁵ Tac. *Hist*, 1.3. See also 1.12; 1.37.

¹³⁶ Tac. *Hist*, 1.3.

¹³⁷ Tac. *Hist*, 1.3.

room for *virtus* after all: 'this age was not so barren of virtue that it did not display noble examples'.¹³⁸ And this was what really counted for history: *ne virtutes sileantur*.

Tacitus proposes to set forth the state of Rome, the armies and the provinces, the sources of discontent and the elements of power: 'I think that we should turn back and consider the condition of the city, the temper of the armies, the attitude of the provinces, the elements of strength and weakness in the entire world'.¹³⁹ Descriptions of men are sharp and brief – he cannot slow down his pace: *alter* [Titus Vinius] *deterrimus mortalium*, *alter* [Cornelius Laco] *ignavissimus*.¹⁴⁰ With few words he gives the real atmosphere of the city: *venalia cuncta*,¹⁴¹ the east: *oriens adhuc immotus*,¹⁴² and the west: *Germanici exercitus solliciti et irati*.¹⁴³ Speed is all pervasive, what else can we expect of a year which saw four emperors?

But Tacitus' purpose is to record how everybody reacted under such difficult circumstances, thus he presents complex portraits, not just of individual generals and emperors, but also of armies, whose collective identities develop distinctively as the narrative progresses. Armies are now an independent political body which can take their own decisions, being most of the times highly erratic and emotional. Tacitus wants to make clear that things are going badly, and in fact they are so bad that even the soldiers have been affected; the very foundation of the Roman army – discipline – has collapsed: 'the soldiers seized arms without regard to military custom or rank, with no desire to distinguish praetorian or legionary by their proper insignia; there was no tribune or centurion to direct them; each guided and spurred himself on'.¹⁴⁴ Discipline and severity are qualities that the Romans can no longer bear.¹⁴⁵ But it was not only that they rebelled against the old *disciplina militaris* because it was too harsh, 'the strength of the soldiers also was corrupted by luxury in contrast to the ancient discipline and maxims of our forefathers, in whose day valour formed a better foundation for the Roman state than

¹³⁸ Tac. *Hist*, 1.3. See also Tac. *Ann*, 3.55: 'our own age too has produced much in the sphere of true nobility and much in that of art which posterity well may imitate'.

¹³⁹ Tac. *Hist*, 1.4. Note the ability to describe with attributes of 'life' some unanimated realities: cities, armies, provinces, world, etc.

¹⁴⁰ Tac. *Hist*, 1.6.

¹⁴¹ Tac. *Hist*, 1.7.

¹⁴² Tac. *Hist*, 1.10.

¹⁴³ Tac. *Hist*, 1.8.

¹⁴⁴ See also Tac. *Hist*, 1.5; 1.6; 1.8; 1.9; 1.13; 1.23; 1.27; 1.36; 1.38; 1.40; 1.46; 1.47.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Tac. *Hist*, 1.18

money'.¹⁴⁶ *Disciplina* and *virtus* should definitely go together: what is the use of a disciplined but cowardly army or a brave, but anarchic one?

The brute reality of the army is depicted in many different ways, but always with the same meaning: they are dangerous because they have military training and weapons, they have become a destabilising element for the empire, they can have a candidate and take him to the throne:¹⁴⁷ 'the soldiers' will was henceforth supreme'.¹⁴⁸ It draws one's attention to see how Tacitus gives a 'character' to the different armies which fought in this year of civil war. Rhiannon Ash has devoted a whole book to the study of them and the result is very interesting.¹⁴⁹ The vacillating Galbians, and the greedy, but loyal Othonians are presented in a better light than their successors the Vitellians and Flavians, who seem to succumb to the irrational forces. But Tacitus 'complicates, and in part reverses, the familiar picture of fickle soldiers who gradually assimilate themselves to the character of their commander, whether he is honourable or defective. In the Histories we see troops who actually change for the better as they struggle to overcome the erratic and confused signals being sent by their immediate superiors'.¹⁵⁰ Even this type of soldiers were sometimes able to behave in an admirable way: 'now that every possible hope from any source was destroyed, the troops of Vitellius were ready to come over to Vespasian's side, but they wished to do it with honour'.¹⁵¹ There is always one last resource, one last free decision that can change things completely: this unworthy soldiery,¹⁵² under an indolent and self-indulgent general,¹⁵³ is in the end capable of showing *virtus*: they had the courage to choose freely to keep their dignity alive. This stress on free will is very significant and, in some way, reminiscent of the *Agricola*.

We do not meet these examples of *virtus* very often in the narrative, but precisely for that reason they are all the more effective and memorable. Even Galba, the emperor who was 'rather free from faults than possessing virtues',¹⁵⁴ finds his opportunity to act with a freedom of conscience that deserves applause. In his adoption of Piso, Galba has

¹⁴⁶ Tac. *Hist.*, 2.69.

¹⁴⁷ Galba was the first emperor acclaimed by his soldiers.

¹⁴⁸ *Hist.* 1, 46: *omnia deinde arbitrio militum acta*.

¹⁴⁹ R. Ash, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories* (London, Duckworth, 1999).

¹⁵⁰ Ash, *Ordering Anarchy*, 168.

¹⁵¹ Tac. *Hist.*, 3.63.

¹⁵² Cf. Tac. *Hist.*, 2.94.

¹⁵³ Cf. Tac. *Hist.*, 1.62.

¹⁵⁴ Tac. *Hist.*, 1.49.

considered the candidate's high character and patriotism and has not been led by ambition or fear: 'I do this not because I have no relatives or associates in arms; but I did not myself gain this power by self-seeking, and I would have the character of my decision shown by the fact that I have passed over for you not only my own relatives, but yours also. You have a brother as noble as yourself and older, worthy indeed of this fortune, if you were not the better man'.¹⁵⁵

Galba knows that he is setting a precedent in adopting Piso, because although he was following the example of the deified Augustus, he had 'looked for a successor within his own house, I in the whole state'.¹⁵⁶ The fact that the emperors are now beginning to be chosen 'will be for all a kind of liberty; and since the house of the Julii and the Claudii are ended, adoption will select only the best; for to be begotten and born of princes is mere chance, and is not reckoned higher, but the judgement displayed in adoption is unhampered'.¹⁵⁷ Galba showed something of his being *capax imperii*, he had plans for the empire and he thought he was giving back some of the political freedom which was lost with the principate. His understanding of the situation of Rome appears quite realistic when he said to his heir: 'Think only what you might wish or would oppose if another were emperor. For with us there is not, as among peoples where there are kings, a fixed house of the rulers while all the rest are slaves, but you are going to rule over men who can endure neither complete slavery nor complete liberty'.¹⁵⁸ Tacitus needed *oratio recta* to say this. In fact many of the speeches in the Histories are direct;¹⁵⁹ the political circumstances – different from those depicted in the Annals – are bolder and civil war open, therefore, nothing prevents people speaking 'out loud'.

For Tacitus, this was the real tragedy of the Romans of that time. They could not decide whether to give their lives fighting against oppression or enjoy peace being contented with subjection. Livy had said it many years before: *ad haec tempora quibus*

¹⁵⁵ Tac. *Hist*, 1.15.

¹⁵⁶ Tac. *Hist*, 1.15.

¹⁵⁷ Tac. *Hist*, 1.16.

¹⁵⁸ Tac. *Hist*, 1.16.

¹⁵⁹ For the role and meaning of the speeches in the Histories, see E. Keitel, 'The Structure and Function of Speeches in Tacitus Histories 1-3', *ANRW* II, 33.4 (1991) 2772-94 and E. Keitel, 'Speech and Narrative in Histories 4' in Luce and Woodman, *Tacitus and the Tacitean tradition*, 39-58. See also Damon, *Histories* I, 136-41.

nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus.¹⁶⁰ The vices of servility, flattery or fear were as unbearable as their cure of courage, fortitude and resolution.

The situation at Rome looked all the more desperate precisely because everything was not lost, but there was a generalised weakness in people that brought forth the worst of them: 'the leading men of the senate were weak from old age and had grown inactive through a long peace; the nobility was indolent and had forgotten the art of war; the knights were ignorant of military service; the more all tried to conceal their fear, the more evident they made their terror'.¹⁶¹ The words he chooses portray the sense of muddle, messiness and chaos which was probably what people were feeling at that time:¹⁶² 'the cities on the rich fertile shores of Campania were swallowed up or overwhelmed; Rome was devastated by conflagrations, in which her most ancient shrines were consumed and the very Capitol fired by citizens' hands. Sacred rites were defiled; there were adulteries in high places. The sea was filled with exiles, its cliffs made foul with the bodies of the dead (...) Slaves were corrupted against their masters, freedmen against their patrons; and those who had no enemy were crushed by their friends'.¹⁶³

He gives a complete panorama of the conduct of everybody at Rome: senators, *equites*, freedmen, slaves and he adds another character in the scene: the masses.¹⁶⁴ Tacitus is fascinated by the behaviour of the mob and the crowds, especially in the city of Rome.¹⁶⁵ He deals with their psychology – different from that of the armies – and their rationality; the final result is frightening: the crowds now were everywhere filling the public halls and temples and, as they contemplated the grim spectacle in which the city was immersed, their cruelty was awoken 'as if they were calling to a show in the

¹⁶⁰ Livy, *praef.* 9.

¹⁶¹ Tac. *Hist.* 1.88.

¹⁶² The Latin words are even more telling, see for example this paragraph: *haustae, obrutae, vastatae, pollutae, infecti, atrocious, saevitium, crimine, delatorum, scelera, odio, terrore, corrupti*.

¹⁶³ *Hist.* 1.2. It is very strongly reminiscent of another silver Latin author, Lucan, also dealing with civil war, see e.g. 2.148-51: 'The servant drove the accursed sword to the hilt through his master's body; sons were sprinkled with their father's blood and strove with each other for the privilege of beheading a parent; and brother slew brother to earn rewards'. Cf. J. Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's Bellum Civile* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992). For more on this, see E. Keitel, 'Principate and civil war in the Annals of Tacitus', *AJP* 105 (1984) esp. 309-10 and 314-5.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Syme, *Tacitus*, 194: 'Especially urgent and terrifying are the descriptions of masses'.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Hist.* 1.19; 1.32; 1.35; 1.40; 1.50; 1.89; 1.90; 2.1; 2.29; 2.44; 2.90; 3.32; 3.38; 3.55; 3.83; 4.1; 4.37.

circus or in the theatre'.¹⁶⁶ They were servile towards the emperor, fickle, extravagant and insincere. The mobs were perhaps the only ones who had not been able to exercise any kind of liberty or virtue. Galba, Piso and even Otho and Vitellius seemed to have had some good qualities,¹⁶⁷ Roman generals and barbarian leaders alike show some courage and nobility under difficult circumstances;¹⁶⁸ for the mobs not a single approbatory comment. They appear to have given up their most human attributes – freedom and discernment – and Tacitus despises them for that. It seems that for Tacitus, groups and masses – armies or crowds – would have a sense of communal or shared morality somehow detached from personal liberty and responsibility. Masses and armies followed their leaders and generals who followed and represented the emperor. The notion of seeing the state embodied in one imperial figure was something characteristic of the principate, and therefore, the state as a whole would act as one moral entity led by the virtues or vices of the princeps. Not only the emperor, then, could be described as virtuous or vicious in a 'Suetonian way', but also the system.¹⁶⁹

Virtus, *libertas* and *servitus* appear to be intimately connected in a sort of spiral where one concept explains the cause of another and vice versa. *Virtus* can only exist where there is *libertas* and, at the same time, the way to preserve this *libertas* is through *virtus*. The principate brought the loss of *libertas* – *haud facile libertas et domini miscentur* –¹⁷⁰ and thus *virtus* gave way to terror, which meant *servitus: civitas pavida et servitio parata*.¹⁷¹ The relationship of these terms is expressed insistently throughout the Histories and, as we saw in the *Agricola* and the *Germania*, *virtus* is a quality mainly attached to barbarians rather than Romans.¹⁷² The interconnection of freedom and *virtus* comes out almost fiercely in several speeches that a non-Roman leader, Civilis, gave to his people.¹⁷³ In them, Civilis addresses the Batavians reminding them that they, as

¹⁶⁶ *Hist*, 1, 32.

¹⁶⁷ For Galba see *Hist*, 1.35 and 1.49, for Piso: 1.14, for Otho: 1.71 and for Vitellius: 2.97.

¹⁶⁸ See e.g. Mucianus' description: *Hist*, 1.10 or Civilis' speech: 4.17.

¹⁶⁹ This view raises questions about the type of *virtus* that fits a Republican system or the kind of *virtus* that is needed in a Principate, and also the importance of the development of imperial biography as a means of writing history. For this latter theme, see A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius* (London, Duckworth, 1983); C. Pelling 'Biographical History? Cassius Dio on the Early Principate', 117-44.

¹⁷⁰ *Tac. Hist*, 4.64.

¹⁷¹ *Tac. Hist*, 4.2.

¹⁷² Cf. *Tac. Hist*, 1.79: *Sarmatarum virtus*; 3.9: *virtus Germanici*; 4.15: *virtus Canninefati*; 4.23: *virtus Batavi*. See also 3.2.

¹⁷³ Cf. *Tac. Hist*, 4.17; 5.17; 5.25.

privileged Roman allies, did not need to pay tribute, 'but only to furnish valour and men', and therefore their condition could be considered 'next to freedom' [*proximum id libertati*].¹⁷⁴ To pay taxes would have been seen as servitude, but to defend Rome with their courageous men was contemplated as a kind of liberty, 'courage [being] the peculiar blessing of man: the gods favour the braver'.¹⁷⁵ They could count on divine help, because they were brave, which meant to be free.

As my main purpose is to throw some light on Tacitus' concept of *virtus* and his novel approach to *libertas*, I will not go into detail analysing his style.¹⁷⁶ I would like, however, to consider two aspects of it, which seem to me relevant to the understanding of his work. By dealing with these features I am not claiming the primacy of style over content or that Tacitus is mainly a literary artist. He is first and foremost a historian, who thinks deeply about men and change and who happens to write these thoughts in an extraordinarily powerful way.¹⁷⁷

In the *Histories*, then, we see a tendency to round off a chapter or a speech with an epigram. The first three chapters of Book I finish with the following words: 'in these times of rare happiness when you can think what you want and say what you think' [*rara temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet*];¹⁷⁸ 'those who lacked an enemy were brought down by their friends' [*et quibus deerat inimicus, per amicos oppressi*];¹⁷⁹ 'the gods are not concerned for our safety but only for our punishment' [*non esse curae deis securitatem, esse ultionem*].¹⁸⁰ Tacitus surprises the reader with these short sentences, terse and pointed observations which say so much.

¹⁷⁴ Tac. *Hist.*, 4.25.

¹⁷⁵ Tac. *Hist.*, 4.17.

¹⁷⁶ For this, see for example, J. Hellegouarc'h, 'Le style de Tacite, bilan et perspectives', *ANRW* II 33.3 (1991) 2385-2453; R.G. Tanner, 'The Development of Thought and Style in Tacitus', *ANRW* II 33.3 (1991) 2689-2751.

¹⁷⁷ I disagree with statements like: 'Dealing with Tacitus we are dealing first and foremost with a literary artist and that, for him, in any conflict between style and content, style will inevitably prevail: in other words, actual historical facts will be altered or re-arranged in the interests of a smoother narrative flow, a striking antithesis or even a sardonic epigram' in Ch. Murison, 'The Historical Value of Tacitus' *Histories*', *ANRW* II, 33.3 (1991) 1711; or 'The *Annals* is an artistic creation to be judged as one judges the *Aeneid*' in B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus, a study in the writing of history* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1952) 257.

¹⁷⁸ *Hist.*, 1, 1.

¹⁷⁹ *Hist.*, 1, 2.

¹⁸⁰ *Hist.*, 1, 3.

Picking up just these three examples we can have a vividly coloured picture of what the state of the City was after the death of Nero.¹⁸¹

The use of the epigram is so effective in describing the atmosphere or portraying a character that we run the risk of taking the part as the whole, of losing our perspective on the reality. Epigrams are a useful technique and a wonderful expression of genius, but they should be taken with caution. Their success relies somehow on exaggeration and if we take them completely at face value we fail to keep that impartiality necessary to approach the past in an understanding way, and we can end up oversimplifying history. Perhaps the clearest example of the use of epigram is seen in the obituary of Galba, where Tacitus concludes the first major section of Histories I. The passage ends with the brilliant and famous concise sentence *omnium consensu capax imperii nisi imperasset*.¹⁸² Is this not a splendid epitaph for someone like Galba, a man of ‘mediocre genius, being rather free from faults than possessing virtues’?¹⁸³ And yet, we know that Galba was much more than that, but now this is how we will remember him forever. Tacitus manages to engrave scenes and characters in our minds; the power of his speech is such that these remain vividly carved in our memories.¹⁸⁴ It appears as if his moral judgements come through with particular intensity in these epigrams. This is a very different technique from Livy, for example, who relies mostly on the narrative. No doubt that this is a feature of Silver Latin literature – recall the *sententiae* of Seneca or Lucan – but at the same time it is a very specific Tacitean trait.

The second aspect of Tacitus’ style that I would like to consider is how his rhetorical expertise has worked for him as a double-edge sword and sometimes undermined his seriousness as a historian. This may seem at first sight contradictory

¹⁸¹ Tacitus’ epigrams are so powerfully expressive that I would like to quote a few more: 1.16: ‘men who can endure neither complete slavery nor complete liberty’; 1.35: ‘no one knew; everyone affirmed’; 1.38: ‘there is no time for delay in a plan which is not praiseworthy unless put into effect’; 1.49: ‘men called wisdom what was really indolence’; 1.50: ‘in the struggle between the two, the only thing of which men were certain was that the victor would be the worse’; 1.15: ‘we simply endure misfortune but are corrupted by success’; 1.54: ‘it being human nature to follow eagerly a course that one hesitates to begin’; 2.32: ‘money in times of civil war is more powerful than the sword’; 2.77: ‘they who plan revolt have already revolted’; 4.1: ‘for in times of violence and civil strife the worst men have the greatest power; peace and quiet call for honest arts’; 4.42: ‘wickedness even if unlucky, finds rivals’; 4.42: ‘the fairest day after a bad emperor is the first’; 4.76: ‘no man is so bent on war as not to prefer quiet to danger, if he gets the same reward’.

¹⁸² Tac. *Hist.*, 1.49.

¹⁸³ Tac. *Hist.*, 1.49.

¹⁸⁴ This is even clearer in the *Annals* with the descriptions of Tiberius, Nero, Agrippina, etc.

with what I have claimed few lines above, but in a second reading it actually helps to support the argument. Even though I do not share the opinion that ‘for the ancient historian trained in the rhetorical tradition truth plays a secondary role’,¹⁸⁵ I am aware that it has been a valid point for some.¹⁸⁶ This kind of remark seems to me somewhat narrow-minded; is the credibility of the historian in direct proportion to his dryness and lack of expression? Is historical truth a privilege invented by the Enlightenment only? The fact that ancient historiography counted more on eloquence and command of language than we do does not mean that they got the story wrong and we get it right. To reach truth is as difficult now as it was then. Saying that Tacitus was a literary artist or even a poet should not weaken his reputation as a *bona fide* historian.¹⁸⁷ Tacitus’ rhetoric does not impugn his integrity in any sense: allusions, *sententiae*, innuendos are there to lead us to look in a deeper level, because beneath this ‘surface’ something else was happening. His narrative technique is not something that we could take away from the story to keep the facts only. On the contrary, it is an essential feature of the period itself, not only of his perception of it. Tacitus’ style is part of his task as a historian in matching words and deeds, and it will appear as part of the historian’s *virtus* to be at the same time truthful and illuminating. If we stay on the surface, it is our problem, not Tacitus’. As Sinclair has rightly said, ‘the contradiction between Tacitus the literary artist and Tacitus the historian is a problem in modern thought, rather than a problem in Tacitean historiography’.¹⁸⁸

It appears almost impossible to be indifferent to Tacitus. And this is not only because the subject he is bringing to us is controversial, but firstly and mainly for his provocative style. Although the narrative is interrupted very frequently, we do not lose control of the plot. His aggressive intrusions flow and incorporate instead of cutting off the line. He breaks to unite, he subtracts to add.

I am aware that I have moved away a little from *virtus*. But this fragmented discussion about Tacitus’ style has somehow tried to mirror his disjointed way of writing history. The lack of complete coherence in the analysis or the absence of real unity and

¹⁸⁵ Quote from F. Leo, Tacitus, 272 in P. Sinclair, ‘Rhetorical Generalizations in Annales 1-6. A Review of the Problem of Innuendo and Tacitus’ Integrity’, *ANRW* II 33.3 (1991) 2797.

¹⁸⁶ See ‘Introduction’ I.2 above.

¹⁸⁷ What about Syme’s style and rhetoric? For this, see F. Millar, ‘Style abides’, *JRS* 71 (1981) 144-52.

¹⁸⁸ P. Sinclair, ‘Rhetorical Generalizations in Annales 1-6, 2828. See also Martin, *Tacitus*, 243.

‘jumps’ are not here by mere chance. If the bits do not hang together in this section is perhaps because they do not hang together in Tacitus’ narrative either. A smooth study does not necessarily suit him; snappy and vivid insights possibly do a better job and give us a more faithful panorama of the author himself, his style and the period he was talking about. Because Tacitus always gives us something more than history. The powerful combination of *res* and *verba* attracts us and compels us through the labyrinths of human character.

This is precisely the ‘something else’ that interested Tacitus most. Rome had undergone other serious crises in her political history. AD 69 was not the first and it was not going to be the last one. Roman history had seen bad generals, selfish consuls, self-centred senators and rebellious people before. What was new then? What was worthy of recording for posterity? The simultaneity with which all this happened; the generalised state of confusion and distrust at all levels. Tacitus wants to stress the enormous influence that the emperor had over his empire: citizens, armies, provinces, even enemies. His character and behaviour affected the conduct of everybody. It is significant then that, when Tacitus turns back to consider the condition of the city, the temper of the armies, the attitude of the provinces, the elements of strength and weakness in the entire world, he should start with Nero’s death.¹⁸⁹ Nero’s character will help us to understand ‘the reasons and causes of the events’.¹⁹⁰ Not because it was him, Nero, a particularly influential person, but because *rationes et causae* for Tacitus are a matter of human motives and intentions. ‘Character is the motive force behind events throughout the history: the dramatic struggles arise directly from conflicts of character’.¹⁹¹ How that character and the morals of the person developed had been the explanation for political changes; this was a distinctive feature of Roman historiography, but it was particularly relevant under the principate, when the morals of the prince could alter and condition so much. Thus, a succession of bad emperors had deeply weakened the Romans: ‘the world has been shaken to its foundations’.¹⁹² For Tacitus, it is the psychological impact which conditions the events. Losing one’s fortune, dignity or even life appears to be less sad

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 1.4.

¹⁹⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 1.4.

¹⁹¹ Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus*, 46.

¹⁹² Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.

for him than the deep loss in character that the Romans who survived these events have experienced: very few seemed to have the courage to continue to believe in virtue and freedom.

But even though one person – the emperor – had a tremendous impact on his subjects, he did not ‘determine’ them to act in a certain way. And the Romans had to learn how to exercise this freedom, it was new for them, so much so that they did not know how to use it and they turned it into flattery and fear, and in the end, slavery. More courage was necessary to remain free under the principate, more virtues to keep one’s dignity alive, and the path to discover this way was a hard one. It was inevitable that one must endure many Othos and Vitellii to see one Agricola.

Our survey of the *Historiae* has been especially disrupted and unsettled because we have been dealing with civil war. I have consciously avoided an orderly analysis that could give the impression that Tacitus was in total control of the situation. His mastery here is in the command both of detail and of the presentation of the general nature, not just of a civil war, but civil war under the principate.

b) The *Annales*:

We are finally approaching Tacitus’ last historical work, and one may feel somewhat overwhelmed. The many strands in the story, nuances and motives in its characters can make the project of dealing with this work a daunting task. But for us, on the contrary, exploring the Annals is an exciting venture. If tracing *virtus* in the Roman historians has been a stimulating mission throughout, with Tacitus, as I said in the introduction to this chapter, we are certainly reaching the climax. We will see that the presence (or absence) of *virtus* in the Annals has expanded as an idea in the moral and political horizon of the players. Tacitus has tried to identify true *virtus* and Romanness by telling us not only what has gone wrong with them, but why and how. I shall concentrate in this section not so much on Tacitus’ pessimism and gloominess regarding the Principate, but on his challenging progression of the understanding of the idea of internal freedom.

It has been said that ‘it is the continual failure of *virtus* and the triumph of evil that gives his work its special character’.¹⁹³ But Tacitus’ pessimism does not only derive from the conviction that virtue may no longer be possible, but from the realisation of how difficult it is to exercise it in times of no political freedom and how few are the ones who accept the challenge of running the risk for this ideal.

Livy’s display of *virtus* had been a pleasant task, heroic examples filled his narrative of the good old days; Tacitus sets for himself a more uncomfortable mission, being perhaps more concerned with the new obstacles that appeared, recording how quickly Rome’s ideals were going down and how basely people – especially the senators and nobles – reacted to the circumstances. At the same time, he reminds his readers that the calling to behave like a true Roman was still active and the choice to do so was taken by some.

The problem of the principate started with the definition of *libertas*. Romans understood the concept of freedom in a rather narrow sense. *Libertas* was, above all, the political freedom of the citizen ‘to determine his own destiny and the destiny of his country, and the constitutional safeguards of the citizen’s rights’.¹⁹⁴ The foundation of the Republic had been freedom because it had been established to get rid of a tyrant. And in this very simple way Romans equated in their minds Republic and liberty.¹⁹⁵ Tacitus himself does the same when he starts the *Annals*: *libertatem et consulatum L. Brutus instituit*.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, *libertas* was linked to a particular order of society which narrowed the term even more.

But any definition of freedom in antiquity will be, at the same time, deeply affected by the existence of slavery, which gave special moral connotations to the concept. They saw enslavement tending to debase man, and this degradation made it natural to relate morality to freedom.¹⁹⁷ Thus, a free Roman was ‘better as a person’ than

¹⁹³ Mellor, *Tacitus*, 65.

¹⁹⁴ Wirsuzubski, *Libertas as a political idea*, 166.

¹⁹⁵ See for example the opening of Livy book 2: ‘The new liberty enjoyed by the Roman people, their achievements in peace and war, annual magistracies and laws superior in authority to men will henceforth be my theme’.

¹⁹⁶ Tac. *Ann*, 1.1.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. P.A. Brunt, ‘Libertas in the Republic’ in *The Fall of the Roman Republic and other Related Essays* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988) 281-350, esp. 283, 287.

a slave, who was commonly seen as low-spirited, coward, idle and dishonest.¹⁹⁸ Freedom, then, imposed a sort of responsibility or duty on its possessor – one should behave like a free person – and simultaneously, it was a right to be exercised. During the Republic, *libertas* involved, among other things, the participation in political power, the supremacy of law and freedom of speech. It worked mainly as a ‘pact among gentlemen’, nowhere was *libertas* defined, because there was no need of a definition. This liberty, however, was not the same for everybody; what I have just described applies mainly to the senatorial order, but not to the rest of the *populus Romanus*. The upper classes contrasted *libertas* with *regnum* or *dominatio factionis*, and so Cicero could say that ‘freedom consists not in having a just master, but in having none’.¹⁹⁹ For the Roman people, liberty consisted mainly in the protection under the laws against the injustice of the nobles or magistrates. *Libertas* for them meant *securitas*.²⁰⁰ We can see, then, that the term had different connotations and was used by all – even by opposed groups within the society – as a reason and justification for their political actions.

In his *Roman Revolution*, Syme suggests, with a certain cynicism, that *libertas* was little more than a catchword: ‘*Libertas* is a vague and negative notion – freedom from the rule of a tyrant or a faction. It follows that *libertas*, like *regnum* or *dominatio*, is a convenient term of political fraud. *Libertas* was most commonly invoked in defence of the existing order by individuals or classes in enjoyment of power and wealth. The *libertas* of the Roman aristocrat meant the rule of a class and the perpetuation of privilege’.²⁰¹ This definition, most Sallustian, can perhaps work as a perversion of the original meaning of *libertas* during the upheavals of late Republic. But there is no reason to doubt that they believed that *libertas* was essential for the welfare of the state and for each one of its members.²⁰²

The advent of Augustus brought to the concept of liberty some nuances that, according to Tacitus, would end up somehow ‘watering down’ the true republican meaning. The *princeps* was determined to have the Romans convinced that there had

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, the representation of slaves in Plautus’ comedies.

¹⁹⁹ Cic. *De Rep.* 2.43.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Brunt, ‘*Libertas* in the Republic’, 331; Morford, ‘How Tacitus defined Liberty’, 3423, 3436.

²⁰¹ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 155. For the same, cf. also 2, 59, 156, 513.

²⁰² In this sense, the use of the notion of freedom has not changed very much. See now, for example, how politicians of all sides have freedom as a battle-cry for very different purposes, but, at the same time, it is a heartfelt belief that freedom is necessary and something worth fighting for.

been no *libertas* with Sulla or Caesar, it was not possible under one man – Caesar had been killed in the name of freedom – but now, with the end of the civil wars, people were again free, and could exercise the same political freedom with an added advantage, peace: ‘he [Augustus] first seduced the army by gratuities, the populace by cheapened corn, the world by the amenities of peace, then step by step began to make his ascent and to unite in his own person the functions of the senate, the magistracy and the legislature. Opposition there was none: the boldest spirits had succumbed on stricken fields or by proscriptions-lists; while the rest of the nobility found a cheerful acceptance of slavery the smoothest road to wealth and office’.²⁰³

Anything that was not the traditional political liberty exercised by the senatorial class under the Republic was denounced as *servitus* by Tacitus, but this was especially true regarding the behaviour of the senatorial class; living under a prince they had lost their *dignitas*: ‘At Rome, consuls, senators and knights were rushing into slavery’.²⁰⁴ He is certainly disappointed with the political circumstances, but he is even more so with the ignoble response of his own class to the events. What was sadder in the whole matter was not that they lost their freedom because of the tyrannical behaviour of the *princeps*, but on the contrary, with their base conduct they made the *princeps* behave like a tyrant. This is particularly clear with Tiberius, whose reign would have been perhaps different had the senators been more honest in their opinions or had they taken some responsibility in the political participation of the *res publica*, with more courage and less fear or flattery. This is perhaps the reason why Tacitus is so intrigued with Tiberius’ personality. The good intentions of Augustus’ successor were patent, but the atmosphere of *adulatio* and *metus* in which he moved made him resentful and a simulator, ‘forcing’ him to behave in an autocratic way.

The case of Tiberius in Tacitus is fascinating and one to which scholarship has devoted much study.²⁰⁵ It is not just the interest in understanding a complex personality,

²⁰³ Tac. *Ann*, 1.2.

²⁰⁴ Tac. *Ann*, 1.7.

²⁰⁵ Giving an exhaustive list of works on the topic would go beyond the scope of this thesis, but see for example, the important article of M. Griffin, ‘Tacitus, Tiberius and the Principate’ in I. Malkin and Z.W. Rubinsohn (eds.), *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World: Studies in Honour of Zvi Yavetz* (Leiden, Brill, 1995) 33-57. Cf. also A.J. Woodman, ‘Tacitus Obituary of Tiberius’ and ‘Tacitus on Tiberius’ accession’ in *Tacitus Reviewed* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998) 155-67 and 40-69; E. O’Gorman, *Irony and Misreading in the Annals of Tacitus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000) 78-105.

but seeing how much of the outcome of this character and personality in some way determined the way in which the principate was going to evolve and how the political relationships between the emperor and the people would develop in the future. The useful distinction between ‘character’ and ‘personality’ given by Gill, can help us here to try to comprehend Tacitus’ obsession with Tiberius.²⁰⁶ Tacitus appears to see Tiberius as a psychological and moral agent, and thus he would be answerable for his intentions and actions, which could be defined and judged in terms of good or bad character. For Gill this description would correspond to ‘character’, although he admits that Tacitus gives some ‘hints’ of aiming at a personality description, i.e. trying to understand Tiberius and also seeing him as someone whose behaviour is determined by forces which fall outside his control. But this would be only an impression, since, in fact, it is very much a character-viewpoint because he is always passing moral judgement and making Tiberius responsible for his actions.²⁰⁷ The personality-viewpoint is described as having an empathetic response rather than a moral one, a desire to identify oneself with the person rather than appraise her ‘from the outside’.²⁰⁸ Indeed, we cannot say that Tacitus’ judgement of Tiberius was sympathetic, but this does not mean that he did not try to understand him, and excused some of his reactions. I would say that Tacitus really ‘tried’ to approach Tiberius from a personality-viewpoint and was concerned with Tiberius’ person as a unique individual, but the nature and rules of ancient historiography, with its emphasis on exemplarity, did not give much space for a total psychological comprehension,²⁰⁹ but was more concerned with moral judgement. What I have been trying to emphasise in this discussion is that the concept of personal freedom and responsibility with regard to somebody’s character was for Tacitus perhaps more important than we see it nowadays.

The other question would be, why is Tacitus so fascinated by Tiberius? There were worse emperors than Tiberius, and yet their characterization is less dramatic. Although there cannot be a definitive answer, it seems as if there really was ‘something objective’ about Tiberius’ character and behaviour. Tacitus tries to illustrate this

²⁰⁶ Cf. Gill, ‘The Character-Personality Distinction’, 1-31, and ‘Character-Development in Plutarch and Tacitus’, 469-87.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Gill, ‘Character-Development in Plutarch and Tacitus’, 484-6.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Gill, ‘The Character-Personality Distinction’, 2.

²⁰⁹ Hardly possible anyway.

complex personality sometimes being more successful than others, but what comes out in the end is the deep contradiction that the author realises that Tiberius is in, and is carrying everyone else along in: the more he simulates – intentionally or not – the clearer it becomes what the rule of one man is about. Paradoxically, the master of *dissimulatio* has done nothing else but unmask the real nature of the principate.

Tacitus, then, focuses particularly on Tiberius because there was so much expectation placed on him. As soon as Augustus becomes ill and infirm some ‘began idly to discuss the blessings of freedom; more were apprehensive of war; others desired it; the great majority merely exchanged gossip derogatory to their future masters’,²¹⁰ namely Agrippa and Tiberius. Agrippa was too young and inexperienced for the job, the only real choice was Tiberius. What were they really thinking of with these discussions? Were there some actual hopes that Augustus’ successor might restore some of the liberty they had lost?

We will come back to the idea of *libertas* as it is one of the main features of the Annals, but now I will try to explain how the change in the political circumstance had brought with it also the change of meanings of traditional concepts.²¹¹ The debasement of the language under the principate played an important role in the decline of Roman standards, it appeared to be something generalised and somehow the cause of the instability and confusion in which people seemed to be living. Tacitus seems to have realised this at a deeper level than other politicians or historians, and therefore his account of the period is a reflection of this change towards a feeble and almost cosmetic political structure. His narrative is full of ‘old words’ with new meanings not only to confuse the reader, but to give an idea of the situation itself: not even the characters in the play knew what they were talking about. This is what I have called ‘helpful and unhelpful vocabulary’: it is convenient and handy to use the same words, one does not need to explain them, but it is highly ineffective if they mean something else.

To begin with, the very idea of *res publica* appeared to Tacitus to have been misused. First of all by Augustus himself. He could claim that he had restored the Republic, because *quotus quisque reliquus, qui rem publicam vidisset?*²¹² In fact, if there

²¹⁰ Tac. *Ann.*, 1.4.

²¹¹ Hinted in the *Dialogus*.

²¹² Tac. *Ann.*, 1.3.

were not many people left who had lived under a truly republican government, it was easier – and certainly advantageous – for Augustus to appear as its saviour. However, the Romans were not so blind so as to swallow a nice tale without thinking. The Republic was one of the strongest and most powerful political concepts they had and Augustus' death seemed to have opened again a debate concerning the *res publica*. Tacitus is delighted to record the different points of view of the *prudentes*: for some, Augustus had become *princeps* because of his great *pietas* towards his father and the *necessitudine rei publicae*;²¹³ for others instead, these claims were merely excuses and a justification for his *cupidine dominandi*.²¹⁴ Republic meant annual and collegial magistracies and this was not the situation under the heir of Julius Caesar.

Once this essential notion of *res publica* – and inevitably with it *libertas* and *virtus* – was corrupted, every other meaning started collapsing little by little. *Paulatim* is for Tacitus a key word to explain the changes during the principate; they did not involve violence or the introduction of *res novae* and precisely for this they were all the more effective.²¹⁵

I would like to look at this phenomenon of changing of meaning using helpful and unhelpful vocabulary regarding the *lex laesae maiestatis* under Tiberius, for this is one of the very few occasions where Tacitus actually explains the reshaping of a concept. *Maiestas* trial was a 'statute which in the old jurisprudence had carried the same name but covered a different type of offence: betrayal of an army; seditious incitement of the populace; any act, in short, of maladministration diminishing the majesty of the Roman nation. Deeds were challenged, words went immune'.²¹⁶ The difference now is that under the old name of *maiestas* law, also words and *libelli* were punished.

Maiestas trials get more and more complicated.²¹⁷ Tiberius takes the side of the accusers, he thinks that 'they had better demolish the constitution than remove its custodians. Thus the informers, a breed invented for the national ruin and never

²¹³ Tac. *Ann*, 1.9.

²¹⁴ Tac. *Ann*, 1.10.

²¹⁵ See for example, Tac. *Ann*, 3.66 and 4.41.

²¹⁶ Tac. *Ann*, 1.72.

²¹⁷ For a more detailed account on *maiestas* trials under Tiberius, see Griffin, 'Tacitus, Tiberius and the Principate', 49-55; Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, appendix 5; Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 180-200.

adequately curbed even by penalties, were now lured into the field with rewards'.²¹⁸ For Tacitus it was undoubtedly 'the most deadly blight of the age that prominent senators practised even the basest forms of delation (...) to speak of any subject was to be accused: for every man was hastening to be first in the field and to mark down his victim, occasionally in self-defence, generally through infection with what seemed a contagious disease'.²¹⁹ Even women were not exempt from peril, they were indicted for their tears, and in one occasion one was put to death because she had wept at the killing of her son.²²⁰ *Maiestas* was not only concerned with the majesty of the empire, but also that of the emperor himself, precisely because he was now the incarnation of the state. *Maiestas* trials increased *metus*, and therefore diminished the possibilities of exercising *virtus*.²²¹ The slightly different application of the law – not only facts, but words – meant also the moving of the boundaries of behaviour, making it yet more difficult to act in a lawful or virtuous way: it is not always clear what it means to be good or bad if the definitions of crimes themselves change. Cases of *maiestas* work as a very clear example of how vulnerable to change and debasement *virtus* was.

Another instance where we can see a reshaping of traditional vocabulary is regarding *auctoritas*. *Auctoritas* had been in the Republic that personal influence or ascendancy which comprehended the idea of acquiring this prestige through a combination of inheritance, personality and achievement. Augustus could claim *auctoritate omnibus praestiti*,²²² and it had certainly been essential under his regime. It did not necessarily mean *potestas*, although they were, of course, related. Under the principate, however, we see *auctoritas* displayed by the wrong type of person according to Tacitus, people who should not have *auctoritas* at all: women and freedmen instead of senators or the *princeps* himself. Furthermore, *auctoritas*, which in its origins was not automatically associated with a certain office, started to be strongly linked to the position regardless of the person himself.

We can take, for example, the position of women with respect to Tiberius' succession. The situation was already complex, but the *auctoritas* of all these female

²¹⁸ Tac. *Ann*, 4.30.

²¹⁹ Tac. *Ann*, 6.7.

²²⁰ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 6.10.

²²¹ So corrupted were the times that Tacitus records with horror a son prosecuting his own father, cf. 4.28.

²²² *Res Gestae*, 34.3.

relatives made it even more so. They reacted in different ways to ensure their own interests in the position of their defender: Livia, as head of the family and the dynasty, Agrippina, as widow of the heir chosen by Augustus and mother of the future emperor, and Livia Julia, as wife of Drusus, Tiberius' son.²²³ Tacitus is clearly inclined to forge a significant role for these imperial women in manipulating behind the scene, a role which would become more and more decisive in the history of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.²²⁴ The *auctoritas* of these women was clear, the next step was to prove their *potestas*. And they certainly did. Agrippina the Younger was addressed and paid homage 'in the same terms of praise and gratitude which they had employed towards the emperor. It was an innovation, certainly, and one without precedent in ancient custom, that a woman should sit in state before Roman standards: it was the advertisement of her claim to a partnership in the empire'.²²⁵ There was something of this sort in the behaviour of her mother standing on the bridge and preventing its destruction.²²⁶

Tacitus is also keen to show how anybody could have *auctoritas* if they were in favour with the powerful. The emperor's favourites came to have *auctoritas*, and with it, *potestas*: under Claudius, Nero's adoption is accelerated *auctoritate Pallantis*,²²⁷ and the freedman Polyclitus is sent to Britain since Nero hopes that his *auctoritas* will be effective.²²⁸

More painful for Tacitus is the situation of the *auctoritas* of the senate. Germanicus gives us a hint of its deterioration in his speech to the soldiers: 'Who have treated the authority of the senate as a thing so abject?'²²⁹ Almost nothing of the force of the senate's *auctoritas* is left in this new order of the principate. They were *homines ad servitutem paratos*;²³⁰ adulation and flattery had become their weapons for surviving. *Adulatio* meant for Tacitus almost the opposite of *auctoritas*, but paradoxically, servile

²²³ For the influence and importance of these imperial women cf. Tac. *Ann.*, for Livia: 1.3; 1.5; 1.14; 2.82; 3. 17; 4.21; 5.2-3; 6.2; 6.25 for Agrippina: 1.33; 1.41; 1.69; 2.75; 3.4; 4.12; 4.40; 4.53-54; 6.26; for Livia Julia 2.84; 4.3; 4.40.

²²⁴ For this topic see: N. Purcell, 'Livia and the womanhood of Rome', *PCPS* 32 (1986) 78-105; M. Griffin, 'The Senate's story', esp. 256-7 and G. Grether, 'Livia and the Roman imperial cult', *AJP* 67 (1946) 222-52.

²²⁵ Tac. *Ann.*, 12.37.

²²⁶ Tac. *Ann.*, 1.69.

²²⁷ Cf. Tac. *Ann.*, 12.25.

²²⁸ Cf. Tac. *Ann.*, 14.39.

²²⁹ Cf. Tac. *Ann.*, 1.42.

²³⁰ Tac. *Ann.*, 3.65.

flattery under the powerful provided some authority. The term meant something different now, but it was very compelling to keep using the old word. Achieving *auctoritas* through *virtus* was being replaced by the acquisition of *auctoritas* by *potestas*.

Even people could experience in some sense this 'change of meaning'. We have in Tiberius' reign the example of Germanicus. His role in the Annals is not only to serve as a foil to Tiberius, but also to prove how much things have changed. Germanicus is by no means a straightforward character and the diversity of judgements about him ranges from the noble good old general to the caricature and failure of it.²³¹ Germanicus could be seen as a person who has changed meaning because what would have been a brave and patriotic military man in the Republic, becomes a threat under the principate. Moreover his position in history gains weight and prestige retrospectively. By the time Tacitus is writing, Germanicus had been heir himself, father, brother and grandfather of three emperors. His image certainly grew with time.²³² But Germanicus had not always been 'great', his pathetic performance during the mutinies had given him a tough time and he had shown that his impulsiveness and theatricality were signs that his *auctoritas* was not yet mature enough.²³³ With Germanicus we feel that we are in front of a case of 'unjustified popularity', as Pelling has said.²³⁴ However, it is not totally unjustified. Germanicus carries with him the unrealised hopes of the future *princeps*. He is presented in an indefinite manner because the principate, by its very nature, is indefinite and the only way to see how an emperor would turn out was to see him in power. Germanicus was never put to that test and perhaps he would not have been successful, but the fact that he 'never was and could have been' gave him at least the benefit of the doubt. Tiberius instead had the opportunity of being an emperor and the results were not satisfactory. The potential to be a bad emperor was large because, according to Tacitus, the essence of the principate helped to bring about the bad qualities of men.

²³¹ Cf. Pelling, 'Tacitus and Germanicus', 72: 'the grimy and stifling realities of imperial politics are not the stuff for the noble and brilliant Germanicus'; Walker, *The Annals*, 9: 'Tacitus' political hero', 232: 'true Roman ideal of *prisca virtus*'; D.O. Ross, 'The Tacitean Germanicus', *YCS* 23 (1973) 227: 'a figure of failure and futility'.

²³² Cf. O'Gorman, *Irony and Misreading*, 46.

²³³ For Germanicus' theatricality, see D. Shotter, 'Tacitus, Tiberius and Germanicus', *Historia* 17 (1968) 198-9; Pelling, 'Tacitus and Germanicus', *passim*.

²³⁴ Pelling, 'Tacitus and Germanicus', 67.

But Tiberius had also been a successful general under Augustus, with immense popularity among his soldiers and a future before him. According to Velleius, who actually deals with the period in which Tiberius was adopted son and heir, he was very much a figure of *prisca virtus*, a general like those the Republic had seen.²³⁵ In fact, there are striking similarities between Tiberius' and Germanicus' careers as princes. Their relationship with their respective foster-fathers had not been easy. Tiberius with Augustus and Germanicus with Tiberius never felt comfortable. Was there something in the *princeps* himself – whoever he was – that made this relation strained? In that case the blame should be placed in the institution: something in the principate was not wholly resolved. Tiberius was with Germanicus as Augustus had been with himself: ambiguous, humiliating, and jealous. And we see that 'so much of Tiberius is there in Augustus, murderousness, the hypocrisy, the bloody elimination of rivals, the *dissimulatio*, even the choice of a worse successor. These are qualities not just of individuals, but of the principate as a whole, the patterns of behaviour the system recurrently imposes on each new *princeps*'.²³⁶

Tacitus was not only concerned with the vices of a particular emperor,²³⁷ he was interested in noting how the lack of freedom had made the system so corrupt that it corrupted people as well. The rules of the game during the principate were such that it was not always possible to draw a definite line between the man and his office. Man, power and state had become one; the consequences were, then, that one ended up judging them indiscriminately. This change affected the approach to *virtus* in a very relevant way. In republican times, the competition for the offices had promoted a system of *virtus*. But under the rule of one, *virtus* was no longer going to be the natural and fair route to reward: *potestas* had taken over, the will of the incarnation of this power and this authority was going to make the final decision in politics. Was it still worthwhile to keep fighting for *virtus* then?

²³⁵ See chapter V.3 above.

²³⁶ Pelling, 'Tacitus and Germanicus', 79.

²³⁷ There is a certain discussion as to whether Tacitus was critical of Tiberius as a man or the principate as a system. For the view that Tacitus' opposition to Tiberius was moral and personal, but not political, see for example, J. Percival, 'Tacitus and the Principate', *Greece and Rome* 27 (1980) 119-33; for the view that Tacitus was resentful of the *princeps* as well as the principate, see Griffin, 'Tacitus, Tiberius and the Principate', 33-57.

Virtus and Libertas

I would like to take the discussion about the change of meaning of *libertas* together with that of *virtus*. The concepts are so intimately interconnected that attempting a separate analysis would not help to the comprehension of this change. In general terms, we can say that if there is no freedom, virtue is not possible; a good action done under pressure lacks merit, free will is absolutely necessary to be truly virtuous. And at the same time, virtue is the safeguard of personal freedom, only a virtuous man is able to keep his liberty till the end, no matter how tied or bound he is by external circumstances.²³⁸

In an age of despotism, where peace was ‘unbroken or half-heartedly challenged’,²³⁹ *virtus* consisted in something more complex than giving one’s life to defend the country against a foreign enemy. This was still necessary – and Tacitus tells us stories of *pristina virtus* –²⁴⁰ but he is more concerned with showing us a deeper understanding of *virtus* proper to times of tribulation: the virtue of remaining free.

Tacitus uses the term freedom in several senses: the old political *libertas* which everybody recognises as the traditional constitutional right, *libertas senatoria*, and the personal freedom which involved the courage and will to behave like a free man.²⁴¹ Once again we are faced with this helpful and unhelpful terminology, which if it is subtle for us to grasp, it was even more so for the protagonists of the time. He will use the word without distinguishing what kind of *libertas* he is talking about, and in the same way as the principate has a ‘political’ and ‘moral’ reading, so has freedom.

The history of the Annals is one of *metus*, *adulatio* and *simulatio*. All these feelings were almost mutually exclusive terms with *virtus* and *libertas*. Who would be able to escape the fate of falling inevitably into slavery if one wanted to survive under tyranny? Was it possible to reconcile virtue and freedom with an autocrat *princeps*?

Metus was the prevailing condition of the senate in Rome and Tacitus records it with great expressiveness: ‘everybody feared something, whether they spoke the truth or

²³⁸ For a more detailed explanation of the links between *virtus* and *libertas*, see chapter II.3 above.

²³⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.32. For the idea of peace in Tacitus, see H.W. Benario, ‘Tacitus’ view of the Empire and the *Pax Romana*’, *ANRW* II 33.5 (1991) 3331-53.

²⁴⁰ See e.g. *Ann.* 1.40; 1.41; 12.51.

²⁴¹ Cf. Wirszubski, *Libertas as a political idea*, 165-7 and R. Martin, ‘Structure and Interpretation in the Annals of Tacitus’, *ANRW* II, 33.2 (1991) 1573-7.

they lied, they ran great risks’;²⁴² ‘the senate feared that they might seem to comprehend him’;²⁴³ ‘the senators were penetrated with terror and astonishment’;²⁴⁴ ‘they feared more the inexpressiveness of Tiberius’.²⁴⁵ Just two words revealed the whole tone and mood of the city: *pavor internus*;²⁴⁶ *priores metus*;²⁴⁷ *vi metus*.²⁴⁸ How could anyone be free under such circumstance when one went ‘pale at the very thought that he had manifested alarm’?²⁴⁹ The fear and servility together with the secrecy and rumours created an intoxicating atmosphere which did not encourage the exercise of the traditional Roman values.

Much of the history of the early principate happened behind closed doors. And this secrecy bred rumour and with it came confusion, uncertainty, doubt ... *Arcana imperii* and *suspensa semper et obscura verba* made every truth provisional in Tacitus,²⁵⁰ we have a feeling what his final interpretation was, but he never tells it plainly: the conclusion is open.²⁵¹

The worst of all was perhaps that not everybody realised the changes because *manebant etiam tum vestigia morientis libertatis*.²⁵² So strong were the foundations of the Republic that the image remained imprinted in the new order: with this *species libertatis*, kept by the *simulatio* of the *princeps*,²⁵³ it was still possible to find the *imago rei publicae*.²⁵⁴ The use of the words *specie*, *imago*, *simulatio* in Tacitus reveals the dark reality of an agonising freedom still trying to live, but managing with difficulty.

But Tacitus’ response to the times is not one of total despair and discouragement: *haud facile libertas et domini miscentur*.²⁵⁵ It is not easy, even dangerous, but it is still achievable. The old Roman *libertas* was giving birth to a new one of a different kind:

²⁴² Tac. *Ann*, 1.6.

²⁴³ Tac. *Ann*, 1.11.

²⁴⁴ Tac. *Ann*, 6.24.

²⁴⁵ Tac. *Ann*, 3.15.

²⁴⁶ Tac. *Ann*, 4.74.

²⁴⁷ Tac. *Ann*, 6.18.

²⁴⁸ Tac. *Ann*, 6.20.

²⁴⁹ Tac. *Ann*, 4.70.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 1.6; 1.11; 2.36; 2.59; and *Hist*. 1.4.

²⁵¹ I owe this idea to Michael Comber.

²⁵² Tac. *Ann*, 1.74.

²⁵³ For the *simulatio* of the *princeps*, especially Tiberius, see 1.52; 1.81; 2.5; 2.29; 2.36; 2.42; 3.8; 3.22; 3.64; 4.31; 4.60; 4.67; 4.71; 6.24; 6.50.

²⁵⁴ Tac. *Ann*, 13.28.

²⁵⁵ Tac. *Hist*, 4.64.

less connected with political action and more related to personal virtue. At first sight *virtus* under the principate ‘is admirable, but futile; it is cruelty and evil that determine the fate of the Roman people’,²⁵⁶ it seems to have been relegated to the private sphere. To stand firm before tribulation, unyielding endurance and courage in serving the *res publica* had been the characteristics of a proper Roman. But Tacitus says that they still are, even if we do not find them very often and the circumstances have changed for the worse. The main message of Tacitus in the *Annals* is to persuade the Romans and us that, even if everything seems lost, debased, and corrupted, *virtus* is still worthwhile.

It is particularly characteristic that Tacitus connects *virtus* and *libertas* in the moment of death. Even though it had become difficult to behave and act like a true Roman, nobody could take away the possibility of dying like one. *Virtus* would always be successful if one died free, *libertas* in death demanded a high degree of *virtus* and was perhaps the last exercise of freedom.

We see examples of *libertas* in death scenes – which Tacitus is very keen on describing in detail –²⁵⁷ spread throughout the work; not very many, but every age produced its own. I would like to start looking at some of them retrospectively. After the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero, a series of men and women who had to face death is presented to us. Some of them showed lowliness and debasement of character, but this served to make the virtuous shine all the more. The freedwoman Epicharis, for example, endures a harsh torture and finally strangles herself in order not to reveal the names of some conspirators.²⁵⁸ For Tacitus she is a *clarius exemplum* of *virtus*, which had been pushed to the extremes and kept till the end: ‘an example which shone the brighter at a time when persons freeborn and male, Roman knights and senators, untouched by the torture, were betraying each his nearest and dearest’.²⁵⁹ The cases of the conspirators Subrius Flavus and Sulpicius Asper receive unequivocal admiration from Tacitus as well. Both of them face death without any terror, Flavus offered his neck bravely to the

²⁵⁶ Mellor, *Tacitus*, 64.

²⁵⁷ Especially compared with all the other things he does not tell us about the period.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 15.57.

²⁵⁹ Tac. *Ann*, 15.57.

tribune entrusted with that task and Asper answered the emperor back daringly till the last minute.²⁶⁰

The deaths of Seneca and Thrasea Paetus are the stereotypes of freedom and virtue par excellence. Nero's tutor faced an unfair fate with the same admirable dignity with which he had lived; he had been one of the few who had not been overcome by *adulatio* in an age where to flatter the emperor was to keep one's own life safe; on the contrary, Seneca asserted, that 'Nero had more often experienced his frankness than his servility'.²⁶¹ His desire to retire from politics and give away part of his riches,²⁶² reveal that the situation was getting more and more dangerous for him because he was not going to compromise to Nero's insane whims. But the over sensitive emperor perhaps perceived the hidden motive: 'not your moderation if you give back your riches; not your retirement, if you abandon your prince; but my avarice and the terrors of my cruelty will be upon men's lips'.²⁶³

Seneca's death is described with precision: his words, reactions and feelings provide a true example of *virtus* in the moment of trial.²⁶⁴ Seneca accepts death with incredible courage and leaves his friends heirs to his fairest possession: *imaginem vitae suae*.²⁶⁵ Tacitus concludes the account with Seneca's libation to Jupiter the Liberator and thus he expresses how death could be the last and foremost act of freedom.

In putting to death Thrasea Paetus, Nero wanted to destroy *virtutem ipsam*.²⁶⁶ The charges against him were false and treacherously made up as a justification of his extermination; the real motive was that 'certain virtues are a ground for hatred',²⁶⁷ as Thrasea himself had said before, and Nero could not bear them any longer. Thrasea decided not to defend himself – it was useless and dangerous for his family – and thus he remained 'unstained and unpolluted' till the end.²⁶⁸ His final action, like Seneca's, was an offering to Jupiter the Liberator.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁰ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 15.67-8.

²⁶¹ Tac. *Ann*, 15.61.

²⁶² Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 14.52-6.

²⁶³ Tac. *Ann*, 14.56.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 15.60-3.

²⁶⁵ Tac. *Ann*, 15.62

²⁶⁶ Tac. *Ann*, 16.21.

²⁶⁷ Tac. *Ann*, 15.21.

²⁶⁸ Tac. *Ann*, 16.26.

²⁶⁹ Tac. *Ann*, 16.35.

Here, perhaps, it would be convenient to stop and try to understand the political meaning of these deaths in Rome. The tradition had, undoubtedly, grown stronger since Cato's suicide in 46 BC, but it had been present in the collective imagination possibly since Socrates' death.²⁷⁰ Plato and Aristotle had given some guidelines with regard to suicide and neither of them condemned it or recommended it, but had left it as an open question to be defined having the personal circumstances very much in mind.²⁷¹ The Stoics combined the idea of suicide as a supremely free act with seeing it as a course not to be followed by all, but according to the appropriate reason. The paradigmatic case of Cato the Younger, although not exactly the same as that of Socrates,²⁷² came to be identified with the death of the philosopher, and the fact that Plutarch tells us that Cato had been reading the *Phaedo* the night before killing himself,²⁷³ gave to his death a touch of theatricality that would be imitated by other 'martyrs' of freedom, among them Seneca and Thrasea. 'Stoicism, not alone but via the powerful example of Cato, made suicide, not tolerated or acceptable – for it was already – but fashionable and esteemed'.²⁷⁴ Suicide became one way of showing *virtus* and acquiring *gloria* under the principate, with an added advantage: it could be performed in front of an audience and have witnesses; philosophy had taught men to die in style.²⁷⁵ As the last free act of a man, it also became a symbol of not having been subjected to the will of the tyrant: *libertas invicta*.²⁷⁶

However, more than exalting suicide as such, these men were an example of being ready to face death rather than complying with the wishes of the emperor in what

²⁷⁰ For this topic, see M. Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato and Roman Suicide: I and II', *G&R* 33 (1986) 64-77; 192-202; M. Griffin, *Seneca, a Philosopher in Politics* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992 [1976]) 367-88; P. Veyne, *Seneca, The Life of a Stoic* (New York and London, Routledge, 2003, orig. in French, 1993) 157-72.

²⁷¹ Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 61ff; Arist, *NE*, 9.1169a19ff; 3.1116a12; 5.1138a4ff.

²⁷² As a matter of fact, Socrates did not commit suicide, but accepted an unjust death.

²⁷³ Plut. *Cato min*, 68.2; 70.1.

²⁷⁴ Griffin, 'Philosophy, Cato and Roman Suicide: II', 197.

²⁷⁵ See, for example, Seneca's death, Tac. *Ann*, 15.62-4: the reading of the will, the speech encouraging friends, dialogue with wife, dictation of last discourse, the libation, the scene in the bath.

²⁷⁶ This is one of the main topics that Lucan develops in his *Bellum Civile*: Cato, the incarnation of *virtus* preserves *libertas* by dying. For more, see F. Ahl, *Lucan, an Introduction* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1976) esp. 251, 323.

they thought it was wrong.²⁷⁷ And this is admirable for Tacitus, not the specific way of dying. To die by one's own hand proves that 'the courage to commit suicide would have consisted in overcoming the fear of death'.²⁷⁸

The last death I would like to look at is that of Cremutius Cordus. Even though the matter was completely different to that of Seneca and Thrasea, the motivations were very similar: suspicion, hypocrisy and fear. The condemnation of the historical work of Cremutius was a milestone in the story of the end of liberty; it meant that the freedom to express one's own ideas was henceforward lost and it acknowledged the enormous power of history as the true record of the past to influence people in the present. Tacitus compares Tiberian with Augustan times: Livy, for example, could be called 'Pompeianus' by Augustus himself without prejudice to their friendship. Asinius Pollio who praised Cassius and Cicero with his *Cato* could speak freely under Caesar. Tacitus stresses once again that not deeds, but words were now punished: Cremutius' crime was to have praised Brutus and Cassius, whose acts everybody had recorded with honour.²⁷⁹ The accusers were some of Sejanus' clients and this had seemed to decide his fate: freedom of speech was tacitly considered a crime, but if on top of that you were accused by somebody powerful, your end was sure.

The speech of Cremutius before the Senate, gives many examples of freedom of speech during the Republic and even under Augustus,²⁸⁰ but above all raises important questions about the impact that history has in helping to shape the present. Why could history be dangerous? 'Are Brutus and Cassius under arms on the plains of Philippi, and I upon the platform firing the nation to civil war? Or is it the case that, seventy years since their death, as they are known by their images, which not even the victor abolished, so a portion of their memory is enshrined likewise in history?'²⁸¹ Cremutius states that his record of these last republicans is harmless; they have been dead for a long time, and it seems fair to remember them. He tries to defend his work and affirms that he is 'only' commemorating their deeds. But that is not a good enough defence: reading

²⁷⁷ Suicide for trivial motives were in fact condemned by Seneca and other Stoics. Cf. Sen. *Ep*, 4.4; 30.12; 104.3. Cf. H. Hine, 'Seneca, Stoicism and the Problem of Moral Evil' in D. Innes, H. Hine and C. Pelling (eds.), *Ethics and Rhetoric* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995) 93-106.

²⁷⁸ Griffin, *Seneca, a Philosopher in Politics*, 369.

²⁷⁹ Tac. *Ann*, 4.34.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Tac. *Ann*, 4.34.

²⁸¹ Tac. *Ann*, 4.35.

history – any history – provokes a certain reaction in the audience. The reader somehow always responds to the story he is told. Tiberius perhaps feared this and wanted to avoid it. Cremutius realises that his case is lost, he is trapped in a paradox: if history cannot do any harm, it means that it cannot do any good either. He knew that this was not true. So did Tacitus.

Cremutius ends his life by self-starvation, choosing to die rather than to live without freedom; if he could not say what he thought it was true, life did not seem worth living. However, hidden copies of Cremutius' work remained secretly kept: 'a fact which moves us the more to deride the folly of those who believe that by an act of despotism in the present there can be extinguished also the memory of a succeeding generation'.²⁸² The greatest sign of stupidity is for Tacitus those who believe they can delete the memory of their deeds from posterity.²⁸³ 'Immortalising the wrong exempla from the past was Cremutius Cordus' mistake, although by so doing he managed to turn himself into the right kind of model in Tacitus' account'.²⁸⁴ The only loser is the one who forbids the writings: the victim is crowned with renown, the tyrant with ignominy.

It looks as if there is something inevitably tragic about *virtus* under the principate. To be able to exercise one's own interior freedom to choose to behave virtuously had a high price: life. The ending is not completely bad – they achieved *gloria* – but it was almost always a sad one, the virtuous had to die. The last action in life was to choose how to die – not in the physical sense – but in the way one accepted death. Poisoned, opening his veins, offering his neck to the executioner, no matter how, the brave always dies free.

Again, although all this is true, if we stay here, we run the risk of staying on the surface. Death in the name of *libertas* was a glorious end, and Tacitus admired it, but it was not the only way out. Tacitus' complaint *in arto et inglorius labor* applies not only to his task of recording petty intrigues of the principate compared to the great republican

²⁸² Tac. *Ann.* 4.35.

²⁸³ This has a very 'Orwellian' ring, in 1984, Big Brother's maxim is: 'who controls the past, controls the future. Who controls the present, controls the past'. A similar parallel, with regards to the suppression of what is known or believed to be true, has been drawn by Luce in 'Tacitus on History's Highest Function: *praecipuum munus annalium*', *ANRW* II, 33.4 (1991) 2921.

²⁸⁴ K. Clarke, 'In arto et inglorius labor: Tacitus' anti-history' in A. Bowman, H. Cotton, M. Goodman and S. Price (eds.), *Representations of Empire, Rome and the Mediterranean World* (Oxford and London, Oxford University Press, 2002) 98.

wars, but also recording the life of people who did not ‘die’ like heroes, but rather, who ‘lived’ heroically under bad circumstances. For Tacitus living was braver. It had been the choice of Agricola, Marcus Lepidus,²⁸⁵ and to a certain extent, Seneca. In some sense, it had been Tacitus’ own choice as well. But again, the principate had altered the meaning of heroic. To be a hero during the rule of one man signified – as always in Rome – living to serve the state, but now this implied a rather novel approach; collaborating with the regime – without becoming contaminated – because each and everyone could make a difference; their presence in it mattered.²⁸⁶ In few words, ‘being’ a hero, without ‘playing’ the hero. Paradoxically, these ‘unheroic lives’ had achieved great glory and Tacitus’ *inglorius labor* turned out to be most glorious after all. The principate changed the meanings of old concepts and changed perhaps the value of things, but the core of Romanness remained. It only had to be exercised in a different way.

Since now it was the emperor – i.e. the state – the one who tried to annihilate the individual’s integrity and dignity by destroying his freedom, *virtus* – once the first and foremost service *for* the state – had to be exercised *despite* the state or even *against* it. *Virtus* was now dangerous, because it attracted the anger of the powerful. Having the old notion of *libertas* in mind, it was impossible to practise *virtus*, with the concept of ‘interior freedom’ it was not only possible, but loftier. When there was no political liberty, there was always the personal freedom to be virtuous and brave. *Virtus* had served to preserve *libertas*, now *libertas* was a manifestation of *virtus*. Both remained at the very heart of being Roman.

History’s first duty according to Tacitus was ‘to ensure that virtue shall not lack its record and to hold before the vicious word and deed the terrors of posterity and

²⁸⁵ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.13. See, for example, his praise in 4.20: ‘I am discovering for myself that this Lepidus was a weighty and wise [*gravem et sapientem*] man during that period. He frequently steered issues away from the savage sycophancies of others in a better direction, but at the same time he did not lack balance, since he thrived as much by his continuing influence with Tiberius as by the latter’s favour toward him’. Woodman’s translation in *Tacitus: The Annals* (Indianapolis-Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Co., 2004) 132.

²⁸⁶ For example Seneca playing a role in Nero’s regime: we can just imagine what Nero would have been like without Seneca’s tuition. And also Domitian’s reign without an Agricola would have been worse and so that of Tiberius without people like Lepidus.

infamy'.²⁸⁷ History as memory of virtue and history as a deterrent to avoid the bad examples lest they should be recorded for ever.²⁸⁸ But this *ne virtutes sileantur* should be understood in a broad way; there are a lot more things that should not be silenced by history, a lot to be seen 'underneath'. Tacitus seems always keen on giving us that plus: subverting the meaning of *libertas* and unsettling the traditional point of view of *virtus*, Tacitus proposes a much higher ideal for the definition of Romanness. True *libertas* did not depend on the constitutions or on exterior and favourable circumstances that made easy its exercise, but in the inner strength to feel free, even in the most difficult conditions. Real *virtus* implied the courage and integrity to preserve one's self-respect and dignity. The tyrants may have been able to kill men of *virtus*, but they could not corrupt Roman excellence. Through the records of history *virtus* outlives the state, the emperor and the man himself.

The real challenge of the Annals – and this is why it is always exciting to deal with them – is perhaps that the surface is so rich and complex that it might prevent us from getting to the centre.²⁸⁹ By studying this work so much, we have become familiar with its distinctive features and, in some ways, we have turned it into a stimulating, but 'pleasant' reading. I am not claiming, by any means, that the interpretation which I have given of the Annals, or of Tacitus' work as a whole, has reached its very centre in a definitive way. There is so much that remains between the author and his text and never sees the light. I would be satisfied if I was able to raise some questions that can help us to understand the 'character' *together with* the 'personality' of his work, and thus come closer to the core of it.

By tracing the evolution of the concept of *virtus* and *libertas* in the works of Tacitus I have aimed not only at showing what was actually happening during the Principate and how much things had changed, but I have also tried to illustrate the personal maturity of these ideas through the literary career of the author. There is a

²⁸⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 3.65.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Luce, 'Tacitus on History's Highest Function', 2914. But see A. Woodman, '*Praecipuum Munus Annalium*: The Construction, Convention and Context of Annals 3.65.1' in *Tacitus Reviewed*, 92-3, 103 (although I think he is over-reading the text) and Woodman and Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus*, book 3 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996) *ad loc.*

²⁸⁹ Cf. A. Woodman, 'Lectorum Incuria', in *Tacitus Reviewed* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998) 218-43.

double development in time: *virtus* has changed from Republic to Principate, and it has suffered a transformation in Tacitus' life as well. The writing of history has demanded a *virtus* from the historian that helped to redefine *virtus* in history itself. After all, Tacitus plays a role not only in the history he writes, but also in the history he lives.

With his writings Tacitus tries to show us the small changes through time, 'which so often set in motion the great events of history'.²⁹⁰ He takes us, through the examination of the past, to the idea that political transformations have more and deeper consequences than one might think; he leads us along the complicated and fascinating path of character analysis to discover the deep folds of human nature which seem to wake up when they sense change. Through writing history he has not only re-interpreted the concepts of *virtus* and *libertas* in Roman history, but also in his own life. By showing us how to do it, Tacitus encourages us to be constantly evaluating and redefining the values that make life worth living. Certainly, our obsession for Tacitus increases with knowledge.

²⁹⁰ Tac. *Ann*, 4.32.

Epilogue

‘Here are the questions to which I would have every reader give his close attention: what *vita* and *mores* were like; through what men and by which policies, in peace and in war, empire was established and enlarged’.

Livy, *praef.* 9

We have come to the end of our study on *virtus* in the Roman historians. I realise that the time limits I have set for this thesis are arbitrary, but they are not wholly capricious. The period of the political crisis in Rome was a particularly rich one for historical analysis. The end of the Roman Republic brought a transformation which involved a lot more than just a change in the political system. The players were aware of some of the consequences of this fact, but it was necessary to draw out all its significance to be able to accept the change entirely. They assumed quite quickly the practical alterations in politics or administration, but the process of assimilation and deep understanding of what had actually happened took longer. The historians played a particularly important role in creating the framework for the reception of the full implications of these changes. Through the writing of history they sought to generate the principles by which they could build a proper self-definition in times of constant change. Through their different and personal reactions to the situations they were in, the four historians I have chosen for my analysis tried to create a valid response in an attempt to explain and assimilate the historical process they were immersed in.

We do not need to stick rigidly, for example, to one particular model or response; we do not need to ‘choose’ between one history or another, one historian or another. Why cannot we take something from Sallust, Livy, Velleius and Tacitus and weave them into a new system? After all none of them individually portrays reality, but all of them together give us an approximate idea of the problem.

Although it looks as if I have adopted a chronological view of the topic, in fact the true nature of my project prevents me from following a purely temporal approach. It is true that *virtus* developed itself in time, that the concept evolved and matured, but it is

also true that *virtus* was always there in its entirety to be discovered. The historians performed the task of ‘uncovering’ an idea that was made into an ideal and as such it could be understood in its holistic nature from the beginning.

Another reason why the temporal approach serves us to depict only one aspect of the evolution of the concept, but not the whole reality is that, as we have seen, all historians use *virtus* in its double meaning of, on the one hand, ‘courage’ or ‘bravery’ and on the other, ‘virtue’ in a more general moral way. That means that it is not the case that for Sallust, or for the historians before him, *virtus* was ‘courage’ and for Tacitus *virtus* was ‘virtue’. The meanings are temporally overlapped. And precisely here lies its power and strength: being difficult to define, or better, the existence of many different ways of defining Roman *virtus* made the term less concrete and specific and therefore it multiplied the contexts in which it could be used. *Virtus* could be found everywhere and under any circumstance: it was what everybody claimed, an aim for life, a means to achieve *gloria*, a criterion by which to judge people – especially politicians –, energy of action, courage to undertake brave deeds, true manliness, the moral code of the *maiores*... For the Romans it was difficult to approach any important topic without having to deal with *virtus*. Since *virtus* was such a key concept within the Roman tradition, the study of it through historical writings can help us in our understanding not only of the historical thought behind this concept, but also its role in shaping and explaining historical reality.

In this final part of the thesis I would like to stress once again that the characterisation of *virtus* through historical writing not only tells us about the overpowering presence of the notion as a crucial idea in political success, but also as a central ideal for the self-definition of Romanness. Roman historians of the late Republic and early Empire were concerned with these ideas precisely because they were living a period that looked for redefinition. History seemed the right means to acquire and preserve this identity. Through the memory of their deeds, the Romans could see themselves performing the acts of their ancestors and, at the same time, they could project themselves into future generations. History was not a nostalgic preoccupation with the past, but a question of contemporary relevance.

Thus, I argued in chapter III that for Sallust, deploring the disappearance and lack of *virtus* in a specific time in the Republic, served as a form of analysis of political decline. For him, the final purpose of writing history appeared to be searching for causes and, therefore, his study of the connection between the collapse of the Republic and the failure of *virtus* seemed a valid one. By illustrating decay and showing how spread political corruption had become at all levels of society, he would appeal to a broader concept of *virtus* that could cure the sickly condition of the state. He hinted an answer to the problem, but was more concerned to denounce the origin of it. When *libertas* came to mean personal power under the disguise of *dignitas*, *virtus* was forgotten or used for personal pursuits which went against its true meaning. He showed his contemporaries how little was needed to pass from *virtus* to *vitium*, how fragile the boundaries were and how often they had been crossed. Aiming to win *gloria* was good, but too much *gloria* led to *ambitio* and *avaritia*. Did *virtus* start disappearing when the Republic started crumbling or was the crisis in the Republic a consequence of the decline of *virtus*? And perhaps more importantly for Sallust, would the restoration of the Republic restore the morals? Would the return of *virtus* bring again the original Republic?

In my fourth chapter I tried to show how Livy, on the contrary, focuses not on the *vitia* of the present, but the *virtus* of the past. Portraying *virtus* is for him the means to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the history of the Roman people: by showing what they had been, they would be able to discover who they were now and what they were called to. Livy sought to give such a persuasive picture of the Romans of the past that could make contemporary Romans feel identified with that definition of Romanness. He writes history in some degree to portray, to evoke a lost world and to make it live in the mind of the reader. Livy constructs this memory and presents this Roman identity of *virtus* as being intimately connected with *libertas*. Freedom, especially political freedom, was necessary to be and to behave like a proper Roman.

I dealt with Velleius in chapter V and presented him working as a hinge between two historiographical strands: on the one hand as being part of the Roman historiographical tradition, and on the other being able to express the new attitudes towards history in a very original way, perhaps permitting a new era in historical writing to dawn. Velleius means the acceptance of the principate not as a dramatic change from

the Republic, but as a restoration of its main features. The re-establishment of peace and order had brought back the possibility of exercising and displaying *virtus* in the traditional Roman way.

Analysing the concept of *virtus* in Tacitus made me consider as a whole some of the arguments which had been raised individually in previous chapters: the need for re-evaluation of Romanness, arising mainly because of the political change, passed unquestionably through the reassessment of *virtus* and *libertas*. The traditional view of freedom being lost because of autocracy and old Roman courage because of peace appears to be true, but it is not the main problem that Tacitus is addressing. He also wants to awake the realisation of the existence of an interior freedom with which Romans could choose how to react to the circumstances instead of being led by them and this involved a courageous challenge, in the old Roman sense, that not all Romans were prepared to face.

As a small exercise, it would be helpful perhaps to try to imagine these four historians having some sort of Ciceronian dialogue about *virtus* in Rome. This will distance ourselves from the chronological view and could facilitate our understanding of the importance of this problem as something always contemporary and present in the Roman mind. Sallust would start the conversation complaining that in the present age *virtus* cannot be found anywhere; he would choose some specific examples to describe the situation which would end up as an escalation in the way to corruption. He is passionate in his language, but discouraged with the situation. Livy would interrupt Sallust even before he attempts to draw a conclusion and would try to cheer him up giving him a lengthy account of the whole history of Rome; it is somewhat unfair to look just at the present situation when they have had so long and powerful a tradition of their city being a model of *virtus*. In fact, they have had other periods of political turmoil and they have overcome them, so let them remember where they came from and the great things they have done. At this point Velleius would say that they did not need to look so far in the past, even in the present examples of true *virtus* could be found. The Roman state, identified with its ruler the emperor, was again a stage for *virtus*; the example of its head promoted and encouraged *virtus* in the rest of the Roman people. The period of decline had been left behind and they had passed the test successfully.

Tacitus, speaking at the end, would expand and deepen their notion of the term and suggest that there were other ways of living *virtus*, especially when the circumstances were adverse. Courage was even more necessary than in the fighting of the Republican wars, a brave man in the principate had to discover and face a different kind of enemy. The panorama was certainly dark, but there was a way out.

The language of the historians played an important part in their interpretation and analysis of the history they were writing. Language and style are, in fact, not completely arbitrary signifiers, but have matured and evolved in a particular way through contact with the real world in an effort to name and identify real things. Throughout this study I have tried to emphasise the development of a specific vocabulary in each author and to illustrate that it can work as another form of evidence: Sallust's vocabulary of decline and *vitium* articulate his main idea in a different way to Livy's vocabulary of honour and virtue. Perhaps the idea is not so dissimilar in its essence, but it is expressed through diverse logos. Velleius' vocabulary of restoration conveys not only the hope he feels with the advent of the new regime, but also shows us what were the main features of the Republic that for him were worth restoring. For Tacitus instead, his insistence on presenting us with the inner nature, thoughts and motives, of the historical characters was the way he had chosen to portray and interpret the inner reality of the problem and its possible solution.

Identifying the 'gaps' in the documents, what they do not mention, has been often just as interesting and illuminating as interpreting what they contain. Silence can be another way of participating in a dialogue, another way of responding to the understanding of events. The open and unfinished endings of Sallust's monographs, Livy's mysterious *vitia ac remedia*, together with Velleius' significant omissions and Tacitus' puzzling and unresolved explanation of affairs tell us, in a tacit but powerful way, what the authors tried to avoid in their histories. The attempt of discovering the reason why they would have chosen not to say some things can help us in the finding of their hidden motives for writing history.

My analysis of *virtus* and the Roman understanding of it has tried to portray the ways in which a concept is shaped and re-shaped through time and according to the historico-political circumstances; the parallel could be found more in a spiral than in a

straight and progressive line. *Virtus* appeared as the main characteristic of the Romans which developed itself and became idealised regarding their highly militaristic society. But courage had been an ethical quality from the very beginning; to be brave was to be a good Roman in a moral sense; with time *virtus* expanded to other good qualities as well and came to mean good moral behaviour in general.

Courage was intimately connected with political success: if one was brave in war, one won the wars. When the concept expanded to a broader ethical behaviour, political success was still subject to the morality of the individuals playing a role in politics. In the Republic this was 'spread out' in many offices: consuls, generals, senators; the success of the state did not depend only on the morality of one person. With the advent of the principate this changed and the behaviour of the central figure was primarily responsible for whatever happened to the state: the whole body of citizens became more vulnerable to corruption if the leader was not upright, almost as an inevitable consequence. This is, of course, a way of speaking; people would not actually blame the emperor for being the cause of their own vices and evilness, but they did blame him for not giving the example that his position required, for not encouraging virtuous conduct among the people, for failing to keep what was considered traditional Roman moral values, in short, for allowing *tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora*.¹

The Romans' insistence on explaining political life through moral standards justified the position of *virtus* as a political slogan as much as an ethical ideal for self-definition. With the crisis of the Republic they underwent a crisis of identity: to be Roman had been to have and to be a republic, when this disappears they feel the need to redefine their values. Historians of this period not only reconstructed the history of the time, but helped in this redefinition in a powerful way. Their responses to this need was related to but importantly different from previous periods of crisis and change.

But the aim of this thesis was not only to explore a particularly important concept which the Romans used for their self-definition, but through this to help us to discover their particular view on the human being. Identifying Romanness – what was particular to the Romans – involved trying to understand oneself, and understanding oneself as a Roman helped to understand others as men. Placing *virtus* at the very centre of history

¹ Tac. *Agr*, 1.4.

and making it appear as the cause for Roman greatness is to believe that men are intrinsically political and ethical beings. For the Romans, anything that man did affected others as much as himself. The social dimension of actions was an omnipresent reality that had an effect in life in a very practical way. There were no private actions that could remain private forever. They would leave a mark on the doer and it would appear somehow at some point in his dealings with others.² This is perhaps easier to understand or to see when we talk about *virtus*-courage: a cowardly decision of a general in battle will affect himself as a person as much as his army and with it the whole nation. But it is not less real and present about *virtus*-virtue.

I have, by no means, attempted to deal with the essence of the Roman concept of *virtus* exhaustively. In the Roman mind *virtus*, to which *libertas* was intimately connected, aroused also an emotional response, and in some way, the cognitive aspect of *virtus* was overshadowed by its emotional one. Analysing the historians' attitude to these facets would help to enlarge our sensibility to the understanding of both. But this study aims no more at answering some questions than at raising new ones, and I hope that it will open up some possibilities of further investigation. For me, at least, the topic appears to be so rich that it still remains fresh and novel, despite centuries of scholarship. There are so many other aspects that could be addressed when approaching Roman *virtus*: How much was *virtus* the ideal of an epoch? Is *virtus* susceptible to fashion? Is *virtus* a political idea only because political in Rome meant moral? How much can the creation of an ideal and its expression in literary writings can shape and influence the real world? Is *virtus* also linked to *libertas* in relation to citizenship? Was a *civis Romanus* a natural subject of *virtus* and *libertas*? How much was this something essentially Roman compared for example with the Athenian citizen? Did the Greek historians perform their role of providing a self-identification for a nation in a similar way?

Virtus is not just a word that represents reality, it is also a concept that stands for values, attitudes and norms, and therefore, more than translating it needs to be interpreted. Thus, the writing of history became a major and distinctive stage in this

² See for example Tacitus' insistence in presenting Tiberius' personal vices and conduct – especially in Capri – as having a direct effect in the emperor's cruelty and crimes towards the state.

process of interpretation. Searching for memory and identity, two particularly important missions of history, was a way of interpreting. The Roman historians I have dealt with were relevant actors in the construction of the identity of *virtus*. They, especially in a period when political horizons had to be reconsidered, looked for re-evaluation. The historians were, in some sense, guides, someone who showed the way and gave responses.

It is, therefore, possible and all the more relevant to consider also the *virtus* of the historian. Did he have one as well? In the same way as a soldier should display courage in battle or an emperor prudence in his ruling, the historian was expected to perform his task competently. The need for interpretation, for organisation and selection, for matching words and deeds and for truthful and imaginative reconstruction of the events of the past make the historian's *virtus* an essential element of his job. Roman historians were aware of this and struggled, with different degrees of success, to live up to this *virtus*.

History is, of course, not only an account of the evidence, but also of the human beings by whom this evidence was created.³ The study of the evidence of *virtus* in Roman historiography is significant in telling us about and expanding our knowledge of the people who produced this concept and lived by it. Learning their historical thought, by which they explained change in human experience through time, brings a constant interaction between ourselves and the actors, their acts, beliefs, values, intentions and justifications together with the sources which record the acts and emotions of the actors and which also have intentions of their own. By making ancient history something real, close, immediate we are playing only one game: understanding the past. It will never be over. History is all about life.

³ Cf. K. Hopkins, 'Rules of Evidence', *JRS* 68 (1978) 178-86.

Appendix

The Presence of *Virtus* in the City of Rome

In this appendix I will show how the presence of *virtus*, such an abstract belief and value, could be visually manifested to the Romans in material monuments in the city. I shall illustrate this presence by listing and giving a brief description of the archaeological evidence we have in buildings, coins and inscriptions. The list will be by no means exhaustive to the Roman empire, but restricted to the city of Rome, unless otherwise indicated.

1.-Buildings

There are no material remains of buildings dedicated to *Virtus*. The evidence we have comes from the literary sources.¹

a) Honos et Virtus, Aedes

The first temple that appears to be related to *virtus* was the temple of *Honos*, which meant and implied the honour due to military prowess. This temple seems to have been dedicated by Q. Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, afterward Cunctator, in 234 BC. In 222 BC, after the battle of Clastidium, M. Claudius Marcellus vowed a temple to *Honos et Virtus* and renewed his vow after the capture of Syracuse in 211 BC. He then attempted to fulfil this by refurbishing Maximus' temple with many works of art from the spoils of Syracuse.² By 208, the year of his death, he still had not been able to re-dedicate it to *Honos et Virtus* because the *pontifices* forbade this on the grounds that the two could not occupy the same cella. The explanation given by the priests was that if a

¹ For this, see A. Claridge, *Archaeological Guide of Rome* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998); F. Coarelli, *Roma, Guide Archeologiche* (Roma, Laterza, 2001); *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*. A cura di E.M. Steinby (Roma, Edizioni Quasar, 1996) and L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

² Cf. Cic. *Rep.* 1.21, *Verr.* 2.4.121; Livy 26.32.4; Asconius *ad Cic. Pis.* 44.

portent or miracle should occur, they would not know to which divinity to attribute it, so Marcellus had to add a new cella for *Virtus*, making it a double shrine, which his son finally dedicated in 205 BC.³ It is worth noting that the first dedication to *Virtus* was made by a plebeian, and not an patrician.

According to Asconius,⁴ M. Claudius Marcellus erected statues of himself, his father and his grandfather in the precinct of the temple. Vespasian restored it, perhaps after damage or destruction in the fire of Nero and at that time the artist Cornelius Pinus and Attius Priscus decorated it.⁵ It is last mentioned in the regional catalogues of the fourth century.

The temple stood in *Regio I ad Portam Capenam*.⁶ Just outside this gate the Roman proconsuls had their farewell when they were heading to their provinces. The importance of this place on the Via Appia had made it necessary to create adequate installations and structures related to the departure or arrival of the magistrates and later of the emperors. For example the *Senaculum*, the place outside the *pomerium* where the Senate used to meet the generals or magistrates who were coming back from their provinces. Also here was situated the *Mutatorium Caesaris*, a building which served the emperor to change his clothes at the moment of the departure or arrival: from the toga (civil garments) to the *paludamentum* (military garments). The area therefore had a military tone. Probably the Domitianic relief kept in the Palazzo della Cancelleria was a *transvectio* or *adventus ad Portam Capenam*. (see fig. 1)

b) Virtus, Aedes

Plutarch records that Scipio's grandson built a shrine or dedicated an altar – *hieron* – to *virtus* in 133 BC after the conquest of Numantia.⁷ Plutarch mistakenly states that this is the first dedication to *virtus* forgetting perhaps M. Claudius Marcellus' Temple of *Honos et Virtus*. Because there is no other mention of this shrine, it is very

³ Cf. Livy 25.40.1-3, 27.25.7-9, 29.11.13; Val. Max. 1.1.8; Plutarch, *Marcellus* 28.1.

⁴ Cf. Asc. *ad Cic. Pis.* 44.

⁵ Cf. Pliny, *HN* 35.120.

⁶ Cf. Livy 26.32.4: *in vestibulo urbis* and also: Liv. 25.40.3; 29.11.13: *Res Gestae*, 11.

⁷ Cf. Plutarch *De Fort. Rom.* 5.

difficult to say where it was located and presumably it would have been relatively modest.

c) Honos et Virtus, Aedes Mariana.

A second temple to *Honos* and *Virtus* – there is not enough evidence to count Scipio's as such – was dedicated by Marius from the spoils of the Cimbri and Teutones (102-1 BC). It constituted the only monumental building of Marius' political career. It was planned by the architect L. Mucius, the father of Marius' daughter-in-law, whose work Vitruvius praises for the refinements of its design, but laments that no treatise on the specifications and symmetries were left. He also deplores that it was not of marble, otherwise it would have ranked *in primis et summis operibus*.⁸ It certainly stood in the Forum, but there is some debate as to where exactly it was located. It has been said that it was on the Capitol, near the Auguraculum in the Arx. Richardson following Cicero's reference in *De Orat*, 2.226 proposes to locate it at the eastern side of the Basilica Aemilia, in the gap between the temple of Antoninus and Faustina and the temple of Romulus. Coarelli, instead thinks that it was in the area of the Arch of Titus and suggests that it must have looked like the temple of Venus and Rome also intended for a double cult. These suggestions are indeed plausible, but they are not more than speculations, because the evidence does not allow certainty on the matter. Following Plutarch it can be said that it stood near the house of Marius on the Sacra Via.⁹ Again we have a temple dedicated not by a patrician, but a *homo novus*.

d) Virtus, Signum

A statue known from a dedicatory inscription (CIL 6.3735 = 31061) found in via XX Settembre during the construction of the Ministero delle Finanze, probably just outside Porta Collina and probably the same one referred to by Cassius Dio (48.43.4).

⁸ Cf. Vitruvius 7, *praef.* 17.

⁹ Cf. Plutarch, *Marius* 32.1

The proximity of this to the ancient Temple of *Honos* extra Portam Collinam suggests that *Virtus* was associated with *Honos* here as elsewhere.

2.- Coins

The personification of *virtus* in coins usually appears to be represented in Amazon attire: a helmeted female with short tunic and one naked breast, resting one foot on a helmet, very similar to 'Roma',¹⁰ to whom she is closely akin. Her characteristic attribute is the short sword, worn at the belt – the *parazonium* – the weapon of hand to hand combat. The representation of *virtus* in coins corresponds mainly to *virilis-virtus*, although is always depicted as a woman.

Republic:

We have evidence of two Republican coins which represented *virtus*.

- i) The first one depicts a helmeted head belonging to the already described Amazonian figure, almost identical with Minerva and Roma and was issued by M. Aquillius c. 68 BC.
See RRC,¹¹ vol.1: page 412, n. 401, plate L.
- ii) The other – issued by F. Calenus and Cordus – appeared around the same time and shows the joint heads of *Honos* and *Virtus* on the obverse and Roma and Italia clasping hands on the reverse, the traditional gesture of Concordia. Roma wears the diadem, holds the fasces, and rests her foot on the globe; in the clasped hands of Italia and Roma a cornucopia rests, and a caduceus appears in the field. *Victrix omnium gentium*, Roma rules the world. Her *virtus* has bestowed *honos*, the dignity and honour of Roman citizenship, upon Italy and has

¹⁰ The difference is that Roma puts her foot not on a helmet, but on a globe and in her hand she frequently holds the small figure of a victory instead of the *parazonium*. For an interesting article on the similarities of *Virtus* and *Roma* in coinage, see M. Brieber, 'Honos and *Virtus*', *AJA* 49 (1945) 25-34. For a completely different opinion see R. Mellor, 'The Goddess Roma', *ANRW* II 17. 2 (1981) 950-1030.

¹¹ RRC = *Roman Republican Coinage*, M. Crawford (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974).

inaugurated the epoch of peace, concord and felicity symbolized by the cornucopia and the caduceus.

See RRC, vol.1: page 413, n. 403, plate L. (See figs. 2 and 3).

Augustus

BMC,¹² vol.1: page 7, n. 36-7, plate 1.19: ob., bust of *Virtus* wearing a crested helmet; rev., Augustus holding laurel branch and sceptre standing in biga of elephants (see fig. 4).

page 8, n. 43-4, plate 2.3.

Tiberius no evidence

Caligula no evidence

Claudius no evidence

Nero no evidence

After Nero, *virtus* became almost a ‘must’ in imperial coinage. We see it appearing more and more often and sometimes bearing no relation at all with the characteristic of the particular reigns, such as the tyrannical government of Domitian or the peaceful one of Antoninus Pius.

Galba

see BMC, vol. 1: page 347, n. 215, plate 54.14;
page 316, n. 50, plate 52.26: obv., head of Galba; rev., *Virtus* holding sword upwards and spear. (see fig. 5)
page 342, n. 193-6, plate 53.23-26;
page 351, n. 234-6, plate 54.27;
page 357, n. 255-7, plate 58.10.

Otho no evidence.

¹² BMC = *A Catalogue of the Roman Coins in the British Museum*, vols. 1-4, H. Mattingly (London, Spink and Son, 1923-1940).

Vitellius

see BMC, vol. 1: page 375, after number 48, no plate.

Vespasian

see BMC, vol. 2: pages 104-5, nn.499-501, plate 18.9-10;
 page 114, n. 530-1, plate 20.2: obv., Vespasian's head; rev.,
Honos and *Virtus* standing facing one another, *Honos* holds long
 sceptre and cornucopia, *Virtus*, helmeted and in military dress
 holds *parazonium* and vertical spear (see fig. 6);
 page 185, n.760, plate 32.8.

Domitian : it is possible to see in coins the type of *Virtus* every year of Domitian's reign. It expresses the spirit of martial valour, symbol of the military policy, which ruled Domitian from AD 83 to almost the close of his reign.

see BMC, vol.2: page 366, n. 313, no plate;
 page 374, n. 352, no plate;
 page 379; n. *, no plate;
 page 383, n. 384, plate 76.1;
 page 385, n. 393-4, no plate;
 page 387; n.+, no plate;
 page 388, n. 404-5, plate 77.2;
 page 390, n.413-4, plate 77.8: obv., Domitian's head; rev., *Virtus*
 draped, standing foot set on helmet, holding vertical spear and
parazonium upright (see fig. 7);
 page 391, n. 417, plate 78.2;
 page 398-400, n. *, n. 446-7, plate 79.8, n. 451, plate 79.11, n.
 453, plate 79.13;
 page 404, n. 468, plate 80.8;
 page 405; n *, no plate;
 page 408, n. 479, plate 81.4

Nerva

no evidence

Trajan

see BMC, vol. 3: page 103, n. +, no plate;
 Page 205, n. ++, no plate.

Hadrian

see BMC, vol. 3: page 336, n. 774, plate 62.2;
 page 421, n. 1239, no plate;
 page 425, n. 1263, plate 80.4: obv., Hadrian's head; rev., *Virtus*
 helmeted, in military dress, foot set on helmet, holding vertical
 spear and *parazonium* upright (see fig. 8);
 page 429, n. 1280, plate 81.1.

Antoninus Pius

see BMC, vol. 4: page 15, n. +, no plate;
 page 39, n. 255-9, plate 6.16;
 page 72, n. 505-6, plate 11.9;
 page 73, n. *, no plate;
 page 87, n. 610, plate 13.3;
 page 113, n. +, no plate;
 page 121, n. *, no plate;
 page 128, n. 874-5, plate 18.5;
 pages 131-2, n. 893-7, plate 19.5;
 page 144, n. 962-6, plate 20.15-16;
 page 289, n. 1783-5, plate 43.3: obv. Antoninus Pius' head; rev.,
Virtus helmeted, in military dress, cloak falling over right arm,
 foot set on helmet, holding vertical spear and *parazonium* upright
 (See fig. 9)
 page 290, n. 1790-2, plate 43.10;
 page 292, n. *, no plate;
 page 307, n. }, no plate;
 page 318, n. 1916-7, plate 46.17;

page 319; n. +, no plate;
 page 333, n. *; no plate
 page 356-7, n. 2084, plate 50.5;
 page 361, n. 2107, plate 50.19;
 page 364, n. *, no plate.

Marcus Aurelius

see BMC, vol. 4: page 681, n. 1711-4, plate 90.2: obv. Marcus Aurelius' head; rev.,
Virtus helmeted, in military dress, with right breast bare, seated on
 low seat, holding vertical spear and *parazonium*. (see fig. 10)
 page 624, n. 1427, plate 82.10;
 page 626, n. ++, no plate.

Commodus

see BMC vol. 4: page 683, n. 1723-5, plate 90.7;
 page 684, n. 1731, plate 90.11;
 page 703, n. 90-1, plate 93.5-6: obv., Commodus' head; rev.,
Virtus, helmeted, in military dress, seated on low seat, holding
 Victory on right hand and vertical spear in left. (see fig. 11)
 page 719, n. 168, plate 95.8;
 page 730, n. 227-8; no plate;
 page 800, n. 562, plate 106. 4.
 page 812, n. 604, plate 107.4;
 page 813, n. }, no plate;

3.- Inscriptions

Elogia Scipionum: On the tombs of the Scipios near the Porta Capena.

a) Lucius Cornelius Scipio: consul in 298 BC, censor in 290. Epitaph on the lid.

Cornelius Lucius Scipio Barbatus
Gnaivod patre, prognatus, fortis vir sapiensque
Quoius forma virtutei parusima fuit,
consol censor aedilis quei fuit apud vos
Taurasia Cisauna Samnio cepit,
Subigit omne Loucanam opsidesque abdocuit. (CIL I,2.7)

b) Publius Cornelius Scipio: probably a son of Scipio Africanus; he died about 170 BC (?). Epitaph on the front of a two-pieces sarcophagus.

Quei apice insigne Dial[is fl]aminis gesistei,
mors perfe[cit] tua ut essent omnia brevia,
honos fama virtusque gloria atque ingenium,
quibus sei in longa licu[i]set tibi utier vita,
facile facteis superases gloriam maiorum.
Qua re lubens te in gremiu, Scipio recip[i]t
Terra, Publi, prognatum Publio, Corneli. (CIL I,2.10)

c) L. Cornelius Scipio: probably a son of Scipio Hispallus. Died about 160 BC (?). Epitaph on a tablet from a sarcophagus.

L. Cornelius Cn. f. Cn. n. Scipio
magna sapientia multasque virtutes
aetate quom parva possidet hoc saxsum.
Quoiei vita defecit, non honos, honore,
is hic situs, quei numquam victus est virtutei,
annos gnatus XX is l[oc]eis mandatus.
Ne quairatis honore quei minus sit mandatus. (CIL I,2.11)

d) Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio: Hispanus, probably son of Hispallus, praetor peregrinus in 139 BC. Died ca. 135. Epitaph found on three tablets which formed the front of the sarcophagus

Cn. Cornelius Cn. f. Scipio Hispanus pr. aid. cur.
q. tr. mil. II Xvir sl. iudik. Vvir sacr. fac.
Virtutes generis mieis moribus accumulavi,
progeniem genui, facta patris petiei.
Maiorum optenui laudem, ut sibeï me esse creatum
laetentur; stirpem nobilitavit honor. (CIL I,2.15)

***Res Gestae*:** inscription found in the walls of the temple of Rome and Augustus at Ancyra (Asia Minor). Also set up in the Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome (on the Tiber, on the northern edge of the Campus Martius).¹³ Other extant versions found in Apollonia, Pergamon and Antioch.

The *Res Gestae* certainly reveals a turning point for the presence of *virtus* in public inscriptions. The emperor was the possessor of it, the only one who could claim to have it in an official way. The choice of these particular virtues must have been something carefully considered by Augustus, always so jealous of the image he was projecting to Roman society.¹⁴

Chapter 34:

Clupeus aureus in curia Iulia positus, quem mihi senatum populumque Romanum dare virtutis clementiaeque et iustitiae et pietatis caussa testatum est per eius clupeii inscriptionem.¹⁵

Other inscriptions in the city of Rome: I list here all the inscriptions recorded in CIL VI (City of Rome) which appear to have *virtus* on them. I have selected some to give the text or a brief description so as to illustrate the importance of *militaris virtus* in emperors, the difference of meaning between the plural and the singular and the relevance of *virtus* in epitaphs (also of women).

See CIL vol. VI, pars 7, 5: 30122
1106 *

*Gallieno clementissimo principi
cuius invicta virtus sola pietate
superata est et Saloninae
sanctissimae aug. aurelius victor v.
e. dicatissimus numini maiestatique*

¹³ Cf. Suet. *Aug.*, 101.

¹⁴ There is an interesting debate in A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Emperor and his Virtues', *Historia* 30 (1981) 298-323, where the author challenges the canonicity of these four virtues suggested in M.P. Charlesworth, 'The Virtues of a Roman Emperor: Propaganda and the Creation of Belief', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 23 (1937) 105-133. For a more updated bibliography on the *Res Gestae*, see R. Ridley, *The Emperor's Retrospect: Augustus Res Gestae in Epigraphy, Historiography and Commentary* (Leuven, Peeters, 2003) XIII-XXV.

¹⁵ Text from Brunt and More, *Res Gestae*, 34.

eorum. Arch of Gallienus, near S. Maria Maggiore, see fig. 12

37053U

1288 *

P. Cornelius Scipio, see *Elogia Scipionum*, b)

975L1

1319L

39147 *

Quid rapis, heu fatum, semper virtute beatos? Qui primo iacet hic ereptus flore iuventae, innocue vixit, damnavit vitia semper. Non saevus iudex, non umquam causa petivit egregium iuvenem magnis virtutibus aptum. Found in via Flaminia.

1066

36954U

30135, A

1527, D

15225

1126

31399

1772

1144

1768

1163

1756

30105

1289 *

L. Cornelius Scipio, see *Elogia Scipionum*, c)

1285 *

L. Cornelius Scipio, see *Elogia Scipionum*, a)

29758

31582

1293 *

Cn. Cornelius Cn. F. Scipio, see *Elogia Scipionum*, d)

31061

1315

1527, D *

Laudatio Turiae

1741

31987

1779V

30920

37045

10153

38971+A

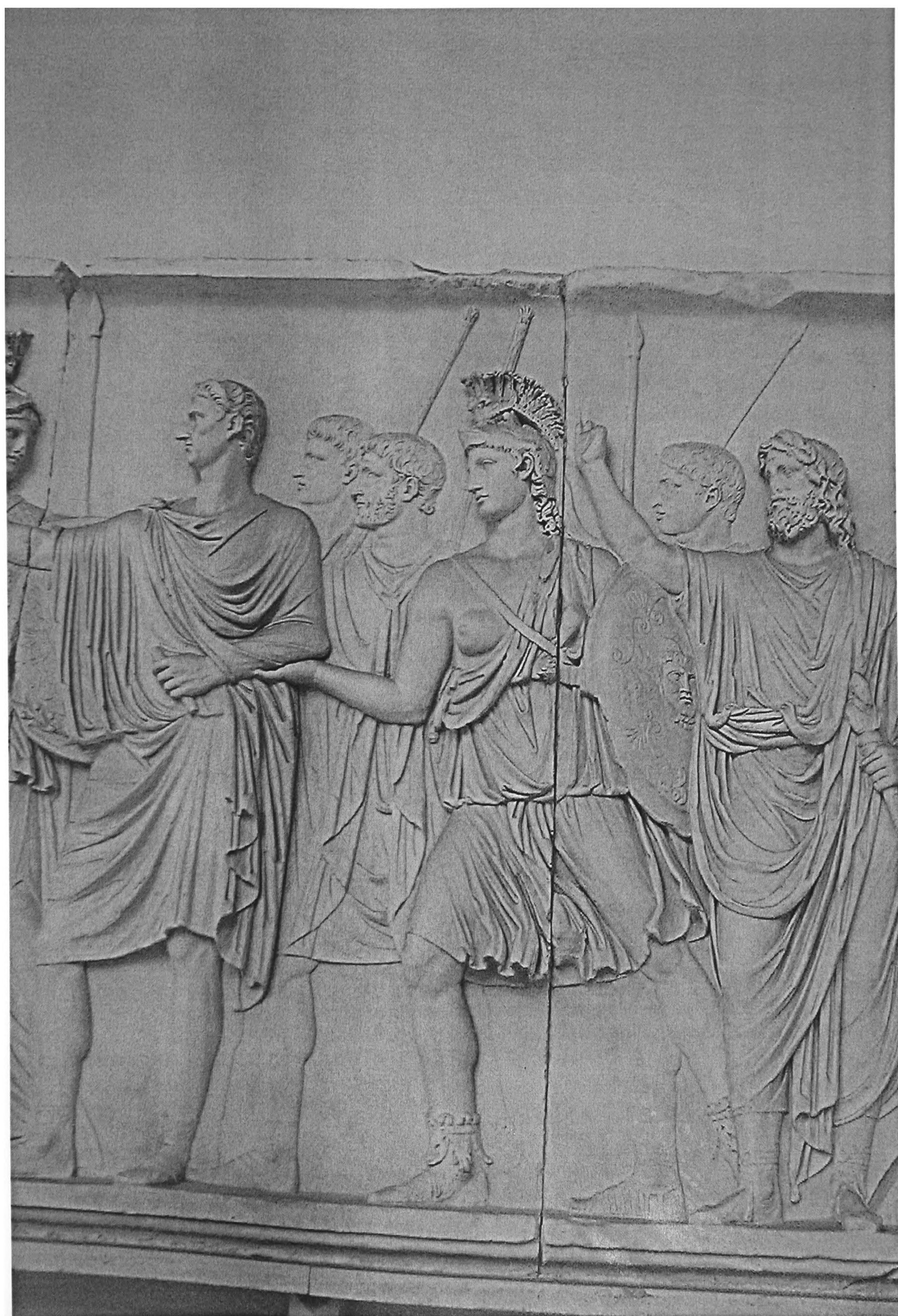
1724U

31381, A

31922, A	
10230 *	<i>Laudatio Murdiae</i> . Found in the cellar of the marquis of Rondinini.
449	
983 *	<i>Imp. Caesari divi Traiani parthici f. divi Nervae nepote traiano hadriano aug. restitutori rei publicae atque virtutis maiorum</i> . Found in St. Paul's Basilica, via Ostiense.
1729U	
3148	
1679	
1492 *	To Trajan: ... <i>gratias agere debeat futurumque ut tantae virtutis vir auxilio sit futurus municipio nostro...</i> Found in the Quirinal in 1558.
31599U	
37073	
36947	
1783	
31711S *	<i>Fabiae Fuscillinae clarissimae at omnium virtutum fecundissimae feminae Clodius Celsinus marit. nondum completis viginti quatuor annos a natis trinis et viro eripior, nomine Fuscillina Petelina domo orta Celsino nupta univira unanims. Laudatio Fabiae</i> .
1760	
1749	
31519	
1725	

Images:

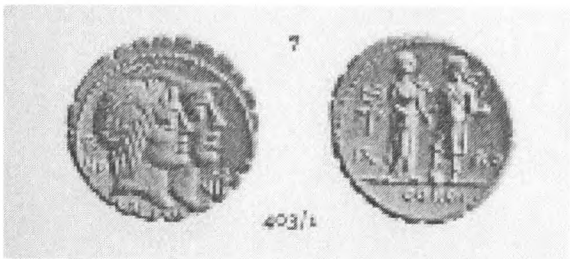
Fig. 1. Domitianic relief: *Virtus* in the middle holding the emperor's arm. See next page



Republican Coins Fig. 2



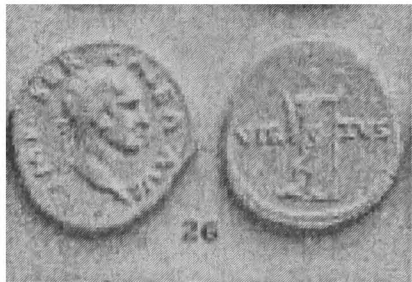
Fig. 3



Augustus Fig. 4



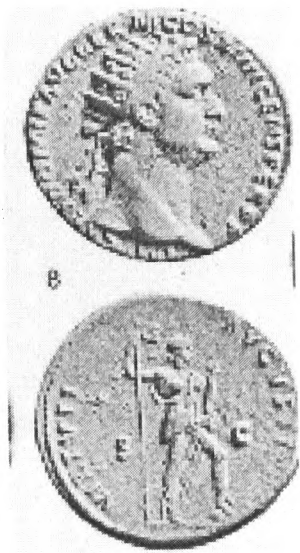
Galba Fig. 5



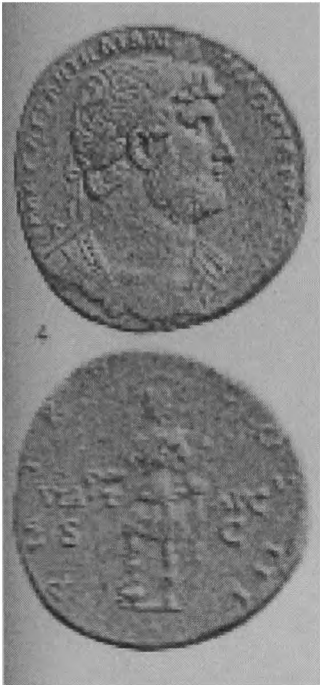
Vespasian Fig. 6



Domitian Fig. 7



Hadrian Fig. 8



Antoninus Pius Fig. 9



Marcus Aurelius Fig. 10



Commodus Fig. 11

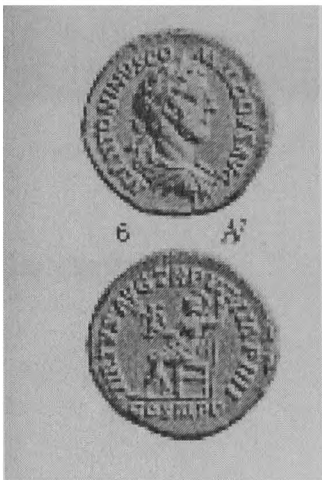




Fig. 12 Arch of Gallienus (*invicta virtus* in the centre)

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