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SENTENTIAE IN THE AGRICOLA OF TACITUS*

Apstrakt: Author discusses 31 *sententiae* from the *Agricola* of Tacitus. As the definition of *sementia* is somewhat loose, the choice has been necessarily subjective. It has been shown that the *sententiae* of Tacitus always arose from concrete, often political situations. Each aphorism is fairly self-explanatory and has a firm place in the context in which it is used. Tacitus readily used aporistically sharpened formulations, which corresponded to the style of his pointed manner of writing.

De vita Iulii Agricolae

Tacitus' first text, a biography of Cn. Julius Agricola¹, has already been discussed exhaustively by Reitzenstein² and subsequently by a long series of modern philologists; a bibliography was collected by Borzsák³, and a short description of the work was given by Syme⁴ and also Ogilvie in the introduction to one of the best editions of the *Agricola*⁵. It is an accomplished work of art, in which the author achieved a charming portrait of a morally irreproachable man, a conscientious public official, and a general of exceptional ability. Philologists, however, have endeavoured to classify the artistic type to which the text exactly belongs and have arrived at extremely varied opinions. Only rarely has the work been recognized as what it was intended to be, namely a biography. It was maintained that it represents a

* I gratefully thank Prof. Dr. Kajetan Gantar who kindly read the manuscript and discussed it with me. I also thank Mrs. Barbara Smith-Demo who translated it in English.

¹ *De vita Iulii Agricolae*; incorrectly: *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*, see H. Heubner, *Kommentar zum Agricola des Tacitus*, Göttingen 1984, 143-144.

² R. Reitzenstein, „Bemerkungen zu den kleinen Schriften des Tacitus“. *NAWG* 1914/15, 186 ff. = *Aufsätze zu Tacitus*, Darmstadt 1967, 30 ff.

³ St. Borzsák, *RE Suppl.* 11 (1968), 399-414 (s.v. P. Cornelius Tacitus).

⁴ R. Syme, *Tacitus*, vol. I, Oxford 1958, 121 ff.

⁵ R.M. Ogilvie, I. Richmond, *Cornelii Taciti de vita Agricolae*, Oxford 1967, 1 ff.

biography only formally, while in spirit it was a *laudatio funebris*⁶ (only several months prior to the publication of this text Tacitus had given the funeral oration for Verginius Rufus) or rather a *laudatio* edging into biography, halfway between rhetoric and history⁷. Pliny (*Epist.* 5,5,3) similarly characterized Fannius' books about Nero's victims as literature (philology currently terms it *exitus*-literature) *inter sermonem historiamque medios*.

Certainly it is difficult to classify the text merely as a historical monograph⁸ or even as a political pamphlet⁹, while it is actually possible to distinguish several styles in it: *tantum sui similis*¹⁰, nor is there any doubt that it is primarily a biography (1,4: *narraturo mihi vitam defuncti hominis*; 46,4: *Agricola posteritati narraturus*)¹¹. Cornelius Nepos also differentiated the expressions *narrare vitam* and *scribere historiam* (*Pelop.* 1,1:... *vereor, si res explicare incipiam, ne non vitam eius enarrare sed historiam videar scribere*). A long tradition of writing biographies had existed in Rome (1,1: *clarorum virorum facta moresque posteris tradere, antiquitus usitatum*)¹², and it is known that Cicero wrote a biography of Cato, among Augustus' lost works was a *Vita Drusi* (Suet. *Claud.* 1), and several other titles are known, although the works themselves were not preserved. Cornelius Nepos' short biographies and Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* are not typical examples of this type of work, such that it is easier to compare the *Agricola* with Xenophon's *Agesilaus* or Polybius' *Philopoemen*. The form of Roman biography changed parallel to the development

⁶ M. L. W. Laistner, *The Greater Roman Historians*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1963², p. 112; W. Steidle, *Suetonius und die antike Biographie*, Zetemata 1, 1963², 130 ff.; Id., „Tacitus – Probleme“, *MH* 22 (1965), p. 96; p. 82. Also compare A.G. Woodhead, „Tacitus and Agricola“, *Phoenix* 2 (1947-48), 45-55, who considers the text a *laudatio* of Agricola and the new regime. Also see H. Gugel, *Studien zur biographischen Technik Suetons*, (WSt. Beiheft 7, 1977), 15-20.

⁷ Syme, *op.cit.* n. 4, p. 125; similarly also Borzsák, *op. cit.* n. 3, p. 401.

⁸ R. Hanslik, „Der Forschungsbericht, Tacitus, I. Bericht“, *AAHG* 13 (1960), 84-85, emphasizes that the text is primarily a type of historiography, although he agrees with Büchner (see note 4): *es sind viele Stile und viele Formen in ihm vertreten*.

⁹ H. Nesselhauf, „Tacitus und Domitian“, *Hermes* 80 (1952), 222-245 = *Tacitus. Wege der Forschung* 97 (1986²), 219-251.

¹⁰ K. Büchner, P. Cornelius Tacitus, *Die historischen Versuche: Agricola-Germania-Dialogus*, Stuttgart 1955, p. 76 f (= *Studien zur römischen Literatur VIII Werkanalysen*, Wiesbaden 1970, 200-229). Various opinions are collected in: P. Steinmetz, *Die literarische Form des 'Agricola' des Tacitus, Politik und literarische Kunst im Werk des Tacitus*, ed. G. Radke, AU, Beih. 1 zur R. XIV (1971), 129-141.

¹¹ R.K. Sherck, „Goethe and Winckelmann, Tacitus and Agricola“, *Sprachkunst* 9 (1978), 19-28, compares both biographies on the basis of their uniqueness, because of which it would not be possible to assign them to a distinct type without difficulty: both authors are defending their ideals.

¹² F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form*, Leipzig 1901; D.R. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Sather Classical Lectures), 1928.

of Roman society and the emphasis in the narratives was more readily placed on the personal qualities of the individual, who was no longer evaluated merely as a member of the *civitas*, that is, solely in terms of his activities on behalf of the state¹³. Polybius (*Philop.* 10, 21, 8) states that the task of biography is to describe historical events so as to illuminate as much as possible the character of the individual without regard for the wider historical context. It is to be expected that the events would mainly illuminate human *virtutes*, thus it is not surprising that a biography would simultaneously be a panegyric. Even in the introduction, Tacitus emphasized that his text was *honori Agricolae destinatus* (3,3): a document of piety in honour of his father-in-law.

The constant recurrence of the concept of *virtus* in Tacitus is apparent not only in the *Agricola*, but can also be traced in his other works. The most notable example of this in the *Annals* is Germanicus, and Tacitus' *Agricola* actually exhibits a series of similarities with Tacitus' Germanicus, two bright figures who stand out against the dark background of the principates of Tiberius and Domitian. It should not be excluded that Tacitus was somewhat influenced in his representation of both individuals by literature on Alexander the Great, which is also indicated by several linguistic characteristics (for example 5,3: *intravit animum militaris gloriae cupido*, a phrase very reminiscent of the well known πόθος ἔλαβεν αὐτόν, characteristic for biographies of Alexander)¹⁴, although such interpretations must be suggested with care.

F. Giancotti, in his analysis of the structure of Sallust's and Tacitus' monographs, came to the conclusion that the biography of *Agricola* was constructed in an extremely precise manner from several corresponding concentric parts. The three introductory chapters correspond to the last three (*consolatio*), and in a similar manner, all chapters in the first half of the work accord numerically with those in the second half. In this manner, the central complex of chapters (10–17), containing a description of Britain, corresponds to another significant complex (30–37) with the speeches of Calgacus and *Agricola* before the battle and the description of the battle¹⁵.

As a specific literary type, the biography of *Agricola* also differs somewhat from the other texts of Tacitus in the linguistic sense. The narrative sections, which contain biographical and historical data, were written using Livy as a model – to a greater extent than in the *Historiae* and the *Annals*¹⁶ – and also Sallust. Tacitus was also greatly

¹³ G.S. Knabe, „Tacitus' *Agricola* and Roman Biography“, *VDI* 1980, No. 154, 53–73.

¹⁴ I. Borzsák, „Alexander der Grosse als Muster taciteischer Heldendarstellung“, *Gymnasium* 89 (1982), 37–56.

¹⁵ *Strutture delle monografie di Sallustio e di Tacito*, Biblioteca di cultura contemporanea 108, Messina, Firenze 1971.

¹⁶ R.M. Ogilvie, I. Richmond (*op.cit.* n. 5), 25 ff.

influenced by Cicero, which is particularly apparent at the beginning and the end of the text (*De oratore* 3,8; *Brutus* 4 ff.). It is possible to compare some details with the texts of other Roman writers, such as Caesar and Cato. There are several conceptual and linguistic parallels with Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*, while the influence of Cato is only indirectly visible in Sallustian reminiscences (for example Agr. 18,5: *clarus ac magnus haberi Agricola* and Cat. 53,1)¹⁷.

Modern philology and history are mainly concerned with two themes: the first is the description of Britain and the second concerns the relations between Domitian and the victorious general¹⁸. References are collected in the relevant sections about the Agricola in various bibliographic surveys on research into Tacitus¹⁹. The different interpretations of the relations between Domitian and Agricola are particularly interesting. In several short but nonetheless significant sentences in the text, Tacitus characterizes Caesar and the rulers from Augustus to Domitian, all of them in close connection with Agricola, his family, or Britain; almost all are shown in a negative light through this prism²⁰. Caesar merely indicated the existence of the island with his exploratory military expedition to Britain, Augustus was happiest to forget about it, and Tiberius took the advice of his predecessor as a doctrine (13, 1-2: ... *primus omnium Romanorum divus Iulius cum exercitu Britanniam ingressus... potest videri ostendisse posteris, non tradidisse; mox bella civilia... ac longa oblivio Britanniae etiam in pace: consilium id divus Augustus vocabat, Tiberius praeceptum*. Compare Ann. 1,11,4: *consilium coercendi intra terminos imperii (!)*). Caligula had Agricola's father killed (4,1); Nero was a notoriously bad ruler (6,3: *gnarus sub Nerone temporum, quibus inertia pro sapientia fuit*); Otho's soldiers killed his mother (7,1). Claudius and Vespasian were described in a positive manner: Claudius made the decision to conquer Britain (13,3: *divus Claudius auctor tanti operis, transvectis legionibus... et adsumpto in partem rerum Vespasiano, quod initium venturae mox fortunae fuit; domitiae gentes, capti reges et monstratus fati Vespasianus*). Agricola went over to Vespasian's

¹⁷ M. Lausberg, „Caesar und Cato im Agricola des Tacitus“, *Gymnasium* 87 (1980), 411-430.

¹⁸ L. Alfonsi, „Discussioni su letteratura storiografica 'inconnue'“, *Stud Urb* 49/1 (1975), 44-46, concludes that Tacitus used Agricola's *Commentarii* since the historical data are extremely precise and analytically ordered.

¹⁹ See, for example, „Forschungsberichte“ in *AAHG* 13 (1960), 65-102; 20 (1967), 1-13; 27 (1974), 129-166 (R. Hanslik), and 37 (1984), 153-208; 38 (1985), 129-204 (F. Römer), and also H.W. Benario, *Classical World* 63 (1970), 253-267, and 71 (1977), 1-32. M.M. Sage, *Tacitus' Historical Works: A Survey and Appraisal*, *ANRW II* 33, 2 (1990), pp. 851 - 1030 (for Agricola see p. 853 ff.), appeared after the manuscript had been submitted. Forthcoming are contributions about Agricola in Vol. II 33, 3.

²⁰ Borzsák (op. cit. n.3), 404 ff.

side quite early (7,2: *nuntio adfectati a Vespasiano imperii deprehensus ac statim in partes transgressus est*) and was made a patrician.

Just as Agricola was the personification of the virtues and above all a model for a provincial governor²¹, so Domitian was the personification of tyranny in the worst meaning of the word. Still, the *Agricola* is a literary composition²² and not a professional manual about the history of Britain and its conquest, although this theme does occupy two thirds of the entire work, and thus it would be difficult to reproach Tacitus either for impermissibly reducing the accomplishments of the governors of Britain prior to Agricola²³, or for deliberately exaggerating in blackening Domitian with the desire to divert suspicion that he and his father-in-law enjoyed Domitian's favour²⁴. It is logical that Tacitus would not have dwelled on the achievements of Agricola's predecessors, as he wished for the unequalled successes of Agricola to stand out in relief for the reader. It is equally logical that he would expose the imperial propaganda which inflated the successes of Domitian (which were certainly not without value)²⁵, and his guiding idea was the premise that the ruler's character represented his actual qualities, which were exactly opposite to the virtues emphasized on coins and elsewhere²⁶.

²¹ Margot Streng, *Agricola. Das Vorbild römischer Statthalterschaft nach dem Urteil des Tacitus*, Beiträge zur alten Geschichte 9 (1971), analyzed Tacitus' image of an ideal provincial governor and compared it with the picture created by Cicero and Pliny the Younger of the ideal governor. Tacitus' *Agricola* is placed in the tradition of great Republican conquerors and Tacitus' ideal was in essence closer to that of Cicero than Pliny.

²² K. v. Fritz, "Tacitus, Agricola, Domitian, and the Problem of the Principate", *CPh* 52 (1957), 73-97 = *Wege der Forschung* (ed. R. Klein) 135 (1969), 431-463, using the *Agricola* as a basis, was concerned with the question of why Tacitus is widely acknowledged as an artist, but is often criticized as an historian. He suggests that in contrast to Thucydides, Polybius, and Posidonius, Tacitus had no sense of overriding forces in history. Two points must be made here: first, the *Agricola* is not one of Tacitus' historical works, and second, in the recent period, Tacitus has become more positively assessed as a historian.

²³ E. Birley, "Britain under the Flavians, Agricola and his Predecessors", *Durham University Journal* 7 (1945-46), 79-84; Idem, *Roman Britain and the Roman Army*, Kendal 1961², in the chapter *Agricola and his Predecessors*, pp. 10-19; similarly, F. Grosso, *Tendenziosità dell' Agricola*, *In memoriam A. Beltrami*, Univ. Genova, Fac. Lett. Ist. Filol. class. 1954, 97-145. Very critically: G. Walser, *Rom, das Reich und die fremden Völker in der Geschichtsschreibung der frühen Kaiserzeit. Studien zur Glaubwürdigkeit des Tacitus*, Baden-Baden 1951, 28-42.

²⁴ T.A. Dorey, "Agricola and Domitian", *G & R* 7 (1960), 66-71; R. Urban, *Historische Untersuchungen zum Domitianbild des Tacitus*, Diss. München 1971; K.H. Schwarte, "Trajans Regierungsbeginn und der Agricola des Tacitus", *BJ* 179 (1979), 139-175.

²⁵ H. Nesselhauf *op. cit.* n. 9.

²⁶ A.D. Castro, *Tacitus and the "virtues" of the Roman emperor. The role of imperial propaganda in the historiography of Tacitus*, Diss. Bloomington 1972. Summary in *DA* 33 (1972), 291 A.

Agricola undoubtedly enjoyed the favour of the Flavian dynasty and his lengthy governorship of Britain can be explained primarily by the fact that he joined the Flavian side very early. A.R. Birley attributed his successful career to his friendship with Titus, which would simultaneously explain why he did not advance under Domitian²⁷. The Stoics also shared in Domitian's displeasure, although Agricola and Tacitus may perhaps have felt that they deserved the ruler's enmity. Tacitus moderated his opinion of the Stoic opposition in his later books, and could not deny his admiration for their firm and steadfast position, although he most probably concurred with Agricola's belief that the study of philosophy can be carried to excess and that such excess is harmful. He emphasized that Agricola, despite a desire to increase his knowledge of philosophy, knew enough to be moderate (4,3: *ex sapientia modum*) and this sense for the proper measure was exactly what he had gained from the study of philosophy, which is gained by only very few. In the period when Tacitus wrote the biography of Agricola, the governor in Britain was the well known Stoic T. Avidius Quietus²⁸, the friend of Thrasea Paetus. A large part of the gains made in Britain by Agricola were lost after his departure, and the province became *perdomita et statim missa* (10,1). Perhaps Tacitus' thoughts about Britain and the Stoics became interwoven during writing, as Birley suggested, in which case his harsh censure of the Stoic position would be more comprehensible.

It is not clear how to judge Tacitus' political orientation on the basis of this text. Mentions of the currently ruling Trajan are positive and complimentary, and Domitian's image is totally negative: to what extent did he wish to exert an influence on the emperor²⁹? It is impossible to prove that he was involved in any possible (and unprovable) plot against the Flavians³⁰.

Editions and Commentaries

Among the list of publications, cited in the already mentioned bibliographic surveys about the text (see n. 19), the following are particularly important:

R.M. Ogilvie, I. Richmond, *Cornelii Taciti De vita Agricolae*, Oxford 1967.

²⁷ Agricola, the Flavian Dynasty, and Tacitus, *The ancient historian and his materials, Essays in honour of C.E. Stevens* (ed. B. Levick), Farnborough 1975, 139-154.

²⁸ *PIR*² A 1410; *CIL* XVI 43.

²⁹ R. Sablayrolles, *Style et choix politique dans la „Vie d' Agricola“ de Tacite*, BAGB 1981, 52-63, addressed this problem and attempted to prove that Sallust and Cicero were mainly models for Tacitus in terms of political activity.

³⁰ F.G. d'Ambrosio, „The End of The Flavians. The case for senatorial treason“, *RIL, Classe di Lett., Scienze morali e storiche*, 114 (1982), 232-241, holds the opinion that certain senatorial circles to which Tacitus belonged had systematically attempted the destruction of the Flavian dynasty.

J. Delz, *P. Cornelii Taciti libri qui supersunt, II, 3, Agricola*, Teubner 1983.

E. Koestermann, *P. Cornelii Taciti libri qui supersunt, II, 2, Germania – Agricola – Dialogus de oratoribus*, Teubner 1970³.

D. Bo, *Cornelii Taciti de vita Iulii Agricolae, introduzione e commento a cura di D. Bo*, Milano 1958.

G. Forni, *Taciti De Vita Iulii Agricolae librum edidit, commentariolo instruxit et illustravit G. F.*, Romae 1962.

H. Heubner, *Kommentar zum Agricola des Tacitus*, Göttingen 1984.

Sententiae

A *sententia*, a wise precept expressed in a few words, a maxim or an epigram, is accessible to the mass of people, hence it is not at all unusual that *sententiae*, Greek γνώμαι (Quint. *Inst. orat.* 8,5, 3: *sententiae vocantur, quas Graeci γνώμαι appellant*), were popular from the distant past in Greek as well as Latin literature³¹ and certainly also later, for as long as literature was under the influence of rhetoric. A *sententia* is a concept which would be difficult to define very precisely, but in principle the somewhat loose definition given in *Auctor ad Herennium* still applies: *sententia est oratio sumpta de vita, quae aut quid est aut quid esse oporteat in vita, breviter ostendit* (4,24). Various sayings, proverbs, aphorisms and short anecdotes are related to it (ἀπόφθεγμα, χεδελί! εἶα, ὁμοίωμα, ἀπομνημονεύματα)³². *Sententiae* were intended to educate and their importance in terms of this had already been emphasized in the distant past (for example Aeschines 3,115: διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ οἶμαι παῖδας ὄντας τὰς τῶν ποιητῶν γνώμας ἐκμανθάνειν, ἵν' ἄνδρες ὄντες αὐταῖς χρώμεθα).

The use of *sententiae* was a constituent element of almost every literary genre, particularly historical works. When historians assessed people and situations, they usually expressed traditional wisdom and the fruit of their own thoughts in the form of *sententiae*. The tone and shade of *sententiae* were modified in accordance with the theme: referring to wars, whether civil or otherwise, and to the everyday brutal battle for power, pedagogically positive aphorisms about truth, loyalty, and honour had become old fashioned, and the meaning of moral instructions had frequently been turned upside down. The his-

³¹ For a definition of *gnome* and its meaning in classical literature see. K. Horner, *RE Suppl.* 6 (1935), 74–84, s.v.

³² See A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer*, Leipzig 1890, who also lists a short selection of aphorisms from Tacitus' works, see the subject index on p. 434; *Nachträge zu A. Otto Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten der Römer*, ed. R. Häussler, Hildesheim 1968; P. Roos, *Sentenza e proverbio nell' antichità e i „Distici di Catone“*, Brescia 1984.

torian would write that which his experience of life had taught him and even Thucydides noted that in certain historical situations the usual meaning of words unexpectedly changes, and the actual state of affairs justifies their new meaning (καὶ τὴν εἰσθῆναι ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ :3,82,4).

Tacitus followed Sallust in the use of *sententiae*, this being one of the main characteristics of Sallust's historiography. Not infrequently pessimism crops up in his *sententiae*, and there is a fair amount of it in the *Agricola*, as well³³. Tacitus fully realized the importance and popularity of *sententiae*, and noted in his *Dialogue* (20,4) that young people do not go to hear speakers merely in order to acquire knowledge but also to take home any particularly dazzling expression:... *sed etiam referre aliquid inlustre et dignum memoria volunt; traduntque in vicem ac saepe in colonias ac provincias suas scribunt, sive sensus aliquis arguta et brevi sententia effulsit, sive locus exquisito et poetico cultu enituit*.

A large number of aphorisms and *sententiae* were transferred from generation to generation, and some were original. Thus, for example, the aphorisms of Cn. Domitius Afer circulated in written form (*Urbane dicta*, Quint., *Inst.* 6,3,42); he was the greatest orator in the period of Tacitus, famous for his wittiness. The competition of refined stylists led to the perfection of the technique of formulating *sententiae*: they were freely borrowed, but authorship belonged to the one who gave a *sententia* its final sharpness and could express it most concisely. This is nicely illustrated by a fragment from book nine of the *Controversies* of Seneca the Elder, which is so illustrative of this practice that it is cited here in entirety. *Con.* 9,1,13-14:

Memini deinde Fuscum, cum haec Adaei sententia obiceretur, non infitiri transtulisse se eam in Latinum; et aiebat non commendationis id se aut furti, sed exercitationis causa facere. Do, inquit, operam ut cum optimis sententiis certem, nec illas corrumpere conor sed vincere. Multa oratores, historici, poetae Romani a Graecis dicta non subripuerunt sed provocaverunt. Tunc deinde rettulit aliquam Thucydides sententiam: δεινὰ γὰρ αἱ εὐπράξια συγκρίνῃαι καὶ συσχεῖσθαι τὰ ἐκάστων ἀμαρτήματα, deinde Sallustianam: res secundae mire sunt vitiis obtentui. Cum sit praecipua in Thucydide virtus brevitās, hac eum Sallustius vicit et in suis illum castris cecidit; nam in sententia Graeca tam brevi habes quae salvo sensu detrahas: deme vel συγκρίνῃαι vel συσχεῖσθαι: deme ἐκάστων: constabit sensus, etiamsi non aequē comptus, aequē tamen integer. At ex Sallusti sententia nihil demi sine detrimento sensus potest. 14 T. autem Livius tam iniquus Sallustio fuit ut hanc ipsam sententiam et tamquam translatam et

³³ E. Castorina, Sul proemio delle „Historiae“ di Sallustio (frr. I 1-18 M.): la sentenziosità e il pessimismo, *Stud Urb* 49 (1975), 355-366; general notes on Tacitus: M.C. Mittelstadt, Tacitus and Plutarch: some interpretative methods, *RSC* 15 (1967), 301-302.

tamquam corruptam dum transfertur obiceret Sallustio. Nec hoc amore Thucydidis facit, ut illum praeferat, sed laudat quem non timet et facilius putat posse a se Sallustium vinci si ante a Thucydide vincatur.

«I recall that Fuscus, when reproached for that *sententia* of Adaeus, did not deny having translated it into Latin; he claimed that he had not done it from a desire for fame and that it had not been plagiarism, rather practice. „I attempt“, he said, „to measure my capabilities against the best *sententiae* and I try to surpass and not ruin them. Roman orators, historians, and poets did not merely appropriate many Greek aphorisms, rather they competed with them“. He then cited one of Thucydides' *sententiae*: „Successes have the power to hide and obscure everybody's faults“ and the Sallust's: „Successes cover corruption wonderfully“ (*Hist.* 1,55,24; Ed. B. Maurenbrecher). Although conciseness was a particular distinction of Thucydides, Sallust vanquished him in this, defeating him on his own ground. The Greek *sententia* is also short, however it does contain some words which could easily be removed without the meaning suffering: if either „hide“ or „obscure“ and „everybody's“ are removed, the meaning remains unchanged. Despite not being as elegantly expressed, it is nonetheless complete, while nothing can be taken from Sallust's *sententia* without causing damage.

Livy was so unjust to Sallust as to accuse him not only of translating this *sententia*, but also of ruining it in his translation. He certainly did not prefer Thucydides because of affection towards his work; he praises the man without fear of him, and considers that he would more easily surpass Sallust if Thucydides already had.»

Every ambitious classical writer undoubtedly deliberated in a similar manner, and such a practice can also be attributed to Tacitus. There are comparatively few general, banal *sententiae* in his works³⁴, and *sententiae* arising from concrete situations and written in his unique style predominate, as he was firstly a historian, and was a moralist only to the extent of being unable to ignore the imperatives of his time.

Sententiae in the Agricola

The biography of Agricola is more liberally sprinkled with *sententiae* than Tacitus' other texts, which considering its content is entirely understandable³⁵. Agricola is one of the very rare figures present-

³⁴ See the short commentary on Tacitus' *sententiae* in E. Aubrion. *Rhétorique et histoire chez Tacite*, Metz 1985, 208; cf. pp. 46-47, 328, 475.

³⁵ J. de Vreese, „Tacitus' *Sententiae* (I)“, *Hermeneus* 42 (1970-71), 13-17, and: „Tacitus' *Sententiae* (II)“ *ibid.* 149-152, unsystematically selected several *sententiae* from the *Agricola*, the *Germania* and the *Histories* and discussed them in an accessible manner.

ted in a completely positive manner in Tacitus, thus in his biography it is possible to discover several elements used by Tacitus for the image of Germanicus or the assessment of M. Aemilius Lepidus (*Ann.* 4,20 and 6,27)³⁶ and P. Memmius Regulus (*Ann.* 14,47)³⁷. Parallels can also be found in the *sententiae*. A total of 31 *sententiae* have been chosen, quoted in Latin and in translation, each with a commentary. Except where specifically noted, the *sententiae* are cited in their original form, just as they are written in the *Agricola*. Heubner's commentary is cited only with the author's name (see p. 00).

1.(1,1):

Vitium parvis magnisque civitatibus commune, ignorantia recti et invidia.

Antipathy to justice and envy are defects common to both large and small states.

Envy is a human quality which would decisively impede Agricola's later career – perhaps that explains why Tacitus placed this at the very beginning of the text in the first sentence. Tacitus, like Horace, was particularly disturbed by envy and continually harped on this deadly sin. He mentions in chapter 8 that Agricola deliberately avoided causing envy (*Ita virtute in obsequendo, verecundia in praedicando extra invidiam nec extra gloriam erat.* 8,3). In Tacitus' opinion, envy was expressed particularly strongly in the relations between Tiberius and Germanicus (see, for example, *Ann.* 2,26,5)³⁸. A similar construction can be found in Cornelius Nepos: *est enim hoc commune vitium magnis liberisque civitatibus, ut invidia gloriae comes sit...* (*Chabr.* 3,3). A similar concept can be found in Sallust (*postremo, quod difficillimum inter mortalis est, gloria invidiam vicisti.* *Iug.* 10,2) as well as in Velleius Paterculus (*eminentis fortunae comes invidia,* 1,9,6). Heubner (p. 6) points out that the singular form of the noun *vitium* refers to both faults which are the cause and effect of the same defect.

2. (1,3):

Virtutes iisdem temporibus optime aestimantur, quibus facillime gignuntur.

³⁶ R. Syme, „Marcus Lepidus, capax imperii“, *JRS* 45 (1955), 22–33 = *Ten Studies in Tacitus*, Oxford 1970, 30–49.

³⁷ Memmius Regulus was, in addition to other positions, the provincial governor of Moesia, Macedonia, and Achaia for almost a decade (35–44); *PIR*² M 468. Also see R. Syme, „Obituaries in Tacitus“, *AJPh* 79 (1958), 18–31 = *Ten Studies in Tacitus*, Oxford 1970, 79–90, about Memmius especially pp. 83–84.

³⁸ Also see I. Borzsák, „Das Germanicus-Bild des Tacitus“, *Latomus* 28 (1969), pp. 588–600.

Virtues are most appreciated in the same period when they can most easily develop.

3. (1,4):

Narraturo vitam defuncti hominis venia opus est, quam non peteret incusaturus: tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora.

The person who intends to recount the life of a deceased man needs an excuse, for which he would not ask if he were to accuse; so savage and hostile to virtue is the age.

This sentence with aphoristic content is cited in a somewhat changed format, as in Tacitus it is expressed more personally and refers to himself (*At nunc narraturo mihi vitam defuncti hominis opus fuit, quem non petissem...*) This is the third aphoristic expression to be used in the introductory first chapter of the text. An equal number can be found only in chapter 30, which is one of the longest and contains the first third of Calgacus' speech, and in the last (46th) chapter.

Aversion to positive qualities is a very common motif in Tacitus³⁹, and a comparison between good and evil has and always will have a very contrasting effect and often provokes hostile reactions (*etiam gloria ac virtus infensos habet, ut nimis ex propinquo diversa arguens, Ann. 4,33,4*). Only very rarely does it appear that possibilities exist for the development of personal virtues (... *videbaturque locus virtutibus patefactus, Ann. 13,8,1*: referring to the appointment of Domitius Corbulo by Nero as the commanding general in Armenia), which most often leads to certain ruin (... *ob virtutes certissimum exitium, Hist. 1,2,3*). Tacitus' characterization of the period of Pompey can be repeatedly confirmed: the worst villainy remains unpunished, while probity sometimes even leads to death (*detrimenta quaeque impune ac multa honesta exitio fuere, Ann. 3,38,1*).

The meaning of the third *sententia* is clear and logical, a sarcastically expressed comparison which does not imply either that Tacitus was ever forced to ask for official permission to write the biography of his father-in-law, or necessarily that the reigns of Nerva and Trajan were still antagonistic to virtue⁴⁰. Even Tiberius, who otherwise hated faults, did not admire virtues which were particularly evident: *neque enim eminentis virtutes sectabatur, et rursum vitia oderat (Ann. 1,80,2)*. This period was already characterized by servility (*celerum tempora illa adeo infecta et adulatione sordida fuere... Ann.*

³⁹ H. Haas, „Virtus Tacitea“, *Gymnasium* 49 (1938), 163–180; R. Feger, „Virtus bei Tacitus“, *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 3 (1948), 301–315.

⁴⁰ Such and similar indistinct elements are actually merely forced indistinctness. In connection with this, see the commentary in Heubner, pp. 7–8.

3,65,2), which in and of itself excludes positive qualities. Tacitus in fact attempted to immortalize virtues later in the *Annals* (... *praecipuum munus annalium reor ne virtutes sileantur...*, *Ann.* 3,65,1). Certain statements throughout his entire opus indicate that hatred of individual virtues among the members of the ruling class intensified: the peak was reached under Nero who with the execution of Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus wished to suppress virtue itself, positive qualities personified (*Ann.* 16,21,1: *Nero virtutem ipsam excindere concupivit interfecit Thrasea Paeto et Borea Sorano...*). After the generally positive reigns of Vespasian and Titus, conditions worsened badly under Domitian. In Tacitus' period the opinion (shared to some extent by Tacitus) that earlier times had been better and more just (for example *Ann.* 3,5,2: *ubi illa veterum instituta... meditata ad memoriam virtutis carmina et laudationes...* in reference to the funeral of Germanicus; or *Hist.* 2,69,2:... *instituta maiorum apud quos virtute quam pecunia res Romana melius stetit*: referring to the lack of discipline and corruptibility of Vitellius' soldiers; and above all *Hist.* 3,51,2: *tanto acrior apud maiores, sicut virtutibus gloria, ita flagitiis paenitentia fuit*). He certainly did not, however, excuse indifference about contemporary affairs (*dum vetera extollimus recentium incuriosi*, *Ann.* 2,88,3; also 3,55,5: *nec omnia apud priores meliora, sed nostra quoque aetas multa laudis et artium imitanda posteris tulit*) and in his introduction to the *Historiae* emphasized that the century had not been entirely lacking in virtue (*Hist.* 1,3,1: *non tamen adeo virtutum sterile saeculum ut non et bona exempla prodiderit*).

4. (2,3):

Memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdidissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere.

We would have lost our memories as well as voices, were it in our powers to forget as well as to be silent.

Tacitus expressed the same thought later in the *Annals* in reference to the condemnation of the historian Cremutius Cordus and the burning of his historical work: *quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet, qui praesenti potentia credunt extinguere posse etiam sequentis aevi memoriam* (*Ann.* 4,35,5). Great things should not be forgotten and they shall not be – at least, one hopes this is true. The opposite also applies, but certainly not necessarily and not always, to works unworthy of mention. Thus Tacitus cited the texts of a well known informer Fabricius Veiento (Juvenal, 4,115, called him a *grande et conspicuum nostrum quoque tempore monstrum*, although he later was favoured with Nerva's friendship)⁴¹, in which obscene and scandalous accusations were published against senators and priests.

⁴¹ See Syme, *op.cit.* n. 4, pp. 4–6.

Nero had him exiled from Italy and the books burnt because of these texts and for selling advancements. While they were forbidden, they were in great demand, and when they were again permitted, they were forgotten (*mox licentia habendi oblivionem attulit*, *Ann.* 14,50,2).

Memory is in principle resistant even when it would be better to forget... *etiam si impetus offensionis languerat, memoria valebat* (*Ann.* 4,21,1): so says Tacitus about Tiberius, who was deeply offended by Calpurnius Piso's libertarian eruption against denouncers and his declaration against Urgulania who enjoyed Livia's protection. Tacitus mentions in the 4th book of his *Historiae* that Helvidius Priscus, the son-in-law of Thræsea Paetus and praetor in AD 70, suggested in the Senate that the Capitol be renovated at the public expense and that Vespasian merely aid in this. The proposal could be interpreted as unworthy of Vespasian's greatness and Tacitus added: *eam sententiam modestissimus quisque in silentio, deinde oblivio transmisit: fuisse qui et meminissent* (*Hist.* 4,9,2) The above parallels show that Tacitus thought several times about problems related to the loss or preservation of historical memory, about silence, compulsory of discreet, forced by political conditions, and about opportunism or rather the unavoidability of oblivion.

5. (3,1):

Natura infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala.

Human frailty is such that medicines are slower than sickness.

6. (3,1):

Ut corpora nostra lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur, sic ingenia studiaque oppresseris facilius quam revocaveris.

Like our bodies, growing slowly and perishing quickly, so the spirit and its ideals are more easily crushed than reanimated.

7. (3,1):

Subit ipsius inertiae dulcedo, et invisa primo desidia postremo amatur.

Idleness gradually develops a strange fascination of its own, and we end by loving the sloth that at first we loathed.

The latter three *sententiae* (cited with minimal modifications and without conjunctions) were connected in a unit creating the second part of a long paragraph in which Tacitus states that a new period started under Nerva, that under Trajan conditions had further improved (*augeatque quotidie felicitatem temporum Nerva Traianus*), and that hope in a better future had already been confirmed. The

above *sententiae* modify the first part of the paragraph: damage done is difficult to repair.

Heubner (p. 12) draws attention to the word combinations, some of which were not attested before Tacitus, such as *corpora... extinguuntur* or *ingenia... oppresseris*; such philological statements are certainly interesting, however considering the small proportion of preserved Latin literature, they have no particular weight. The word combination *humana infirmitas* appears in the *Dialogue* (25,6) in connection with *vitia*. This was more a reference to fragility in the sense of a stalk which a wind could easily damage, thus implying a thought about the frailty of human nature which is more inclined to evil than to good. Remedies themselves not only are not always effective, but sometimes can be even more injurious than evil. This thought was expressed by Tacitus in a short note about the 3rd consulate of Pompey the Great where he states: *...et gravior remediis quam delicta erant* (*Ann.* 3,28,1).

The expression *inertiae dulcedo* cannot be found prior to Tacitus (*Thes.* V, 1,218,2 f.), rather Tacitus himself uses an association of words expressing the same idea at the beginning of the *Annals* (1,2,1) in the famous passage in which the political conditions enabling Octavian to claim supreme power were succinctly condensed: *cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit...*

8. (4,3):

Retinere ex sapientia modum difficillimum est.

To retain the sense of proportion taught by philosophy is very difficult.

The *sententia* is written in a somewhat modified form, taken from Tacitus' phrase: *Mox mitigavit ratio et aetas, retinuitque, quod est difficillimum, ex sapientia modum*. The word *modus* was used here with the meaning *moderatio*. It is difficult always to act with moderation, and this ability is gained by man mainly through the study of philosophy: *sapientia* here means *studium sapientiae*⁴², and *modus* a virtue received from it, not at all its opposite⁴³. Tacitus was distinctly antagonistic to any extremes of human behavior. Agricola, thanks to his mother's perceptivity, avoided the danger of excessively

⁴² Ursula Klima, *Untersuchungen zu dem Begriff sapientia von der republikanischen Zeit bis Tacitus*, Bonn 1971, 165 ff.

⁴³ P. Wülfing, „Prägnante Wortverbindungen bei Tacitus – Interpretationen zu Agricola, cap. 4–9“ *Dialogos*, Festschrift H. Patzer (ed. J. Cobet et al.), Wiesbaden 1975, 236, mentions that such opposites in the then current rhetoric were probably not unknown (but lacking citations!). For the concept of *moderatio* also see M. Vielberg, *Pflichten, Werte, Ideale: eine Untersuchung zu den Wertvorstellungen des Tacitus*, Hermes Einzelschriften 52, Stuttgart 1987.

studying philosophy. That would be inappropriate for him as a Roman and senator (*ultra quam concessum Romano ac senatori*, 4,3). Such argumentation certainly *eo ipso* condemns the Stoics with their political opposition which was openly condemned in chapter 42⁴⁴.

9.(5,3):

Sinistra erga eminentes interpretatio nec minus periculum ex magna fama quam ex mala.

Any distinction was interpreted as sinister and a great reputation was no less dangerous than a bad one.

The word *eminens* was first used as a substantive noun by Quintilianus (*Inst.* 9,4,79)⁴⁵. Elite qualities were and often still are a stumbling block; Tiberius was not partial to them, although he condemned deficiencies (*neque enim eminentis virtutes sectabatur*, *Ann.* 1,80,2)⁴⁶, and mediocrity has always been more acceptable. All that is truly great is open to ambiguous interpretations: *adeo maxima quaeque ambigua sunt* (*Ann.* 3, 19,2).

A similar, although more commonplace, thought can be found in Livy: Camillus (385 BC) said he would rather be greatly discussed than praised (*famaeque magnae malle quam bonae esse*, 6,11,7), and it is not excluded that this might have influenced Tacitus' formulation. It is interesting that Tacitus uses the word *magnus* in the contrast *magna fama* – *mala fama* (a similar contrast, *mali principes – magni viri*, is found in *sententia* 28) in a different meaning than the word has in Livy's juxtaposition of *fama magna* – *fama bona*. This is yet another example of Tacitus' efficacious juxtapositions condemning the dictatorship which rejected any divergence, whether in the positive or negative sense⁴⁷.

10. (6,1):

In bona uxore tanto maior laus, quanto in mala plus culpa est.

A good wife deserves as much praise as a bad one deserves blame.

This aphoristic statement, which Tacitus mentions in reference to the happy marriage of Agricola and Domitia Decidiana, but which probably contains also a reference to his own marriage with Agricola's daughter, was based on the belief that in marriage it is the wife

⁴⁴ See above, pp. xx–xx.

⁴⁵ Heubner, p. 21.

⁴⁶ See the commentary on *sententiae* 2 and 3.

⁴⁷ S. J. Bastomsky, Tacitus, *Agricola* 5,3: More than an Epigram?, *Philologus* 126 (1982), 151–153.

who represents the moral principle of marriage, and thus the decisive influence on its positive or negative development⁴⁸. The wife, thus, mainly takes care of the home and children, while the man has wider concerns. Tacitus was not particularly interested in the role of women in Roman society, and his views of women do not differ essentially from the other classical viewpoints – all male, of course. His note concerning Agrippina the Elder is typical of this, she was *aequi impatiens, dominandi avida, virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat* (*Ann.* 6,25,2), clearly illustrating the difference between male and female affairs.

The period described by Tacitus in his works saw more or less prominent roles played by women, some of whom were even protagonists in his narratives. External factors as well as their specific position affected public participation by women, and their influence in Roman public life was extremely varied, hence the seeming inconsistencies or even misogyny attributed to Tacitus by philologists, and so many varied interpretations of Tacitus' attitudes to women⁴⁹.

It is possible to classify Tacitus' descriptions of women into several types⁵⁰, although these descriptions are still a component part of historical narratives and are thus *eo ipso* more complex. In principle, Tacitus' attitude toward women was humane. This is shown, for example, in his condemnation of the proposal of Caecina Severus that wives should not accompany their husbands in service in the provinces. He himself, as can be inferred from the *Agricola* (45,5) took his wife with him on assignments outside Italy. Historical experience has shown that women could also play a dangerous role in politics. Tacitus granted them an independent status and condemned Messallinus Cotta (the son of the well-known M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, Ovid's protector; in contrast with M. Aemilius Lepidus he characterized the former as: *haud minus claris maioribus, sed animo adversus* (*Ann.* 4,20,4)), who suggested in the Senate that husbands should be punished for the crimes of their wives while in the provinces as if they had committed them, despite any lack of previous knowledge.

⁴⁸ See Heubner, p. 22.

⁴⁹ See, for example, B. Riposati, „Profili di donne nella storia di Tacito“, *Aevum* 45 (1971), 25–45; B. Baldwin, *Women in Tacitus*, *Prudentia* 4 (1972), 83–101; Dorothee Schürenberg, *Stellung und Bedeutung der Frau in der Geschichtsschreibung des Tacitus*, Diss. Marburg 1975; K. Christ, „Tacitus und der Prinzipat“, *Historia* 27 (1978), 449 ff, and in chapter 4: *Zur taciteischen Frauendarstellung*, 470–482; R. Syme, „Princesses and others in Tacitus“, *G & R* 28 (1981), 40–52.

⁵⁰ H. Königer, *Gestalt und Welt der Frau bei Tacitus*, Diss. Erlangen 1966, distinguished the types: *uxor bona*, *mala*, heroic women and foreign women. Agricola's mother Julia Procilla and his wife Domitia Decidiana are typical examples of the *uxor bona* type.

11. (6,3):

Tempora, quibus inertia pro sapientia est.

A period in which inactivity was a sign of wisdom.

Several times in the *Annals*, Tacitus honoured the deaths of prominent individuals with short obituaries⁵¹; in one of them Memmius Regulus was immortalized as a great man. He survived Nero's commendatory recognition, protected by his inconspicuous conduct (*quiete defensus*, *Ann.* 14,47,1). Heubner (p. 23) notes Tacitus' delineation of Galba's character as a parallel: *sed claritas natalium et metus temporum obtentui, ut, quod segnitia erat, sapientia vocaretur* (*Hist.* 1,49,3). The thought is expressed with a similar phrase, although its meaning is exactly the reverse. Galba was truly indifferent, although his inactivity gave the impression of wisdom. The times were such that intelligent people did not wish to be exposed unnecessarily by undesirable activity in public life. In contrast, the inactivity of Agricola and Memmius Regulus was merely the result of necessity and the sign of acquired wisdom. Similar ideas can also be found in Pliny the Younger (*Epist.* 8,14,7; 9,13,3).

12. (9,3):

Facilitas auctoritatem severitas amorem deminuit.

Familiarity lessens authority, severity lessens popularity.

Tacitus used the *sententia* in a negative form. Agricola achieved with his moderate and resolute behaviour something that is otherwise very rare: amiability did not weaken his authority, nor severity his popularity (*Nec illi, quod est rarissimum, aut facilitas auctoritatem aut severitas amorem deminuit.*).

Facilitas, popularity, kindness, is a quality which does not always characterize prominent people, thus it is accordingly praiseworthy; its opposite is inaccessibility. *Facilitas* was one of Caesar's more significant characteristics (Sallust, *Cat.* 54,3: *illius (sc. Caesaris) facilitas... laudabatur*). Its connection with *auctoritas*, like *severitas - amor*, is an example of one of Tacitus' effective juxtapositions⁵².

13. (9,5):

Haud semper errat fama; aliquando et eligit.

Reputation is not always wrong; sometimes it correctly prompts a selection.

⁵¹ R. Syme, "Obituaries in Tacitus", *op. cit.* n. 37.

⁵² Also see P. Wülfing, *op. cit.* n. 43, pp. 239-240.

The *sententia* is written in an iambic senarius, perhaps merely by chance⁵³, as opposed to the hexameter at the beginning of the *Annals* (*Urbem Romam a principio reges habuere*) which was doubtless premeditated. The use of an abstract term for the subject of *eligere* has been noted to date only in Pliny (*N.H.* 26,4: *tamquam malo eligente*; *Thes.* V 2,377,41 f.). Heubner emphasizes that the verb was used pregnantly: meaning to choose correctly.

14. (12,2):

Singuli pugnant, universi vincuntur.

Fighting separately, all are conquered.

This aphorism is a common proverb.

15. (18,6):

Ipsa dissimulatione famae fama augetur.

Reticence about fame brings greater fame.

The *sententia* is expressed in an active form in Tacitus: ...sed *ipsa dissimulatione famae famam auxit* (sc. Agricola), *aestimantibus quanta futuri spe tam magna tacuisset*. This *sententia*, supplemented by a second phrase, is located at the end of a chapter as are the previously discussed *sententiae* 3, 4, 8 and 9. In the *Annals*, Tacitus subsequently expressed a similar thought in reference to Rubellius Plautus, proposed by some as a possible successor to Nero (Rubellius was a man of the old stamp with strict conduct who lived in a retired manner although his isolation, sought from fear, merely brought him greater fame): *quantoque metu occultior, tanto plus famae adeptus* (*Ann.* 14,22,1). Sallust used a similar *sententia* in reference to Cato: *quo minus petebat gloriam, eo magis illum adsequebatur* (*Cat.* 54,6).

16. (19,1):

Parum proficiunt arma, si iniuriae sequuntur.

Force is of little use if injustice follows.

This has been taken from the subordinate and put into the active. The *sententia*, like no. 14, is a common proverb. Armed battles always carry the seeds of injustice. Tacitus continued with this thought in reference to Pompey: what he controlled by force, he lost by force (*quae armis tuebatur, armis amisit*, *Ann.* 3,28,1).

⁵³ Compare Heubner, p. 33.

17. (19,3):

a. *Parvis peccatis veniam, magnis severitatem commodare.*

Overlook minor offences and severely punish major ones.

b. *Nec poena semper, sed saepius paenitentia contentus esse.*

Do not always punish, but be content with repentance.

c. *Officiis et administrationibus potius non peccaturos praepone, quam damnare cum peccassent.*

It is better to appoint people who will not transgress than to have to punish transgressions.

This is a complex of instructions illustrating Agricola's manner of dealing with subordinates, each of which individually expresses common sense⁵⁴; all three *sententiae* (a-c) are interconnected although each is a closed unit consisting of a single sentence.

A thought similar to the one expressed in the first precept (a) was written by Tacitus subsequently in reference to Vespasian's relations with his collaborators: he preferred to conceal the faults of friends rather than their virtues (*vitia magis amicorum quam virtutes dissimulans*, *Hist.* 2, 82,1). This passage from the *Agricola* was evaluated by Voss mainly in terms of stylistics, in which the third antithesis: *nec poena semper...* seemed to him only a variation of the previous epigram, animated by the play on words of *poena* – *paenitentia*⁵⁵. In contrast, Heubner interpreted it as an example of Tacitus' conscious and deliberate formulation. *Paenitentia* is a concept which closely connects the person who has done wrong with the individual who will accept his apology and forgive him. This antithesis, far from a mere play on words, illustrates the warm relations of Agricola and his subordinates who respected him and had trust in him⁵⁶.

The proverb that it is better to prevent human mistakes in advance (c), was also expressed by Tacitus in the *Annals*, although in a negative context. Cornelius Dollabella suggested, after the condemnation of proconsul of Asia Junius Silanus, that in future Tiberius decide for himself which senators were suitable for governing provinces: laws punish offences, but would it not be better for senators and the provincial populations if unpleasantness did not occur in the first place? (*Nam a legibus delicta puniri; quanto fore mitius in ipsos* (sc. senators), *melius in socios, provideri ne peccaretur?* *Ann.* 3,69,1).

⁵⁴ Compare with Heubner, p. 65, who discusses linguistic particularities.

⁵⁵ B.R. Voss, *Der pointierte Stil des Tacitus*, *Orbis antiquus* 19, München 1980², p. 96, compare p. 103.

⁵⁶ H. Heubner, „Sprache, Stil und Sache bei Tacitus“, *Gymnasium Beihefte* 4 (1964), 137–138.

18. (21,2):

Quod apud inperitos humanitas vocatur, interdum pars servitutis est.

What the inexperienced call civilization is sometimes a part of enslavement.

The *sententia* has been modified (originally: ... *idque apud inperitos humanitas vocabatur, cum pars servitutis esset.*). It is placed at the end of a chapter and represents an effective conclusion. Tacitus used the expression *humanitas* – civilization in the same meaning as Caesar (*Bell. Gall.* 1,1,3: *a cultu atque humanitate prvinciae longissime absunt, sc. Belgae*)⁵⁷. The word *humanitas*, however, in the *Germania* (21,2) means *comitas*: civility, courtesy. Heubner (p.70) collected passages in texts where *pars* circumscribes a certain concept, for example *pars doloris* in Ovid (*Met.* 9.291).

The thought expressed in the *sententia* is ancient and well known, one needs mention only Horace's verse *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*. Tacitus also expressed this in the *Historiae* in the chapter describing how the German tribe of the Tenciteri called on the inhabitants of the Colonia Agrippinensis (Köln) to cast off the Roman yoke and join them in battle: *instituta cultumque patrum resumite, abruptis voluptatibus, quibus Romani plus adversus subiectos quam armis valent* (*Hist.* 4,64,3).

19. (22,4):

Honestius est offendere quam odisse.

It is more honest to offend than hate.

In Tacitus: *honestius putabat offendere quam odisse*. This *sententia* is also placed at the end of a chapter and represents a very effective conclusion to this narrative section. Tacitus had Thrasyllus Peatus express a similar *sententia* when he states that it is often wronger to avoid resentment than to offend: *plura saepe peccantur, dum demeremur quam dum offendimus* (*Ann.* 15,21,3)⁵⁸.

20. (27,1):

Prospera omnes sibi vindicant, adversa uni imputantur.

Success is claimed by all, failure is blamed on one.

⁵⁷ K. Büchner, „Humanum und humanitas in der römischen Welt“, *Studium Generale* 14 (1961), 636 ff.

⁵⁸ This parallel is also noted by Heubner, p. 73.

This *sententia* is taken from a military context: *iniquissima haec bellorum conditio est*. The idea is also applicable to other situations⁵⁹. Similar phrases were used by Cornelius Nepos (*.. si quid secundi evenisset, nullam in ea re suam partem fore, contra ea, si quid adversi accidisset, se unum eius delicti futurum reum*, *Alc.* 8,4) and Sallust (such is man: in the moment of victory even cowards can boast, while a defeat humiliates even the brave; *quippe res humanae ita sese habent: in victoria vel ignavis gloriari licet, adversae res etiam bonos detrectant*, *Iug.* 53,8). Tacitus himself used a similar phrase for Tiberius' speech in the *Annals*: *et cum recte factorum sibi quisque gratiam trahant, unius invidia ab omnibus peccatur* (3,53,3) as well as in the *Historiae* (4,52,1 – referring to rulers – *... quorum prosperis et alii fruantur, adversa ad iunctissimos pertineant*).

21. (30,1):

Ita proelium atque arma, quae fortibus honesta, eadem etiam ignavis tutissima sunt.

Battle and weapons, the pride of the brave, are at the same time the best security of cowards.

This and the following three *sententiae* are taken from Calgacus' speech prior to the decisive battle at a location which has not yet been identified with certainty, called *Mons Graupius* by Tacitus. It is interesting that the adjectives *honestum* and *tutum* are often connected, not merely in Tacitus but in the works of other writers; several such parallels and combinations with similar meanings were gathered by Heubner (p. 88).

22. (30,3):

Omne ignotum pro magnifico est.

All that is unknown is greatly exaggerated.

Two related phrases from Tacitus' other texts could be noted as parallels to this *sententia*: a line from the description of Germanicus' shipwreck: *ut quis ex longinquo venerat, miracula narrabant...* (*Ann.* 2,24,4) and the famous words with which Tacitus ended the *Germania*: *cetera iam fabulosa...* (46,4).

23. (30,5):

Auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium atque ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant.

⁵⁹ Some parallels are noted by Heubner, p. 82.

Livy describes the viewpoint of the Thessalians, who took the side of Rome against Philip of Macedonia: *imitaretur populum Romanum, qui caritate quam metu adiungere sibi socios mallet* (39,25,15). Fear is a common motif in Tacitus' works⁶⁷. Parallels from Cicero are noted by scholars for *vincla caritatis* (Att. 6,2,1: *vincla... amoris* and *Fin. 2,117: vincla concordiae*)⁶⁸.

25. (33,6):

Honesta mors turpi vita potior.

An honourable death is better than a shameful life.

This is one of the most common *sententiae*, universally known in minor variations. An elegant example in Slovenian would be Prešern's verse:

*And if the gods give us up to death,
The night in earth's dark bosom is less terrifying
Than enslaved days under the bright sun!*

(transl. by H.R. Cooper, Jr., Boston 1981)

In classical literature this was a *locus communis* par excellence, as is shown by the numerous examples offered by Heubner (p. 99). Tacitus supplemented his *sententia* with two additional phrases: *...et incolumitas ac decus eodem loco sita sunt; nec inglorium fuerit in ipso terrarum ac naturae fine cecidisse* (security and honour walk hand in hand; it would not be inglorious to die here where the world and nature end). The sentence is taken from Agricola's speech prior to the decisive battle with the Caledonians under Calgacus and was effectively placed at the end of a chapter.

26. (41,1):

Pessimum inimicorum genus sunt laudantes.

The worst type of enemy praises.

This is also not a rare theme in Tacitus. Referring to one of Tiberius' speeches in the Senate he wrote: *Heac atque talia, quamquam cum adsensu audita ab iis quibus omnia principum, honesta atque inhonesta, laudare mos est...* (Ann. 2,38,4). *Adulatio* is a significant characteristic of a corrupt society and additionally is dangerous (*...adulatione, quae moribus corruptis perinde anceps, si nulla et ubi*

⁶⁷ See P. Ramondetti, „Il sentimento della paura nell'Agricola di Tacito“, AAT 108 (1974), 381-434.

⁶⁸ See Heubner, p. 94, who cites parallels for the combination of *metus* and *terror*.

nimia est, Ann. 4,17,1). At the beginning of the *Historiae*, he also ends the 2nd chapter of Book 1, describing the horrors of the period, with the closing sentence: those lacking enemies persecuted their friends (*Hist.* 1,2,3: *et quibus deerat inimicus per amicos oppressi*; also compare 1,64,4: ... *quo incautior deciperetur, palam laudatum*).

27. (42,3):

Proprium humani ingenii est odisse quem laeseris.

It is indigenous to human nature to hate those whom one has injured.

The reasons for Tiberus' and Livia's hatred of Germanicus were that much stronger because they were unjust (.. *sed anxius occultis in se patruī aviaeque odiis, quorum causae acriores quia iniquae*, Ann. 1,33,2). Seneca expressed himself similarly in *De Ira* 2,33,1: *hoc habent pessimum animi magna fortuna insolentes: quos laeserunt et oderunt*.

28. (42,4):

Possunt etiam sub malis principibus magni viri esse.

Even under bad rulers men can be great.

This is a typical political *sententia*, in a certain manner a motto of Tacitus. It is elucidated in the sentence, directed at the Stoic opposition: *Sciāt, quibus moris est illicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abrupta sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt*. Let them know, whose habit is only to admire forbidden things, that even under poor rulers men can be great, and that subordination and modesty, allied to industry and self-will, can achieve the same degree of fame which the majority attain on the steep path of ambitious death with no benefit to the state.

This *sententia*, which had particular significance for Tacitus, was also given a prominent place at the end of a chapter. The juxtaposition of *malus* – *magnus* was also used by Tacitus in *sententia* 9. Tacitus, and previously his father-in-law, held a different position than the politically active Stoics who were open opponents of the ruling apparatus, although they did not manage to change the regime through their actions. The biography of Agricola is in some sense also an apologia of the political careers of Tacitus and Agricola.

29. (46,1):

Non cum corpore extinguuntur magnae animae.

Great souls do not perish with the body.

30. (46,3):

Ut vultus hominum, ita simulacra vultus imbecilla ac mortalia sunt.

Like the human face, representations of a face are also fragile and transitory.

31. (46,3):

Forma mentis aeterna.

The form of the mind is eternal.

The last three *sententiae* are taken from the epilogue, from its final section consisting of three chapters (44–46), which can be defined as a *consolatio*. The wording is quite rhetorically coloured and shows a strong influence of the Ciceronian style. Existing literary genres certainly influenced Tacitus' use of such a style (like the *consolatio ad Liviam* or Seneca's *consolatio ad Marciam*), as well as a new type of literature describing the deaths of prominent individuals, the so-called *exitus* literature, which Tacitus evidently used as a model in the descriptions of Seneca's death and the death of Thrasyllus Paetus⁶⁹. He says for Seneca that he bequeathed his friends the most precious thing he had, the example of his life: *imaginem vitae suae* (*Ann.* 15,62,1), a life which was *per virtutem acta* (*ibid.* 63,1). A man's soul is reflected in his actions, and a good man is an example for later generations, this model being immortal⁷⁰. This is also stated by Tacitus about Agricola, as the aphorism *forma mentis aeterna* was supplemented by the phrase: *quam tenere et exprimere non per alienam materiam et artem, sed tuis ipse moribus possis* – and thus was made explicit.

Conclusion

As the definition of *sententia* is somewhat loose, as has been seen, the choice of *sententiae* has necessarily been subjective. There are certainly more thoughts expressed in a *sententia* type format in the *Agricola*. Thus, for example, a series of interconnected aphorisms in chapter 5 has been omitted (5,1):... *discere a peritis sequi optimos, nihil adpetere in iactationem, nihil ob formitudinem recusare simulque et anxius et intentus agere*), as has a *sententia* from chapter 19

⁶⁹ G. Guttilla, „I tre filoni consolatori dell' epilogus dell' *Agricola*“, *Annali del Liceo classico G. Garibaldi di Palermo* 7–8 (1970–71), 216–248; also compare „La morte di Cremuzio Cordo nella *Consolatio ad Marciam*. Appunti per una storia degli *exitus*“, *ibid.* 9–10 (1972–73), 153–179.

⁷⁰ See the commentary in Heubner, pp. 137–138.

(19,3: . . . *optimum quemque fidissimum putare; omnia scire, non omnia exsequi...*); both certainly express generally valid acquired wisdom. Similarly, the following phrases could have been placed among the *sententiae*:... *rarissima moderatione maluit videri invenisse bonos quam fecisse* (7,3), and *Ita virtute in obsequendo, verecundia in praedicando extra invidiam nec extra gloriam erat* (8,3). Also omitted was the reflection: *Porro in eius modi consiliis periculosius esse deprehendi quam audere* (15,5).

The *sententiae* of Tacitus always arose from concrete, often political (or at least politically charged) situations and were closely connected to their contexts. Thus there would be no purpose in attempting to classify and assign them into various categories, i.e. philosophical or political, as was attempted for Sallust⁷¹, or indeed to seek an additional category. It would commonly be established that it is not possible to classify them clearly and the attempt would prove to be a failure at the very beginning. Each aphorism is fairly self-explanatory and most often requires no learned commentary. Each has a firm place in the context in which it is used, and additionally illuminates, supplements and sharpens the meaning of what was expressed. It always has a deeper meaning and never merely a decorative function. Tacitus readily used *sententiae* and aphoristically sharpened formulations, which corresponded to the style of his pointed manner of writing⁷², although rhetoric did not greatly influence this to the extent that he would cite a *sententia* merely because of felicity of phrasing without close connection to the context. Parallel constructions, taken from his other works, show that most commonly these were not chance ideas, rather that similar thoughts preoccupied him throughout his writing. The fact that they were frequently located at the end of chapters (nos. 3, 4, 8, 9, 15, 19, 23, 25, 28; thus almost a third) and that there were more of them in the first and last chapters of the text directly indicates the important role attributed to them by Tacitus.

The *sententiae* of Tacitus have retained their charm to the present, not merely because of the eternal wisdom they contain, but also because of their style, so typical of Tacitus.

⁷¹ E. Castorina, *op. cit.* n. 33, 359 ff. Also see U. Paananen, *Sallust's politico-social Terminology, its use and biographical Significance*, Helsinki 1972, 22 ff.

⁷² See B.R. Voss *op. cit.* n. 55; also compare A. Draeger, *Ueber Syntax und Stil des Tacitus*, Leipzig 1882³.

