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## METAPHORICAL PICTURE OF TIBERIUS IN TACITUS'S *ANNALS*

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SUMMARY: The paper discusses the way of presenting Tiberius in Tacitus' *Annals*; it concentrates on the analysis of diction and metaphors (Tiberius as a snake, the metaphors of clothing, of siege and of fire). Possible analogies with Vergilian metaphors of the fall of Troy are also taken into account.

Tacitus introduces Tiberius Nero almost at the very beginning of his narrative, straight after three chapters describing the change in Roman form of government and the doubts of Augustus on the choice of his future successor (*Ann.* I 4). Tiberius is described as a mature man and a great warrior, yet full of pride (*superbia*), inherited after his Claudian ancestors, as well as showing signs of cruelty which surfaces despite his attempts to suppress it (*multaque indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere*). Accustomed to being pandered with honours and triumphs, he spent all his time as an exile on Rhodos cultivating his anger, hypocrisy and secret debauchery (*ira, simulatio, secretae libidines*). Tiberius, his young and brutish co-pretender to the throne, Agrippa Postumus, and Agrippina the Elder, Augustus's wife and Tiberius's mother, were the cause of universal anxiety in Rome, perceived as three monsters who will one day tear the country apart (*distrabant*).

The three main characteristics of Tiberius are expounded and repeated throughout the next six books of the *Annals*. The tragic flaw of Tiberius

who otherwise might have been a decent man with his intelligence and maturity, is excessive pride. His exile and his wounded pride led him to develop and nurture his three main vices: anger, hypocrisy and debauchery, and taught him to shroud them in secrecy. The whole Tacitean picture of Tiberius is based on showing these primary vices; the secretiveness of the emperor is reflected in the metaphors used throughout the text to describe him. It is the aim of this paper to study these particular metaphors within their context and investigate how they help to paint the emperor's character and its negative development and deterioration caused by the rise to power.<sup>1</sup>

The first act of Tiberius when he gains imperial power (as Tacitus states explicitly in I 6) is to remove the most serious threat to his rule, Agrippa. Tiberius feigns (*simulabat*) that the order to execute Agrippa has been given by Augustus and he is merely passing it on. When a centurion reports that the order has been carried out, he denies having issued such an order and says the report should be given to the senate (*nuntianti centurioni, ut mos militiae, factum esse quod imperasset, neque imperasse sese et rationem facti reddendam apud senatum respondit*). The almost verbatim reflection of the words uttered by the centurion in Tiberius's negation (*factum esse quod imperasset, neque imperasse sese*) as well as the repetitive use of sibilants brings the reader's attention to this sentence: it illustrates the duplicity (he directly denies his previous words) and secretiveness of the emperor.<sup>2</sup> Virgil, to whom Tacitus is vastly indebted, made use of sibilants as a way to express whispering:<sup>3</sup> here they might indicate the emperor's wish for secrecy.

The sibilants, indicative of hissing, might as well perpetuate the picture of Tiberius as a snake: I believe (and intend to prove) that the majority of the metaphors describing Tiberius seem to be centred around his snake-like qualities: his actions are described by verbs which typically refer to the movements of a snake (*inrepere, volvere, lambere*); his

<sup>1</sup> About the motive of corruption of power in Tacitus see Mellor 2009: 90-91.

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus says at the beginning of the passage that Tiberius did not mention Agrippa's death to the senate by even a word. The report given by the centurion in front of the senate disrupted this façade of silence.

<sup>3</sup> Whispering could evoke either pleasant and peaceful connotations, as in *Ecl.* I 55, or quite the opposite, as in *Aen.* II 9. See Sadler 1971-1972: 174 for Vergilian use of sibilants.

deceptiveness and tendency to hide (typical for a snake which wants to strike on an unsuspecting victim) is evidenced by the metaphors of darkness and “clothing”, or rather putting on a new skin, masquerading.

In the next passage (I 7) the emperor is said to have slithered (or, more literally, crawled) into imperial power (*inrepsisse*). Tacitus uses this verb in the *Annals* only a few times, exclusively when referring to Tiberius (I 73) or his prefect of the praetorians, Sejanus, mastermind of deception (IV 2, IV 8). The Tacitean use of parallel as a means of characterisation has been discussed often enough,<sup>4</sup> yet this particular instance of it enables the reader to understand the metaphor more profoundly: *inreperere* is used to describe the rise to power of both Tiberius<sup>5</sup> and Sejanus.<sup>6</sup> They subtly court other people's good opinion (Augustus' in Tiberius' case, soldiers and senators' in Sejanus') to gain their obedience and compliance. Then, once they are established in their position, they use it for evil purposes; such usage is again described by the verb *inreperere*: the evil of delators and unending political trials on the basis of *lex Iulia de laesae maiestatis*<sup>7</sup> surreptitiously crept in due to Tiberius' skill<sup>8</sup>; the murder of Drusus, Tiberius' son and heir, was perpetrated by Sejanus who chose a “slowly creeping in” poison to simulate death by illness and avert suspicions.<sup>9</sup> Therefore the verb *inreperere* appears in two crucial moments of Tiberian drama: when he enters the stage in Book I, taking over Augustus's empire

<sup>4</sup> Parallels between people and situations were used by many ancient historians as a narrative technique; see Mellor 1993: 117.

<sup>5</sup> [...] *dabat et famae, ut vocatus electusque potius a re publica videretur quam per uxorium ambitum et senili adoptione inrepsisse* (I 7).

<sup>6</sup> [...] *ut perfecta sunt castra, inreperere paulatim militaris animos adeundo, appellando; simul centuriones ac tribunos ipse deligere* (IV 2).

<sup>7</sup> *Lex Iulia*, introduced by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. and based on several earlier laws against sedition and treason, has been renewed by Tiberius in 15 A.D. While previously the law punished the crimes against the Roman state, since Tiberius's reign it encompassed all crimes perpetrated against the head of the state, i.e. the emperor, and his family. The punishment ascribed by the law became more severe: in the original *lex Iulia* it was only *interdictio aquae et ignis*, i.e. exile; while under Tiberius it became the confiscation of the convict's fortune and death.

<sup>8</sup> [...] *ut quibus initiis, quanta Tiberii arte gravissimum exitium inrepererit, dein repressum sit, postremo arserit cunctaque corripuerit, noscatur* (I 73).

<sup>9</sup> *Igitur Seianus maturandum ratus deligit venenum quo paulatim inrepente fortuitus morbus adsimularetur. id Druso datum per Lygdum spadonem, ut octo post annos cognitum est* (IV 8).

and Julius Caesar's law (the beginning of the tragedy), and when his nemesis Sejanus, in the guise of a friend, ascends to power and kills his son, the only person whose existence still kept the emperor in check (IV 7; the climax of the tragedy, placed exactly in the middle of Tiberian hexad, i.e. the first six books of the *Annals*).

The metaphor of a serpent gains further depth and significance when it is compared with a similar metaphor used by Vergil. In Book II of the *Aeneid* there is a large passage devoted to Laocoön and his sons who die devoured by sea-serpents (199-233), after Laocoön tried to convince the Trojans not to accept the gift of the horse and to warn them against the insidious words of Sinon (*talibus insidiis periurique arte*; 195): this passage foreshadows the doom of Troy and is the turning point of the plot. Though the serpent is used here as a symbol and portent, it appears in metaphorical sense frequently in the first books of *Aeneid*. According to Bernard Knox (1950: 397), the serpent has three metaphorical senses in the Vergilian epic, concealment, violence (destruction) and rebirth. Knox analyses the second book of *Aeneid*, claiming that the underlying "obsessive" metaphor used there by Vergil is that of a serpent: Sinon (a telling name, reminiscent of *sinus*, *sinuare*, i.e. the word denoting snake movement), Helen (567-574) and the wooden horse (235-236) are all likened to a snake as a metaphor of concealment; Pyrrhus (471-475 and the following references, see Knox 1950: 393), the serpents from Tenedos (in Laocoön passage) and finally Aeneas (who awakes maddened from his dream and, using subterfuge, participates in the battle, see especially 370-381) all symbolise violence; the portent which convinces Anchises to leave Troy, a flame appearing over the head of Iulus, "which Virgil's allusive language presents as the final manifestation of the serpent metaphor, is a portent of Troy's rebirth"<sup>10</sup> (Knox 1950: 398, see verses 682-687).

The Tacitean use of *inreperere* to denote deceit and violence mirrors the usage of verbs denoting snake movements in Vergil: Tiberius crawled into his reign through the death of Augustus<sup>11</sup> and Agrippa, his deceit led to

<sup>10</sup> Tacitus applies the metaphor of the flame to Tiberius as well, though it is used mainly to denote anger and violent emotion and is not combined with the metaphor of the serpent.

<sup>11</sup> Tacitus implies that Livia and possibly Tiberius were suspected to have murdered Augustus (I 5).

the wide-scale persecutions of his political enemies, which allowed him to control them; Sejanus achieved his power and his control over Tiberius due to deceitful words and the murder of Drusus. The sense of rebirth does not seem to be present in Tacitus,<sup>12</sup> unless by rebirth one understands the passing down of power, from a bad individual to worse (Augustus to Tiberius, Tiberius to Sejanus), in a vicious circle. The old republic, of which Tacitus was a staunch defender, died giving birth to the empire; yet the new Troy shown on the pages of *Annals* is much more bleak than the promise contained in Vergil's *Aeneid*.

It is important to note that Vergil does not use *inreperere* to build the snake-metaphor in the *Aeneid*; instead, he uses verbs such as *serpere*, *sinuare*, *lambere*, *labi*, *volvare*, *implicare*. The last two are used by Tacitus in reference to Tiberius and will be discussed below. *Inreperere* (or *reperere*) itself rarely appears in a non-metaphorical usage, however it is sometimes employed to denote snake movement, e.g. in Hyginus 136 (*draco repente*) and Suetonius *Aug.* 94 (*draconem repente irrepsisse ad eam pauloque post egressum*, about the conception of emperor Augustus). Whether Tacitus had in mind the Laocoön description when building the metaphors relating to Tiberius is doubtful, especially as he does not employ exactly the same word (*inreperere*) as Vergil (*serpere*, *sinuare*). However, there seem to be some common features between the two metaphorical images of snakes, such as the tendency to secrecy and concealment (see the “clothing” metaphor described below), violence (see *rumpere* and *laniare*) and connotation with fire (*exarsere* used to denote Tiberius's anger, compare with *ardentis oculos* of the serpents in *Aeneid* 4.210). I believe that the majority of Tacitean metaphors relating to Tiberius have something in common with his image as a serpent, hiding from the world in darkness and solitude, then attacking unsuspecting victims. However, it is much more probable that Tacitus uses here a well-established picture of how a snake is supposed to act rather than referring directly to the specific

<sup>12</sup> Suetonius, however, refers to snake imagery when talking about the first emperors, their parentage or rearing: the father of Augustus is rumoured to be a serpent (*Aug.* 94); Tiberius (himself having a pet snake, *Tib.* 72) is said to be rearing a viper, *natrixem*, meaning young Caligula (*Calig.* 11). It seems the members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty have been, at least to some extent, associated with serpents (see also Nero 6, where Nero's life is reportedly saved by a snake). In a literal sense, then, the “rebirth” theme is present in Suetonius: one “snake” emperor is succeeded by another one.

employment of the snake metaphor in the second book of the *Aeneid*. Vergil merely provides a comprehensive example of all the possible meanings and connotations which can be associated with serpent metaphor in the Augustan and early imperial era.

The first chapters of Book I introduce another important metaphor. Tiberius is said to behave confidently as an established ruler, yet in the senate he appears to delay his decisions and be uncertain (*cunctabundus*) in order to commit to his memory the senators' words and face expressions, twisting them in his mind as proofs of sedition (crime against *maiestas*): *postea cognitum est ad introspectiendas etiam procerum voluntates inductam dubitationem: nam verba vultus in crimen detorquens recondebat* (I 7). He is pulling on *dubitatio*, uncertainty, as people pull on boots (*inducere* means "to pull on a tightly fitting clothing, something which covers the body directly, usually boots"); he puts on a new skin.<sup>13</sup> This is the first of many verbs used by Tacitus to describe clothing as concealment of inner thoughts and intentions.<sup>14</sup> In I 24 Tiberius is said to cover even the most unpleasant situations with the deepest secrecy: *abstrusum et tristissima quaeque maxime occultantem Tiberium*. The verb *abstrudere* in passive voice means "to be covered, hidden from sight" (by any

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the only other place in the *Annals* when the verb is used in this sense is IV 70: *vincla et laqueus inducantur* ("they put on fetters and noose"). Perhaps Tiberius is fettered by his deceit and secrets (which accompany his reign and rise to power) as much as senators are fettered by his decrees?

<sup>14</sup> Francesca Santoro L'Hoir believes that all references to dissimulation and pretence in Tacitus are meant to heighten the dramatic effect of a particular moment. According to her, Tacitus uses lexical clusters which parallel Aristotelian poetics of tragedy: δέσις – binding, λύσις – loosing, unravelling, περιπέτεια – reversal and change, ἀναγνώρισις – recognition (knowledge and ignorance) and finally ὄψις – appearance, all lexical items connoting spectacle and pretence, see Santoro L'Hoir 2006: 72. She perceives the clusters of words such as adjectives *occultus*, *secretus*, *obscurus* versus *visus*, *clarus*, *manifestus*, *apertus*, nouns *nox*, *tenebra* versus *lux*, *dies*, *claritudo* and even verbs like *obtegere* versus *videre*, *spectare*, *ostendere* as contributions to creating dramatic effect: "as contradictory imagery of night and light portrays 'moral confusion' in tragedy, so it operates similarly in the *Annales*" (Santoro L'Hoir 2006: 98). While this thesis is intriguing and adds further depth to what other scholars have said on the dramatic effect of contrasting light and darkness (e.g. Mellor 2010: 75, on the colours and light in description of Germanicus and mutiny with German legions in Book 1 of the *Annals*), it does not take into account how the imagery of darkness corresponds with descriptions of particular characters. For instance, Tiberius is described solely in terms of darkness (for examples, see below).

physical obstacle, from clothing to buildings); it is used by Tacitus only in three other places in the *Annals*, two of which refer to covering feelings of pain or fear (*Augustus ereptis nepotibus abstruserint tristitiam*, III 6; *metu abstruso*, of Tigranes, XV 5).<sup>15</sup> In each of these instances, the feelings are experienced and hidden by people of power, which might be a deliberate choice of words on Tacitus's part: those who reign over others are never free to express their emotions.

The clothing metaphor can be seen most easily in verbs *exuere* ("to take clothes off") and *induere* ("to put clothes on"); while *exuere*<sup>16</sup> is used mostly to denote the disposition of innate (usually positive) features (e.g. I 75: *erogandae per honesta pecuniae cupiens, quam virtutem diu retinuit, cum ceteras exuere*, "the readiness to spend money is a virtue retained by the emperor, when he denuded himself of every other"),<sup>17</sup> *induere* describes the assumption of a temporary trait or role (e.g. I 7: *postea cognitum est ad introspectiendas etiam procerum voluntates inductam dubitationem*, "it was discovered later that he clothed himself in uncertainty in order to gain insight into the senators' intentions"; VI 20: *qualem diem Tiberius induisset, pari habitu, haud multum distantibus verbis*, "whatever mood Tiberius put on a given day, his words were not much dissimilar from it"). The metaphors are frequently exploited by Tacitus to describe hypocrisy and false pretences and are not limited to his description of Tiberius. Bessie Walker noted that Tacitus generally employs the same metaphors for people who are of a similar character, though she believes this particular metaphor is used in a broader scope:

The metaphor of clothing and stripping is a constant means of characterizing the hypocrite, and is also used in reference to the pretences forced on honest characters by their oppressors (Walker 1968: 63).

This statement stems largely from the fact that the metaphor is applied to "positive" heroes of the *Annals*, Germanicus and his wife Agrippina the Elder, which seems incongruent to Walker. Francesca Santoro L'Hoir goes even further in her interpretation, claiming that the

<sup>15</sup> In *Ann.* IV 69 the verb is used literally.

<sup>16</sup> *Exuere* is also used to describe the shedding of a snakeskin (a shed snakeskin is called *exuviae*): this might be another instance of snake metaphor.

<sup>17</sup> Positive features: *Ann.* III 26; innate character trait: *Ann.* II 72.

metaphor of clothing has a particular meaning when applied to Agrippina in *Ann.* I 69:

Agrippina's actions are conveyed in terms of the confusion and transgression of the boundaries of gender, which Tacitus' metaphor of clothing highlights. In describing her as "putting on" her husband's duties, Tacitus dresses her metaphorically in the clothing of the legitimate *dux*, a responsibility she shoulders in quelling the mutiny and in congratulating the returning legions (Santoro L'Hoir 2006: 137).

Though this interpretation is interesting, I believe the metaphor in all its instances, including Agrippina and Tiberius, is used to express the mask that every person of power needs to assume: it is used as well to describe the actions of Sejanus: VI 8, of Nero: XIII 13, XV 69 and of Piso (when he rebels against Germanicus): III 12.

Another "clothing" metaphor of secrecy can be found in the verb *implicare*: *Tiberioque etiam in rebus quas non occuleret, seu natura sive adsuetudine, suspensa semper et obscura verba: tunc vero nitenti ut sensus suos penitus abderet, in incertum et ambiguum magis implicabantur* (I 11). Tiberius, even if he did not need to be secretive, always spoke in uncertain and obscure words, yet in this case (when the senate asked him to take over the rule of the whole empire after Augustus's death) he strived to hide his thoughts deeply, therefore he entwined them in doubt and ambiguity. *Implicare* means "to entwine, entangle", and is derived from *plicare*, "to roll up, coil, fold", thus it can refer to a piece of cloth, as well as rope.<sup>18</sup> Whenever the verb appears in Tacitus, it is used to describe being caught in a trap:<sup>19</sup> here the people caught by a master web-weaver (or perhaps an insidious snake) are members of the senate.

Clothing is not the only metaphor for shielding inner thoughts, emotions and intentions. Tiberius is described by Tacitus as a man who

<sup>18</sup> It may also refer to the coils of a snake, see e.g. the previously discussed Laocoön episode: *serpens amplexus uterque implicat* (4.214-215).

<sup>19</sup> IV 53: *Agrippina pervicax irae et morbo corporis implicata*; XI 8: *implicatur obsidione urbis validae et munimentis obiecti amnis muroque et comaeatibus firmatae*; XII 4: *consiliis eius implicari*.

surrounds himself with walls,<sup>20</sup> as if he was a besieged city. The most striking example of this metaphor can be found in *Ann.* III 15: *Tiberium sine miseratione, sine ira, obstinatum clausumque vidit, ne quo adfectu perrumperetur*. Tiberius is said here to be without compassion, without anger, to appear obstinate (or determined) and closed, so that no emotion can break through (*perrumpere* means shatter, crack, smash, i.e. break something solid). The metaphor appears much earlier though, at the beginning of Tiberian drama, where all main metaphors referring to the emperor are introduced: *multaque indicia saevitiae, quamquam premanantur, erumpere* (I 4), “many signs of cruelty, though repressed, were bursting forth”. The metaphor reappears in many subsequent passages, of which the two most striking<sup>21</sup> can be found in Books I and VI. *Ad quod exarsit adeo, ut rupta taciturnitate proclamaret* (I 74): *rumpere* means “to burst, tear asunder, destroy something physical, an obstacle, especially from within.” Here Tiberius bursts his silence to proclaim he will vote openly in the senate to pass verdict on Granius Metellus; his anger, described in the metaphor of the flame, *exarsere*, leads him to destroy the walls around his emotions, to break the silence. In VI 24 the walls are taken down again: *callidum olim et tegendis sceleribus obscurum huc confidentiae venisse ut tamquam dimotis parietibus ostenderet nepotem sub verbera centurionis*; Tiberius, once cunning and apt at keeping his crimes in the dark, now has gained such confidence that, as if he took down the walls, he shows to the world his own grandson Drusus under the whip of a centurion (the walls, *parietes*, have been moved from their place around his actions and emotions, *demovere*).

The violence of the emperor’s emotions is reflected in verb *volvere*, “to roll”, a verb which may refer both to the movement of turbulent water or flames and to the movement of a serpent. The brewing storm of

<sup>20</sup> The metaphor of hiding and shielding is present as well in verb *condidere*, e.g. *Ann.* II 28: *non vultu alienatus, non verbis commotior (adeo iram condiderat)*. *Condidere* means literally “to put something in, to store something; also to hide in the earth, hide behind a veil, build walls around something (e.g. a city)”.

<sup>21</sup> See also: I 10, where Augustus manages to see through the walls around Tiberius (*introspererit*); III 15: *Tiberium sine miseratione, sine ira, obstinatum clausumque vidit, ne quo adfectu perrumperetur*: Tiberius is closed, *clausum*; IV 71: *eo aegrius accepit recludi quae premeret*: he took it badly that people wanted to open the doors (*recludere*) to that which he kept hidden.

anger against Piso is said to be “revolving” in Tiberius’ heart: *quae in praesens Tiberius civiliter habuit: sed in animo revolvente iras, etiam si impetus offensionis languerat, memoria valebat* (IV 21). The intense desire for power changes his entire character: *cum Tiberius post tantam rerum experientiam vi dominationis convulsus et mutatus sit* (VI 48).

Finally, there is a metaphor widely exploited since ancient times until the current day: violent emotion described in terms of fire. Tiberius emotions erupt in flames, *exardescere*, whether it is anger, as in I 74 (*ad quod exarsit*) and VI 25 (*Tiberius foedissimis criminationibus exarsit*), or desire, as in VI 1 (*scelerum et libidinum quibus adeo indomitis exarserat ut more regio pubem ingenuam stupris pollueret*).

The key to linking all those metaphors can be found, I believe, in VI 6:

*Insigne visum est earum Caesaris litterarum initium; nam his verbis exorsus est: ‘quid scribam vobis, patres conscripti, aut quo modo scribam aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, di me deaeque peius perdant quam perire me cotidie sentio, si scio.’ adeo facinora atque flagitia sua ipsi quoque in supplicium verterant. neque frustra praestantissimus sapientiae firmare solitus est, si recludantur tyrannorum mentes, posse aspici laniatus et ictus, quando ut corpora verberibus, ita saevitia, libidine, malis consultis animus dilaceretur. quippe Tiberium non fortuna, non solitudines protegebant quin tormenta pectoris suasque ipse poenas fateretur.*

Tiberius sends a letter to the senate regarding Cotta Messalinus, the opening words of which Tacitus deems characteristic of the emperor: “What should I write to you, fathers, or how should I write, or what should I not write at all at the moment? If I know, let the gods and goddesses make me perish in a worse manner than what I feel as I perish every day.” This is the extent to which his crimes and heinous passions turned into punishment for himself. The wisest of men (Socrates, according to Plato in *Gorgias* 524E) used to say that if the doors to the hearts of tyrants were opened, one would be able to see them mangled (*laniare*, “tear to pieces, mangle, lacerate in a savage way”) and wounded; as a body is torn by a whip, so a soul is torn by cruelty, lewdness and evil intentions. Why, even high office and solitude did not protect Tiberius enough from confessing to the torment of his heart and his punishment.

Every tyrant surrounds himself with walls and shrouds himself in secrecy, every tyrant suffers from being torn asunder by his misdeeds, by fear,<sup>22</sup> by anger. And Tiberius is not any different. People wound his suspicious heart throughout the *Annals*: in I 13 (*Q. Haterius et MamerCUS Scaurus suspicacem animum perstrinxere*), III 10 (*quaque ipse fama distraheretur*), IV 42 (*audivit Tiberius probra quis per occultum lacerabatur*). His heart is a treasury, a fortress, which people try to breach (II 38, *eandem vim in me transmittere ac velut perfringere aerarium, quod si ambitione exhauserimus, per scelera supplendum erit*).

Tiberius, corrupted by the absolute power of *primus inter pares*, though he denounces the title of *dominus*, behaves like one. Driven by fear and revenge, guided by his vices, *invidia* (envy), *ira* (wrath), *implicatio* (cunningness, deceit), *dissimulatio* (hypocrisy), which are veiled and hidden behind walls, he is doomed to a fate of every tyrant. The evolution of Tiberius's character and his eventual tragic death are predetermined: power corrupts, therefore gaining power creates a tragic flaw in the emperor. Tiberius, despite his maturity, allows domination to twist and change him (VI 48, *post tantam rerum experientiam vi dominationis convulsus et mutatus sit*). The predetermined fall of Tiberius is reflected in the "megametaphors" used to describe him: the fire of his emotions, the secrecy and concealment he employs (serpent and clothing metaphor), the walls he builds around his wounded heart, which finally crumble before his very end (VI 51). Tiberius is like Troy, doomed to fall. It is not, perhaps, entirely inconceivable that Tacitus chose his metaphorical themes with Vergil's depiction of the destruction of Troy in his mind: he borrows the serpent metaphor present in the *Aeneid* (though the vocabulary references to this particular Vergilian passage are scant) and converts the elements of Troy's fall (walls being brought down, doors to a fortress opened) into metaphorical themes. Yet the metaphor is not a new one, as shown by the quote from Plato in VI 6.

Tacitus in the epitaph of Tiberius says the emperor's character has had three eras (VI 51): excellent while he was a private man, he became deceitful after he gained power: secretive and cunning in pretending

<sup>22</sup> Fear is constantly accompanying Tiberius, especially during the first part of his tragedy, e.g. I 6, I 7, II 40, III 4. In the end, he denudes himself of fear: VI 51.

to be virtuous while Germanicus and Drusus lived, bordering between good and evil during his mother's lifetime, openly cruel, yet secretly lascivious when adoring or being afraid of Sejanus; finally, when all who were close to him departed, denuded of fear and shame, he no longer hid his crimes and dissipation. Power exacerbated his natural proclivity for secrecy and made him a cruel, deceitful and lonely man. Despite the walls with which he surrounded himself, his heart was bleeding both from external attacks and internal pangs of conscience. When the walls have crumbled, he was doomed to fall as well, only to be replaced by Caligula, more ruthless, deceitful and cruel than himself.

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