POPULAR IN THE PROVINCES?
À PROPOS OF TAC. ANN. 1.2.2*

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'Besides, the new order was popular in the provinces'. This is what Tacitus says, in Michael Grant's Penguin translation, about the change from Republic to Empire at the beginning of his Annals. Then he goes on to give the reasons: 'There, government by Senate and People was looked upon sceptically as a matter of sparring dignitaries and extortionate officials. The legal system had provided no remedy against these, since it was wholly incapacitated by violence, favouritism, and — most of all — bribery'.

Tacitus' grand Latin is grandly translated. In plain words, not only did taxation of the provinces perform its acknowledged function of paying for their defence and of financing further conquests, but the provinces had suffered from the dynastic struggles between powerful individuals such as Caesar and Pompey, the Triumvirs and the Liberators, Octavian and Antonius — to mention only those of the last twenty years of the Republic —, while officials had been making a good thing of it: senatorial governors and their subordinates had been taking a cut. If they were brought to book under whatever law against extortion was in force at the time of their offences there was no redress because juries and prosecutors could be bullied and intimidated, the defendant could enter into mutually beneficial intrigues with them, or they could simply be bribed. All this is painfully familiar and needs no new documentation. It is only surprising that Tacitus makes no mention of equestrian tax contractors, the publicani and their servants, who were no less notorious. However, the point that Tacitus is making concerns provincial dissatisfaction with senatorial government and with the representatives of the senate who carried it out on the spot. Except in the province of Asia, where Caesar cut out the publicani, there seems to have been no drastic change in methods of collecting taxes from Republic to Empire, at least in public provinces under proconsuls.

Tacitus is making an enormous claim in telling us what 'the provinces' felt, and it needs examination. There is another passage where he writes of them in the same sweeping way: in A.D. 69 the provinces of Greece and Asia are 'terrified' by news of an impostor on the loose pretending to
be Nero. But this impostor had a lot of support from the lower orders, have-nots. The prospect of social unrest encouraged by him, at a time when the government of Rome itself was in dispute between Otho and Vitellius, would certainly have caused alarm to the propertied classes in those provinces, and it is surely to them that Tacitus is referring when he writes of the two provinces as a whole: as governor of Asia himself in about 112–3 he is likely to have enjoyed close social relations with leading families in the province.³

It is probable then that what Tacitus is saying about the provinces welcoming the change from Republic to Empire also applies in particular, if not exclusively, to the upper classes there: it was the men who came into contact with Roman officials, whose place in society and local power were guaranteed by Rome, whose money was the main source of Roman taxes, and whose property would be liable to confiscation in civil war, who were pleased. No direct efforts were made to improve the lot of the lower classes, the overwhelming majority of the (perhaps 54 m.) inhabitants of Italy and all the provinces.⁴

Two characteristic episodes, widely separated in time and place, show members of the lower classes oppressed by men in the imperial service but below the rank of governor. Both concern the ‘requisitioning’ of donkeys, and that is not entirely a coincidence: donkeys were the main form of transport that the less well-off had for themselves and their market-produce. The first episode is known from a papyrus that records an edict issued by the prince Germanicus when he was in Egypt in A.D. 19. It has come to his attention that members of his staff have been requisitioning donkeys from people who are driving them through Alexandria. He issues a stern warning against it. Complaints are to be addressed to his secretary. That looks promising, as long as the peasants are not intimidated by the offenders and can get hold of the secretary. Gross injustices against the poor and helpless are not approved; just difficult to prevent because only in exceptional circumstances is anyone likely to take notice of what is going on. Germanicus is a temporary fly in the oppressors’ ointment, and, however unwittingly, he has intensified regular oppression by introducing a retinue of his own, one likely to be particularly self-important and arrogant. In Apuleius’ Golden Ass, written in the mid-second century A.D., the hero, who has been turned into a donkey, is travelling through Greece. A Roman soldier comes and beats up his current owner, a gardener, and tries to ‘requisition’ the donkey. He is beaten up in his turn by the owner’s friends, but the soldier comes back with reinforcements.⁶

Such low grade oppression of people who were in a poor position to complain went on, and worsened as the needs of the government became more pressing in the third century A.D., especially in financing the armies, which were in constant use and constantly on the move. Economic pressure
on all ranks intensified and at the bottom of the heap, among the suppliers of primary goods, it was worst of all. Long inscriptions record complaints sent to the Emperor. From Scaptopara in Thrace comes a familiar story of the imperial highways, dated to 238, of oppression by officials, unauthorized billeting against an imperial edict, and incursions into plots of land, looting and kidnapping. A renewed appeal to the Emperor was referred back to the provincial governor with instructions that the original edict should be respected. The natives put up the inscription to deter further offenders; whether it worked is another matter. 6

But even for people higher up the social scale the idea that Roman ‘provincial administration’ (to give it its older and grander name) improved under the Principate met a strong challenge more than thirty years ago from P.A. Brunt, and he has reprinted the paper in Roman Imperial Themes, with minor changes. 7

The main points of that paper are that, while the old abuses went on much as before, new ones developed in addition, and efforts to check them were useless. Further, any imperial improvements were based on Republican legislation and the Republican outlook. ‘The government of senate and people was no less honourable in its intentions than that of the Empire’; and in conclusion: ‘We may grant that the Principate made some improvements in the standard of administration . . . But there was also deterioration. Rome tried to govern more and more, and slowly extinguished what remnants of liberty were left to her subjects.’ There certainly were cases of repetundae under the Empire, some of them particularly scandalous. One involved the consul of A.D. 5, an aristocrat impressively named L. Valerius Messalla Voilesus. As governor of Asia about five years later, he became notorious for an atrocity: allegedly he had 300 men executed in one day, and stalked about among the bodies muttering ‘Oh, what a royal deed!’ When he arrived back in Rome he was put on trial in the senate for extortion aggravated by violence (vis), found guilty, and sent into exile. 8

Voilesus’ punishment was little consolation for the relatives of the dead, but it might have been seen as a deterrent: if so, it was apparently a failure. Ten years later a senator called Gaius Silanus, also a former governor of Asia, was likewise put on trial in the House for extortion aggravated by violence, and his case was evidently considered in the same particularly serious class as Voilesus’. To encourage the senate to do its duty — we are to infer that it would have failed in it otherwise — Tiberius produced the decree that had been passed against Voilesus and had it read out. Silanus too was sent into exile, relegated to the island of Cythnus with interdiction from fire and water; in other words he suffered the severe penalty later to be known as deportation. 9

Cases of extortion went on into the second century A.D.; they were documented down to Trajan by P.A. Brunt. Most of the cases were less
sensational than those of Volesus and Silanus. But one of the worst came eighty years after the Volesus trial: that of Marius Priscus, ex-governor of Africa, in 99–100. It is worth noting that Tacitus was involved alongside Pliny in prosecuting Priscus; he knew the worst.\(^\text{10}\)

Beyond the extortion and brutality familiar from the Republic, P.A. Brunt catalogued three new abuses. One was the power and influence that the Emperor had in appointing men. Senatorial *legati Augusti pro praetore* and equestrian prefects and procurators were directly appointed by him, the former only ratified by the senate; even proconsuls, who won their place by putting their names forward when they were simply the most senior ex-consul (or ex-praetor) on the roster and drew lots for the two (for ex-praetors half a dozen) available positions, the emperor may be assumed to have approved, or they would never have reached praetorship or consulship in the first place. That made all these men very formidable to attack: it amounted to a criticism of the Emperor, either for misjudging his man, or, worse, for seeming to collude in his misbehaviour.\(^\text{11}\)

Second, some of the Emperor’s men were allowed to hold office for years. Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judaea, for whom nobody has a good word, neither Christian nor Jew, had been in office for ten years before he was removed in 36 by a governor of Syria with superior *imperium*. And it was impermissible to bring charges against a governor while he was in office. Even proconsuls were sometimes prorogued and stayed in place for more than one year, once or twice under Tiberius up to six years. That emperor was notorious for keeping men in post. The explanation imputed to him is that he thought of governors as flies who would eventually become gorged and stop sucking the blood of their victims; Tacitus suggests that he was afraid of appointing men of more than average ability, or that he found it difficult to take decisions. More probably he met a shortage of satisfactory candidates — he certainly complained of that — and kept them on when he had them. This would be self-defeating, a deterrent to others who did not want to spend winters in the snows and fogs of the Rhine and North Sea instead of enjoying the social and intellectual pleasures of Rome. And in any case Pontius Pilate was clearly not a good choice.\(^\text{12}\)

There was another development that P.A. Brunt thinks did as much harm as good: again Tacitus gives us a fine example of it. In A.D. 62 the senate learned that a leading man on the island of Crete, Claudius Timarchus, boasted that it depended on him whether or not votes of thanks were given to governors when they left office. That put governors into the power of the provincial aristocracy, or of a section of it. The votes of thanks were given by councils on which the cities of the province were represented. Cliques could dominate the councils, and then the governor was in their hands. This means that one of the things that scholars cited as a factor for improvement actually contributed to the mischief, putting undue power in the hands
of oppressive provincial potentates. Minor attempts at improvement had already been made: in A.D. 11 votes of thanks to governors were forbidden within six months of their leaving their provinces; and in the wake of the Timarchus scandal of 62 such votes were banned altogether — an easy rule to evade if resolutions were worded carefully enough, and one that probably did not apply to individual cities, as Brunt argues.¹³

A more important move had been made in 4 B.C. against direct misgovernment by governors, both proconsuls and legates. The fifth Cyrene Edict embodies a senatorial decree that introduced a new, shorter procedure for attacking a delinquent governor, provided the provincials were trying only to recover their money and were not accusing him of brutality: such cases were to be tried by a five-man committee of the senate, there was a limit on the number of witnesses who could be sub poena’d, and the whole procedure had to be completed and the result reported to the full senate within one month. Augustus made it clear in the decree that he himself was behind the new procedure and he says that it was designed expressly to help the provincials get justice, and allow elderly and hard-up witnesses to escape being sub-poena’d; and he advertises the care (ppovτες, cura) that he and the senate felt for their subjects. But a critic would have little difficulty in faulting the scheme. First, the cases were taken by five senators, who would be biased in favour of their peers, as they always had been, unless they had a particular grudge against the individual concerned; second, the fewer the prosecution witnesses, the less good the chances of securing a conviction actually were. And there was a temptation, for the sake of a speedy result, not to go for the full-scale longer process even when brutality was involved; so the accused would get away with it. In the decree it is for the provincials to decide which process to use, but by the time of Pliny’s cases, a hundred years later, the defendant seems to be able to exercise some influence on the choice and he is naturally trying to get his case heard by the shorter process: if the senate agrees, it is virtually handing down a verdict of not guilty on any possible charges of vis.¹⁴

P.A. Brunt’s cogent, compelling, and influential paper will always prevent scholars from taking the rose-tinted view of developed Roman imperialism in occupation that was acceptable in late Victorian times and even until after the Second World War, when paternalistic imperialism was still considered respectable in European countries. We have already seen that metropolitan Roman aristocrats did not change their attitude to provincials, that they were there to be used. Even those with the best intentions and a strong reason for keeping provincials contented had something of that attitude: the Emperor Tiberius thought of them as domestic animals, as opposed to the wild beasts of the regions outside the Empire, when he (allegedly) told a governor that he wanted his subjects shorn and not flayed.¹⁵
Roman aristocrats outside the imperial house, climbing the ladder of the official career under Augustus, still had temptations to resist similar to those of Republican officials. They certainly still had to face inordinate expense getting to the top of the political ladder and some may still have expected to repay themselves out of what they made in their provinces. Aristotle had pointed out that it was one of the failings of timocracy, where men virtually paid for office, that they expected afterwards to reimburse themselves for their expenses; he obviously regarded this as a universal rule, and he may have been right. Perhaps it was knowledge of the candidate's financial circumstances that made Tiberius prevent C. Sulpicius Galba (cos. 22) from drawing lots for Asia and Africa in 36: he wrote him a letter and told him not to stand. Galba killed himself whether because of the disgrace alone or also because the ban had definitively ruined him financially. Thirteen years previously Tiberius had refused to exercise control over the lot on the grounds that punishment was intended to follow the crime not to anticipate it, and that it was impossible to tell how a man might turn out in office. It is tempting but facile to put this inconsistency down to Tiberius' increasing carelessness in handling his peers: if on Capri the old Emperor was less well-informed than he confidently supposed, in 22 he cannot have missed the fact that the proposal for him to vet candidates for proconsulships was part of a mischievous game designed to remove some of them from the path of the politician who put it forward, Cn. Cornelius Dolabella.16

In A.D. 14 popular election effectively came to an end, to the joy of senators, who were no longer forced to tip the electors for their votes, but that was not the only form of expenses connected with election and the holding of office: a man's peers (the new electoral college) still had to be dined, games still had to be given. One praetor, A. Fabricius, went on strike under Nero and refused to train horses for his games because the charioteers' fees were too high. He began to train dogs instead, until the Emperor was ashamed into making up the difference himself.17

The question then is not whether Rome's running of her provinces reached some impeccable level under the Principate but whether there was any improvement greater than P.A. Brunt argued; and it seems possible that there was, first because Tacitus seems to claim it, second because of two factors: the enhanced will to control governors, highlighted by Brunt as a decisive factor; and the arrival on the senatorial (and equestrian) scene of new men whose careers were in the hands of the emperor.

The passage of Tacitus relating to the provinces quoted at the beginning of this paper is significant in itself. It raises the question of his purpose in including it, if provincials were no better off under the Principate than they had been before. Irony, it might be suggested; but this is no place for it and there is no sign of it here: Tacitus is giving a straightforward
account of the state of affairs in A.D. 14. He believed that at least the men he thought important in the provinces welcomed the change, and he believed that they were right.

Nor is Tacitus likely to be altogether mistaken. We have already seen him prosecuting a serious case; and as governor of Asia he will have met members of the cultivated upper class there and got to know how they felt. We have a conflict to resolve between the state of affairs implied by the opening of the *Annals*, and the weighty evidence arrayed against the claim that there was a distinct improvement under the Empire. It is not unreasonable to ask if there is further evidence in favour of the eyewitness.

Although temptations remained for senators, they did diminish with the end of elections in 14. And it was not only elections that came to an end, but, to a large extent and much more gradually, the nobility and patriciate of the Republic, and their aspirations as well. Shortage of money, and the savage dynastic politics of the Principate, virtually finished them off. If they were too close to the throne like the Iunii Silani, they were liable to be attacked for political reasons. The last Silanus was killed by Nero on his way to exile in A.D. 65: one of them had married a granddaughter of Augustus and they had the imperial blood. Wealth alone, however, is alleged as motive enough for some members of the imperial dynasty. Lesser *gentes* had lost property in the earlier civil wars and were unable to afford politics at all; others limited their families dangerously to make sure that there was enough to pay for one member in a generation to go into politics. The section of society that regarded it as its natural prerogative to govern Rome's Empire and make a good thing of it was gradually eliminated.

The names of the two men who behaved particularly outrageously in the provinces in the reigns of the first two Emperors, Valerius Messalla Volesus and Iunius Silanus, were both indicators of high nobility, patrician and (originally at any rate) plebeian. That is probably not a coincidence: these were the men who thought that royal deeds were theirs to perform.18

These aristocrats were replaced by new families from all over Italy under Augustus and Tiberius, men like the later Emperor Vespasian and his brother Sabinus, Sabines indeed, from Reate in central Italy north of Rome; and from further north, from Cisalpine Gaul, just below the Alps, men like the younger Pliny (suff. 100); and from beyond the Alps, in southern Gaul, which was certainly where Tacitus' father-in-law Agricola (suff. 76 or 77) came from and probably Tacitus himself (suff. 97), Spain, the home of Seneca (suff. 56), and even further afield. From Nero and Vespasian onward there was an increasing proportion of men from eastern provinces let in, especially from the province of Asia, as well as the beginning of a strong African representation. Roman colonies were often favoured, and in Narbonensis the local dynasts, descendants of tribal chieftains, whose wealth — landholdings, that is, — was greater than anything a colonial family
could easily develop from its original allotment. With the change came a significant change in fashion — even in eating habits: the extravagance that had been encouraged by open competition gave way — though only gradually and not necessarily steadily — to a provincial, frugal style.¹⁹

These men were not all intellectual or moral giants: Marius Priscus who despoiled Africa came from Baetica, his counterpart Caecilius Classicus vice versa, as Pliny pointed out. The new men listed above — and we must include Tacitus himself — are well known; except Vespasian and Agricola (a frustrated philosopher whose mother wanted him to get on and discouraged excessive attention to the study, we are told), they were writers — elite Roman society came in the second century, with Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius at its head, to be dominated by literary men —, and the younger Pliny and Cornelius Fronto present themselves as patterns of virtue. That imposed obligations, as it had imposed them on Cicero, who had spoken in public against Verres and written to his brother Quintus on provincial government long before he went to Cilicia, and it made lapses conspicuous, hence more to be avoided. Hypocrisy admittedly is a common enough failing: the philosopher Seneca (from Corduba in Spain) loaned forty million sesterces to Britons and his hasty recall of the money was put forward as one of the prime causes of the revolt of Boudicca in 60. He is a striking parallel to Cicero’s friend the philosopher Brutus who drove Salaminian councillors to their deaths by hounding them for the money owed him. Neither however was acting in an official capacity. Vespasian proved an excellent Emperor, better than Tacitus might have expected. One of the things that was held against him was his running of the province of Africa in the early sixties; Tacitus claims that it gave him a bad reputation; another source, Suetonius, is a little kinder: he did well there but ended up a laughing stock because he was pelted with turnips in the market place at Hadrumentum (Sousse).²⁰

‘New men’ were particularly subject to Aristotle’s rule about timocracies, that when offices are obtained by money the holders expect to get their investment back: they would have to spend more money to make sure that they won the favour of their peers and got on. But one of the main merits of new men for the Romans (for some, the only merit they had) had always been that they already had money: Tacitus makes Claudius advocate the admission of Gauls to the senate partly on just those grounds: that they should contribute their cash; and when Tacitus brings on the new men from the east who were admitted during Vespasian’s bid for power in 69 he says that the newcomers were men of outstanding calibre on the whole, though some had more money than merit. And Trajan made his new admissions invest one third of their spare cash in Italian land, which immediately sent the prices up and delighted Italian landowners. At any rate they could afford what they were paying for, which was more than some of the older
The main point about these new men is that, like the paradigmatic novus homo Sulpicius Quirinius whose sour obituary is delivered by Tacitus under the year A.D. 21 (he reached the consulship of 12 B.C. with a combination of 'energetic generalship and zealous acts of loyalty'), they depended for advancement not only on money but on the favour of the Emperor, and they knew it. To get on they would have to behave satisfactorily. They were aware of their main supporter looking over their shoulder. Of course this effect would diminish as their sons entered the senate and could be more confident of advancement without the particular favour of an emperor, but the rate of turnover was quite high: 'By and large,' write K. Hopkins and G. Burton, 'senators' sons did not follow in their fathers' footsteps'. Two questions follow: first, did the Emperor care how they treated provincials? And second, how far could he know what they were doing?

The answer to the first question is, in the main, surely 'yes'. We have seen two emperors professing their care for the provinces, Augustus and Tiberius. Another, Claudius, was cited by his 'friend' Paulus Fabius Persicus, proconsul of Asia, as being a devotee of justice, giving each man his due, a principle that Persicus explicitly claims to follow on Claudius' example. (We are still with the upper class: if the ideal of imperial justice was to give each man his due, it would freely be admitted that some men were not owed much.) And Trajan actually made performance in provinces a criterion for advancement: Pliny remarks in the Panegyric on a quaestor who has performed well in a province; the Emperor uses this in the senate as an argument for his further advancement. Emperors had good reasons for taking care: one was to avoid discontent and actual revolt. Tiberius, we are told by Tacitus, was very careful to avoid imposing new taxes — so as to preserve tranquillity in the Empire. Apart from unrest, emperors could find themselves besieged by the vocal diplomats from the Greek-speaking provinces who were clearly well known to Tacitus. (He comments unfavourably on their attacks on the unskilled speaker C. Silanus.) When Domitian at the beginning of the nineties issued an edict ordering the cutting down of half the vines in the provinces — an absurd demand, when it could not be policed —, a vine-growing district of Asia sent him an embassy led by the sophist Scopelian, a speaker so eloquent that, we are told, Domitian actually ended by encouraging the growers to plant more. Exaggerated, but the orator must actually have had some effect or at least have been believed to be able to persuade Domitian. These were men of substance from the very class in the province of Asia that was now producing senators, they had to be heard, and listening to them was an integral part of cultural life. In particular, those accounted as part of the 'Second Sophistic' passed from city to governor as to emperor and were equally at ease with all. The provinces were beginning to count more in the Roman
scheme of things. There was a sound economic reason for this: there were to be few more conquests self-sustainable from the rich pickings they provided. After the conquest of Dacia that of Parthia had to be given up, and in costly Britain the move to the Antonine Wall was only temporary. The Empire depended on steady income from provinces at peace, the 'sheep' of Tiberius' metaphor.23

Admittedly, financial needs sometimes overrode imperial prudence. Augustus' procurator in Gaul, Licinus, was an embarrassment to him, though one might well be sceptical of the final twist in the story, how Licinus took Augustus home and showed him all he had gathered — for the state. Nero's excessive demands (due to the cumulative costs of the war and rebellion in Britain, the campaigns against the Parthians, and the restoration of Rome after the fire of 64 as much as to extravagance on his part) are notorious. It is a plausible scenario that it was they that led to the revolt of Vindex in 68. Here too we may have an explanation of the mess that the careful Vespasian made of his government of Africa. It is possible that he was pelted with turnips in the market because that was all there was for sale there, just as in the reign of Tiberius there had once been nothing for sale in the market of Aspendus in Pamphylia except vetch: in particular there was no grain. Drought and locusts are no fault of a governor, but there was also the consuming hunger of the city of Rome three days' sail away across the water, which, if we believe Josephus, Africa played the major part in assuaging by supplying two-thirds of Rome's imported grain to Egypt's one-third. The precise year of Vespasian's governorship is not known for certain, but in 62 there was a shortage of grain in Rome, which as usual worried the authorities. Nero would not want to be pelted, as Claudius had been during the shortage of 51, with a hail of dry crusts. Maybe Vespasian, knowing what Nero's priorities were, commandeered all the grain available, even above what was normally taken as tribute, and sent it off. Vespasian was a new man of noted sycophancy, and such behaviour would fit that picture. Probably rightly, he was more afraid of Nero than of the turnips; but, significantly, the notorious episode damaged his reputation, certainly in Africa itself, but perhaps also elsewhere. It passed into history, but that may be due to Vitellian propaganda of 69.24

A comparable case, but plainer and much more gross, comes to our attention from the reign of Tiberius: that of Pontius Pilate, whose offences are too numerous and too well-known to enumerate. They seem to make sense if they are interpreted as efforts to placate an alarming emperor: Pilate tried to bring standards bearing the Emperor's image into Jerusalem; diverted sacred funds into the construction of an aqueduct; set up aniconic shields on the Antonia ('with the intention of annoying the Jews rather than of honouring Tiberius'); and spent provincial funds (presumably) on the construction of the Tiberieum at Caesarea. It is the episode of Christ's
condemnation that is most illuminating, whatever the historicity of John's version. Even if it has been distorted by anti-Jewish feeling after the event, it still illustrates the point. Pilate was inclined to let Jesus off, and the crowd is represented as doing everything they could to make him execute him. They are shown threatening Pilate: if he lets Jesus off, they say, 'thou art not Caesar's friend'. There could hardly be a better illustration of the way in which not only the personality of an individual Emperor, but even the way that personality was perceived by his officials and his subjects, could affect government in far corners of Empire.  

What then of Domitian, arguably the most intimidating ruler of the first two centuries of the Empire? Suetonius (no favourable judge) gives him the credit of a particularly clear record as far as repetundae was concerned, by contrast with his successors Nerva and Trajan. Scholars are at odds on how to interpret what Suetonius says. In P.A. Brunt's view Suetonius deduced his conclusion from the simple fact that there were fewer cases brought than in the succeeding reigns, and his deduction was unsound: the lower rate might be due either to the better quality of governors or to the reduced expectation of convictions. Some support is given to Suetonius' claim both by Pliny's remark in the Panegyricus that Trajan (by contrast with Domitian, presumably) made men good by not punishing the bad but by rewarding the good, and by the flattering remarks of contemporary writers who praise Domitian's justice and even-handedness. A certain proportion of repetundae cases were really political, part of feuds conducted by Roman politicians in the senate and by provincials at home; the two became intertwined. Domitian will have been aware of that, and was not the man to tolerate games of that kind. It is interesting that the other emperor who has a particularly good reputation for his 'provincial administration', Tiberius, clocked up not one but eleven trials during his principate; but he was consciously non-interventionist in senatorial affairs.

So far self-interest has been assumed as a universal and sole motive, even for emperors who made lofty claims. The Roman moral code, though, insisted on mutual obligations between equals and unequals (beneficia, officia), giving each man his due (iustitia), as Claudius maintained, keeping one's hands off others' property (abstinentia, innocentia), loyalty and keeping to one's obligations (fides). When these principles were not kept to, at least the failures were easily recognized, if only because of their familiarity; avaritia and luxuria, stimulated by an excess of the perfectly honourable ambitio, were diagnosed as sources of the fall of the sick Republic. A governor had to choose between adhering to this code, and giving way to the temptations that his office put in front of him or to pressures imposed by what it had cost him. If he did this he might try to deceive himself or to brazen it out ('What a royal deed!'), on the basis that provincials were outsiders, even animals. Some Romans at least adhered to the code. Tiberius
did and in about A.D. 4 committed himself to helping the small city of Aezani in Phrygia: 'Letter of Tiberius Caesar brought from Bononia in Gaul ... Since it was long ago that I learned of your devotion and fellow-feeling towards me, I was very glad to receive from your envoys the decree illustrating the goodwill of the city towards me. I shall therefore try as far as I am able to benefit you on every occasion on which you require assistance'. It was worth while sending envoys a thousand miles or more from central Asia Minor to get in touch with Tiberius on the north coast of Gaul. In Dio's version of the 'shorn sheep' apothegm, the governor rebuked an Aemilius Rectus, Prefect of Egypt; Egyptians were held particularly contemptible, and allowances must be made for inconsistencies of attitude: a governor, even an emperor, writing of Egyptians, even of Greeks as a whole, might write and even feel differently from one dealing with a high class individual, his moral, intellectual, and cultural equal.

The second question is more problematical. Some provinces like Britain beyond the Channel and Judaea were far enough from Rome to present a particular temptation, and Judaea presented particular problems too. Agrippa II is brought on the stage by Josephus using a number of arguments to dissuade the Jews from revolt in 66, including the claim that distance made it hard for emperors to know what was going on in Judaea, so that they could not be blamed. The way Britain was despoiled by Roman settlers, governors and tax gatherers (aware of what the subjugation of the island was costing), as well as money lenders, at least in its early days and into the Flavian era, may have had something to do with this factor.

But both Britain and Judaea were special cases, Judaea additionally so because governmental and financial matters were in the hands of the same official, the Prefect-Procurator. Most provinces were governed by senators and the collection of taxes was in the hands of knights, and the rivalry that had existed in the Republic still lingered on. In Britain a new financial agent reported back to Rome on the way the senatorial governor who had put down the revolt of Boudicca in 61 was ill-treating his subjects: he thought it would lead to a new outbreak. Nero sent his freedman Polyclitus to find out what was going on. In Aquitania Agricola is said to have paid particular attention to avoiding trouble with the financial agents. Of course, if they were corrupt, the senatorial governor might be led to condone their misbehaviour, but no system was perfect, and oppression by him would give them an open-and-shut case for accusing a rival. Tiberius, having given his written undertaking to Aezani, would have been obliged to investigate any complaint from there. More than that, the city put up his reply in stone in their market place for all to see, and they could entertain visiting Roman officials there, the governor, the financial agent, and show it to them, just in passing, as part of a tour of the city. The monument would be equally impressive to the city's neighbours, precisely the people
with whom they were most likely to be at loggerheads, over boundaries, for example.29

The appearance on the scene of administrators of provincial origin could and did lead to particular difficulties, it must be admitted. A man governing his own province might be tempted to take advantage of it politically: he might use his position to favour local friends or to pay off old scores: the cities of the Greek East and no doubt the communities of Gaul (as the rôles of Diviciacus and Dumnorix in Caesar’s Bellum Gallicum suggest), though we hear a lot less about this in the west than the east, were riddled with ambition, jealousy, and faction. This could cut two ways: the rival faction could accuse the governor of misconduct after his term of office. We have a case that looks like this in A.D. 70, from Cyrenaica in N. Africa: the governor Antonius Flamma was charged with extortion by his province. Later his family is found back in power there. It looks as if they suffered a temporary setback because of trouble in the long-turbulent city of Cyrene. A similar shift in power, in the provincial assembly, explains why the prosecution against Varenus Rufus, governor of Bithynia Pontus in about 104/5, was dropped.30

Counter-examples, of fellow-feeling between governors and governed, are in order. First Vindex: if Nero’s tax-demands were what led directly to the outbreak of this revolt among the dynatoi of Gaul, it was led by a Gallic prince who was governor of a Gallic province. Then there was the action of C. Julius Alpinus Classicianus in Britain seven years previously, prompted perhaps by rivalry between a senatorial and an equestrian official, but also involving one who was himself a Celt and dealing with a Celtic nobility: Classicianus’ own name and that of his wife Julia Pacata, daughter of Indus, link him with Julius Indus, the Treveran loyalist of the revolt of 21 and with Alpinus the Helvetian executed by A. Caecina and Classicus the Treveran who was to break away with Civilis in 69.31

Overall, the increase in the importance to Rome of the provinces and the men who were important in them made a favourable difference. This is most apparent at the narrow political level. The provinces had a voice, though it might be distorted and misused, and the employment of men who were dependent on the Emperor for advancement encouraged a more careful and cautious approach. Any economic improvement during the first two centuries is likely to have been almost equally unbalanced, tipped heavily towards the wealthy; if the poor benefited it was from use of the buildings and amenities with which the rich paid for their predominance. But under the new dispensation buildings and amenities proliferated, and economic activity was stimulated, not so much directly by tax demands as indirectly by the presence of a market of stationary troops in a number of provinces which had its beneficial effect on producers at all but the lowest levels.32


62

11. Imperial intervention in appointments due to the lot: Tac. Ann. 3. 69. 1–6, refused, A.D. 22; 6. 40. 3; C. Galba, A.D. 36; Agr. 42. 1, Cn. Agricola, c. 90.

12. Tiberius' prorogations (noticed by Brunt, 'Charges' 210f./76f.): Tac. Ann. 1. 80; C. Poppeaus Sabinus, Moesia, A.D. 15, 11–35; Jos. AJ 18. 6. 5; Cass. Dio 58. 23. 5; his complaint: Tac. Ann. 6. 27. 3; see Orth, op. cit., 131f.


15. Rose-tinted view: see above, n. 1, on Furneaux, 18932. Sheep: Suet. Tib. 32. 2, 'flayed'; Cass. Dio 57. 10. 5, 'shaven'. Maroboduus of the Marcomanni is compared with a snake in its lair, lured out by Tiberius, in Vell. Pat. 2. 129. 3. A compliant Greek-speaking subject might regard his compatriots as children in relation to the Romans, Plut. Mor. 814A, Precepts for politicians 17. 7 — where there is hope of growing to adulthood.


19. Changing composition of the senate (and mores): Tac. Ann. 3. 55, esp. 4; previous


δικαιουόταύ λγηλόνος and 16, τα τία έκστρω ἀπο/καταστάθων; tr. Braund 586.


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