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‘If He Is Worthy’: Interactions between Crowds and Emperors in Plutarch and Tacitus’ Accounts of A.D. 69.

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Introduction¹

But no power, no empire, can hope to exist for long unless it wins the assent and trust of the majority of its subjects, and the question that this lecture aims at answering is, ‘What did the common people under the Empire expect of their rulers, and how were they satisfied?’ It is no good simply referring the inquirer to such treatises as Seneca *On Clemency*, Dio Chysostom *On Kingship*, or the younger Pliny’s Panegyric on Trajan. Instructive these treatises are, and useful... but they have one common fault: with their elegance and sophistication, their almost painfully literary quality, they can have reached and influenced only a small circle, whereas we are concerned with the ordinary people, ‘What did the farmer in Gaul, the corn-shipper in Africa, the shopkeeper in Syria, expect?’²

At the Raleigh Lecture on History in 1937, M. P. Charlesworth showed his interest in the attitudes of subjects towards the empire, and asked the question of what they expected from the emperor, and what they thought about him. An interesting question, which is fraught with difficulties and pitfalls. For one thing, Charlesworth’s solution to his enquiry was to explore the ‘propagandic’ output of the centre, including observing imperial coinage, arguing for both the purposeful propagation of an imperial idea or image, and its unproblematic reception by a wider population.³ In other words, Charlesworth’s method was to extrapolate popular opinion on the emperor from evidence of his actions and images, including media which could be interpreted as having been disseminated by the government.⁴ This ‘top-down’

¹ This article has gone through numerous iterations, starting first as a paper at the Plutarch graduate conference in Edinburgh University in 2014. It has been improved by colleagues and professors who have kindly heard and read it, among the foremost are Chrysanthos Chrysanthou, Christopher Pelling and Nicholas Purcell. Any errors remain my own.

² Charlesworth 1937: 5.

³ Charlesworth 1937: 12-13: ‘In addition coins could act as a sort of newspaper or official gazette to the provinces, and those handling them would be continually reminded of the benefactions, the good deeds, or the glorious exploits of their emperor... The use of these legends assumes a large number of people able to read them, and to be affected by them.’

⁴ Noreña 2001: 147: ‘each coin minted at Rome was an official document and as such represented an official expression of the emperor and his regime’ cf. Noreña 2011, who has a similar approach to Charlesworth, but his interest is in understanding imperial ideals from the side of its production and dissemination, rather than its reception in the wider world.

approach to the understanding of ideology and image dissemination in the empire has had a large impact in the historiography of the Roman empire.⁵ However, the problem of exploring how and what a subject of the Roman emperor thought about him is an interesting topic that can be a development from this theme, however with a different approach. It is contended in this short article that representations of what people said and thought about the Roman emperor can be observed from various media, importantly including standard historical texts such as Tacitus' *Histories* and Plutarch's *Lives of the Caesars*, which form the case study of this paper.

As highlighted by Charlesworth in the quotation above, the idea that the imperial regime and its power was derived from the consensus of different constituencies has been important to the understanding of the Roman government in the early principate.⁶ Ideologically, this meant that the 'acceptance' of an emperor by his subjects was important to the legitimacy of the imperial regime. The corollary of this premise is that the dialogue that existed between emperor and subject was important to this idea of consensus, and that the thoughts and opinions of people on the emperor *mattered*. The distinction that needs to be drawn here concerns how they mattered. Looking for the political impact of opinions on the actions and history of the regime would be a chimera, as such an interpretation would presume a large degree of political agency resting with the silent masses of the Roman empire, suggesting that this was the sort of discourse that could make or break an emperor. This would go too far. Nonetheless, the evidence for the expression of these opinions points to the interest in understanding the emperor from a wider angle, with the lens of lower class individuals or groups revealing variegated perspectives about the ruler of the Roman world. Put differently, the goal is summarised in an alteration of Millar's famous dictum: whilst it is true that 'the emperor was what the emperor did'⁷, it is also apparent that 'the emperor was what the emperor *seemed*'.⁸

The purpose of paper is to explore the interaction between groups of people and the emperor in ancient historical narrative, looking how the descriptions of Plutarch and Tacitus can represent interactivity between these groups, therefore providing us with vignettes of how an emperor could and should act; a phenomenon of true historical

⁵ Ando 2000: 19-48; Flaig 1992; Syme 1939: 448-475; Noreña 2001: 146-168; Noreña 2011: 1-26; Nutton 1978: 209-220; Rogers 1991; Veyne 2002: 3-25; Wallace-Hadrill 1981: 298-323, 1982a: 32-48, 1982b: 19-36; Winterling 2009: 9-33; Zanker 1988: 3.

⁶ Mommsen 1887-1888: Vol. II, 749-750; Hopkins 1978: 198; Veyne 2002: 3; Flaig 1992: 11; Rowe 2002: 1-2; Noreña 2011: 7: 'With these influential collectivities the emperor was in constant dialogue, both real and symbolic, interacting with each in a highly prescribed manner calculated to elicit the public displays of consensus, or 'acceptance', upon which imperial legitimacy ultimately rested.' cf. Weber 1978: 1114-1115 on charismatic authority, whence the kernel of these ideas is derived.

⁷ Millar 1992: 6.

⁸ cf. Laurence and Paterson 1999: 183 and Potter 1984: 99 for variations on this phrase.

impact on the expectations of an emperor's subjects.⁹ With this in mind, the concentration will centre on examples from Plutarch and Tacitus' parallel accounts of A.D. 69 and their interest in the interactions between large groups of people, be it a military contingent, or a civilian crowd, and the emperor. The discussion will include their depiction and characterisation, with the goal being to explore the substance of talk about the emperor, concentrating potential discrepancies that could point to a wider thought-world about the *princeps*.

Before commencing, it is worth reflecting briefly on the problem of reality and fiction. There is a tension between the constructed world in which the discourse of interaction between people and *princeps* operates, and the world that it alludes to.¹⁰ Such is the difficulty of finding that line between the reality and a mirage. Depending on the cynicism of the author, the ability to read the 'real' situation behind the vignette can be variable, and problematic. However, the substance of talk and discourse about the emperor in the contexts described, for instance at the imperial court or the circus, are in themselves abstract phenomena that *represent* opinion, rather than giving a real break down of what people thought about the emperor. What that is unfortunately is lost to history. Nonetheless, the recording of such material suggests the modes in which the emperor was discussed and understood, which could open a window into the discourse about the emperor, which is useful even in falsehood. It is hoped that this can be extrapolated further, using different texts and material as evidence to reconstruct the thought-world of the Roman emperor from the perspective of his subjects.

People and Princeps in Plutarch and Tacitus' account of A.D 69

Plutarch's account of the tumultuous civil war of A.D. 69, appearing in the only extant biographies of *Galba* and *Otho* that formed a part of the larger *Lives of the Caesars*, has been understudied and often derided.¹¹ These *Lives* have puzzled scholars for their style and content,¹² and they have been criticised for not having the same impact and aesthetic excellence as Tacitus' account in the *Histories*, or in comparison to his own *Parallel Lives*. For example, as Pelling put it when comparing their respective eulogies of Galba: 'it is easy – and right – to praise Tacitus for his

⁹ Compare with work on crowds/collective forces, and leaders in narrative: Ash 1999; O'Gorman 2000: 49-55; Pelling 2002: 207-226, 242-242; Saïd 2004: 7-25; Hardie 2010: 9-27.

¹⁰ For example, see Beard 2014: 140 on the tension between the literary representation and the 'social reality' of laughter between emperor and subject. cf. Saller 1980 for more on the problem, and usefulness, of anecdotal material in ancient text.

¹¹ Note Morgan 2006: 286 for his description of Plutarch's account as sausage meat.

¹² Syme 1980: 104-105: Syme called them 'sliced up narrative history'. cf. Morgan 2006: 272, 285-286 repeats this Symian dictum thrice in his appendices. See Ash 1997: 189 for the scholarly criticism of Plutarch's omissions.

greater epigrammatic force and bite.¹³ These criticisms aside, or perhaps because of them, the *Galba* and *Otho* have both been largely neglected, and the more recent studies on them have concentrated largely on literary characteristics of the texts, such as Plutarch's use of Platonic philosophy,¹⁴ his narrative structure,¹⁵ and his characterisations of the main protagonists.¹⁶ Their work is particularly important to the following analysis, especially their interest in Plutarch's depiction of collective forces and their relationship to the emperors. Hopefully, this can help our understanding of the relevant historical context, which in turn can provide a Plutarchan perspective of the thought-world of the Roman emperor.

In the *proemium* of the *Galba*, which served as the prologue to both extant lives,¹⁷ Plutarch uses historical fact and philosophical authority to argue that military forces, if unsound and disunited, would be uncontrollable and given to irrationality, even if there was a good leader at the helm:

ὁ δὲ Πλάτων, οὐδὲν ἔργον ὀρώων ἄρχοντος ἀγαθοῦ καὶ στρατηγοῦ στρατιᾶς μὴ σωφρονούσης μηδὲ ὀμοπαθούσης, ἀλλὰ τὴν πειθαρχικὴν ἀρετὴν ὁμοίως τῇ βασιλικῇ νομίζων φύσεώς τε γενναίας καὶ τροφῆς φιλοσόφου δεῖσθαι, μάλιστα τῷ πρῶτῳ καὶ φιλανθρώπῳ τὸ θυμοειδὲς καὶ δραστήριον ἐμμελῶς ἀνακεραυνυμένης, ἄλλα τε πάθη πολλὰ καὶ τὰ Ῥωμαίοις συμπεσόντα μετὰ τὴν Νέρωνος τελευτὴν ἔχει μαρτύρια καὶ παραδείγματα τοῦ μηδὲν εἶναι φοβερώτερον ἀπαιδεύτοις χρωμένης καὶ ἀλόγοις ὀρμαῖς ἐν ἡγεμονίᾳ στρατιωτικῆς δυνάμεως.

Plato saw that there was no point in having a good leader and general if an army was unsound and disunited, and thought that the virtue of obedience, like that of kingship, required a noble nature and a philosophic training which would concentrate on achieving the correct balance between human gentleness and spirited vigour. There is much in the human experience to show that he was right, and particularly the events after the death of Nero, which demonstrated that nothing is more terrifying than a military force exercising dominant power and driven by uneducated and irrational impulses.¹⁸

The Platonic argument outlined by Plutarch in this segment is complex, particularly since it rests on a delicate balance in the relationship between leader and troops: for the virtues of the leader to be fully appreciated, the army had to be under control

¹³ Pelling 2010: 423.

¹⁴ Ash 1997: 192-196.

¹⁵ Georgiadou 1988: 349-356.

¹⁶ Keitel 1995: 275-284.

¹⁷ Bowersock 1998: 204. This is confirmed by the abrupt beginning to *Otho* (Ὁ δὲ νεώτερος αὐτοκράτωρ ἄμ' ἡμέρᾳ προελθὼν εἰς τὸ Καπιτώλιον ἔθυσσε· Plut. *Otho* 1.1). cf. Georgiadou 1988: 351-352.

¹⁸ Plut. *Gal.* 1.3-4.

(σωφρονούσης... όμοπαθούσης), which was based on their obedience (τήν πειθαρχικήν άρετήν) which, like kingship, harmoniously combined the passionate and the active with gentleness and humanity. This is an interesting passage, which can easily go unnoticed in the shade of the following line, which describes the frightfulness of the ‘uneducated and irrational impulses’ of an uncontrolled soldiery. If this final phrase in the quotation is taken as absolute, then the nuance in Plutarch’s argument is diminished: the precariousness of a symbiotic relationship is not necessarily a polarised one between the rational leader and the irrational group. Rather, there is a tension of rationality within the leader and the soldiery, both separately and when conjoined in a system, which can easily be disrupted. In other words, the irrationality of the soldiery is not inevitable, but is rather predicated on the ability of the ‘head’ to control the ‘body’.¹⁹

The use of such terms highlights the weight of Platonic philosophy contained in this passage, and the *Galba* and *Otho* in general. First, the relevant concordance in Plato seems to come from the *Republic* at 375c-e.²⁰ This part of the dialogue discusses the precarious balance between the gentle and the spirited in the soul, without which a good guardian is not possible, despite the opposition of these traits:

Τί οὖν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ποιήσομεν; πόθεν ἅμα πρᾶον καὶ μεγαλόθυμον ἦθος εὐρήσομεν; ἐναντία γάρ που θυμοειδεῖ πραεῖα φύσις... Ἀλλὰ μέντοι τούτων γε ὁποτέρου ἂν στερήται, φύλαξ ἀγαθὸς οὐ μὴ γένηται· ταῦτα δὲ ἀδύνατοις ἔοικεν, καὶ οὕτω δὴ συμβαίνει ἀγαθὸν φύλακα ἀδύνατον γενέσθαι.

“Then what shall we do?” I said. “Where shall we find a gentle and stouthearted character together? You see, surely gentleness of nature and strong spirits are opposing qualities.”... “Yet whichever of these qualities you removed, the result would never be a good guardian. It looks as if we are in an impossible situation here, and so it turns out that it is impossible for there to be a good guardian.”²¹

The use of similar terminology (*θυμοειδὲς* and *πρᾶος*) and a similar tension between parts, with their difficult reconciliation being necessary for functionality, mirrors the delicate mix of Plutarch’s passage above.²²

Second, Platonic imagery extrapolates the tension within to a macro level between

¹⁹ For analysis on the headless imagery that runs throughout these biographies, see Ash 1997: 196-200; and Plutarch himself, *Plut. Gal.* 4.5: ‘ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ λαμπρῶς τὸν πόλεμον ἐκφήνας ὁ Οὐίνδιξ ἔγραψε τῷ Γάλβῳ παρακαλῶν ἀναδέξασθαι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν καὶ παρασχεῖν ἑαυτὸν ἰσχυρῷ σώματι ζητοῦντι κεφαλὴν...’

²⁰ Cited by Ash 1997: 193, 207 n. 16; Pelling 2010: 419.

²¹ *Plut. Resp.* 375c-d.

²² Ash 1997: 193: This Platonic importance of balance is seen in another section at *Plut. Resp.* 410e.

groups of people, which involves the description of collectives as the irrational segment of society. In a paper concerning the representation of the masses in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, Saïd argues that Plutarch's ideas on masses were influenced by the *Republic*, which compares the three parts of the soul, with the three parts of society, with the *demos* being:

ἀλογιστόν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμητικόν, “the irrational appetitive part” (439d), “which is the largest in each person’s soul and is by nature most insatiable of money” (ὁ δὴ πλεῖστον τῆς ψυχῆς ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἐστὶ καὶ χρημάτων φύσει ἀπληστότατον, 442a). Accordingly, the “huge strong beast” (θρέμματος μεγάλου καὶ ἰσχυροῦ), which represents the people in book 6 is given to “violent emotions and desires” (τὰς ὀργάς... καὶ ἐπιθυμίας, 493a-b).²³

Third, these Platonic representations of the people abound in Plutarch. Saïd has collated the terms in the *Parallel Lives* used to describe the people, which include words such as οἱ πολλοί, πλῆθος, ὄχλος, δῆμος, including the number of occurrences of each word.²⁴ Of interest are the adjectives used to describe them, which mostly seem quite pejorative. For instance, throughout the *Parallel Lives*, the people are called the following: lazy, ignorant, overconfident, insolent, violent, disorderly, loud and useless.²⁵ Moreover, bestial imagery can be observed in the *Moralia*, with examples from the *Praecepta Gerendae Rei Publicae* 800c (ὥσπερ θηρίον ὑποπτον καὶ ποικίλον) and 802d-e (δημαγωγία γὰρ ἢ διὰ λόγου πειθόντων ἐστίν, αἱ δὲ τοιαῦται πιθασεύσεις τῶν ὄχλων οὐδὲν ἀλόγων ζώων ἄγρας καὶ βουκολήσεως διαφέρουσιν).²⁶ Furthermore, Rhiannon Ash has shown this to have resonance in the extant emperor biographies themselves, not only including the passage above quoted (*Galba* 1) but bringing in different parts of the narrative to argue the importance of the ‘collective forces’ in the descent into chaos.²⁷ The uncontrollability is highlighted with the simile of the charioteer that has lost control of the reins at *Galba* 6.4:

ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰ Οὐεργινίου καὶ Οὐίνδικος στρατεύματα τρόπον τινὰ βία τοὺς ἡγεμόνας, ὥσπερ τοὺς ἡνιόχους κρατῆσαι χαλινῶν μὴ δυνηθέντας, εἰς μάχην ἐξενεγκόντα μεγάλην συνέρραξαν...

²³ Saïd 2004: 14.

²⁴ Saïd 2004: 9ff for the relevant citations in Plutarch’s works.

²⁵ Saïd 2004: 10. All citations refer to Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*: ἀργός or σχολαστής (*Per.* 11.6; *Sol.* 22.3), ἀμαθεῖς (*Sol.* 5.6), θρασύτης or θρασύνεσθαι (*Lyc.* 2.5; *Sol.* 19.1; *Cor.* 5.4), ὕβρις or ὑβρίζειν (*Cam.* 12.4, *Cor.* 5.4, 23.6, *Lyc.* 5.2), βία (*Cam.* 39.4), κόσμον οὐκ ἐχούσης or ἀσύκτατον (*Pyrrh.* 13.7; *Per.* 12.5), πλῆθος ἄπορον καὶ θορυβοποιόν (*Mar.* 28.7), and ἄχρηστος (*Sert.* 13.9-10; *Pomp.* 28.1). See de Blois 1992: 4578-4599 for the elision of different types of crowds in Plutarch, notably the *demos* and the soldiery.

²⁶ Compare with other bestial images alluded to in Saïd 2004: 21, in particular, *Plut. Mor.* 821B.

²⁷ Ash 1997: 192-196.

And then the armies of Vindex and Verginius virtually forced their commanders, like charioteers who had lost control of their horses, into a great battle.²⁸

This is equated with the similar language found in Plato's *Phaedrus* 253-4, where 'the soul is divided into three forms, two of which are like horses while the third has the role of the charioteer', with the latter having to restrain the 'horse' given over to passion.²⁹ Such is the argument of the literary depiction of the military and the *demos* in Plutarch, both described in similar ways as a large group of people,³⁰ and the importance to the structure of the narrative in *Galba* and *Otho*.³¹

It is precisely this curiosity in the actions and words of the 'collective forces' towards the emperor and vice versa that makes this an interesting historical source to engage with. Take for instance the episode that depicts the armies in Germania Superior questioning the acceptance of Galba:

καί ποτε θέας οὔσης, καὶ τῶν χιλιάρχων καὶ λοχαγῶν τὸ Ῥωμαίοις σύνηθες εὐτυχίαν ἐπευχομένων τῷ αὐτοκράτορι Γάλβα, διεθορύβησαν οἱ πολλοὶ τὸ πρῶτον, εἶτα ταῖς εὐχαῖς ἐπιμενόντων ἐκείνων ἀντεφώνουν "εἰ ἄξιος."

On one occasion the tribunes and captains were making customary prayers at show for the good fortune of the emperor Galba: the soldiers responded first with a shout of discontent, then, when the officers persevered with the prayers, let out a cry: 'If he deserves it.'³²

Within the context of a growing discontent at Galba's principate,³³ Plutarch tells us about how a seemingly routine exercise of wishing health and happiness to the emperor Galba turned sour, where the soldiers at first expressed their discontent, and thereafter would only reply 'if he is worthy' at the persistent entreaties of the tribunes and centurions. It could perhaps be listed as consistent with other parts of the biography depicting the insubordination of a collective of troops. However, the description of noise and reply adds a different texture and dimension.³⁴ The multitude at first 'make a great noise, and then reply 'εἰ ἄξιος' to those waiting to hear the customary *vota*. Responding with the idea of worthiness evokes the process of

²⁸ Plut. *Gal.* 6.4. |

²⁹ Ash 1997: 193, quoting Plut. *Phdr.* 254e.

³⁰ De Blois 1992: 4599.

³¹ For more interesting work done in this vein, see Godolphin 1935: 324-328; Keitel 1995: 275-288; Ash 1997: 189-204; Pelling 2010: 417ff.

³² Plut. *Gal.* 18.9.

³³ Plut. *Gal.* 17-18, concentrating on Galba's age and his parsimony. cf. Suet. *Gal.* 12.3-13.1, with the Atellan farce verse, *venit Onesimus a villa*, supposedly referring to his stinginess. cf. *ὀνήσιμος*, meaning useful or beneficial. Irony?

³⁴ cf. Saïd 2004: 10: cf. *θορυβοποιόν* in 97, n. 25 above.

acceptance to which the emperor was subject—it was ideologically important for the troops to acclaim the emperor. Furthermore, it is unclear from this evidence that these troops fit into the construction of the ‘collective forces’ as argued by Ash. With an analysis predicated on the irrational and bestial, and the total uncontrollability of the soldiery, then it would follow that entreaties to worthiness of an emperor would be drowned out with disorderly actions. However, this is not the case. It suggests that despite arguments for rhetoric and literary allusion obscuring the historical picture, the heterogeneity of the historical material allows for a more nuanced understanding of collective responses to the emperor; namely those including *verbal* reactions.³⁵ In this case, the repetition of ‘if he is worthy’ places an importance on the reactionary aspect of Roman politics, and the place of acclamation.³⁶ As argued by Campbell on a different, but related, matter:

The political importance of acclamation is highlighted by the fact that from the time of Gaius emperors apparently considered their acceptance by the army as their first salutation. Indeed from this time part of the accession ceremony of a new emperor was perhaps carried out in the form of an acclamation.³⁷

The episode in Plutarch suggests that this acceptance was reviewed regularly, and could be lost. In the end, it should not detract from Plutarch’s thesis discussed above, which is more nuanced than a monolithic treatment of ‘collective forces’ acting as irrational beasts. Instead, it betrays the chaotic possibilities of interaction between the emperor and his troops, and its importance for the stability of the empire.

The question then concerns the criteria of worthiness, and whether or not nuance can be extrapolated from the evidence at hand. Further thematic discussions on *congiaria*, donatives and generosity follows below, but the attestations of wishes for monetary gain in the biographies would suggest that the ability of an emperor to give was one of these criteria.³⁸

ἐπεὶ δὲ μεμφομένους ἀκούσας ἀφῆκε φωνὴν ἡγεμόνι μεγάλῳ πρέπτουσαν, εἰπὼν

³⁵ Compare with *Galba* 1.2, where Plutarch’s description of an unruly band of soldiers uses words ‘*λαλιᾶς καὶ περιεργίας*’, which is not necessarily the image one gets from irrational beasts. They respectively mean talk (or chatter) and *curiosity*. I owe this point to Nicholas Purcell. cf. Leigh 2013 on this subject in general.

³⁶ Both Roueché 1984: 181-184 and Aldrete 1999: 87-91 argue for the value of acclamation as a manner of response to the emperor. Further, Aldrete 1999: 90 argues for the importance of gesture as well: ‘In these circumstances, however, gestures were not a one-way form of communication, but were employed as part of a truly interactive dialogue between ruler and ruled... public rituals, and particularly entertainments, were approved settings for the people to make known their opinions to the emperor on a variety of subjects.’

³⁷ Campbell 1984: 126-127.

³⁸ See Plut. *Gal.* 17, 18; Plut. *Otho* 3.

είωθέναι καταλέγειν στρατιώτας, οὐκ ἀγοράζειν, πυθομένοις τοῦτο δεινὸν εἰσῆλθε μῖσος καὶ ἄγριον πρὸς αὐτόν.

But then, on hearing of the complaints, Galba made a remark that was worthy of a great emperor: his practice was to enlist soldiers, he said, not buy them.³⁹

Galba's aphorism that he would not buy the soldiers is met with hatred and savage feelings, exhibiting a quality of a leader that Plutarch commends. This is consistent with both the bestial representation of the troops and Plutarch's criticism of demagoguery (Plut. *Mor.* 802d-e). It also seemingly creates a comfortable dichotomy between an "elite" and "common soldier" perspective, crudely being that the former opposes giving gifts for demagoguery, while the latter approves. This would be too simplistic. For perspective, one can look to the *Life of Otho* and the aftermath of his death:

ἀραμένων δὲ τῶν παίδων οἰμωγῆν, εὐθύς ἅπαν τὸ στρατόπεδον καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐπεῖχε κλαυθμός· καὶ οἱ στρατιῶται μετὰ βοῆς εἰσέπεσον ἐπὶ τὰς θύρας καὶ ὠλοφύροντο, περιπαθοῦντες καὶ λοιδοροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς, μὴ φυλάξαντας τὸν αὐτοκράτορα μηδὲ κωλύσαντας ἀποθανεῖν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν. ἀπέστη δὲ οὐδεὶς, τῶν κατ' αὐτόν, ἐγγὺς ὄντων τῶν πολεμίων, ἀλλὰ κοσμήσαντες τὸ σῶμα καὶ πυρὰν κατασκευάσαντες, ἐξεκόμιζον ἐν τοῖς ὄπλοις οἱ φθάσαντες ὑποδῦναι καὶ βαστάσαι τὸ λέχος ἐπιγαυρούμενοι. τῶν δὲ ἄλλων οἱ μὲν τὸ τραῦμα τοῦ νεκροῦ κατεφίλουσαν προσπίπτοντες, οἱ δὲ ἤπποντο τῶν χειρῶν, οἱ δὲ προσεκύνουσαν πόρρωθεν. ἔνιοι δὲ τῇ πυρᾷ λαμπάδας ὑφέντες, ἑαυτοὺς ἀπέσφαξαν, οὐδὲν ἐκδήλως οὔτε πεπονθότες χρηστὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ τεθνηκότος, οὔτε πείσεσθαι δεινὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ κρατοῦντος δεδιότες. ἀλλ' ἔοικε μηδενὶ τῶν πώποτε τυράννων ἢ βασιλέων δεινὸς οὕτως ἔρωσ ἐγγενέσθαι καὶ περιμανῆς τοῦ ἄρχειν, ὡς ἐκεῖνοι τοῦ ἄρχεσθαι καὶ ὑπακούειν Ὀθωνος ἠράσθησαν·

The slaves raised a wail, and the whole camp and city was immediately filled with weeping. The soldiers fell with a shout on the doors and cried openly, lamenting and blaming themselves for failing to protect their emperor and to stop him from dying on their behalf. Nobody left, nobody looked to their own safety, despite the closeness of the enemy; instead they prepared and adorned the body, built a funeral pyre and took out the body under arms. Those who seized the chance of acting as pallbearers did so proudly, regarding it as a great honour. As for the rest, some fell on the body and kissed the wound, some grasped his hands, some fell to the ground in worship at a distance. Some lit the pyre with torches and then killed themselves, even though there was no clear benefit that they owed to the dead man, and no clear danger to fear from his victor. But it seems that no previous tyrant or king had felt so intense or frenzied lust for rule as these

³⁹ Plut. *Gal.* 18.4.

people felt for being ruled, and for serving Otho as his subjects.⁴⁰

The wails and shouts of the people and the soldiers, accompanied by their lamentation and preparation for the funeral, kissing, touching and prostrating before the body. These emotional scenes are incongruous to the idea of a mob motivated solely by monetary gain. The emotionality could fit into the theme of irrationality, as Plutarch seems to allude to when attempting to explain the frenzy of both the emperor and his subjects, however, the reported devotion of these people toward Otho shown by action and voice, allows for a more complicated view of their opinions, potentially revealing the in turn complicated nature of the perception of an emperor from the perspective of his subjects.⁴¹ In this sense, there is a tinge of religiosity at play here, suggesting that there was a devotional aspect of the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. In other words, such adherence to the charismatic nature of the person and office of emperor suggests a worldview that saw the emperor as a crucial part of how the world works, in that the safety of an emperor was essential for world order. Indeed, this is adjacent to what Plutarch seems to argue in both *Lives*, in that the empire needed a strong emperor in order to maintain peace and security, and that the subjects of his narratives proved what would have happened if this were not the case.

In contrast to Plutarch, Tacitus has been commended for his variegated interpretation of the very same collective forces.⁴² As Ash argues for Tacitus' description of the feared mutiny against Otho at *Histories* 1.80-82, as compared to Plutarch's version in *Otho* 3:

the fragmentation is striking... the soldiers act together, but Tacitus allows his audience to see the diverging motives which lie behind this apparently unified collective movement. By contrast, Plutarch restricts himself to external focalisation, which draws a veil over the soldiers' different motives.⁴³

The passage in question is as follows:

septimam decimam cohortem e colonia Ostiensi in urbem acciri Otho iusserat; armandae eius cura Vario Crispino tribuno e praetorianis data. is quo magis vacuus quietis castris iussa exequeretur, vehicula cohortis incipiente nocte

⁴⁰ Plut. *Otho* 17.6-11.

⁴¹ Perhaps there is a connection in other expressions of grief at the loss of the potential future of an emperor, as seen at the death of Germanicus in Tacitus, or the grief of the city after the *lugubri prospectu* of Galba's death. See Tac. *Hist.* 1.40, 50, or the funeral of Pertinax in Dio 75(74). 4-5.

⁴² Notably Ash 1999: *passim* for arguing this. However, Tacitus is also noted for his derogatory terms for the mob, such as Tac. *Hist.* 1.32.1, where the clamour for the death of Otho is interpreted as *adulatio*, and the famous *plebs sordida* at Tac. *Hist.* 1.4.3.

⁴³ Ash 1999: 27.

onerari aperto armamentario iubet. tempus in suspicionem, causa in crimen, adfectatio quietis in tumultum evaluit, et visa inter temulentos arma cupidinem sui movere. fremit miles et tribunos centurionesque proditoris arguit, tamquam familiae senatorum ad perniciem Othonis armarentur, pars ignari et vino graves, pessimus quisque in occasionem praedarum, vulgus, ut mos est, cuiuscumque motus novi cupidum; et obsequia meliorum nox abstulerat. resistentem seditioni tribunum et severissimos centurionum obtruncant; rapta arma, nudati gladii; insidentes equis urbem ac Palatium petunt.

Otho had given orders that the Seventeenth cohort be brought from the colony of Ostia to Rome. Varius Crispinus, one of the praetorian tribunes, had been charged with equipping these troops. That he might be the freer to carry out his orders, when the camp was quiet, he ordered the armoury to be opened and the wagons belonging to the cohort to be loaded at nightfall. The hour gave rise to suspicion; his motive became the basis of a charge against him; and his attempt to secure quiet resulted in an uproar, while the sight of arms in the hands of drunken men roused a desire to use them. The soldiers began to murmur and charged the tribunes and centurions with treachery, saying that the slaves of the senators were being armed for Otho's destruction. A part of the soldiers were ignorant of the circumstances and heavy with wine; the worst of them wished to make this an opportunity for looting; the great mass, as is usual, were ready for any new movement, and the natural obedience of the better disposed was rendered ineffective by the night. When the tribune attempted to stay the mutiny, they killed him and the strictest of the centurions. Then they seized their arms, drew their swords, and jumping on their horses, hurried to Rome and to the Palace.⁴⁴

The noise aspect reveals itself again in Tacitus' use of language—*fremit*, adding the dimension of the soldiers howling and sharply accusing the actions of their superiors. Ash's phrasing rests upon Tacitus' rhetorical and epigrammatic force of showing the different motives of the soldiers in question, to accentuate the chaos of the civil war. This historiographical point is interesting, but what is the historical significance of these differing motives attested by Tacitus of the troops for taking up arms and rushing to the Palatine to protect Otho? Four reasons seem to be provided: the first (and main one) being the fear of the treachery of their superiors; the second, ignorance and wine making them follow aimlessly; the third, looking for their opportunity to loot, the fourth, as is accustomed with a mob, desiring something new, often translated into English as revolution, with the night carrying away the loyalty of the 'better' section of the soldiery. It would be unsatisfactory to categorise these explanations as stereotypical biases of an "elite" perspective, for unrest of this sort could happen for various reasons.⁴⁵ Despite the rash action and emotion, different

⁴⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 1.80.

⁴⁵ The contradictions in a sense make it plausible: even if the mob, desiring something new,

reasons for their actions are provided, working against a monolithic understanding of their motives and opinions. It thus gives us a potential range of indifference to devotion towards the emperor, in essence providing us with a rich representation of the potential responses towards an emperor and his conduct, which is seemingly of great interest in Tacitus' narrative.

Conclusion

Tensions in these historical texts allow for the potential to glean discourses about the emperor from a wider perspective, which involves the conversation of acceptance, in turn cedes to an ancient thought-world about the Roman emperor. It must be stated that truth and fact were not the goals of this exercise *per se*: conversations about the emperor need not to have been true to have had an impact on the historical, social and cultural context of the Roman empire. Once rumour and stories promulgate, they become historical entities in their own right, revealing the reception of an emperor in the Roman world. It is this ancient thought-world that is being suggested in these examples. The interest in our ancient sources to depict and record occurrences, sayings and interactions between the emperor and wider society reveals a curiosity about how the emperor seemed.

Plutarch and Tacitus' parallel accounts of A.D. 69 provide windows into the nature of the interaction between an emperor and his subjects, and in particular in this context, his troops, during a period of turmoil. Each author gives us different perspectives of the situation. Plutarch's Platonic interpretation of collective forces taken by irrationality informs his description of the soldiers, revealing a more nuanced picture than it would suggest on the face of it. This is in comparison to Tacitus' more fragmented depiction of the soldiery, squabbling and reacting differently, thus showing the chaos of these events of civil turmoil. Both together highlight the complexity of such interactions in their different ways, and the analysis pursued here tries to bring out examples and instances of different reactions and expectations to an emperor. Accordingly, these discrepant experiences allow us to tap into the thought-world of the Roman emperor, of which Plutarch and Tacitus' respective styles are important manifestations. Instead of viewing them as examples of elite-only perspectives that would then hinder our understanding of this thought-world, they are rather part of this wider discourse of what an emperor is and should be, which includes an array of potential reactions and interpretations. This can be enriched by further examples and comparisons to other evidence. Indeed, this sort of interactivity is legion in ancient literature: the ubiquity of the Roman emperor in the lives of his subjects is manifested in our evidence, which not only includes the standard historical works from the period, but also other genres, including sub-

mobilised to then go and protect the sitting emperor. Compare with the reactions of the soldiers after the incident at Tac. *Hist.* 1.82.3: '*sensit invidiam miles et compositus in obsequium auctores seditionis ad supplicium ultro postulabat.*' This can be compared to the soldiers' obedience at the death of Otho.

literary examples such as the *Hermeneumata* (Latin-Greek phrasebooks) and the *Acta Alexandrinorum* (stylised accounts of embassies to the emperor found on papyri). In total, they can help map out the thought-world of the Roman emperor in the minds of his subjects, indicating what sorts of roles the emperor was cast in. In essence, this article is a beginning of such a project to be developed further with more examples.

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