

# HUI216

# Italian Civilization

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# 12.0 Announcements

- <http://www.campo7.com/hui216/>
- Usability improved (links, site map, 404s)
- All the audio files of the lectures are available, up to Mar. 1
  - in RealPlayer format, divided by topics
- I have updated the review page
- I have posted required and optional readings for wk. 7
  - topics [4] and [7] for the paper deal with Tacitus

# 12.1 The midterm: sample question 1

- 1. A conference was held in Florence in February of 2001, entitled "La parola Italia" (The word Italy). Identify the correct statement among the following:
  - A) Italians now have a strong national identity, and therefore they do not support the idea of a stronger European Union
  - B) Patriotism and nationalism in Italy were weakened by the events of 1943-45, when Italian fascists who continued the war on the side of the Germans exploited those values for their propaganda
  - C) As former premier Giuliano Amato said at the conference, ideals such as State and Nation have finally acquired prestige in Italy today, thanks to the efforts of Italian politicians and their parties
  - D) All of the above

# 12.1 The midterm: sample question 2

- 2. The book written by Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, looks back to the experience of the ancient Romans to find examples that could be helpful for modern-day strategists. Identify the correct statement among the following:
  - A) The endurance of the Roman empire depended solely on a fortunate succession of great generals and a multitude of competent soldiers
  - B) The principal goal of the Romans was to provide security for their civilization without constraining the vitality of its economic base and without compromising the stability of the political order
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## 12.1 The midterm: sample question 2, continued

- C) Roman tactics were almost invariably superior, and the typical Roman soldier was a warrior intent on proving his courage, initiative and extraordinary heroism
- D) Roman weapons were universally more advanced than those used by their enemies

# 12.1 The midterm: sample questions 3-5 (short-answer questions)

- 3. With his detailed description of a mutiny of the Roman legions, Roman historian Tacitus wants to emphasize political, social and moral issues that were important for him and for Roman conservatives during the first century of the Roman Empire. Lists some of those issues.
- 4. The collapse of the Roman Empire in the Italy and the West cannot be explained citing just one event or a single problem. List some of the key reasons for the decline of the Roman Empire.
- 5. List some of the geographical areas ruled, at some point or another, by the Roman empire.

## 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: Percennius

- Tacitus' description of the harsh life of Roman soldiers is one of the most realistic portraits of the military under the Roman empire, and has been studied by German scholar Eric Auerbach, in his book *Mimesis*, as a great example of classical realism
- Even after such a realistic description, Tacitus refuses to take side even momentarily with the soldiers
- Look carefully at the way Tacitus frames the speech given by Percennius
  - Rather than attacking him directly, he takes away his credibility by reframing his statements, with references to his past in the theaters and to his questionable morals

## 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: Tacitus' agenda

- Tacitus' agenda is clear: he, like many conservative Roman Senators who deplored the Senate's loss of power, did not look favorably at the political alliance between the Emperors and the soldiers
- Therefore he was trying to portray the soldiers as irrational and irresponsible, and the Emperors as irresolute, inept or immoral, in order to instill in the readers the idea that Rome needed the more experienced, mature and balanced Senators to moderate, control and steer the whole of Roman society in the right direction

## 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: the premise

- This was the state of affairs at Rome when a mutiny broke out in the legions of Pannonia, which could be traced to no fresh cause except the change of emperors and the prospect it held out of license in tumult and of profit from a civil war.
- In the summer camp three legions were quartered, under the command of Junius Blaesus, who on hearing of the death of Augustus and the accession of Tiberius, had allowed his men a rest from military duties, either for mourning or rejoicing.
- This was the beginning of demoralization among the troops, of quarreling, of listening to the talk of every pestilent fellow, in short, of craving for luxury and idleness and loathing discipline and toil.

## 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: the instigator

- In the camp was one Percennius, who had once been a leader of one of the theatrical factions, then became a common soldier, had a saucy tongue, and had learnt from his applause of actors how to stir up a crowd.
- By working on ignorant minds, which doubted as to what would be the terms of military service after Augustus, this man gradually influenced them in conversations at night or at nightfall, and when the better men had dispersed, he gathered round him all the worst spirits.
- At last, when there were others ready to be abettors of a mutiny, he asked, in the tone of a demagogue, why, like slaves, they submitted to a few centurions and still fewer tribunes.
- "When," he said, "will you dare to demand relief. . .? We have blundered enough by our tameness for so many years, in having to endure thirty or forty campaigns till we grow old, most of us with bodies maimed by wounds.

# 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: the instigator and his speech to the soldiers

- Even dismissal is not the end of our service, but, quartered under a legion's standard we toil through the same hardships under another title. If a soldier survives so many risks, he is still dragged into remote regions where, under the name of lands, he receives soaking swamps or mountainous wastes.
- Assuredly, military service itself is burdensome and unprofitable; ten asses a day is the value set on life and limb; out of this, clothing, arms, tents, as well as the mercy of centurions and exemptions from duty have to be purchased. But indeed of floggings and wounds, of hard winters, wearisome summers, of terrible war, or barren peace, there is no end. Our only relief can come from military life being entered on under fixed conditions, from receiving each the pay of a denarius, and from the sixteenth year terminating our service.
- We must be retained no longer under a standard, but in the same camp a compensation in money must be paid us. Do the praetorian cohorts, which have just got their two denarii per man, and which after sixteen years are restored to their homes, encounter more perils? We do not disparage the guards of the capital; still, here amid barbarous tribes we have to face the enemy from our tents."

## 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: the reaction of the soldiers

- The throng applauded from various motives, some pointing with indignation to the marks of the lash, others to their gray locks, and most of them to their threadbare garments and naked limbs. At, last, in their fury they went so far as to propose to combine the three legions into one. Driven from their purpose by the jealousy with which every one sought the chief honour for his own legion, they turned to other thoughts, and set up in one spot the three eagles, with the ensigns of the cohorts. At the same time they piled up turf and raised a mound, that they might have a more conspicuous meeting-place.

## 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: the first reaction of the commanding officer

- Amid the bustle Blaesus came up. He upbraided them and held back man after man with the exclamation, "Better imbrue your hands in my blood: it will be less guilt to slay your commander than it is to be in revolt from the emperor. Either living I will uphold the loyalty of the legions, or pierced to the heart I will hasten on your repentance."
- None the less however was the mound piled up, and it was quite breast high when, at last overcome by his persistency, they gave up their purpose.

## 12.2 The mutiny of the legions: the speech of the commanding officer

- Blaesus, with the consummate tact of an orator, said, "It is not through mutiny and tumult that the desires of the army ought to be communicated to Caesar, nor did our soldiers of old ever ask so novel a boon of ancient commanders, nor have you yourselves asked it of the Divine Augustus.
- It is far from opportune that the emperor's cares, now in their first beginning, should be aggravated.
- If, however, you are bent upon attempting in peace what even after your victory in the civil wars you did not demand, why, contrary to the habit of obedience, contrary to the law of discipline, do you meditate violence? Decide on sending envoys, and give them instructions in your presence."

## 12.2 The aftermath of the first mutiny

- It was carried by acclamation that the son of Blaesus, one of the tribunes, should undertake the mission, and demand for the soldiers release from service after sixteen years. He was to have the rest of their message when the first part had been successful.
- After the young man departure there was comparative quiet, but there was an arrogant tone among the soldiers, to whom the fact that their commander's son was pleading their common cause clearly showed that they had wrested by compulsion what they had failed to obtain by good behavior.

## 12.2 Mutiny is spreading in strategic areas of the Empire

- Meanwhile the companies which previous to the mutiny had been sent to Nauportus to make roads and bridges and for other purposes, when they heard of the tumult in the camp, tore up the standards, and having plundered the neighboring villages and Nauportus itself, which was like a town, assailed the centurions who restrained them with jeers and insults, last of all, with blows.
- On the arrival of these troops the mutiny broke out afresh, and straggling from the camp they plundered the neighborhood. Blaesus ordered a few who had conspicuously loaded themselves with spoil to be scourged and imprisoned as a terror to the rest. . . .

## 12.2 The soldiers participating in the mutiny

- As the men were dragged off, they struggled violently, clasped the knees of the bystanders, called to their comrades by name, or to the company, cohort, or legion to which they respectively belonged, exclaiming that all were threatened with the same fate.
- At the same time they heaped abuse on the commander; they appealed to heaven and to the gods, and left nothing undone by which they might excite resentment and pity, alarm and rage.
- They all rushed to the spot, broke open the guardhouse, unbound the prisoners, and were in a moment fraternizing with deserters and men convicted on capital charges.

## 12.2 The inadequate reaction of the Emperor Tiberius: a worrismatic pattern at the court

- This intelligence had such an effect on Tiberius, close as he was, and most careful to hush up every very serious disaster, that he dispatched his son Drusus with the leading men of the State and with two praetorian cohorts, without any definite instructions, to take suitable measures.
- The cohorts were strengthened beyond their usual force with some picked troops.
- With them too was the commander of the praetorians, Aelius Sejanus, who had been associated with his own father, Strabo, had great influence with Tiberius, and was to advise and direct the young prince, and to hold out punishment or reward to the soldiers.

## 12.2 The simple strategy of Drusus, the simple minds of the soldiers

- When Drusus approached, the legions, as a mark of respect, met him, not as usual, with glad looks or the glitter of military decorations, but in unsightly squalor, and faces which, though they simulated grief, rather expressed defiance.
- As soon as he entered the entrenchments, they secured the gates with sentries, and ordered bodies of armed men to be in readiness at certain points of the camp. The rest crowded round the general's tribunal in a dense mass.
- Drusus stood there, and with a gesture of his hand demanded silence. As often as they turned their eyes back on the throng, they broke into savage exclamations, then looking up to Drusus they trembled. There was a confused hum, a fierce shouting, and a sudden lull. Urged by conflicting emotions, they felt panic and they caused the like.

## 12.2 Tiberius' letter: political maneuvering (the Senate vs. the army)

- At last, in an interval of the uproar, Drusus read his father's letter, in which it was fully stated that he had a special care for the brave legions with which he had endured a number of campaigns;
- that, as soon as his mind had recovered from its grief, he would lay their demands before the Senators;
- that meanwhile he had sent his son to concede unhesitatingly what could be immediately granted, and that the rest must be reserved for the Senate, which ought to have a voice in showing either favor or severity.

## 12.2 The reaction to Tiberius' letter: blame game and other tricks of the absolute rulers

- When Drusus pleaded in answer reference to the Senate and to his father, he was interrupted by a tumultuous shout.
- "Why had he come, neither to increase the soldiers' pay, nor to alleviate their hardships, in a word, with no power to better their lot? Yet heaven knew that all were allowed to scourge and to execute.
- Tiberius used formerly in the name of Augustus to frustrate the wishes of the legions, and the same tricks were now revived by Drusus. Was it only sons who were to visit them?
- Certainly, it was a new thing for the emperor to refer to the Senate merely what concerned the soldier's interests. . .

## 12.2 The primitive minds of the soldiers, the casual tactics of Drusus

- That terrible night which threatened an explosion of crime was tranquillized by a mere accident. Suddenly in a clear sky the moon's radiance seemed to die away.
- This the soldiers in their ignorance of the cause regarded as an omen of their condition, comparing the failure of her light to their own efforts. . .
- And so they raised a din with brazen instruments and the combined notes of trumpets and horns, with joy or sorrow, as she brightened or grew dark. . .
- Drusus, thinking that he ought to avail himself of this change in their temper and turn what chance had offered to a wise account, ordered the tents to be visited.

## 12.2 The superstition of the soldiers, judged by the Stoic thinker Tacitus

- The men's troubles were increased by an early winter with continuous storms so violent that they could not go beyond their tents or meet together or keep the standards in their places, from which they were perpetually tom by hurricane and rain.
- And there still lingered the dread of the divine wrath; nor was it without meaning, they thought, that, hostile to an impious host, the stars grew dim and storms burst over them.

## 12.2 The massacre that ended the second mutiny, in Germany

- Upon this, they sounded those whom they thought best for their purpose, and when they saw that a majority of their legions remained loyal, at the commander's suggestion they fixed a time for falling with the sword on all the vilest and foremost of the mutineers.
- Then, at a mutually given signal, they rushed into the tents, and butchered the unsuspecting men, none but those in the secret knowing what was the beginning or what was to be the end of the slaughter.

## 12.2 Tacitus offer his comments on the end of the second mutiny

- The scene was a contrast to all civil wars which have ever occurred.
- It was not in battle, it was not from opposing camps, it was from those same dwellings where day saw them at their common meals, night resting from labor, that they divided themselves into two factions, and showered on each other their missiles.
- Uproar, wounds, bloodshed, were everywhere visible; the cause was a mystery. All else was at the disposal of chance.

## 12.2 The final episode in the conclusion of the second mutiny: the massacre of the Germans

- Soon afterwards Germanicus entered the camp, and exclaiming with a flood of tears, that this was destruction rather than remedy, ordered the bodies to be burnt.
- Even then their savage spirit was seized with desire to march against the enemy, as an atonement for their frenzy, and it was felt that the shades of their fellow-soldiers could be appeased only by exposing such impious breasts to honorable scars.
- Caesar followed up the enthusiasm of the men. . .
- Caesar, to spread devastation widely, divided his eager legions into four columns, and ravaged a space of fifty miles with fire and sword.

## 12.2 Tacitus offer his comments on the massacre of the Germans -- Tiberius' reaction

- Neither sex nor age moved his compassion.
- Everything, sacred or profane, the temple too of Tamfana, as they called it, the special resort of all those tribes, was leveled to the ground.
- There was not a wound among our soldiers, who cut down a half-asleep, an unarmed, or a straggling foe.
- The news was a source of joy and also of anxiety to Tiberius. He rejoiced that the mutiny was crushed, but the fact that Germanicus had won the soldiers' favor by lavishing money, and promptly granting the discharge, as well as his fame as a soldier, annoyed him.

## 12.2 More comments on the account of the mutiny of the legions by Tacitus

- After giving one of the most accurate and realistic descriptions ever of the conditions of the members of the military at the beginning of the Roman Empire, Tacitus takes great pain to remind his readers that all of this happened exactly when the soldiers were allowed to rest and relax, and that without proper guidance or strict rules their minds began to wander (which implies that laziness is the sin that produced all that havoc)
- Then the author seems to give too much credit to the manipulative arts and the powers of one Percennius, whose former employment in the theaters becomes all of a sudden greatly relevant and also highly suspicious

# 12.2 Classical historiography and Tacitus: the mutiny of the legions

- Overall, the entire episode is meant to convey the political idea that the political alliance between Emperors and soldiers cannot benefit Roman society and may in fact gravely affect its future
  - Don't overlook the reference to the sacrilege committed by the soldiers when they destroy a temple of the barbarians, exposing all Romans to the possibility of a revenge by angry pagan divinities
- The underlying assumption, which comes out here and there in the narration, is that when the Army and its leaders were under the supervision and the leadership of the Senate, Roman society was more stable and stronger
- Even during the worst times of political turmoil at the end of the republic, Tacitus suggests, there was never such a display of immorality and lack of military discipline



Marble Portrait of Agrippina (ca. 50 CE, Museo Nazionale, Naples)



Aureus of Agrippina and Nero, minted in Lyon (France) (ca. 54 CE)<sub>HUI216</sub>

## 12.3 The life of Nero: chronology of the main events

- 49 Agrippina marries Emperor Claudius, who adopts Nero (Agrippina's son from a previous marriage)
- 53 Nero marries his stepsister Octavia
- 54 Claudius dies (poison?)
- Nero becomes Emperor, before his 17th birthday
  - Seneca and Burrus are his tutors: the first a great philosopher, originally from Spain, the second a former military officer
- 55 Britannicus (Claudius's son) dies (poison?)

## 12.3 The murder of Agrippina and the life of Nero: chronology of the main events

- 59-62 Agrippina is killed, Burrus dies, Seneca retires
  - Nero is on his own, free to do whatever he likes
- 64 The Great Fire destroys more than half of Rome
  - Nero builds his new palace on prime land that was expropriated after the fire
- 68 Nero kills himself before he is captured by the soldiers of an opposing faction
- 68-69: the year of the 4 Emperors
  - in a short period, these 4 Emperors succeed one another by defeating the previous Emperor in battle, or by gaining more support in the army
  - the events of this year shows the weakness resulting from the lack of a clear mechanism of succession in the Roman Empire

## 12.4 Tacitus: how Roman Emperors are chosen

- At noon on the 13th of October, the gates of the palace were suddenly thrown open, and Nero, accompanied by Burrus, went forth to the cohort which was on guard
- There, at the suggestion of the commanding officer, he was hailed with joyful shouts, and set on a litter
- Some, it is said, hesitated, and looked around and asked where Britannicus was; then, when there was no one to lead a resistance, they yielded to what was offered them.

## 12.4 How Nero becomes Emperor at the age of 17

- Nero is hailed Emperor by a small military unit, that was guarding the palace
- A gift is promised to the soldiers in Rome, to encourage them to welcome and support the new Emperor
- The Senate follows "the voice of the soldiers"
- "...no hesitation in the provinces"
- "Divine honors" are decreed to Claudius
- Claudius's will is not "publicly read," for fear that it might mention his son Britannicus, legitimate heir to the throne (even though younger than Nero himself)

## 12.4 The mechanism of accession to the throne

- The mechanism of accession to the throne was not clearly regulated
- The practice of Kings in other regions dictated that the firstborn son would succeed his father, but in Rome that did not always happen, not even during the monarchy (753-509 BCE)
- This lack of fixed rules allowed Nero and his mother to act quickly and win the throne
  - Nero, after all, was Claudius' stepson, and although he was barely 16 (it all happened before his 17th birthday), he was a few years older than Britannicus
  - This course of events makes Claudius' death suspicious

## 12.5 The murder of Agrippina

- A "long meditated crime" motivated by
  - Power and ambition
    - Nero rightly suspects that his mother wants a share of the power that she has procured for her son
    - It is not by chance that on the face of Roman coins produced during the first years of his empire, one can see not just the face of the Emperor Nero, as customary, but also the profile of his mother
  - The passion for Poppaea
    - Nero wants to be free to divorce Octavia and marry his lover
- Tacitus's narration is framed like a tragedy, rather than like an accurate and objective historical narration

## 12.5 The murder of Agrippina

- Tacitus, a conservative Republican historian, was biased, and his narration betrays his political agenda, in favor of a more powerful Senate, to keep Emperors from abusing their position, and to revert to even a limited form of democracy
- Tacitus and other historians, like Suetonius, are largely responsible for the creation of the stereotypical image of the decadent Roman empire that is still so popular
  - The real issue is not even whether Nero or Caligula or Claudius were not as immoral or violent as the senatorial historians described them, but how much their personality quirks really affected Empire, which did not come to an end for another 400 years...

## 12.5 Elements of a literary tragedy inside the narration of the murder of Agrippina

- The sins and the impious behavior of the main characters justify and prepare the story's developments
  - greed, murder, incest, perversion, simulation and hypocrisy
- Growing anxiety results from the various successful crimes, rather than elation and tranquility (cf. *Macbeth*)
- The theme of the fight of good vs. evil
  - Seneca and some of the senators fight on the side of democracy, justice and honesty against Agrippina, Nero and their conniving, criminal accomplices

## 12.5 Elements of a literary tragedy inside the narration of the murder of Agrippina

- Another typical literary device employed in this episode is the historian's insistence on the description of the frame of mind of the main characters
- Traditional historians usually would not speculate on the thoughts and feelings of historical figures at the time of dramatic events
- Unless they could rely on the report of an eyewitness, they would either be silent or they would convey those feelings and thoughts by embellishing and re-creating public speeches given by those historical figures, under the pretense that eyewitness existed who could confirm what they wrote