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## The Histories

of

## Tacitus

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previous:



V.1-13

next:



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## TACITUS HISTORIES

(Vol. III)

### Book V

14<sup>1</sup> But meantime Civilis,<sup>1</sup> after his reverse among the Treviri, recruited his army in Germany and encamped at Vetera, where he was protected by his position, and he also wished to inspire his barbarian troops with new courage from the memory of their former success there. Cerialis followed after him, having had his forces doubled by the arrival of the Second, Sixth,

p199

p201

and Fourteenth legions; moreover, the auxiliary foot and horse that he had ordered up long before had hurried to join him after his victory. Neither general was given to delay, but they were separated by a wide plain that was naturally marshy; moreover, Civilis had built a dam obliquely into the Rhine, so that the river, thrown from its course by this obstacle, flooded the adjacent fields. Such was the nature of the ground, which was treacherous for our men because the shallows were uncertain and therefore dangerous: for the Roman soldier is heavily weighted with arms and afraid of swimming, but the Germans are accustomed to streams, are lightly armed, and their great stature keeps their heads above water.

**15** <sup>1</sup> Therefore when the Batavians attacked our men, the bravest of our troops engaged; but a panic soon followed as arms and horses were swallowed up in the deep marshes. The Germans, knowing the shallows, leaped through the waters, and frequently, leaving our front, surrounded our men on the flanks and rear; there was no fighting at close quarters, as is usual in an engagement between infantry, but the struggle was rather like a naval fight, for the men floundered about in the water, or, if they found firm ground, they exerted all their strength to secure it; so the wounded and the uninjured, those who could swim and those who could not, struggled together to their common destruction. Yet our loss was not in proportion to the confusion, because the Germans, not daring to come out of the marshes on to firm ground, returned to their camp. The outcome of this engagement encouraged both leaders from different motives to hasten the final struggle. Civilis wished to follow up his good fortune; Cerialis to wipe out his disgrace: the Germans were emboldened by their success; the Romans were stirred by shame. The barbarians spent the night in singing or shouting; our men in rage and threats of vengeance.

**16** <sup>1</sup> The next day Cerialis stationed his cavalry and auxiliary infantry in his front line and placed his legions in the second, while he reserved some picked troops under his own leadership to meet emergencies. Civilis did not oppose him with an extended front, but ranged his troops in columns: the Batavi and Cugerni were on his right; the left wing, nearer the river, was held by tribes from across the Rhine. The generals did not encourage their troops in formal appeals to the whole body, but they addressed each division as they rode along the line. Cerialis recalled the ancient glories of the Roman name, their victories old and new; he urged them to destroy for ever

these treacherous and cowardly foes whom they had already beaten; it was vengeance rather than battle that was needed. "You have recently fought against superior numbers, and yet you routed the Germans, and their picked troops at that: those who survive carry terror in their hearts and wounds on their backs." He applied the proper spur to each of the legions, calling the Fourteenth the "Conquerors of Britain,"<sup>2</sup> reminding the Sixth that it was by their influence that Galba had been made emperor,<sup>3</sup> and telling the Second that in the battle that day they would dedicate their new standards, and their new eagle.<sup>4</sup> Then he rode toward the German army,<sup>5</sup> and stretching out his hands begged these troops to recover their own river-bank and their camp<sup>6</sup> at the expense of the enemy's blood. An enthusiastic shout arose from all, for some after their long peace were eager for battle, others weary of war desired peace; and they all hoped for rewards and rest thereafter.

p205

**17**<sup>1</sup> Nor did Civilis form his lines in silence, but called on the place of battle to bear witness to his soldiers' bravery: he reminded the Germans and Batavians that they were standing on the field of glory, that they were trampling underfoot the bones and ashes of Roman legions. "Wherever the Roman turns his eyes," he cried, "captivity, disaster, and dire omens confront him. You must not be alarmed by the adverse result of your battle with the Treviri:<sup>7</sup> there their very victory hampered the Germans, for they dropped their arms and filled their hands with booty: but everything since has gone favourably for us and against the Romans. Every provision has been made that a wise general should make: the fields are flooded, but we know them well; the marshes are fatal to our foes. Before you are the Rhine and the gods of Germany: engage under their divine favour, remembering your wives, parents, and fatherland: this day shall crown the glories of our sires or be counted the deepest disgrace by our descendants!" When the Germans had applauded these words with clashing arms and wild dancing according to their custom, they opened battle with a volley of stones, leaden balls, and other missiles, and since our soldiers did not enter the marsh, the foe tried to provoke them and so lure them on.

**18**<sup>1</sup> When they had spent their missiles, as the battle grew hotter, the enemy charged fiercely: their huge stature and their extremely long spears allowed them to wound our men from a distance as they slipped and floundered in the water; at the same time a column of the Bructeri swam across

p207

from the dam that, as I have said, had been built out into the Rhine. This caused some confusion and the line of allied infantry was being driven back, when the legions took up the fight, checked the enemy's savage advance, and so equalised the contest. Meantime a Batavian deserter approached Cerialis, promising him a chance to attack the enemy's rear if he would send some cavalry along the edge of the marsh; for there, he said, was solid ground and the Cugerni, who guarded at that spot, were careless. Two troops of horse were despatched with the deserter and succeeded in outflanking the unsuspecting enemy. When this was made evident by a shout, the legions charged in front, and the Germans were routed and fled towards the Rhine. The war would have been ended on that day if the Roman fleet had hurried to follow after them: as it was, not even the cavalry pressed forward, for rain suddenly began to fall and night was close at hand.

**19** <sup>1</sup> The next day the Fourteenth legion was sent to Gallus Annius in the upper province: the Tenth, coming from Spain, took its place in the army of Cerialis: Civilis was reinforced by some auxiliaries from the Chauci. Yet he did not dare to defend the capital of the Batavians, but seizing everything that was portable, he burned the rest and retired into the island, for he knew that Cerialis did not have the boats to build a bridge, and that the Roman army could not be got across the river in any other way; moreover, he destroyed the dike that Drusus Germanicus had built, and so by demolishing the barriers that checked it, he let the Rhine pour in full flow into Gaul along an unencumbered channel.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Rhine was virtually drawn off, and the shallow channel that was left between the island and Germany made the lands seem uninterrupted. Tutor also and Classicus crossed the Rhine, with one hundred and thirteen Treviran senators, among whom was Alpinus Montanus, who had been sent into Gaul by Primus Antonius, as we stated above.<sup>9</sup> He was accompanied by his brother, Decimus Alpinus; at the same time the others also were trying to raise reinforcements among these bold and adventurous tribes by appeals to their pity and by gifts.

**20** <sup>1</sup> In fact the war was so far from being over that in a single day Civilis attacked the standing camps of the auxiliary foot and horse and of the regular legions as well, at four several points, assailing the Tenth legion at Arenacum, the Second at Batavodurum, and the camp of the auxiliary foot

and horse at Grinnes and Vada;<sup>10</sup> he so divided his troops that he and Verax, his nephew, Classicus and Tutor, each led his own force; they did not expect to be successful everywhere, but they trusted that by making many ventures they would be successful in some one point; besides, they thought that Cerialis was not very cautious and that, as he hurried from place to place on receiving various reports, he might be cut off. The force that was to assail the camp of the Tenth legion, thinking that it was a difficult task to storm a legion, cut off some troops that had left their fortifications and were busy felling timber, and succeeded in killing the prefect of the camp, five centurions of the first rank, and a few common soldiers; the rest defended themselves in the fortifications. Meanwhile a force of Germans at Batavodurum tried to destroy a bridge that had been begun there; the indecisive struggle was ended by the coming of night.

p211

**21** <sup>1</sup> There was greater danger at Grinnes and Vada. Civilis tried to capture Vada by assault, Classicus, Grinnes; and they could not be checked, for the bravest of our men had fallen, among them Briganticus, captain of a squadron of cavalry, who, as we have said,<sup>11</sup> was loyal to the Romans and hostile to his uncle Civilis. But the arrival of Cerialis with a picked body of horse changed the fortunes of the day and the Germans were driven headlong into the river. As Civilis was trying to rally the fugitives he was recognized and made a target for our weapons, but he abandoned his horse and swam across the river; Verax escaped in the same way; Tutor and Classicus were carried over by some boats that were brought up for the purpose. Not even on this occasion was the Roman fleet at hand; the order had indeed been given, but fear and also the dispersal of the rowers among other military duties prevented its execution. Indeed, Cerialis commonly gave insufficient time for the execution of his orders, being hasty in planning, but brilliant in his successes: good fortune attended him even when he had lacked skill; and the result was that both he and his troops paid too little regard to discipline. A few days later he narrowly avoided being taken prisoner, but he did not escape the attendant disgrace.

**22** <sup>1</sup> He had gone to Novaesium and Bonn to inspect the camps that were being built for the legions' winter quarters, and was now returning with the fleet, while his escort straggled and his sentries were careless. The Germans noticed this and planned an ambushade; they selected a night black with clouds, and slipping down-stream got within the camp without opposition.

p213

Their onslaught was helped at first by cunning, for they cut the tent ropes and massacred the soldiers as they lay buried beneath their own shelters. Another force put the fleet into confusion, throwing grappling-irons on board and dragging the boats away; while they acted in silence at first to avoid attracting attention, after the slaughter had begun they endeavoured to increase the panic by their shouts. Roused by their wounds the Romans looked for their arms and ran up and down the streets of the camp; few were properly equipped, most with their garments wrapped around their arms and their swords drawn. Their general, half-asleep and almost naked, was saved only by the enemy's mistake; for the Germans dragged away his flagship, which was distinguished by a standard, thinking that he was there. But Cerialis had spent the night elsewhere, as many believe, on account of an intrigue with Claudia Sacrata, a Ubian woman. The sentries tried to use the scandalous behaviour of their general to shield their own fault, claiming that they had been ordered to keep quiet that his rest might not be disturbed; that was the reason that trumpet-call and the challenges had been omitted, and so they had dropped to sleep themselves. The enemy sailed off in broad daylight on the ships that they had captured; the flagship they took up the Lippe as a gift to Veleda. <sup>12</sup>

**23** <sup>1</sup> Civilis was now seized with a desire to make a naval demonstration; he therefore manned all the biremes and all the ships that had but a single bank of oars; to this fleet he added a vast number of boats, [putting in each] thirty or forty men, the ordinary complement of a Liburnian cruiser; and at the same time the boats that he had captured were fitted with particoloured plaids for sails, which made a fine show and helped their movement. <sup>13</sup> The place chosen for the display was a small sea, so to speak, formed at the point where the mouth of the Maas discharges the water of the Rhine into the ocean. Now his purpose in marshalling this fleet, apart from the native vanity of a Batavian, was to frighten away the convoys of supplies that were coming from Gaul. Cerialis, more surprised than frightened by this action of Civilis, drew up his fleet, which, although inferior in numbers, was superior in having more experienced rowers, more skilful pilots, and larger ships. His vessels were helped by the current, his opponents enjoyed a favourable wind; so they sailed past each other and separated, after trying some shots with light missiles. Civilis dared attempt nothing further, but withdrew across the Rhine; Cerialis devastated the island of the Batavians in relentless fashion, but, adopting a familiar device of generals, he left untouched the

farms and buildings of Civilis.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime the turn of autumn and the frequent equinoctial rains that followed caused the river to overflow and made the low marshy island look like a swamp. Neither fleet nor supplies were on hand, and the Roman camp, being situated on flat ground, began to be washed away by the current.

**24**<sup>1</sup> That the legions could then have been crushed, and that the Germans wished to do so but were craftily dissuaded by him, were claims afterwards made by Civilis; and in fact his claim seems not far from the truth, since his surrender followed a few days later. For while Cerialis by secret messengers was holding out to the Batavians the prospect of peace and to Civilis of pardon, he was also advising Velela and her relatives to change the fortunes of a war, which repeated disasters had shown to be adverse to them, by rendering a timely service to the Roman people: he reminded them that the Treviri had been cut to pieces, the Ubii had returned to their allegiance, and the Batavians had lost their native land; they had gained nothing from their friendship with Civilis but wounds, banishment, and grief. An exile and homeless he would be only a burden to any who harboured him, and they had already done wrong enough in crossing the Rhine so many times. If they transgressed further, the wrong and guilt would be theirs, but vengeance and the favour of heaven would belong to the Romans.

p217

**25**<sup>1</sup> These promises were mingled with threats; and when the fidelity of the tribes across the Rhine had been shaken, debates began among the Batavians as well: "We must not extend our ruin further; no single nation can avert the enslavement of the whole world. What have we accomplished by destroying legions with fire and sword except to cause more legions and stronger forces to be brought up? If we have fought for Vespasian, Vespasian is now master of the world; if we are challenging the whole Roman people in arms, we must recognize what a trifling part of mankind we Batavians are. Look at the Raetians, the Noricans, and consider the burdens Rome's other allies bear: we are not required to pay tribute, but only to furnish valour and men. This is a condition next to freedom; and if we are to choose our masters, we can more honourably bear the rule of Roman emperors than of German women." So the common people; the chiefs spoke more violently: "We have been drawn into arms by the madness of Civilis; he wished to avert his own misfortunes by the ruin of his country. The gods were hostile to the Batavians on the day when we besieged the legions, murdered their comman-

p219

ders, and began this war that was a necessity only to Civilis, but to us fatal. There is nothing left us, unless we begin to come to our senses and show our repentance by punishing the guilty individual."

**26** <sup>1</sup> Civilis was not unaware of this change of feeling and he decided to anticipate it, not only because he was weary of suffering, but also for the hope of life, which often breaks down high courage. When he asked for a conference, the bridge over the Nabalía was cut in two and the leaders advanced to the broken ends; then Civilis began thus: "If I were defending myself before a legate of Vitellius, my acts would deserve no pardon nor my words any credence; there was nothing but hatred between him and me — he began the quarrel, I increased it; toward Vespasian my respect is of long standing, and when he was still a private citizen we were called friends. Primus Antonius knew this when he sent me a letter calling me to arms to keep the legions of Germany and the young men of Gaul from crossing the Alps. What Antonius advised by letter, Hordeonius urged in person; I have begun the same war in Germany that Mucianus began in Syria, Aponius in Moesia, Flavianus in Pannonia." . . . <sup>15</sup>

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### The Loeb Editor's Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus here resumes the story of the revolt of Civilis which he dropped at IV.79.



<sup>2</sup> Cf. II.11.



<sup>3</sup> Cf. III.44.





<sup>4</sup> The Second had been recently enrolled. See [IV.68](#).



<sup>5</sup> The legions (I, XVI, and XXI) that had gone over to the Gauls and returned again to Roman allegiance. *Cf.* [IV.72](#).



<sup>6</sup> Vetera.



<sup>7</sup> *Cf.* [IV.77 ff.](#)



<sup>8</sup> This dike or rampart had been begun by Drusus in 9 B.C. and completed by Pompeius Paulinus in 55 A.D. (*Ann.* [XIII.53](#)). By breaking it down Civilis let the water sweep into the Waal, the southernmost arm of the Rhine.



<sup>9</sup> *Cf.* [III.35](#).



<sup>10</sup> The identity of these towns is uncertain.

For Grinnes, see [the page at Livius](#); uncertainty, but with a map.



<sup>11</sup> Cf. IV.70.



<sup>12</sup> Cf. IV.61.



<sup>13</sup> In the confused condition of the text at the beginning of this chapter, we cannot do more than give the probable sense of what Tacitus wrote.



<sup>14</sup> That Civilis might be suspected by his supporters of collusion with the Romans.



<sup>15</sup> At this point the *Histories* break off. Of the fate of Civilis we know nothing. That the Batavians were treated favourably seems clear from *Germ. 29*: manet honos et antiquae societatis insigne; nam nec tributis contemnuntur nec publicanus atterit; exempti oneribus et collationibus et tantum in usum proeliorum sepositi, velut tela atque arma, bellis reservantur.

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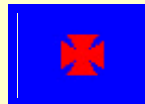
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