

HIST 30103 Ancient Historians
Paper 3 • 1000 words
Due May 4 by 5pm

The last paper assignment explored how a historian could adapt the work of his source. For this paper you will examine how an ancient historian can adapt his own work about an historical event as a model for others.

There are two sections in his early work the *Histories* that Tacitus appears to have adapted later in the *Annals*. In the first, Tacitus described a visit by the Roman Emperor Vitellius to the battlefield of Cremona in northern Italy in 69, where his army had defeated his immediate predecessor Otho, and where a few months later would in turn be defeated by the army of Vespasian. In the corresponding passage of the *Annals* Tacitus describes Germanicus's visit to the Teutoburg Forest, where the Germans of Arminius had defeated the Roman legions of Varus 6 years earlier. The second pair of passages deal with skirmishes with the Germans - a fight between the Batavians of Civilis and the Romans of Cerealis in the *Histories*, and a fight between Caecina and the Cherusci of Arminius in the *Annals*.

For this paper analyze how Tacitus has reworked the two passages from the *Histories* to describe different events in the *Annals*. What parts of the structure and details does he keep and what does he change? What are the effects of these changes on the narrative, tone, and message of each passage? What does this say about the historical accuracy of these events in the *Annals*?

Whenever you quote, paraphrase, summarize, or otherwise refer to a passage of text you must cite. I have numbered the sections of each passage differently, so you only need to give the specific sentence number.

Do not be judgmental, and remember, ancient historians have different standards than modern historians. You are to limit your analysis to the texts of Tacitus below – DO NOT look at modern scholarship or any other sources including AI. I want to read what you have to say, not what someone else has to say. Looking at or using outside sources will result in an automatic F on the assignment.

Use Times New Roman or a similar serif font, double-spaced, with 1” margins all around. Don't forget to put a page number at the bottom of each page and your name and a title on the first page. Papers are due on May 4 by 5 pm. Upload your paper as a .doc, .docx, .pdf, or .rtf attachment on Blackboard. Late papers will not be accepted except in cases of documented emergencies.

Passage 1: Visiting a Battlefield in the *Histories*

11. From there Vitellius deviated to Cremona, and having seen Caecina's gladiatorial exhibition, he desired to set foot on the plain at Bedriacum and see with his own eyes the traces of the recent victory.

12. It was a macabre and horrifying sight: less than forty days had elapsed since the battle, and there were mutilated corpses, trunks, limbs, and the shapes of decomposed men and horses; the ground was stained with gore, and the flattened trees and crops presented a scene of terrible devastation.

13. Equally barbaric was the view of the road, where the people of Cremona had strewn laurel and roses, and built altars for the victims whom they slaughtered: such tyrannical behaviour, however satisfying at the time, was soon to be the cause of their own destruction.

14. Valens and Caecina* were present, and they pointed out the various important areas of the battle-site: where the legionary column had burst out, where the horsemen had massed, and where the auxiliaries had completed their encirclement.

15. Already the tribunes and prefects were each boasting of their own achievements, adding fabrications and exaggerating the truth; and the ordinary soldiers too, shouting happily as they left the road, re-traced the battle-field and proudly examined the pile of weapons and heaps of corpses.

16. Some were affected by the variability of fate, by tears and by pity; but not Vitellius, who gazed impassively on the many thousands of unburied citizens. Unable to restrain his delight, and unaware of the fate that was so soon to befall him, he sacrificed to the gods of the place.

*Vitellius's two senior commanders. This Caecina is different than the Caecina below

Passage 2: Visiting a Battlefield in the *Annals*

21. Germanicus was therefore overwhelmed by a desire to pay his last respects to the soldiers and their commander; and the army there present was moved to pity for their relatives and friends, for the fortunes of war and the fate of men.

22. Caecina had been sent ahead to reconnoitre the unknown forests, to bridge the flooded marshes and to shore up any ground likely to prove treacherous. Then they entered the melancholy site, which was gruesome to set eyes upon and in the memories which it evoked.

23. First there was Varus' camp, a wide area with its headquarters marked out, testifying to the strength of the three legions; next there was the rampart, half-destroyed, and the low ditch where the mortally wounded had evidently huddled together.

24. In the middle of a plain there were whitening bones, lying scattered where soldiers had fled, and piled up where they had made their last stand. Broken pieces of weapons lay nearby, and horses' limbs, and skulls fixed to the trunks of trees.

25. In the surrounding woods there were altars at which the barbarians had engaged in the ritual slaughter of tribunes and first-rank centurions.

26. And survivors of the disaster, who had escaped from the battle or from captivity, recalled where the legates had fallen and where the standards had been captured, where Varus had received his first wound and where he had died by his own doomed hand. They pointed to the mound where Arminius had held his victory rally and arrogantly mocked the military standards, to the number of gibbets for the prisoners of war, and to the pits.

27. And so the Roman army there present, six years after the disaster, started to bury the bones of the three legions: since no one knew whether they were covering over the remains of relatives not,

they treated everyone as if they were kith and kin, while their anger against the enemy mounted with their grief.

28. It was Germanicus who, in sympathy with his men and as a welcome gesture towards the dead, laid the first turf for the burial mound.

29. But Tiberius did not approve — either because he criticised everything Germanicus did, or because he believed that the sight of the unburied dead had deterred the army from fighting and increased their fear of the enemy; besides, a general empowered as an augur to celebrate the sacred rites ought not in his opinion to have come into contact with relics of the dead.

Passage 3: Fighting the Germans in the Histories

31. Such was the appearance of the place, treacherous with hidden swamps and unfavourable to us: for the Roman soldiers were weighed down by weapons and terrified of swimming, whereas the Germans, long accustomed to the rivers, took advantage of their light armour and tall bodies.

32. While the Batavi therefore engaged in harassment, our most intrepid men all began to fight; but panic struck when weapons and horses started to be swallowed up in the unusually deep marshes.

33. But the Germans fairly ran through their native swamps, and disregarding the opposing front-line they encircled the flanks and rear. Contrary to what you would expect in an infantry battle, there was no close fighting, but the men wandered in the waves as if during a naval encounter; or else, if a reliable patch of ground showed up they strove towards it with all their might.

34. The result of that particular battle encouraged each commander to bring the whole operation to a decision, although for different reasons: Civilis wished to press home his good fortune, Cerialis to redeem his disgrace.*

35. Thus the Germans were fierce on account of their success, while the Romans were spurred on by shame: night on the barbarian side was spent in singing or shouting, on ours in anger and threats.

*Civilis is the leader of the Batavi, Cerialis the Roman commander

Passage 4: Fighting the Germans in the Annals

41. In their efforts to break through the guardposts and attack the workers, the barbarians engaged in harassment, encircling manoeuvres and charges.

42. The shouts of the workers and fighters were confused, and everything was equally unfavourable to the Romans: the place, with its deep mud, provided unreliable footholds and was too slippery to allow any progress; their bodies were weighed down by armour, and in the waves they were unable to throw their javelins.

43. On the other hand, the Cherusci were long accustomed to fighting in marshland: they had long limbs, and their huge spears were effective at long-range wounding.

44. Nightfall finally rescued the now sagging legions from their losing battle; but the Germans were tireless in success.

45. It was a disturbed night, though for different reasons. The barbarians at their celebration feasts filled the valleys and echoing forests with their victory or war songs. On the Roman side the fires were fitful, and voices hesitant: they lay against the rampart, or wandered among the tents, unable either to sleep or keep watch.