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**THE FOOD CRISIS IN EGYPT AND THE DECLINE AND  
FALL OF GERMANICUS**

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## The Food Crisis in Egypt and the Decline and Fall of Germanicus

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this article is to provide an evidence-based and fully examined unique and original account of the decline and fall of Germanicus, and the role the food crisis of Egypt in the early years of the principate of Tiberius played in that decline and fall.

**Methodology:** No doubt, that decline and fall may have arguably saved the Roman Empire from civil war between Tiberius and Germanicus in time, but this article finds that Germanicus' swift intervention in Egypt saved Egypt, and perhaps parts of the empire, from potential acute food shortage and even famine and starvation. In terms of methodology, these issues are explored throughout this article, as are the relationship between Tiberius the Roman Senate, and the aftermath of the AD17 earthquake in the Roman province of Asia, and their relating influences over decline and fall of Germanicus, as well.

**Findings:** Still, this article finds that Germanicus' swift salvation of Egypt from famine and starvation rivalled Tiberius' rebuilding of the province of Asia after AD17 too closely, earning the emperor's rebuff and rebuttals, leading to the young Prince's fall from imperial favour, and hence, his premature death.

**Keywords:** *Germanicus, Tiberius, Piso, Julio-Claudians, Egypt.*

### Introduction

The decline and fall of Germanicus is inherently bound up with Tiberius' motives in natural disaster intervention, the commissioning of Germanicus to the East, and Piso's role there as well. This article provides the reasoning behind Tiberius' choice, of Germanicus and Piso in the eastern provinces, the multifarious reasons for Germanicus' sojourn to Egypt, and his death upon his return to Syria. In the course, it shall be proven that the young prince's downfall and death were inextricably linked to Tiberius' own rebuilding programme in the province of Asia, and his efforts to ensure his legitimacy throughout the empire in the early years of his principate. By doing so, this article shall show that Germanicus' handling of the corn crisis in Egypt denied

the emperor of his realisation of ambitions to intervene there himself in a more swift manner, and that this was of importance to Germanicus' eventual downfall.

This article is the product of three years' research, note-taking, contemplation, reflection, and typing. It is based upon the author's Doctor of Philosophy thesis, which explores Roman responses to natural disasters from 65BC to AD63, but builds upon it by adding the element of a leading character in the form of Germanicus, and his decline and fall. In doing so, this article incorporates rigorous historical methodology, by drawing upon ancient evidence and presenting it through the lens of modern scholarship, but the findings and conclusions of this article are the author's own. It is hoped that this article will be well-received as an important resource for modern historians, and that it will hopefully encourage timely interventions to halt potential famine without the declines and fall of those who may attempt such interventions in a historical, and historiographical, sense.

### **Discerning Germanicus' and Tiberius' Motive**

On 26<sup>th</sup> May AD17, Germanicus celebrated his triumph over Germany (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 41; C. *Caelio L. Pomponio consulibus Germanicus Caesar a. d. VII. Kal. Iunius triumphavit*; Suet. *Cal.* 1; Beard, 2007, 107-114; Powell, 2013, 120.). Although this war against the Germans had not yet been brought to a completion, Tiberius decreed Germanicus' campaigns successful (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 40.), and that he could achieve more in Germany through diplomacy rather than through further war (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 24-26.). Soon after this, Tiberius commissioned Germanicus and Piso to the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, including Egypt where Germanicus himself would intervene save Egypt, and the empire, from a potentially serious food crisis (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 42-44.).

Various arguments exist regarding Tiberius' motives for deploying Germanicus and Gnaeus Piso to the East. In the nineteenth century, Theodor Mommsen argued Germanicus' role there was one of pure diplomacy, and that Piso's commission was to be a soldier and a leader of men over Syria should any trouble arise with Parthia (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 43, 55-58; Mommsen, 1996 [1882-86]), 138-139.). In the early twentieth century, Beesley challenged Mommsen's appraisal, pointing out on several occasions Piso challenged Tiberius. Beesley argued Germanicus was a trustworthy military commander, hence his *maius imperium* (Beesley, 1924, 125-126.). By the middle of the twentieth century, Syme challenged both, arguing Tiberius was content to remove his imperial rival Germanicus from his devoted legions in Germany to the East with Piso, whom Tiberius counted on to undermine his position (Syme, 1958, 492.). In the seventies, Levick argued that Germanicus had no ambition for imperial power, and that both he and Piso were sent to the East by Tiberius simply to resolve the political instability there (Levick, 1976, 148.). In the eighties, Beesley's earlier case was taken up by Rapke, who argued that far from being a threat to Tiberius, Germanicus was a close confidant of the emperor's, and was chosen to monitor Piso in the East, far off from the centre of power in Rome where Piso could be a threat (Rapke, 1982, 62-64.). However, in 2012 Pettinger pointed out that while on the Rhine, Germanicus was an unwilling threat to Tiberius, living as he was among mutinous



legions. But, after Germanicus left the Rhine legions for the East, ‘the possibility of having to share supreme power was eliminated’ for Tiberius – hence Germanicus’ new *maius imperium* in the East, given to him by Tiberius. For, Tiberius felt secure enough to give Germanicus added power. Tiberius’ position, and life, were secure. These views are accepted by this article, which shows that Germanicus’ imperial presence would prove effective in the East. But even in the East, Germanicus had to be countered by Tiberius, through Piso or otherwise, for he proved too much of a success there, outshining the *princeps*, including in his fast and effective solutions to the corn supply crisis in Egypt (Pettinger, 2012, 193.).

Later, parts of Rapke’s scenario were taken up by Drogula, who argued Piso was given Syria as a province to secure the support of the Senate for the *princeps* (Drogula, 2015, 123-124, 130, 141, 146, 150.). Still, from Tacitus’ writings, Drogula finds, we find that Tiberius had reasons to remove both of these powerful figures specifically from Rome itself (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 42-44.). By removing from the city Piso, who had shown open dissent, and Germanicus – grandson of the *triumvir* Marc Antony - the main political rival of Tiberius’ predecessor Augustus, with the allure of commission in the East, Tiberius made an emphatic statement to the Senate and to others that he was in control of Rome and the empire. Thus, Drogula points out, loyalty from senators might secure them provincial commands, but disloyalty would result in the likes of Piso having to endure public disgrace by taking orders from young commanders, like Germanicus, whose *imperium* depended entirely upon Tiberius, not them (Drogula, 2015, 123-124, 130, 141, 146, 150.). However, accepting Rapke’s position that the young Germanicus was no rival to Tiberius, Pagán has noted that he still was a political rival to Tiberius’ natural son Drusus the Younger, and that Piso’s commission to undermine Germanicus’ own commission was to pave the way for Drusus’ future political and military career – and hence *gloria*. These arguments are also taken up by this article. Even unwillingly, Germanicus evoked the memory of Marc Antony, the enemy of Augustus – the dynastic source of Tiberius’ legitimacy. He was also a rival to Drusus, and hence Tiberius’ visions for smooth eventual succession and civic harmony throughout the empire (Pagán, 2017, 34.). After all, as Vervaeke has noted, Tiberius’ mother Livia favoured her natural son Tiberius, especially in the wakes of the deaths of Marcus Agrippa and Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and Livia was the wife of Augustus – the *princeps* Tiberius based the legitimacy of his own principate upon (Vervaeke, 2020, 121201.).

### **Tiberius Responds to the AD17 Earthquake of Asia**

Almost immediately after Germanicus and Piso were sent from Rome for the East, Tiberius announced his intervention in the Roman province of Asia after a major earthquake there.

According to Tacitus, in AD17 ‘twelve famous cities in the province of Asia were overwhelmed by an earthquake’ (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 47.). Shortly after this brief statement, Tacitus provides a full list of eleven cities that received most of the compensation for the rebuilding efforts that were carried out by the ex-praetor, Marcus Aletius (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 47.). Clearly, the twelve ‘famous cities’, or rather *poleis* Tacitus refers to were the famous *koinon* of Asia, situated as they were along the busy maritime coastline of Lydia and northwest Caria in Asia: Ephesus, Miletus,

Myus, Lebedus, Colophon, Priene, Teos, Erythrae, Phocaea, Clazomenae, Chios and Samos (Strab. 8. 7. 1; 14. 1. 3-4; Graham, 2019, 9-10.).

However, the eleven worst hit cities in Asia in Tacitus' list, are not along this coast, but were located further inland, around Sardis, including: Sardis, Magnesia-by-Sipylus, Temnus, Philadelphia, Aegeae, Apollonis, Mostene, Hierocaesarea, Myrina, Cyme and Tmolus. According to Tacitus, Sardis was the most badly hit, and received the most compensation from Tiberius - some ten million sesterces. It happens, that city was the closest to the earthquake's epicentre (Strab. 13. 4. 8; Tac. *Ann.* 2. 47; Graham, 2019, 10.). An honorific inscription commemorated for Tiberius, from Puteoli, lists these eleven cities as restored by the emperor, following the earthquake, together with Ephesus, which happened to be a *koinon* city, and two other cities, that were neither in Tacitus' list of eleven, or in the *koinon* confederacy: Cibyra and Hyrcania (*ILS* I 156 = *CIL* X 1624; Murray, 2005, 153.). Murray puts the inclusion of the two cities down to the councils of their respective cities, honourably (for them, but not otherwise) adding themselves to gain greater fame, and perhaps sympathy, following the earthquake (Murray, 2005, 155.). However, given the geographical extent of this earthquake, it is perhaps to be expected from these two cities, which were impacted by this earthquake, and these may have received help from the emperor. Evidence exists that villages, like the village of Choriani, near Hierocaesarea (*IGRP* 4. 1304 = *KP* 1. 113; Tac. *Ann.* 2. 47; 3. 62; Broughton, 1934, 216.), and the hamlet of Gök Kaya, near Sardis, also had serious damage by the earthquake, and generously rebuilt by Tiberius, as well (*IGRP* 4. 1348 = *KP* 1. 13, nos. 22-24; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 73; T. R. S. Broughton, 1934, 216.).

Asia was a senatorial province since the time of Augustus, but Tiberius had a number of reasons to intervene there. One was his renowned enthusiasm for philhellenism (Suet. *Tib.* 70-71). Tiberius was heavily influenced by Greek culture and Rutledge argues this was one reason for his intervention (Rutledge, 2008, 454-455, 467.). Another reason was the role that the imperial cult played in Asia. By 29BC, the city of Pergamum in Asia Minor and Nicomedia in Bithynia petitioned Augustus for consent, to worship him. To this Augustus agreed, so long as his cult maintained an ongoing reverence to Roma, and to the deified Julius Caesar. As Cassius Dio states, 'he [Augustus] allowed the aliens, under the name of Hellenes, to consecrate precincts to himself' in those cities (Dio 51. 20.). Temple precincts were promptly dedicated to him in Nicomedia in 29BC, and Pergamum in 19BC. Upon occasion, Dio adds, Augustus granted Pergamum the right to hold the Sacred Games there in celebration of that city's new imperial cult (Dio 51. 21; Koortbojian, 2013, 230-232.).

Pergamum and Nicomedia were not the only cities to offer Augustus divine honours. In the aftermath of the 26BC earthquake in Asia Minor, Augustus ordered the cities damaged by this earthquake Tralles and Laodicea rebuilt, serving as a precedent for Tiberius' own reconstruction of the cities of Asia, even though it was a senatorial province. Augustus had the monetary and human resources to do so, on a far greater scale than the Senate. These cities dedicated two inscriptions at Olympia to Augustus, as 'saviour and god' (I. Olympia 53; Ambraseys, 2009,

103.), and ‘divine’ ruler, respectively (*BCH* 10 (1886) 516. 5; Ambraseys, 2009, 103.). These expressions of ruler-cult were not the initiative only of Greeks, as Dio would have us believe (Dio 51. 20; 55. 10.). According to an inscription from Asia Minor dated to 9BC, Augustus’ birthday was decreed there a festive day for the purpose of emperor-worship by the Roman Paullus Fabius Maximus – a local politician of Roman extraction – on the first day of Asia’s calendar year (*OGIS* no. 458, lines 30-62.).

Another motivation for the imperial response was to maintain the empire’s slave trade. Asia Minor had a long history of slave trade, and there existed a slave-market in the area, in Ephesus. During the Roman period, slaves from local elites were often sold in Ephesus to slave-traders in Sardis, from where they would be transported into the Anatolian interior, and elsewhere, for service. Slaves from Asia Minor were often highly prized by Romans (Gordon, 1924, 93, 99, 104; Finley, 1968, 171-172, 177, 182.).

However, these concerns paled before Tiberius’ immediate pressing concern, to display to Germanicus and the rest of the inhabitants of the empire a vast form of political exhibitionism (Levick, 1996, 648.). Tiberius had contended for power with Rome’s senators ever since he became *princeps*. Intervention in a senatorial province signalled that Tiberius would not be outperformed by senators. According to Tacitus, his succession had not unfolded smoothly. There was talk in Rome among Roman elites that Agrippa Postumus and even Germanicus, who controlled the eight Rhine legions, would rebel against Tiberius’ power at any time (Tac. *Ann.* 1. 1-6.). As a new emperor, Tiberius was left exposed. Such dissent was not without constraint among lower strata of Roman society either. Tiberius immediately secured the allegiance of the consuls, the Praetorian Guard, in Rome, and control of the corn supply in Egypt, gaining invaluable power-bases for himself (Tac. *Ann.* 1. 6-7.).

Thereupon, to assert his position over all Romans, including Germanicus, and to maintain public order, Tiberius punished the senators Gaius Asinius Gallus and Lucius Arruntius who had publically offended him (Tac. *Ann.* 1. 11-13.). But, such harshness served only to aggravate the civil unrest, which in turn, served to aggravate the emperor. As a result, in AD16 Tiberius launched his treason trials, and condemned Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus to death, for looking into astrological predictions concerning Tiberius’ future, and presumably the conditions surrounding his death. As a sign of submission other senators declared holidays with public thanksgiving (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 26-31.).

The Senate’s hostility to Tiberius at this point was perhaps no greater than it had been to Augustus at times, but Tiberius’ harshness then gave rise to an attempted coup. On the island of Planasia, a slave named Clemens, disguised himself as the deceased Agrippa Postumus, and made for a bid for power over Rome. He happened to find a number of senators, equites, and members of Tiberius’ palatial court to advise and subsidise him, to overthrow Tiberius. Upon learning of this plot, Tiberius ordered his guards to capture Clemens, whereupon the *princeps* had him executed. The plot appears to have involved part of the Senate. Thus, Tiberius had a range of political motives to intervene in the senatorial province of Asia. Tiberius acted as a

dutiful sole-ruler, exercising power not beyond Augustus' limits but definitely beyond Germanicus', thus outshining him intentionally. The speed of that decision, and its implementation, of it, exposed a mind that was equal to the task of succeeding Augustus as sole-ruler (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 38-40.). Tiberius depended upon Augustan precedents. They were binding, but in the words of Cowan they required 'explication and interpretation' to apply and reapply. Tiberius projected Augustus' building attitude towards Rome upon Asia (Cowan, 2009, 180-181, 199.).

Just as Germanicus was to respond to a potential natural disaster in Egypt, Tiberius responded to a vast and destructive earthquake, and by rebuilding cities and towns in Asia, he displayed he was equal to the task of succeeding Augustus. Archaeologists have unearthed traces of what Tiberius' Sardis after the earthquake after it was rebuilt, and the sheer size and scale of the gymnasium that Tiberius rebuilt there with its monumental size and classic Roman style and symmetry, reflects its grandeur and importance to Tiberius (Hanfmann, 1975, 42; Murray, 2005, 153.). Archaeologists have also uncovered the street network that was built at precisely this time, or rather rebuilt, and its water supply, at Sardis. Earthquake resistant building methods were experimented with at this time (Hanfmann, 1983, 141-144; Herrmann, 1995, 29; Meier, 2012, 19.).

Like Germanicus in Egypt, Tiberius with his *maius imperium* had legal powers to intervene there. By intervening in a senatorial province thus, Tiberius displayed to the Senate that he was henceforth possessor of power to intervene in any part of the empire, even senatorial ones. He was asserting his legal rights (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 41-47.). However, the sheer generosity of Tiberius in the cases of these cities belied a deeper sense of care, and a deeper concern to be insurmountable, and to be viewed by as many as possible as indispensable. As Levick notes, in this respect Tiberius cemented his 'reputation' and 'serviceability' to the state in the eyes of his provincial subjects to bolster his claims 'to merit as the highest authority in the whole Roman world' (Levick, 1976, 87, 89.). Up until that point, Tiberius' legitimacy as rightful emperor rested upon Augustus' own accomplishments. However, Tiberius would not rebuild Rome that Augustus had rebuilt and in his own way re-founded. So, Tiberius attempted to equal Augustus in the rebuilding and effective re-founding of numerous cities of Asia that were damaged by earthquake in AD17, expanding on Augustus' precedent in Tralles and Laodicea on a massive scale (Tac. *Ann.* 1. 77; 4. 37; Levick, 1976, 82-83; Woodman, Martin, 1996, section *Ann.* 3. 56. 3.). In doing so, he cemented his own celebrity cult, and state cult, owing loyalty and allegiance to what Gradel terms Tiberius' 'life force' (Gradel, 2002, 9-10, 37.). Whereupon, Tiberius endorsed and strengthened the universal Roman consensus that order should prevail among the senators, equites, and plebeians, but under Tiberius' ultimate control (Rowe, 2002, 101, 111, 175.). This new Roman style of rule, Millar notes, 'profoundly affected the personal and collective identities by which people lived', influencing the Roman world with permeating success (Millar, 2002, 220.).

## Tiberius Looms Large Over Germanicus

As a means to exert his power over Germanicus and others, Tiberius encouraged the receipt of honorific commemorations including inscriptions and monuments from among his Asian cities, and by AD22 the *princeps* had begun issuing commemorative coins in Rome bearing the legend CIVITATIBVS ASIAE RESTITVTIS ('the cities of Asia restored') (*BMC* Tiberius 70; *RIC* Tiberius 48.). They came in great number. In Rome in the same year, an honorific monument was dedicated to Tiberius in the Roman Forum by the restored Asian cities, as recorded by Apollonius the Grammarian (Apollonius the Grammarian, in Phlegon of Tralles, F 36 XIII, *FGrH* II. 1182.). An inscription from Sardis also preserves a fragmented part of the civil decree, enacted there, to erect this monument (*CIL* 3450.). The very site of the placement of this monument, reflects the great importance Tiberius invested not only in the re-foundation of his twelve cities, but also of how he wished, to be honoured for it. The Forum was the centre of imperial business, and given the monument with this inscription was placed there, rather than on the Capitol, where the vast majority of inscriptions by non-Roman people were placed, tells us, that this monument and its inscription, were of importance to Tiberius as very public memorials to his leading imperial roles, in rebuilding the commercial and business hubs, of Asia. By doing so, Tiberius signified, he would save Roman commerce again and again, and the empire's economy, as a direct result, of his rebuilding processes, as he displayed in Asia (Cooley, 2000, 7-20; Corbier, 2006, 65; Cooley, 2012, 223- 224.).

Sardis, Mostene, Hycania, and also Cyme, quickly honoured the emperor by assuming the title 'Caesarea', while Philadelphia adopted its new name, 'Neocaesarea' (Magie, 1950, 500; Murray, 2005, 153.). Honours, for Tiberius and Roma, were decreed throughout the countryside towns, villages, and hamlets of Asia. One inscription from Choriani, near Hierocaesarea, commemorates the dedication of an altar to Augustus and Roma, the cult of both Tiberius was chief priest, at precisely the same time (*IGRP* 4. 1304 = *KP* 1. 113; Tac. *Ann.* 2. 47; 3. 62; Broughton, 1934, 216.). At Gök Kaya, near Sardis, another inscription, again from the precisely the same time, commemorates the sacred society called the 'Caesariastae' which was also formed to honour Augustus, and Tiberius, at precisely this point as well, as their supreme leaders, with Tiberius at the head as the physically-present ruler, as well (*IGRP* 4. 1348 = *KP* 1. 13, nos. 22-24; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 73; Broughton, 1934, 216.). These honorific names and inscriptions tell us much about the political shifts under Tiberius. Although, it is sometimes difficult to penetrate the at times uniform facades of epigraphic formulae, in this case the above inscriptions can, nevertheless, tell us much about the power of Tiberius' *aegis* over Asia, that he prompted all these cities and towns to dedicate these inscriptions to him, and honours as well (Quass, 1993, 373-421; Schuler, 2014, 254.).

Two inscriptions, that once adorned the honorary monuments dedicated to Tiberius – one from Puteoli, dated to AD30; and another from Mostene, one of the Asian cities affected by the earthquake, to AD31/32, commemorate Tiberius' vast response, to the earthquake activity in virtually identical terms, revealing deep levels of coordination between two cities far apart, but united in their public praise for Tiberius. Clearly Tiberius' restoration, of that Roman province



had a vast impact not just in Asia, but in Rome. The praise was endorsed by the Roman Senate, unsurprisingly given the groundswell of support now thrown behind the emperor - no doubt of his choosing and will - it was willing praise, nonetheless. Indeed, these two inscriptions, show a deep level of cooperation, between fourteen cities of Asia, like Ephesus, of the *koinon*, in their collective effort to coordinate public honour for the *princeps*. The inscription from Puteoli reads:

‘To Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus, grandson of the divine Julius, pontifex maximus, consul four times, emperor eight times, in his 32<sup>nd</sup> year of tribunician power. Restored by the state. Henia Sardis ulluron – Magnesia – Philadelphia – Tmolus – Cyeme – Temnus – Cibyra – Myrina – Ephesus – Apollonis – Hyrcanis – Mostene – Aegae – Hierocaesarea.’ (*ILS* I. 156 = *CIL* 10. 1624.)

The inscription from Mostene, in Asia, uses the same formulaic convention for praising Tiberius, as the Puteoli inscription, but adds one extra special flavour – a compliance with Tiberius’ open ambitions to become the re-founder of the twelve *koinon* cities in Asia, and equal Augustus’ achievements in Rome, as its re-founder, perhaps: ‘founder of the twelve cities simultaneously’. Of special note is Mostene was not actually one of the twelve *koinon* cities. This demonstrates that deep connections were made between all of the cities mentioned in the inscription, and that the *koinon* cities, together, in order to make this particular honour on this particular inscription at all possible, worked together and with other cities and towns. The inscription reads:

‘Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus, grandson of the divine Julius, pontifex maximus, in his 33<sup>rd</sup> year of tribunician power, emperor eight times, consul four times, founder of twelve cities simultaneously, founded the city.’ (*ILS* II<sup>2</sup>. 8785.)

Neither are these inscriptions the only ones that the inhabitants of Asia dedicated to Tiberius for his benevolence in the wake of the AD17 earthquake. Three other inscriptions, virtually identical to the above examples, have been discovered also, in two other cities affected by the AD17 earthquake: one in Latin found in Aegae (*CIL* 3. 7096.), and the other inscriptions in Greek, found at Cibyra (*IGR* 4. 914, 915.).

Yet, despite the display of power by Tiberius over Germanicus, the Senate, Asia, and other parts of the empire through this act of acceptance of honours, Asia still remained a senatorial province where senators were accustomed to leaving their own imprint through their own political patronage. For these reasons, Tiberius’ solely required intervention there using imperial funds and resources, proved unpopular among Rome’s senators. If Tiberius had sought to dispel all serious rivalry between senators towards himself, he still ran Roman state and its traditional ruling body, the Senate, by holding ‘a wolf by the ears’ – Suetonius’ description of Tiberius’ words relating to how he ruled through the Senate and its followers and supporters (Suet. *Tib.* 25.).

### Germanicus' Commission to the East

Tiberius' expedient despatch of Germanicus and Piso to the East resolved the political instability that existed there at the time. King Vonones of Armenia had been expelled from Armenia, and king Archelaus Sisinnus of Cappadocia had recently died; and so too had king Philopator II of Cilicia and king Antiochus III of Commagene. During his journey to the East, Germanicus toured the kingdom of Pontus, where he met Zeno, the elder brother of Polemon II, king of Pontus, who he warmed to. Upon arrival, Germanicus noticed the nobles of Armenia, and that they had warmed to the idea of having Zeno installed as king by Rome. Zeno had been pro-Armenian since childhood, and had adopted many of the national customs, including hunting. This marked him well apart from king Vonones, who had a disdain for such pursuit. In the end, at the capital of Armenia, Artaxata, Zeno was crowned king by Germanicus, with the new name and title, 'Artaxias' - a name and title he chose himself in honour of the occasion and city of his coronation, an arrangement Germanicus had overseen and ratified on Tiberius' bequest and behalf. It was to prove a fruitful, the reign lasting seventeen years, until Artaxias died in AD34. Meanwhile, Germanicus made Cappadocia a Roman province, reducing its level of tribute to Rome, and appointing Q. Veranius there to as its first governor. Q. Servaeus was also sent to Commagene as *propraetor*. These arrangements proved effective. The Parthian 'King of kings' Artabanus II, wholeheartedly approved of this, as Tiberius did. But as a sign of goodwill, Artabanus offered Germanicus an official meeting on the Euphrates River frontier. No doubt, he was moved to this gesture by the rumours that the young Caesar considered deploying king Vonones against Parthia, with a view to install him as 'King of kings', just as he had made Zeno king of Armenia. These gestures caught Germanicus off-guard, and he declined the king's invitation, but as a concession to the king, Germanicus removed Vonones from the area, and settled him in Pompeiopolis, a port town of Cilicia by the Mediterranean (Jos. JA. 18. 53, 96-100; Tac. Ann. 2. 42-45, 55-58; 6. 31-35, 42-45; Dio 58. 26. 1; Florus 1. 40. 27-28;

Seager, 1972, 103; Levick, 1976, 146; Powell, 2013, 133-139.). However, according to Tacitus, this removal of Vonones was as much a concession to Artabanus, as it was an affront to Piso, for Vonones had won the patronage of Piso, and his wife Plancina, who had accompanied her husband, to the East (Tac. Ann. 2. 58; Levick, 1975, 155; Powell, 2013, 139.).

Not long after he had settled affairs in these provinces, Germanicus embarked on his tour of Egypt. The reasoning behind this move have been debated by modern historians. A number of historians argue that Tacitus made mention of the trip to add weight to his patriotic thematic comparison between Germanicus and Alexander 'the Great' (Aalders, 1961, 384; Borzsák, 1969, 588-600; Gissel, 2001, 277-301; Spencer, 2002, 191-193; Bosworth, 2004, 563; L'hoir, 2006, 202-204.). Kelly has added that through this comparison, Tacitus sought to remind his readers that his theme of the transient nature between tyranny and royal dynastic achievements, including those embodied by these individuals, was still current (Kelly, 2010, 222, 227, 231, 233, 236.). Evaluating these possible motives further,

Koestermann, Goodyear, and Pelling pointed out that Tacitus used this relationship between

Tiberius and Germanicus in juxtaposition as a stylised mirror in the same way he did Inguimerus and his nephew Arminius in Germany (Koestermann, 1963-68, 201; Goodyear, 1981, 447; Pelling, 2016, 80.). Ross and Pelling also observed that the subtle innuendoes that parallel Tacitus' use of stylistic tensions between the emperor and the prince, makes Germanicus to be an antithesis to Tiberius (Ross, 1973, 209-227; Pelling, 2016, 59-85.). Peering behind Tacitus' use of rhetoric, Levick provides a more sentimental portrayal of Germanicus' visit to Egypt, arguing that it was undertaken to honour his grandfather Marc Antony (Levick, 1976, 154-155.).

Consensus also once existed that Germanicus' visit to Egypt undermined Tiberius' position. Since Actium, no senator had been allowed into Egypt without the emperor's consent. Granted, Germanicus was invested with *maius imperium*, but unlike Agrippa, a generation before, his authority was subservient to that of the emperor's, and he was not his equal in constitutional right or powers. Thus, it was once believed that Germanicus deliberately affronted Tiberius, and entered Egypt without Tiberius' consent, as a senator after Tiberius' intervention in a senatorial province. Or, at least, it seemed once to some history scholars through their reading of Tacitus (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 68; Kuntz, 1924, 54; Weingärtner, 1969, 44-45; Henning, 1972, 355-359; Seager, 1972, 220; Levick, 1976, 154-155; Pagán, 2017, 34.).

Granted, the above views clearly have brilliant merit. However, the argument of this article is that Germanicus was sent by Tiberius in order to solve the food crisis emerging there, which could have potentially threatened the empire with famine. A verbatim record on papyrus from Egypt, found at Oxyrhynchus in 1959, of a famous speech Germanicus delivered in Alexandria, celebrates Germanicus' easing of a corn crisis in Egypt, for which he was sent there to alleviate conditions, by none other than Tiberius himself. In the papyrus record, twice the prince announced that he had been sent to Egypt on Tiberius' orders:

'I, sent by my father, men of Alexandria...' The crowd shouted: "Hooray! Lord, good luck! You will get blessings!" The emperor: "You set great store, men of

Alexandria, on my talking with you; hold on until the time when I finish the answer to each of your questions, then make your feelings clear. Sent, as I said, by my father...'

(LACTOR 18 no. 167 = *P. Oxy.* XXV 2435 recto = Sherk 34a; Powell, 2013, 144.)

Historians know this speech was made by Germanicus, for its use of 'Imperator' before 'I, sent by my father, men of Alexandria...', and the deliverer's use of the words: 'settle the overseas provinces' (LACTOR 18 no. 167 = *P. Oxy.* XXV 2435 recto = Sherk 34a.) – strikingly similar to the *Tabula Siarensis* inscription on a monument to commemorate Germanicus' achievements of his life, following his death in AD19 – 'sent as proconsul to the overseas provinces, settling them and the kingdoms of that region in order...' (*Tabula Siarensis*, Fragment a, lines 9-21.).

In what remains of this speech, there is no mention of the food crisis that was unfolding in Egypt, but that is not surprising given that only the papyrus upon which the first portion of the speech was taken down, word for word, in ink, has survived. It was probably mentioned during the course of the speech on occasion as need arose, for once in Egypt, Germanicus acted quickly to alleviate it. Like Augustus, Tiberius had a personal interest in the grain supply, especially in Egypt itself, crucially it was to the sustenance of Rome and its empire. It maintained its

governance through *equites* answerable to the *princeps*. As under Augustus, so as well, under Tiberius. Tacitus states that:

‘Levies of grain, indirect taxation, and other revenues belonging to the state [under Tiberius] were managed by associations of Roman knights... [Tiberius] spared neither money nor labour in combating bad harvests [i.e. in Egypt] and stormy seas.’ (Tac. *Ann* 4. 7; Seager, 1972, 116.)

According to Tacitus, Germanicus had known about the grain shortage in Egypt before entering Egypt, and travelled there partly to honour his grandfather Marc Antony, but partly, and in the main, to relieve the corn shortage in that country, and free the empire at large in the process, of the possibility, or even the probability, of imminent famine. Tacitus states thus:

‘Germanicus went to Egypt to look at the antiquities. His ostensible object, however, was the country’s welfare; by opening the public granaries he lowered the price of corn. His behaviour was generally popular. He walked about without guards, in sandalled feet and Greek clothes, imitating Scipio Africanus, who is said to have done likewise in Sicily though the Second Punic War was still raging.’ (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 67-68.)

This brief statement portrays Germanicus in somewhat tragically simple, but heroic, fashion. Rutland sees this passage as evidence that Tacitus’ view of the prince was one of a display of a degree of naivety and inexperience (Rutland, 1987, 161, 164.).

Suetonius embellished this historical tradition, claiming rightly that Germanicus had travelled to Egypt to relieve it of food crisis, but adding that in the process ignored requesting Tiberius’ permission:

‘Germanicus hurried to Alexandria and there relieved a sudden disastrous famine, without consulting him [Tiberius].’ (Suet. *Tib.* 52.)

In Alexandria, Germanicus promptly opened the grain stores and distributed a vast quantity of corn at cheap prices, although only full citizens of the city and country probably, about 12 percent of the population, benefitted from this move at that stage. But, as Henning argues, 12 percent is still a considerable sum given distribution channels were effectively run by the same men who received the corn through patronage and *clientele* structures. Thus, most likely, Germanicus’ measures succeeded in alleviating the grain shortage. For, Alexandria’s citizens thereby, were able to sell grain to the wider members of Alexandria’s and Egypt’s populations, for profits, with which they could purchase more grain, and sell on. Germanicus might, no doubt, have disappointed, and even infuriated, some price extortionists who acted illegally. However, the cheering of the crowds in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, and the statement by Tacitus that Germanicus’ behaviour ‘was generally popular’ and that he went about Alexandria and Egypt ‘without guards’, points us to the conclusion that Germanicus was more than just generally popular in Alexandria and Egypt on account of his handling of the corn crisis there. He was considered there a life-saving hero (Weingärtner, 1969, 94-97; Henning, 1972, 363364.).



In fact, Germanicus' swift conclusion to the corn supply crisis in Alexandria showed acute decisiveness. Had he eased conditions more slowly, it is arguable that local elites might have been content to receive a handsome profit from increased income, due to inflated prices of grain due to the shortage, at least for a while, until Germanicus slowly alleviated the situation. Indeed, this may very well have appeased them. Notably, soon afterwards, Germanicus encountered a bitter and frank reprimand from the *princeps* by letter. Perhaps, local elites complained to Tiberius, or to the Senate. Tiberius immediately sent an official imperial letter of complaint to the Roman Senate (Suet. *Tib.* 52.), and criticised Germanicus repeatedly and spitefully in public forums. The writing that Germanicus was falling from imperial favour was on the wall, but although he was not yet declared a public enemy, from that point on the young Caesar was seen to be something a rival by Tiberius (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 67-68.). Yet, according to Tacitus, Germanicus remained oblivious to the extent of the emperor's rage in far-off Egypt, perhaps arising to misinformation by letter from a number of senators, or advisers. On the other hand, it is arguable he was not informed, since he was extremely busy seeing his corn distribution reforms implemented (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 68.).

Seager argues that Germanicus aspired to Tiberius' own power, and that he secretly welcomed hails of emperor to his person, while openly protesting against them (Seager, 1972, 220.). But, Weingärtner and Levick point out, that there is no ancient evidence that suggests Germanicus formed any decision to deliberately seize power from Tiberius – not like the kind Clemens had. Indeed, quite the opposite. For when the Rhine legions made moves to march against Rome with Germanicus as their potential leader, the young Caesar dismantled their moves completely, and refused to lead them against any enemy, except the Germans (Tac. *Ann.* 1. 30-48; Weingärtner, 1969, 111-116; Levick, 1976, 148.). In the case of Egypt, there was no reason to doubt his behaviour as consistent. A papyrus from Egypt, also from Oxyrhynchus, penned in this same period, records Germanicus' edict, decreed at this time or shortly afterwards, that he be not worshipped as a god in Egypt, but that only Tiberius and Livia can be. Germanicus decreed:

‘Germanicus Caesar, son of Augustus and grandson of the deified Augustus, proconsul, declares: Your good will, which you always display when you see me, I acknowledge, but your acclamations, which are odious to me and such as are accorded to the gods, I altogether deprecate. For they are appropriate only to him who is really the saviour and benefactor of the whole human race, my father, and to his mother, my grandmother. But my position is [but a reflection?] of their divinity, so that if you do not obey me, you will compel me not to show myself to you often.’ (Wilken, no. 413, lines 31-45 (= *Select Papyri* no. 211))

We have no reason to doubt that Germanicus' announcement in Alexandria was anything but sincere, or that he had been commissioned by Tiberius to visit Egypt, or that he was commissioned there to solve the corn problem. One may wonder what Tiberius might have done had not Germanicus intervened there. Certainly, the grain supply there was of crucial importance, not only to Tiberius, but also to all Romans. Tiberius was notorious for his slowness

in coming to decisions to act, whereas Germanicus for decisiveness, according to Tacitus (Levick, 1976, 90.).

However, Tiberius' deployment of Germanicus to Egypt was not too slow. Tiberius eventually sensed that conditions in Egypt hung in the balance when he despatched Germanicus to the East – he was after all, the one who journeyed from Syria to Egypt to relieve the problem there. Regardless, Tiberius as the saviour and re-founder of Asia, may have arguably wished to have had a greater hand in Egypt's salvation, to once again display his magnanimity, humanity and generosity to the empire – but that was snatched away by Germanicus. Still, Germanicus had followed Tiberius' apparently masterful orders to alleviate the corn shortage, much to Tiberius' satisfaction, in the main. The *Tabula Siarensis* states:

‘Germanicus Caesar... was sent as proconsul to the overseas provinces and in setting them and the kingdoms of that region in order according to the instructions of Tiberius Caesar Augustus... met his death in service to the state.’ (*Tabula Siarensis* Fragment a, lines 9-21.)

Tiberius ordered Piso to confront Germanicus with all the complaints Germanicus had not given notice to in Egypt, upon his return to Syria (Levick, 1976, 155.). According to Tacitus, this was a major development in Germanicus' downfall (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 67-83.). This downfall Tiberius clearly helped encourage, and at least facilitate, but it was a downfall that in Tacitus' view seemed wise for Tiberius to bring about, even if Germanicus, the darling of Rome, was the victim, for after all, the palace was ‘full of Caesars’ loyal to the emperor, who could replace Germanicus (Tac. *Ann.* 4. 2; Fagan, 1987, 56.). From this point, Piso had cancelled Germanicus' orders while in Syria, bribed soldiers, and replaced disciplined officers with undisciplined officers, generally demoralised the legions (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 69; R. Seager, 1972, 219; Levick, 1976, 155; Pagán, 2017, 34.).

Soon after his return, Germanicus fell ill and Piso left the province for the island of Cos. Tacitus states he had been ordered by Germanicus to leave the province, and that he had done so after the Caesar had officially withdrawn his friendship from Piso, by official decree sent to him by letter (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 69-70.). But, this came too late to save the young Caesar. He would not recover from his illness. Fearing ongoing poisoning, over a course of weeks, Germanicus finally died on the 10<sup>th</sup> October, AD19 (*Fasti Ant., Inscr. Ital.*, 13; Levick, 1976, 155.). In an attempt to seize the initiative, the Syrian legions, and the eastern provinces for himself, Piso attempted to sail back to Syria by way of Cilicia. However, at the fortress of Celendris, Piso's limited forces were defeated, by those of Germanicus' chief officer, Cn. Sentius Saturninus (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 74-82.).

In the trial that followed when Piso returned to Rome, it surfaced that Piso's wife, Plancina, had been friends for a long time during Germanicus' illness and demise, with a professional poisoner, named Martina. It also emerged that numerous human body parts, spells, and curses, and charred and bloody ashes, as well as lead magic tablets inscribed with Germanicus' name on them, and a range of other malignant objects had been discovered, in his very own private

bedroom in secret compartments hidden, which were all traced back to Plancina. These were believed by the senatorial jury to have been intended to bring about the young prince's untimely death, by means of black magic, and poisoning. It had also been revealed to the jury that Piso's agents, had spied on the young Caesar's bedroom, and had kept Piso informed, of the prince's demise (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 69.). According to Tacitus, Piso had Tiberius' support, but in secret, and throughout the trial Piso showed no sympathy for Germanicus' fate (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 76-78; 2. 812.). As the trial dragged on, Tiberius and the Senate remained torn between a Piso's guilt or innocence. Although Tiberius did not seriously believe Piso could be guilty of killing such a member of the imperial family, the Senate did, and in a move against Piso, and perhaps against Tiberius' loyalty to him following his intervention in the senatorial province of Asia, both finally agreed Piso guilty of murder and sedition (Tac. *Ann.* 3. 9-15.).

In the senatorial decree inscribed in bronze, located in various places around Spain, and presumably around other parts of the empire in multiple places around each province to belie its importance, to Tiberius, the Senate, and the Roman people, it was decreed Plancina was acquitted, but Piso found guilty (*SCPP* 23-90, 109-120. Eck, Caballos, Fernandez, 1996; Potter, Damon, 1999, 13-41.). It was found not only had Piso countered Germanicus' 'Caesarians' with his own 'Pisonians' in the Syrian army, but that he had also opened temples and worshiped in them contrary to Roman laws in the East to curse Germanicus to death. It was also found he also made presents of money to men who informed him of Germanicus' death, and held banquets when he heard of that young prince's death, and in contrast to Tiberius' firm policy to honour Augustus' memory in order to buttress his own principate, it was found Piso dishonoured the spirit of Augustus and removed marks of distinction that had been accorded to his divine memory (*SCPP* lines 23-70.). Piso's property was confiscated by the state and distributed among Tiberius' and Piso's children, including Drusus the Younger. Half of his property was given to his eldest son, and the other half was given to his youngest son. Four million sesterces was given to his daughter Calpurnia up-front, while one million sesterces were reserved for her in deposit as a dowry, out of the found-guilty Piso's account. The structure which Piso had built over the Fontinal Gate was removed and destroyed, and it was decreed by the Senate and Tiberius that no mourning should be wasted on such a despicable character. All statues of Piso were removed from Rome. No portraits of Piso were allowed for family processions or among displays or collections. His image was not to be shown at funerals. His name was also removed from an inscription on the statue of Germanicus in the Campus Martius. Piso's property in Illyricum were also gifted to Tiberius. They had been left to Piso by Augustus (*SCPP* lines 71-109.).

## Conclusion

In light of the above discussions, this article finds that Germanicus was permitted by Tiberius to enter Egypt, just as the prince maintained all along. But, after having addressed the corn crisis in Alexandria, Tiberius became jealous of him, and in Syria Germanicus met his end. But rather than show his hand, and admit the truth openly that Germanicus had stolen his chance to extend

his *gloria* throughout the empire. Piso's refusal to show pity for Germanicus upon his death reflects his own confidence in Tiberius' perceived approval in the bringing about

Germanicus' downfall. By arranging Germanicus' death through Piso's agency, Tiberius removed a rival for future honours in the effectiveness to respond to major threats in the form of natural disasters. His death paved the way for Tiberius' own son by natural means – Drusus the Younger – to embark upon a more glorious future imperial career, cementing his place as the rightful heir to the throne and the purple. The *princeps* had strengthened his own standing in the eyes of the Senate, and with the death of Piso, one of its leading forces against Tiberius' sole-ruler.

Although Piso had been useful to Tiberius, at least in the early stages, in bringing about the death of Germanicus, he proved expedient, and by opening temples banned by the state, forming sedition, aiming for the empire, and killing a member of the imperial family, he hastened his mortality. Tiberius could not hold the wolf by the ears with perfect ease, but Piso's sedition was an open challenge to Tiberius' own power in the East, and he was dealt with. The wolf that was the Senate and the state was for the time being pacified, and very few interruptions to Tiberius' power resurfaced until the Sejanus conspiracy in the early 30s. In the meantime, and beyond, Tiberius enjoyed the comfort of continuing to receive honours from Asia with increased support among Rome's senators, showing he had surpassed Germanicus and others in responding to a natural disaster. He had proved himself the most benevolent living ruler, cementing his popularity, and thus his position, and as a result his imperial and dynastic visions for Rome and for the Roman world. He neutralised the threat of Germanicus through Piso, and once Piso had done his job, he too proved mortal. Germanicus was extremely popular. Tiberius could not have another Marc Antony on his hands. It was perhaps only a matter of time before Germanicus believed in his own rising star ahead of Tiberius' setting one upon the information of others, including legions. Tiberius decided his star was not setting, but was at its zenith, while Germanicus' own had to set – as indeed it did. In responding to the earthquake, in responding to the food crisis in Egypt through Germanicus, and in neutralising Germanicus and Piso, Tiberius exerted his power, and thereupon extended his own influence and popularity, cementing his legitimacy, and thence, his sole-rule and his own dynastic visions for the future – and perhaps saving Rome from civil war.

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